

Searchable Databases and Information Collections on the Middle East

▶ ROUNDUP

Given the current attention to the serious events in the Middle East, there is a good chance you may be called on to do some researching in this region. You may need not only to locate the usual types of business information (news, company directories, and industry profiles) but also to identify political risks and forecasts for doing business in this volatile region.

We decided to take a broad scan of the best and most accessible sources of information available today for re-

searching both risk and general business issues for this region. Our listing is selective: We chose to concentrate on surfacing sources that focus just on the Middle East and provide a perspective on events from that region directly, supplemented with some of our favorite general country/regional information sources that include coverage on Middle Eastern countries. Geographically, the nations are often known by the abbreviation MENA, for Middle East and North Africa. The MENA category itself includes these countries, which can also be broken down further by this grouping:

- Breaking News
- Company Directories
- Country Profiles
- “Doing Business In” Guides and Studies
- Journal Articles
- Political Risks

Breaking News

Al Arabiya: English

www.alarabiya.net/english

Second only to Al-Jazeera as a recognizable Middle Eastern news source, Dubai-based Al Arabiya is the online offering of the Al Arabiya television news channel. The Arabic-language version of the channel was launched in 2004 and the English news site in August 2007.

According to the site, the majority of its audience is from Saudi Arabia, followed by the U.S., United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Canada, U.K., Germany, Morocco, Syria, and Kuwait. Al Arabiya provides an Arab perspective on both regional and global news. Key sections include Middle East, International, Society & Culture, Business & Technology, and Variety. The site offers an RSS feed and short message service (SMS) news alerts.

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HIGHLIGHTS

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- ▶ 5 Sources for Locating Full-Image Advertisements
- ▶ 8 Social Search: Your Personalized News Service?

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries

- Bahrain
- Saudi Arabia
- Kuwait
- United Arab Emirates
- Oman
- Qatar

North Africa

- Algeria
- Morocco
- Egypt
- Tunisia
- Libya

Levant

- Iraq
- Syria
- Jordan
- Yemen
- Lebanon

We've organized our listing based on the type of information as follows:

Information Today, Inc.

Published monthly by Information Today, Inc., 143 Old Marilton Pike, Medford, N.J. For editorial queries only, please contact the editor, Robert Berkman, at 17 Oxford St., Rochester, NY 14607; email: rberkman@infotoday.com. For ordering instructions, subscription details, and complete contact information, please see page 8.

Dialog®

Authoritative answers enriched by ProQuest

Designed to support innovation across the enterprise, ProQuest Dialog™ delivers critical information to help organizations discover new opportunities, validate the uniqueness of inventions, and bring products to market—a new approach to precision searching based on relevance, transparency, control and completeness.

Learn more: www.dialog.com/proquestdialog

Al-Jazeera English**<http://english.aljazeera.net>**

Al-Jazeera is the Qatar-based, 24-hour privately owned (nongovernmental affiliated) news and current affairs channel. It was the first international English-language channel to broadcast around the world from the Middle East to more than 200 million households in 100-plus countries.

While well-known, not everyone has become aware that Al-Jazeera has been carving out a reputation as one of the highest quality media sites around the globe. Not only does it provide an Arab perspective on the news, it has hired several prominent and respected journalists and continues to enhance its reputation for quality reporting. The English-language website is of particular value to U.S. viewers, as it is rare to find Al-Jazeera's network on a U.S.-based cable or satellite television station.

BBC**www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/middle_east**

When it comes to global news coverage, BBC still sets the standard. While there is an Arabic-language version, if you link to this URL, you can immediately link to BBC's latest coverage of news and events in the Middle East in English.

Financial Times: Middle East & North Africa**www.ft.com/world/mideast**

Link to this site to obtain news and analysis on and about the Middle East from this highly respected U.K. business newspaper. Free registration permits the ability to view up to 10 articles per 30 days: You will need to subscribe to get complete access to more articles.

MEED**www.meed.com**

MEED is a premium-priced, subscription-based business news and intelligence source covering countries in the Middle East. (MEED's Twitter feed with brief updates and news is freely accessible at <http://twitter.com/meeddubai>.)

World News Connection**<http://wnc.fedworld.gov/index.html>**

The World News Connection is a service from the U.S. Open Source Center



Arabia Inform provides extensive coverage of the Middle East (though the databases are in the Arabic language).

Figure 1

(OSC), an intelligence-gathering agency that provides translated and English-language news and information from original local, non-U.S.-based sources around the globe. The information is derived from full text and summaries of newspaper articles, websites, conference proceedings, television and radio broadcasts, periodicals, and nonclassified technical reports.

The OSC provides its feed to the National Technical Information Service, which has partnered with Dialog to make its news searchable for its own subscribers.

Individual Newspapers

You can browse and locate individual English-language Middle Eastern newspapers by linking to the World Newspapers site at www.world-newspapers.com/east.html.

Company Directories Kompass**<http://us.kompass.com>**

You can conduct free searches directly on Kompass to retrieve basic contact information on manufacturers and industrial and related service firms around the globe, including those in Middle Eastern countries. You can also browse by individual country at <http://directory.kompass.com/en/dir.php>.

For more extensive search options, you can search Kompass on Dialog, File 545: Kompass Middle East/Africa/Mediterranean. There you can do advanced searching and focus a search just to countries in the Middle East. Dialog's description for this file is coverage for more than 146,000 companies in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Morocco, South Africa, Turkey, and United Arab Emirates. As with all Kom-

pass databases, its particular strength is coverage of products, with detailed product codes.

Country Profiles

It's easy to find country profiles on the web these days, but here are a few of what we think are the best ones to get authoritative information on countries in the Middle East.

BBC Country Profiles**www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/middle_east**

On this portion of BBC's site, you can click on a nation or region and get a succinct, substantive description of the history, politics, and economic background of the country. Also included are basic statistics, profiles of governmental leaders, and other data.

CIA World Factbook**<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>**

The well-known authoritative profile of countries around the globe includes, of course, all the countries in the Middle East.

Background Notes:**U.S. Department of State****www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn**

The State Department's Background Notes collection provides facts about the land, people, history, government, political conditions, economy, and foreign relations of each country.

globalEDGE: Country Insights**<http://globaledege.msu.edu/countries/region.asp?RegionID=3>**

A compilation of statistical data and information on the economy, history, government, culture, risk, corporations,

trade statistics, rankings, resources, and more, drawn from authoritative original sources (including some listed in this article).

The Economist: Country Briefings

www.economist.com/countries

News, reports, forecasts, and data on countries around the world.

Fee-based country analyses are available at <http://countryanalysis.eiu.com>. To view reports available for specific countries, click http://countryanalysis.eiu.com/country_coverage.html.

Country Insights

www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/countryinsights-apercuspays-eng.asp

This site was created by the Centre for Intercultural Learning, a part of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada. It is a bit different from the others and an intriguing site to browse through, as it provides guidance, advice, and insights on the cultural norms and do's/don'ts of living and doing business in countries around the globe.

Some of the most comprehensive, detailed, and authoritative information on countries around the world is published by international agencies and NGOs. Here are a few of the best:

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

www.imf.org/external/country/index.htm

Publications and research on matters related to financial growth, economics, development, etc., of countries around the world.

OECD

<http://tinyurl.com/nphd6>

Reports reflect OECD's policies to enhance the social and economic well-being in countries around the globe.

Institute of Development Studies: ELDIS

www.eldis.org/go/country-profiles®ion=27

The Institute of Development Studies is a U.K.-based global charity for international development research, teaching, and communications. ELDIS is the arm that shares information and best practices, and this URL links to its profiles, news, and collections on countries in the Middle East.

The World Bank: Publications and Reports: The Middle East

<http://tinyurl.com/37zfyhh>

Data, studies, and analysis on the economic, financial, social, and political issues and challenges for countries in the Middle East

You can find additional country information sites at The University of Auckland library site: www.library.auckland.ac.nz/subjects/bus/infosources/country.htm#country.

'Doing Business In' Guides and Studies

Several organizations publish advisories and reports on how to do business in selected countries. Some are published by a country trade agency that helps its citizens learn how to break into other countries markets; others are issued by tax, accounting, or consulting firms to provide a more general overview. Here are ones we know that include coverage of doing business in the Middle East:

■ Enterprise Surveys:

www.enterprisesurveys.org

■ UHY Doing Business Guides:

www.uhy.com/pages/resources/doing-business-guides.php

■ Country Commercial Guide:

<http://tinyurl.com/6bn28py>

■ Middle East and Northern Africa Business Information Center:

www.export.gov/middleeast

Free Market Reports

The following trade agencies produce detailed and free English-language reports examining particular industries and markets in specific countries. You can browse each to find out if there is a report for the market and country you seek.

■ Australia: AUSTRADE:

www.austrade.gov.au/Country/default.aspx

■ Canada: Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada:

www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/eng/market-reports-region.jsp?rid=13

■ United States: U.S. Commercial Service: www.buyusainfo.net/adsearch.cfm?search_type=int&loadnav=no

■ New Zealand: Trade and Enterprise: www.nzte.govt.nz/explore-export-markets/middle-east-and-africa/pages/middle-east-and-africa.aspx

Journal Articles

Perhaps the most comprehensive collection of Arabic-language journal articles and texts is available from Arabia Inform, a press clipping and media monitoring firm based in Cairo, Egypt, with offices in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and Washington, D.C. It has amassed a database of articles from thousands of Arab-language newspapers dating from 1998: 24-hour coverage of hundreds of television stations since 2008 and thousands of internet sites since 2003.

Arabia Inform actually produces a few Arab-language databases:

■ AskZad: Archived journals, articles, newspapers, books, and other forms of media, all related to the Middle East

■ Acumen Media Intelligence: Provides strategic business and media analysis to governments and corporations with interests in the Middle East

■ Middle East Monitor: Captures, indexes, and archives more than 1,000 Arabic newspapers and magazines; more than 300 television channels; 2.5 million websites, blogs, and forums; 600 scientific journals with 165 licensed for full image content; and 21 radio stations

■ Moheet: Claims to be the world's first Arabic-language news website with 70 staff journalists conducting original reporting and a dedicated page for each Arab country for local, Pan-Arab, and international news

While Arabia Inform's documents are all in Arabic, Global Business Development Manager Jan Diggs told us that some of its English-speaking clients have had good luck in using the built-in translation features of the Google Chrome browser. Her firm also offers translation services for a fee.

EIU ViewsWire: Africa/Middle East

http://viewswire.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=VWRegionVW3®ion_id=430000443&rf=0

The Economist Intelligence Unit's ViewsWire provides news and analysis for countries around the globe. This URL will direct you to its coverage on countries in Africa and the Middle East. Note that some of ViewsWire is searchable on Dialog as File 620, and there

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Searchable Databases and Information ...

you can limit your search to particular countries via the CN= field.

Political Risks

There are several well-known services that advise businesses on the political risks of doing business in specific countries around the world. Typically, these firms rate and compare the level of risk in different nations and publish various reports and advisories. Here are the major players.

The PRS Group, Inc.

www.prsgroup.com/PRS.aspx

The PRS Group, Inc. of Syracuse, N.Y., produces forecasts, guides, reports, and

searchable data on the risks of doing business around the globe. Here are some of its key offerings:

- Country Data: Click Country Data, and then click on the picture of the wizard
- Latest news on political risks in the Middle East: www.prsgroup.com/pdfs/Are%20global%20events%20exposing%20you%20to%20risk_030211.pdf
- *2010 Catalog of Publications & Data for International Business*: This brochure describes PRS' country reports; PRS online for forecasts, ratings, data, and background information on 100 countries; International Country Risk Guides; New Emerging Markets: A Country Risk Guide; workshops; and other PRS publications.

To view the complete set of PRS offerings online, see https://www.prsgroup.com/prsgroup_shoppingcart/c-7-all-products.aspx.

Business Monitor: Middle East

www.businessmonitor.com/country_risk/middle-east.html

Business Monitor International (BMI) is a major independent provider of proprietary data, analysis, ratings, rankings, and forecasts covering 175 countries and 22 industry sectors. Its stated mission is to integrate country risk and financial markets analysis with industry research, so as to best inform decision making in multinational companies, financial institutions, multilaterals, and government. Its specialty includes intra-daily country risk analyses, 5- and 10-year macroeconomic forecasts, sovereign risk ratings, and business environment rankings for 175 markets worldwide.

BMI's Middle East and Africa country division produces forecasts on economic, political, and business environment developments in 18 emerging and frontier markets. Its analysts produce 10 quarterly Business Forecast Reports, which provide analysis of economic and political developments, together with 10-year forecasts. Key areas of focus include real GDP growth, monetary policy, exchange rates, the balance of payments, foreign debt, and FDI. In addition, Middle East and North Africa analysts are responsible for 2 monthly monitors, which incorporate the newer 2-year forecasts across a dozen key indicators, as well as BMI's view of the latest developments affecting regional economies.

Coface

www.coface.com/CofacePortal/COM_en_EN/pages/home/risks_home/country_risks

Coface is an abbreviation for Compagnie Française d'Assurance pour le Commerce Extérieur, which was created in 1946 as the French export credit agency. It was then privatized by the government; it continues today as a commercial enterprise. It is part of the larger bank group Natixis. You can view a complete country risk map at <http://tinyurl.com/2abjmsd> and a rating table of countries in the Middle East at <http://tinyurl.com/687f6wa>. ■

Other Useful Sources

Here are some other recommended sources for researching companies, industries, and business in the Middle East.

Academic Think Tanks/Experts**The Institute for Middle Eastern Studies**

www.gwu.edu/~imes

A program of The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., the Middle Eastern Studies' stated mission is "to foster research, dialogue and the creation of an intellectual community focused on the modern Middle East, geographically defined as the Arab world, Turkey, Israel, and Iran." The site identifies papers, upcoming conferences, faculty experts, and a variety of academic studies and collaboration on the countries of the Middle East.

ISRIA

www.isria.com/c_MiddleEast.php

Political and business analysis of news and developments occurring around the world, including countries in the Middle East. The service is subscription-based, but a free trial is available.

The Federation of International Trade Associations (FITA)

<http://fita.org/countries/me.html>

A portal to locate trade information, profiles, links, and directories on countries in the Middle East (and other countries in other parts of the site).

Blogs and Tweeters

The recent Middle East uprisings have brought social media front and center to the attention of people in that part of the globe. Here are some of the most followed and popular blogs and Twitter users:

- The Emirates Economist: <http://emirateseconomist.blogspot.com>
- Dubai Business Consultancy: www.dubaibusinessconsultancy.com/blog
- Mideast News on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/MidEastNews>
- Arabian Business on Twitter: <http://twitter.com/arabianbusiness>
- Al Aribiya English on Twitter: http://twitter.com/AlArabiya_Eng
- Lara Setrakian: <http://twitter.com/laraabcnews>
- Mohamed Nanabhay: <http://twitter.com/mohamed>
- Arab News: http://twitter.com/Arab_News
- Middle East News: <http://twitter.com/MidEastNews>
- WSJ Middle East: <http://online.wsj.com/public/page/mideast.html>
- AME Info: <http://twitter.com/ameinfofnews>
- Gulf News: http://twitter.com/gulf_news

Sources for Locating Full-Image Advertisements

It seems that we can locate almost any kind of business information online these days—news, facts on firms, market reports, articles, association and industry reports, white papers, and so forth. Supplement that with the rich archival information available from traditional databases, and it seems like the world's information is at our fingertips.

But of course not everything is so easily accessible. One kind of valuable business information that's not readily available on the open web or on professional databases is full images of advertisements. So when you need to find and look at an image of an ad—whether that ad was in print, on radio or TV, or even in an internet or other form, what are your research options?

We covered the topic of locating advertisements a couple of years back in our February 2009 issue, when we reviewed VMS AdSite and some smaller specialized collections. But since that time we've found one new and notable new database, and we discovered that many of the smaller collections we wrote about had gone through some significant changes. We decided an update was in order, and we present our findings here.

Why Research Ads?

First, let's take a step back and think about why you might want to locate old advertisements. The specific need will vary of course. Certainly if you work in advertising, you may need to locate ads as an ongoing part of your job to keep up with best practices in the industry and to monitor new ads coming out in various media. Marketers may need to locate ads to see what competitors did and are doing now to strategically market their products. Legal researchers sometimes need to go back and see when some product, trademark, or copyrighted information was first mentioned, and in what manner.

But if you are a business librarian, market researcher, or another professional whose job is primarily to perform or advise others in effective, qual-



This ad from Australia identifies a partnership between the Indian Aircel mobile provider and Facebook.

Figure 2

ity business research, you would also have situations where you may need to quickly find and view ads. This includes researching companies, discovering how a firm portrayed itself during a certain time, looking at historical industry/product samples, and identifying partnerships (see Figure 2). If your project involves getting a snapshot of a particular period in time, there are fewer sources than old advertisements that can so quickly reveal the cultural values and messages of that time and place. Our suggestions for where to turn follow.

GlobalADsource

We were quite pleased when we discovered GlobalADsource, an easy-to-use, comprehensive collection of searchable advertisements. The site currently holds a collection of more than 9.5 million advertisements from around the globe. These can be further categorized by specific media and geography as follows:

Media Type

- Print: 6.3 million
- Video: 1.5 million
- Internet: 838,000
- Outdoor (e.g., billboard): 339,000
- Audio: 339,000

World Region

- North America: 1,558,365
- South America: 871,611
- Europe: 2,576,234
- Middle East: 86,792
- Asia: 4,480,147
- Oceania and Africa: 126,444

The site says that it adds a total of 400,000 new ads each month. According to the firm's president, Ed Clarke, the lag time between when an ad is captured and its availability on the site averages 1–2 days. He also told us that in terms of an archive, while there are ads dating from 1960, consistent coverage of all media is provided from 2002 onward, with the strongest archive beginning in 2008.

There are a couple of interesting aspects to GlobalADsource. For one, anyone can search it and view selected information without a subscription (more on this later). The other unusual characteristic is the origin of the ads themselves. According to Clarke, the ads in the database are populated by a network of 20 companies around the world that monitor local ads for resale to domestic ad agencies and advertisers. They contribute their advertisements to GlobalADsource's central database.

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Sources for Locating Full-Image Advertisements

Searching the Database

Searching GlobalADsource is quite simple. First you link to the site's rather sparse homepage at www.globaladsource.com. Immediately you see a search box to enter your keywords. By default, words entered into that box will search the entire full text of all ads in the site.

If you search as a nonsubscriber, there are some significant restrictions: There are no advanced search options, and results are limited to the top 10 retrieved sites. The results are basically a straight bibliographic listing: a title, associated brand name, a one-line description, the date of the ad, the media type, the country, and the cost to purchase an ad. Ads are displayed by most recent first. A few listings are accompanied with a small thumbnail

image of the advertisement. It's really not quite enough information to be of too much help in actually locating the ad on your own, so it probably does pay to subscribe to get the most out of the database.

If you choose to subscribe—which costs \$50 per month or \$240 for 6 months or \$360 for 1 year (with enterprise edition options based on the number of users)—you have additional options and features. You can limit your search by several fields: brand, media type, geographic location, industry/subject category, date, and advertisement ID. You can also choose how to sort the ads: by title, date, country, price to download, media type, and brand. Finally, we found that many more thumbnail images of the ads are shown for subscribers as well.

Both subscribers and nonsubscribers will also see a price displayed next to

each ad. While pricing varies, per-ad fees generally range from \$12 for a print ad to \$35 for a video.

Once you see an ad that you would like to buy, you just click on it and add it to your cart. When ready to purchase, it will be downloaded instantly to your PC (typically in PDF for print and internet ads; MPEG or WAV for audio; JPEG for outdoor ads; and MPEG for video television ads).

Evaluation

We liked GlobalADsource quite a bit. The site offered a very simple way to search the full text plus valuable metadata for a huge global collection of ad images from all kinds of media—that is not an insignificant achievement. We were impressed with the range of media covered and how quickly we were able to process our order and to download and view ads. Pricing

Other Ad-Tracking and Monitoring Services

Here are other sites that provide advertising research services that we felt were worth passing along.

Ad Collection and Monitoring Services AdAlert

www.vmsnews.com/2_1_3_adalert.html

This is another service from VMS. AdAlert monitors the occurrences of certain types of ads, based on the user's criteria, and then provides the subscriber with an alert when a new ad matching those criteria is added to VMS' database.

Kantar Media Intelligence: AdScope

<http://kantarmediana.com/intelligence/products/adscope>

AdScope is a product of TNS Media Intelligence. It monitors more than 80,000 hours per week of television coverage, which includes all broadcast networks, 52 cable networks, 450 radio stations in 30 markets, more than 2,500 websites, 145 consumer magazines and newspapers, and multiple Hispanic media outlets. The complete database contains 850,000-plus ads, and AdScope adds more than 1,000 "creatives" per day.

Cultural/Historical Collections

The Ad*Access Project

<http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/adaccess>

The Ad*Access project provides browsable and searchable images for more than 7,000 advertisements printed in U.S. and Canadian newspapers and magazines between 1911 and 1955. The database focuses on five subject areas: radio, television, transportation, beauty and hygiene, and World War II.

The Emergence of Advertising in America: 1850–1920

<http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/ea>

This browsable database of more than 9,000 advertising items and publications dates from 1850 to 1920. It illustrates the rise of

consumer culture and the beginning of the advertising industry in the United States.

Creative/Award Winning Advertisements AdForum.com

www.adforum.com/adfolio/search.asp

A "creative library" of tens of thousands of "the world's best ads" in a variety of media. Searching is free, but you need to subscribe to view more than a limited number of results.

Reference Guide

The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising

This multivolume print directory, published by Routledge in 2002, covers the history, trends, issues, people, and companies involved in marketing. It includes color reproductions of some of the most famous and familiar ads from around the globe. It's available online for about \$300 depending on the source.

Competitive Data and Comprehensive Services Nielsen's Ad Library 360

www.nielsenglobaladview.com/adlibrary360/forms/admin/login.aspx

Nielsen's Ad Library 360 is a searchable site of ads that covers TV, radio, magazine, newspaper, outdoor, cinema, and internet ads. Prices range from an on-demand service (\$25 per creative) to a subscription price that varies based on the requested markets. Charts and graphs analyzing incidence, volume, spending, etc., are included. There is a free trial available (though without the ability to download the ads) at www.adlibrary360.nielsen.com.

Ebiquity

www.ebiquity.com/global/advertising?whyhere=6

Ebiquity is a database of advertising intelligence with more than 15 million creatives from TV, press, and online display from 70-plus countries. It includes ad spending data.

seemed pretty reasonable too. And we even tested the ability to search the full text of spoken words as well—and this worked as it should. All in all, it's very impressive indeed.

Our only real concern was not being able to feel fully confident that when we constructed a precision search we knew precisely what we were searching. It was never completely clear how to create advanced Boolean searches. While we appreciated the field search options, we think more search advice and clarity is needed on the search page itself. It was also a little disconcerting to not be completely clear on which ads around the world were included and which were excluded by the original ad providers.

Furthermore, keep in mind too that when searching an archive like this, you have to think about the words that would be used when the ad was placed. If you try looking for content using today's terminology, you may miss relevant ads. (Think of all the discreet ways that "personal hygiene" is described, or how alcohol and tobacco ads often avoid words such as "drink" or "smoke.")

Who might be the primary competitor to GlobalADsource? We'd say a key one is VMS' large searchable database of ads called AdSight. As mentioned earlier, we covered VMS, a New York City-based media intelligence monitoring service, in some depth in our 2009 article. Here is a quick summary of the key facts from our review of that site, followed by what's new and changed since that time.

VMS AdSight

VMS AdSight was founded in 1983 and has a collection of 3 million ads, along with 8,352 brands, 223,947 products, and 112,259 companies. It tracks 20 media types in the U.S. including print ads, radio spots, TV commercials, internet ads, cinema advertisements, and "out of home" ads such as billboards and ads on buses.

Source of ads: There are multiple sources: VMS staffers read through journals, watch television, manually scan for new spots, and write up the results. VMS also has arranged agreements and partnerships with The Nielsen Co., BurrellesLuce, and Media Monitors.

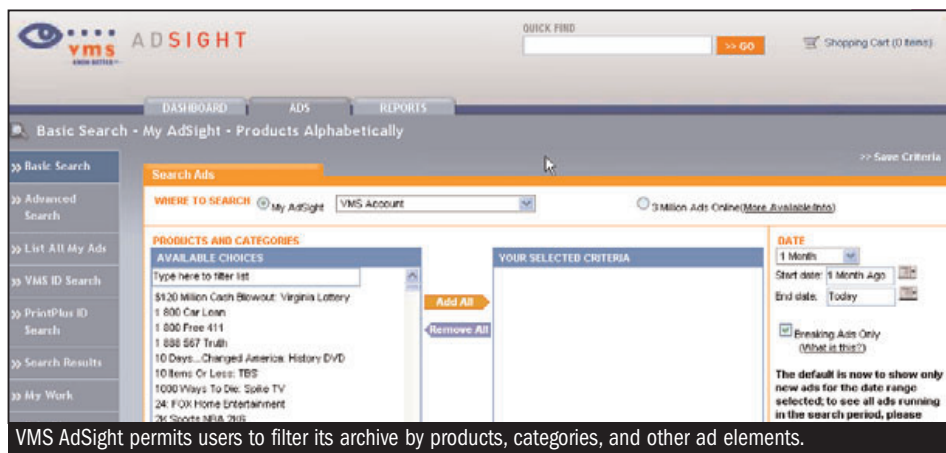


Figure 3

Archive

- Cinema ads: 2007
- Internet ads: 1999
- Out of home: 1997/1998
- Radio ads: 1993
- Television commercials: 1991

Users Can Search By

- Product/brand by name or hierarchical category (see Figure 3)
- Company name
- Filters: date/date range, type of media, and language (Subscribers can also check a box to include "co-op" ads, as well as limit the search just to "breaking ads.")
- Advanced search: limit to which regional ad market(s) a selected product ad had run in (Limit results via a keyword or phrase text search.)

Search Results

Search results provide an image of the ad and basic identifying data. There is also "Ad Detail" with an extensive summary data on the ad: primary product, product category, company name, ad title, voice-over text, tagline, type of media, market, length, language, capture market, station/publication, program name, whether the ad is a "revision" of an earlier ad, air time, run date, keywords, ad characteristics, and targets.

Ordering Ads

Subscribers can purchase an ad and keep it as one of "My Ads" on his or her dashboard. For the television ads, there was an additional option: For \$5, subscribers could "preview" an ad, which meant access for 48 hours. The fee to purchase an ad varies based on medium—see the Subscription and Viewing

Fees section below. Note that when buyers purchase an ad, they do not obtain copyright permission to use it for commercial use—it may only be used for internal research purposes according to fair use.

Subscription and Viewing Fees

VMS told us that all pricing is customized to the user. But here is a guideline you may be able to use. It's based on the pricing the firm provided in 2009: A basic subscription costs \$500 per month for "a few" users to access the database. The price to order a single ad was as follows:

- Print: \$27
- Radio: \$49–\$60
- Television: \$50–\$80
- Internet: \$42–\$45
- Cinema: \$45
- Out of Home: \$57–\$65

On-demand internal research will also be performed by VMS upon request.

Changes in AdSight Since 2009

Most of AdSight hasn't changed, so you can get a more complete description as well as an evaluation of the service by reviewing our February 2009 article; however, here are the few changes worth noting:

- Expansion from U.S. coverage to global coverage (advanced features: search by regional markets, topic areas, U.S./international)
- Name change from AdSite to AdSight
- Change in pricing to customized on demand
- Social media tracking: Currently "pursuing" relationships with major social media sites

Social Search: Your Personalized News Service?

EDITORIAL

You've probably heard the term "social search," which means finding information by relying on the recommendations of people in your online social network. Some have claimed that social search is a better way to do online research—that it provides more relevant and valuable information than searching a database or relying on the algorithm of an internet search engine.

We first discussed social search in our November 2007 issue, but in the last couple of years, interest in social search has exploded. Why? What's happened? And is it paying off for searchers?

The biggest reason for the surge in interest can be described in two words: "Twitter" and "Facebook." These two social sites have taken off, and the buzz around anything social, including search, has grown enormously. (When we published that 2007 article, Facebook had 30 million members and Twitter 550,000; those numbers have now grown to 500 million and 180 million, respectively.) And there's no question that today people are relying more on their "friends" or "followers" as filters to inform them of what *is* useful to hear about—and, on the flip side, screen them from what is supposedly not worthy of their attention. In addition, since 2007, Google introduced its own social network, Buzz, as well as Google Social Search, which leverages the posting of one's contacts in Buzz to influence search results. Microsoft's Bing partnership with Facebook to retrieve and highlight friends' postings has also helped push social search along.

But ... is social search living up to its promise? When we wrote our analysis of the phenomenon in 2007, we agreed that social searching could indeed make online research more effective but that the ability to do so would be based on these four assumptions:

1. The people you have chosen to be part of your network are peo-

ple whose information selections (Web surfing, blog reading, etc.) are ones you would also choose or approve.

2. Even if the first assumption is true, your friends are in the process of looking for information that is relevant to your current interests and research needs.
3. Even if the first two assumptions are true, the Web pages, blog posts, etc., that are revealed to you from your friends' searches were reached by your friends consciously (not by random searching or in error) and were part of some directed research.
4. Whatever method or system is employed to surface these filtered and relevant information sources from your trusted network works efficiently and accurately.

So, as of spring 2011, have these assumptions turned out to be true? Is social search living up to its potential to be as effective, or even more effective, than traditional search? In at least one area—on Twitter—we think it is.

Here's why: If you create a group of colleagues and analysts on Twitter whose opinions and expertise for a certain topic area you trust, you can regularly receive highly filtered useful information just from that set of people. And sometimes their surfaced links, comments, and recommendations serve as early indicators of emerging trends well before the larger media or even niche sites have grasped the trends and publish them to a wider audience.

However, the term "social search" is really a misnomer. One's social contacts on Twitter or other networks provide not so much a collection of knowledge or information to actively search but, rather, more a passive flow of information—acting as a kind personalized social newswire. By creating a network of trusted sources you automatically will be alerted to a stream of informa-

tion *you* feel is noteworthy because someone *you* trust feels it is worthy enough to mention and pass along.

But social search does not and really cannot replace active research and searching. (Though we are becoming more worried about the influence of articles from mass-produced, cheap, sensational stories that use other techniques to capture links on Google—we will discuss this in a future editorial.) What social search does, though, as a personalized current awareness service, is provide us with one more valuable tool to filter and find our way through the glut of information on the web.

But maybe we should come up with a new name for social search—perhaps social filtering? ■

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Robert Berkman, **Editor**

Mary Ellen Bates, **Contributing Editor**
Deborah Poulson, **Editorial Services Manager**

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► Contact Us

Email: iasubs@infotoday.com
Phone: 609-654-6266
Fax: 609-654-4309

