

Investments and personal finance

These sites can help you make informed decisions

Janice S. Lewis and June Chressanthis

The World Wide Web has made it much easier for investors to track the performance of their investment portfolios and for prospective investors to obtain information about companies and their stocks. Sites aimed at helping consumers make informed decisions about mortgages, credit, retirement, and other financial issues also abound. As with much of the Internet, however, the vast quantities of information and the number of sites with similar, overlapping information can make the task seem overwhelming. This column contains a selective list of some of the sites that offer unique, objective data and are most useful to investors, students, researchers, and individuals interested in personal financial issues.

Comprehensive sites

Users can take their pick from a number of sites that offer stock quotes, price/volume charts, company profiles, and financial news. Some sites require free registration; others provide basic information for free, but charge for real-time quotes or in-depth analysis. Sites included here all provide a substantial amount of data at no charge.

- **DBC Online.** Free information at this site includes delayed stock and bond quotes, charts, mutual fund data, market updates, analysts' changes, and news from CBS MarketWatch. DBC is a leading provider of quote information and supplies quotes to

several other sites listed here. Access: <http://www.dbc.com/>.

- **FinancialWeb.** In addition to stock quotes and charts from DBC, this site offers a number of trademarked services. Rapid Research contains detailed historical fundamental performance data on over 8,000 listed U.S. stocks.

Wall Street Guru scans top investment publications for buy, hold, and sell recommendations and provides a summary of each source's stock picks and pans.

Small Cap Investor provides information about often overlooked small and micro-capitalization public companies. Access: <http://www.financialweb.com/>.

- **Hoovers.** Hoovers offers a mixture of free and subscription services. Start at Hoover's Power Searching for free company capsules, which contain a description of the company, key executives, sales and income figures, and employment size. Each capsule provides links to the company's Web site (if available), stock quotes and charts, last quarter earnings, Zack's earnings estimates, annual reports, SEC filings, and current news stories. Use Hoover's Stock Screener Search

FinancialWeb



www.financialweb.com

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to screen for stocks using up to 20 performance criteria. Access: <http://www.hoovers.com/>.



- **Invest-o-rama.** Several features make this site stand out. Type in a ticker symbol at Research a Stock Online, and get links to over 30 Web sites that provide quotes, charts, news, and other data about the company. The Investor's Web Directory includes over 6,223 sites in 70 categories, each with a brief description, while Corporations Online provides links to Web sites for over 4,000 public companies. Access: <http://www.investorama.com/>.

- **Market Guide Investment Center.** This site provides free company reports, quotes, news from Reuters and Business Wire, price charts, stock screening tools, and industry, sector, and company rankings on over 10,000 equities. Nice charting function makes it easy to produce price and volume charts for 3-, 6-, 12-, 24-, and 36-month periods. Access: <http://marketguide.com/>.

- **Quicken.com Investments.** This site provides convenient access to a wealth of company information, including delayed stock quotes; price and volume charts, with data going back five years; news; a company snapshot from Disclosure Inc.; broker recommendations from I/B/E/S; a list of competitors with links to their profiles; and links to SEC filings. Also offers stock screening tools, mutual-fund profiles, and directories. Access: <http://www.quicken.com/investments/>.

- **StockGuide.** The site for OTC/Bulletin Board investors, StockGuide specializes in small-capitalization stocks. The Pink Sheet company database contains information about thousands of companies' OTC stocks and can be searched by company, symbol, state, or industry. Access: <http://www.stockguide.com>.

- **Zack's Investment Research.** Enter a ticker symbol in Zack's free Research Center and get stock quotes and charts, a company profile, actual earn-

ings and earnings estimates, brokerage recommendations, balance sheet, income statement, and a compact financial snapshot. Site also includes list of profit and EPS surprises. Access: <http://www.zacks.com/>.

Exchanges

Nearly every domestic and foreign exchange now has a presence on the Web. For links to commodities, regional, futures, and foreign exchanges, try the extensive list at **Yahoo: Business and Economy: Finance & Investment: Exchanges.** Access: http://www.yahoo.com/Business_and_Economy/Finance_and_Investment/Exchanges/.

- **American Stock Exchange.** Tune in to Amex opening/closing bell live market reports and then watch a live video stream from the trading floor. The Data Site includes profiles of Amex-listed companies, with delayed stock quotes, stock price charts, and links to company news and EDGAR filings. The Web site also includes excerpts from the 1997 Amex Fact Book and an online glossary and dictionary. Access: <http://www.amex.com/>.

- **NASDAQ Web Site.** This Web site offers a wealth of information on all NASDAQ companies, including quotes, intraday and historical daily close and volume charts going back 72 months, news, and company facts. The latter section includes a stock report from Disclosure, Inc. in Adobe Acrobat format. Also includes summary of market activity and information about the performance of market indices. Access: <http://www.nasdaq.com>.

- **New York Stock Exchange.** Features a daily market summary, links to listed companies' web pages, and summary statistical information of NYSE trading activity, including daily reported volume starting in 1888 and daily closing values for NYSE indices starting in 1966. Access: <http://www.nyse.com>.

Securities and Exchange Commission filings

Publicly traded companies are required to file annual and quarterly financial reports and other documents with the Securities and Exchange Commission. The SEC began the transition to electronic filing in 1994 and required

electronic filing of most documents by 1996. These reports form the basis for many investment analysts' predictions and investment decisions. The documents are available at the SEC's Web site and from a number of other free and fee-based services.



EDGAR Database *of corporate information*

- **U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.** Filings are accessed through the EDGAR (Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis, and Retrieval) system. Each filing is one large text file. The EDGAR site posts documents 24 to 36 hours after they are received at the SEC. The SEC site also contains information about the Commission, publications aimed at helping individuals invest wisely, investor alerts, the SEC News Digest, and a directory of state securities regulators. EDGAR is also available through anonymous ftp (<ftp.sec.gov>) and gopher (<gopher.sec.gov>). *Access:* <http://www.sec.gov>.

- **Free EDGAR.** This Web site improves upon the government's Web site in several ways. The current day's SEC filings are available; data can be displayed and downloaded in Excel format; and filings are divided into segments, with a table of contents, so you can load just the portion you want. Search Free EDGAR by company name, ticker symbol, or SIC code. *Access:* <http://www.freedgar.com>.

- **Who Where? EDGAR Filings.** Search by company name or ticker symbol and receive a list of the filings the company has made with the SEC, along with a company profile with links to 20-minute delayed stock quotes and news. Download the entire filing or display portions of it. Also allows searching by filing type, industry, and date. *Access:* <http://www.whowhere.com/Edgar/index.html/>.

Mutual funds

- **IBC Financial Data.** Information concerning money market mutual funds can be found here. Basic information regarding how to select a money market fund and which funds

have the highest yields make this site unique. *Access:* <http://www.ibcdata.com>.

- **Morningstar.Net.** This site merits a look by the name alone. Based on one of the most valuable print investment tools, Morningstar.Net offers facts on 6,500 mutual funds and 8,000 stocks in the Quicktack Reports section. This site offers investment news and useful market data and research tools. A portfolio tracker is a big asset to the investor. *Access:* <http://www.morningstar.net>.

- **Mutual Funds Interactive.** This site bills itself as "the mutual funds home page." Interviews with various fund managers, a Q&A section, news and commentaries along with quotes and portfolio tracking represent the broad range of valuable information provided. *Access:* <http://www.brill.com>.

Financial news

There are innumerable journals, newspapers, newsletters, and newsgroups available to the individual investor. All of the sites listed here are free, but may require registration to access the entire contents of each issue.

- **Bloomberg News.** This site offers a daily digest of the top business news and feature stories from Bloomberg editors in New York, London, and Hong Kong; headlines and lead paragraphs of the top ten breaking financial stories; and fulltext of Bloomberg columns and newswire stories. *Access:* <http://www.bloomberg.com/bn/index.html>.

- **Business Wire.** Browse headlines of stories from the past seven days, then link to the fulltext. Stories can be searched by concept, keyword, or state. Photo wires can be searched back to January 1, 1997. *Access:* www.businesswire.com.

- **Cents Financial Journal.** Updated daily, this site presents a compendium of objective financial commentary, written by economists and analysts from companies such as Banc One and Moody's. Topics include fixed income, commodities, real estate, and economics. *Access:* <http://www.lp-llc.com/cents>.

- **CNNfn.** Follow the day's financial events as they happen. Hot Stories includes the day's most important news. Markets serves as the entry point to CNNfn's exten-

sive coverage of international and domestic financial markets, currencies, interest rates, and commodities. Fn to go, a JavaScript application, invokes a small browser to let you keep track of headlines while you surf to other destinations. *Access:* <http://cnn.fn.com>.

- **Euromoney.** The entire editorial content of the magazine, along with research and surveys, discussion forums, and virtual roundtable discussions. The content is divided in two ways: geographically so that visitors can browse via the world map, select a region or country, and read articles listed on those pages; and market sector, for example, direct investment, government bonds, foreign exchange, etc. Archive goes back to December 1995. *Access:* <http://www.euromoney.com/>.

- **misc.invest.** This newsgroup covers many topics in the investment and personal finance world. Subgroups such as financial-plan, real-estate, mutual-funds, and stocks cover these particular areas in greater depth. Access to newsgroups is available free through the Internet or through other platforms such as unix using programs like tin or netnews.

- **Money Talks.** Written by respected financial journalists, this site is rated as one of the top ten business magazines on the Internet. It is a daily magazine for the serious investor interested in mutual funds, personal finance, equities, and the economy. *Access:* <http://www.talks.com>.

- **Persfin Digest.** A newsletter presented in an interactive style. Any subscriber can submit a question or respond to one posed by other readers. A broad range of subjects is covered with input from certified financial planners and lay people interested in personal finance. All submissions are collated by the editor. To subscribe, send e-mail to **majordomo@shore.net** with the following text: **subscribe persfin-digest**. See Persfin Digest Archives to search the backfiles. *Access:* http://www.ameristock.com/pda/persfin_home.htm.

- **Reuters MoneyNet.** Reuters offers market snapshots, business headlines, currency rates, an economic calendar, and news organized by category (equity, financial, international, etc.). *Access:* <http://www.moneynet.com>.

Bonds

- **Moody's Investors Services.** Free data includes details about Moody's most recent ten bond rating actions, highlights of recent credit research, and a summary of ratings actions for the last three days. *Access:* <http://www.moody.com>.

- **Bonds Online.** This site covers the U.S. municipal and fixed income markets. Features include the ability to search for municipal bond issues and securities firms by state. Access to the most recent issue of Capital Markets Commentary is free; many other services are by subscription only. *Access:* <http://www.bonds-online.com>.

Retirement

Planning for retirement is an important part of personal finance. Planning and investing now, no matter the investor's age, can only help ease the transition into retirement.

- **AARP Webplace: Finance.** Sponsored by the AARP, this site addresses the financial concerns of the growing population of retired people in a number of areas, including retirement and estate planning. *Access:* <http://www.aarp.org/finance/home.htm>.

- **Financial Planning for Retirement.** Similar in content to the AARP site, this page features information on calculating retirement income, pensions, women and retirement, commentaries from syndicated columnists, and links to other financial planning sites. *Access:* <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/cts/osue/retplan.htm>.

- **Social Security Administration.** Users can submit the personal data required for the Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement online and receive the results by mail from the SSA. Other features include information about social security, disability and Medicare benefits, and how to apply for them. *Access:* <http://www.ssa.gov>.



Tax information

- **1040.com.** This site tries to provide "tax information for ordinary people." Here, the browser can read up on tax preparation tech-

niques, learn about allowable deductions, and find resources to assist in tax planning. *Access:* <http://www.1040.com>.

- **IRS Web Digital Daily.** When it is time to complete tax forms, taxpayers can visit this site, maintained by the IRS, to find downloadable federal tax forms (*Access:*



http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/forms_pubs/index.html), tax publications, and news from the IRS. *Access:* <http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/cover.html>.

Credit

- **Consumer World.** Rated in the top 5 percent of all Web sites, this public service site has gathered over 1,700 of the most useful consumer resources on the Internet and categorized them for easy access. Being knowledgeable and informed is certainly an important aspect of personal finance. This site helps by providing buying advice, product reviews, news of the latest scams, consumer rights booklets, and the ability to file complaints with the Better Business Bureau. *Access:* <http://www.consumerworld.org>.

- **Equifax.** Equifax is the only one of the Big Three credit reporting agencies which allows individuals to request a credit report online. *Access:* <http://www.equifax.com>.

Financial calculators

Financial calculators are a great resource. They help answer many types of financial planning questions such as whether to refinance a mortgage or buy or lease a new car.

- **FinanCenter.** This free site has over 100 calculators covering mortgages, retirement, credit lines, mutual funds, autos, and savings. The calculators are listed on the site in the form of questions. To find the calculator required, the investor simply looks through the list for the question being asked. *Access:* <http://www.financenter.com>.

- **Money Advisor.** A "financial help directory for aid in resolving questions related to money." The goal of the site is to provide tools for consumers to make decisions about

their finances. Free calculators are provided, as are links to online government agencies and financial institutions. Links to a free amortization schedule and new and used car prices are a nice feature. *Access:* <http://www.moneyadvisor.com>.

Associations

- **American Association of Individual Investors.** This educational Web site for the individual investor includes FAQs, glossaries and information about various types of investments, as well as articles from association publications. The quarterly Mutual Fund Update offers comparative analysis of funds. *Access:* <http://www.aaii.org>.

- **NAIC Online.** Sponsored by the National Association of Investors Corp., this site's primary focus is investment education for individuals and investment clubs. *Access:* <http://www.better-investing.org>.

- **National Association of Securities Dealers.** The NASD is the largest securities-industry, self-regulatory organization in the United States. Its Web page includes market statistics, speeches, policy papers, news, a glossary, educational materials, and a calendar of events. *Access:* <http://www.nasd.com>.

- **Securities Industry Association.** SIA members control 90 percent of funds in the investment industry. Its Web site examines technology and industry issues through briefing papers, reports, articles, surveys, and proposed rule changes. It also includes program information, a member directory, and a directory of exchanges and industry entities. *Access:* <http://www.sia.com>.

Miscellaneous sites

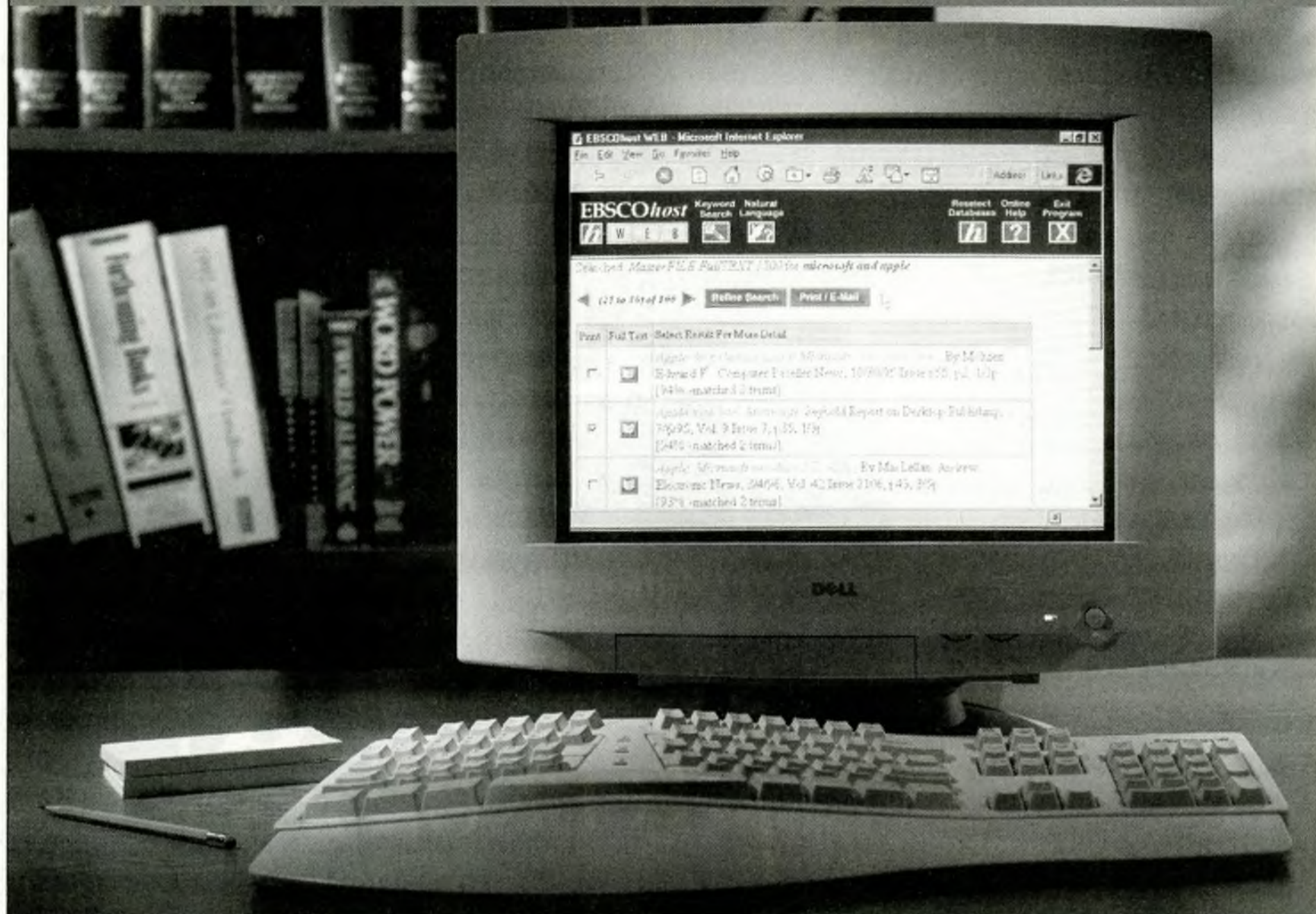
- **EduStock.** This educational site includes tutorials on the stock market and how to pick good stocks. A free stock market simulation is a highlight of the site. *Access:* <http://library.advanced.org/3088/>.

- **Netstock Direct.** Investors who want to buy stock directly from companies will find this site to be invaluable, as it includes a list of companies with direct stock plans. *Access:* <http://netstockdirect.com>.

- **Online Investment Services.** Comprehensive guide to discount stock brokers and discount commodity brokers. *Access:* <http://www.sonic.net/~donaldj>. ■

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