



You Can Find It!

Smart Growth Research on the Internet

Introduction

Knowledge is power, as Sir Francis Bacon wrote. We can all use more power and the Internet can help you get it. This brief report contains hints for research on the Internet. Some of the search tips come from the PC Magazine article “How to Find Anything Online,” available at www.pcmag.com. It also includes a list of useful government, smart growth, and planning websites to get you started.

Find What You Need to Get the Power You Need

Start with a Good Search Engine

PC Magazine recently tested the common search engines and concluded that Google was the best. You input search terms and the search engine returns, more or less, relevant web pages. Most search engines, Google included, have advanced search features often including Boolean terms. Using these advanced features can help you get more relevant responses. <http://www.google.com>

Have a Backup Search Engine

Different engines have different indexing methods. If Google is not returning good results, try another engine.

Try a Metsearch Engine

Metasearch engines, such as Dogpile (<http://www.dogpile.com/info.dogpl/>) and MetaCrawler (<http://www.metacrawler.com/info.metac/dog/index.htm>), search many search engines at one time. Since they have difficulty using advanced search features, they are not a good choice for your first search, but they can work if your usual engine is not returning good results.

Search the “Deep Internet”

Certain data types, such as Adobe PDF files, are difficult to index using conventional methods although the conventional search engines are making progress on these file types. Deep web databases specialize in these data sources. Try InfoMine (<http://infomine.ucr.edu>)

Follow the Links

If you do not find what you are looking for on a good site that addresses your topic, check out the site’s links. One of the linked sites may have what you need.

Use Electronic Versions of Laws, Plans, and Other Documents to Find What You Need Fast

We often need to find laws, regulations, and policies to address a specific situation. The great thing about electronic documents is you can use the same search tools used on the Internet to find what you need in a document. For example, the author needed to find a policy on schools to argue to a County Executive that a middle school should be in town rather than in a rural area. The author went to the county’s website, clicked through to the county comprehensive plan, searched on “middle school” and in five minutes, start to finish, I found a county policy that discouraged middle schools and high schools in rural areas. Doing this by hand would have taken at least a half hour if not hours, assuming we had the plan in the office. And the argument was no longer about what we wanted, but about what the county wanted.

Find Out Who Owns a Website

Knowing who owns a website can often tell you how accurate the information may be. Whois sites, such as www.whois.sc or www.whois.org, tell you who owns the website.

Links to Research Websites

Aerial Photos

Aerial photos can be very convicting. A Washington State county was in denial over certain areas they had inappropriately zoned. We put an end to an argument that it do not matter because they were already developed with a couple of aerial photos that showed large undeveloped lands in these areas. Aerial photos are also useful in evaluation plans and proposals. Many state universities, some large libraries, and state agencies have great collections of aerial photos you can consult for free and purchase at low cost. More and more states are putting these aerial photos on the web too, for example see Mass GIS: <http://www.state.ma.us/mgis/> If your state does not have its photos on the web and you do not have time to travel to a photo collection or get photos send to you, you can use Internet aerial photo websites. You can view the photos for free and download them for a fee.

Terraflly. <http://www.terrafly.com> A public service of Florida International University sponsored by the National Science Foundation, NASA, the United States Geological Survey, and IBM.

ImageAtlas. <http://imageatlas.globexplorer.com/ImageAtlas/view.do?group=ImageAtlas> A for profit site.

Environment

Environmental Protection Agency. Includes great guides to federal environmental law, reports on environmental quality, and data. <http://www.epa.gov/>

View water quality data by watershed: <http://map2.epa.gov/enviomapper/>

Environmental Defense (formerly the Environmental Defense Fund). <http://www.edf.org/home.cfm>

Sierra Club. <http://www.sierraclub.org/> Good section on stopping sprawl.

U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy. Interesting report on the state of our oceans and how land use is adversely affecting them. <http://oceancommission.gov/>

National Wetlands Inventory. Create wetlands maps online or download National Wetlands Inventory GIS data layers. <http://wetlands.fws.gov/>

GIS (Geographical Information Systems)

You can download ESRI's **free ArcExplorer GIS viewer**. You can prepare, view, do limited analysis of, and print GIS maps at: <http://www.esri.com/software/arcexplorer/>

Many states have extensive collections of GIS data online as do federal agencies. Much of this data can be used at the county level with appropriate software including ArcExplorer.

The online **National Topographical Map of the United States.** <http://nationalmap.usgs.gov/> Can select data layers and measure distances.

The online **National Atlas of the United States.** <http://www.nationalatlas.gov/> Many data layers, including county boundaries, from the Atlas can be downloaded for GIS analysis at: <http://www-atlas.usgs.gov/atlasftp.html>

Housing

KnowledgePlex. Fannie Mae's affordable housing and community development website. <http://www.knowledgeplex.org/>

Affordable Housing Design Advisor. How to do good design for affordable housing. Has a great lecture series on how to make density well designed and more acceptable: <http://www.designadvisor.org/>

Law

GPO Access. The gateway to the United States Code (federal laws) Federal Register and Code of Federal Regulations among others resources. <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/index.html>

Supreme Court of the United States. You can read the official version of U.S. Supreme Court decisions here: <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/>

Courts of Appeals. You can link to the websites of each circuit of the Courts of Appeals and read their opinions. <http://www.uscourts.gov/courtsofappeals.html>

Planning

The Official Site of the **American Planning Association**. Lots of planning resources, many free, some fee based. <http://www.planning.org/> The Growing Smart Project contains an evaluation of each state's planning laws and model legislation to reform those state planning laws: <http://www.planning.org/growingsmart/> LUPIN, California Land Use Planning Network. One of the best of the state planning sites.

<http://ceres.ca.gov/planning/>

Cyburbia. The urban planning portal. If you need a funny planning coffee mug, this is the place.

<http://www.cyburbia.org/>

Planetizen. Planning and development news, jobs, and events. Every year Planetizen lists the 50 best planning sites which is a great research starting point. <http://www.planetizen.com/> Go there and nominate your site.

Planners Network. The online hangout for radical planners. No, really there are radical planners, check it out:

<http://www.plannersnetwork.org/index.html>

Project for Public Spaces. Great place making tools. <http://www.pps.org/>

Smart Growth Websites

Smart Growth America. A great site, check out the Smart Growth Share Ware:

<http://www.smartgrowthamerica.com/>

Sustainable Communities Network: <http://www.sustainable.org/>

Smart Growth Online. The website of the Smart Growth Network and a subpart of the Sustainable Communities Network: <http://www.smartgrowth.org/default.asp>

Local Government Commission. One of the best non-profit smart growth, planning, and sustainable development sites: <http://www.lgc.org/>

EPA's Smart Growth Website. It is good, do not tell GW about it: <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/>

Sprawl Watch Clearinghouse: <http://www.sprawlwatch.org/frames.html>

Research

The Brookings Institution. Check out the Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy:

<http://www.brookings.edu/>

Newslink. Contains links to media throughout the United States and world. Media, especially newspapers, are a good research source: <http://newslink.org/>

Victoria Transportation Policy Institute. The Online TDM Encyclopedia is great. <http://www.vtppi.org/>

Science

The gateway to the **National Academies of Science.** <http://nationalacademies.org/>

Sustainable Development

Smart Communities Network (U.S. Department of Energy): <http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/index.shtml>

Ten Steps to Sustainability from the Smart Communities Network:

<http://www.sustainable.doe.gov/management/tensteps.shtml>

Green Map System. How to use community mapping to identify environmental resources and the environmental status of a community. <http://www.greenmap.org/>

Tools for a Sustainable Community: One-Stop Guide for U.S. Local Governments.

<http://www.iclei.org/LA21/ONESTOP.HTM#pubs>

United States

FirstGov.gov The is the main gateway to United States Government websites: <http://www.firstgov.gov/>

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance. The source for federal funding: <http://www.cfda.gov/>

SearchGov.com. A website to search all websites in the gov (government) domain. Includes federal, state, and large city and county sites: www.searchgov.com

United States Data

Fedstats. The gateway to statistics from over 100 U.S. Federal agencies: <http://www.fedstats.gov/>

Census Bureau, United States. The source for census data: <http://www.census.gov/> The decennial census published detailed information for every county and city in the U.S.

American Community Survey. Intended to replace the long-form decennial census and provide more current information, 2002 data is now available. If funded, data for areas of high population will be available every year with smaller area data available every three years and every five years depending on population.

<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/index.htm>

The **Economic Censuses** include information on businesses by industry type and come out every five years.

The 2002 Census data is just starting to become available: <http://www.census.gov/epcd/www/econ97.html> Data is published nationally, for states and territories, and for counties.

Census of Agriculture. Another economic census done every five years. 2002 data is just now becoming available at: <http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/> Data is published nationally, for states and territories, and for counties.

Bureau of Economic Analysis. <http://www.bea.doc.gov/beahome.html> The have a variety of economic data. Includes estimates of total and per capita income for each county each year.

National Resources Inventory. A sample based statistical survey of land use and natural resource conditions and trends on U.S. non-Federal lands. National data is now available and more will be available in June 2004. We use it to track the conversion or resource lands to other uses. Data will be available for the nation, states, and regions within states. <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/NRI/>

National Transportation Library. A virtual library for the transportation community. <http://ntl.bts.gov/> U.S. Department of Agriculture NRCS is putting all of its **soil surveys** online. Very helpful in advocating for farmland protection and other planning issues http://soils.usda.gov/survey/online_surveys/ The availability varies a lot by state and some states have no online surveys.

U.S. Department of Agriculture NRCS **Soil Data Mart.** NRCS is migrating its data from the old SSURGO databases to the new Soil Data Mart: <http://soildatamart.nrcs.usda.gov/Default.aspx> At the soil data mart you can download GIS coverages and database soil data. NCRS says all soil data should be online by the end of the year.

Washington State

Access Washington. The gateway to all state websites: <http://www.access.wa.gov/>

Legalwa.org. The site for free Washington laws, regulations, and published court decisions: <http://www.legalwa.org/>

Growth Management Hearings Boards. The site of Growth Board decisions and digests: <http://www.gmhb.wa.gov/>

1000 Friends of Washington. www.1000friends.org

State of Washington Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development's (CTED) **Growth Management Act website:** <http://www.ocd.wa.gov/info/lgd/growth/>

Municipal Research and Services Center. Links to city and county comprehensive plans and development regulations, often included in county or municipal codes, and lots of information on planning and local government: www.mrsc.org