

# ZoomInfo mines deep for personal data

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Googling someone has fast become an integral part of the English lexicon, and to Google someone before or after a date is de rigueur for many seeking that special someone.

Yet the problem with the Internet is not getting information about a love interest or a business partner, but rather to sift through too much data on people and jobs. By promising to sift through the avalanche of information on the World Wide Web, ZoomInfo is hoping it has found a market niche as a data mine for those who want reliable information about specific companies and the executives behind them.

Since it was launched in 2000 the Waltham, Mass.-based company boasts the largest index of corporate executives, with over 27 million people already with a profile, with 500,000 new people added to the database every month. In addition, the company updates 4.5 million profiles per month, with about 85 percent of all people listed based in the United States.

The free-access part of ZoomInfo's Web site allows users to get information about people that the company has gathered through the Internet and broken down into four main categories: employment history, board memberships, educational background, and certificates, awards and other qualifications that have been acquired over the years.

Subscribers, meanwhile, will be able to search the available data tailored to their needs. For instance, if someone is looking to find a senior marketing executive at a pharmaceutical manufacturer in the New York

region armed with an MBA, the database will be able to find a slew of people who would fit into those parameters.

Such a targeted search function, however, doesn't come cheap.

The company charges \$12,000 per year for two account users, while the price goes up to \$20,000 per annum for five users. Nevertheless, about 20 percent of Fortune 500 companies are already subscribers to the service, including Internet search engine giants Google and Yahoo!, according to Russ Glass, vice president of products at ZoomInfo.

Among the biggest users of the service are headhunting companies that are permanently on the search for people to fill positions; having a tool to make their search efforts more targeted is indispensable, said Jonathan Stern, founder of the company.

Stern himself nonetheless was quick to point out one of the system's weaker points, namely in sorting out people with the same name. For instance, in ZoomInfo alone "there are over 140 entries for Jonathan Stern," he said. At the same time, Stern pointed out that there were over 347,000 entries for the same name when searched under Google, "which makes it unusable."

Another appeal of the service is that while individuals listed in the database may have little control over what initially is written about them, registered users have the opportunity to change their profile once they log in.

"Web identity is really important," and the chance to have control over what people read online about another person is often critical, Glass said. So the New York pharmaceutical executive could add his academic qualifications on his ZoomInfo profile, in addition to any other professional achievements he might have accomplished, thus making

him more attractive to potential recruiters as well as business partners.

Given the fact that the company relies on computer automation technology to draw out information in the first place that is English language-based, ZoomInfo is weak in listing executives in countries where English is not the main language.

It does, however, have plans to expand operations into Britain and Australia by early next year.

Nevertheless, some analysts are concerned that the company's prospects look limited unless it offers more to subscribers.

"It's a one-trick pony, though it's a really good trick," said David Card, senior analyst at Jupiter Research focusing on cross-media programming and online revenue streams.

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