

ITALIAN BEST SOURCES OF MARKET AND BUSINESS INFORMATION

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When you search for market and business information on the Web, you may find some difficulties in finding and evaluating which sources are the best, i.e. reliable and updated. When the information you need are related to a country which is different from yours, your attempt to find valuable information sources may be challenging.

The scope of this contribution is to provide readers with some practical tools to limit the waste of time in finding information about Italian market and to exercise Competitive Intelligence (CI) on Italy.

Usually, foreign companies looking for information on the Italian market face some problems in understanding its structure, the local laws and the sources which are available. Moreover, the language represents a barrier, too. In fact, many websites are written only in Italian; others have a short English version which is not complete as the Italian one. An overview of the complex Italian market may help readers overcome these hurdles.

A look to the Italian market

According to ISTAT (Italian Statistics Institute), there are about 4.3 mln of industry and service companies which employ about 16.3 mln of people in 2005. The market structure is characterized by many small and midsized local companies: about 94.9% of companies have less than 10 employees and about 44% of the production value is created by companies with less than 20

employees. The more used legal form of a company is the sole ownership (about 65% on the total), to confirm the strong presence of small companies.

There are also many subsidiaries of multinationals, often more based on production than on strategic formulation or decision making.

The most important sector is "Services" which concerns about 76.7% of the Italian companies, generates about 53.7% of the value of the industry and employs about 59.5% of people.

In general, the Northern part of Italy is the most developed region (about 52% of the Italian companies and 65% of total employees), with the presence of numerous industrial districts which characterize the so-called "Made in Italy".

Italian online sources for market and business information

In the attempt to search information about Italian companies and industries on the web, you may use a variety of valuable information sources. It depends by the information you need: statistics? Company list and general information? Information about a specific industry?

After defining what you need, please try to use these sources, which are classified in Statistics, Company, Industry and Business. Also links to Italian Ministries and industry associations may provide you helpful information for your search. Obviously, this list contains only the main Italian information sources and cannot be considered exhaustive.

Statistics

The most important source for statistics and territorial data about the Italian market is **ISTAT**, which is the National Statistics Institute (www.istat.it).

Istat also coordinates a network of about 10.000 private statistical operators, called **SISTAN** (www.sistan.it). At this link, you may find industry statistics as well as in **STARNET** (www.starnet.unioncamere.it), which is the portal of Unioncamere (Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce).

All these websites provide information for free, but they are mainly in Italian.

Company information

If your scope is to write a company profile or to benchmark your company toward a competitor, you may find **CERVED** (www.cerved.com) very useful: it is a specialized website which contains financial information like the balance sheets of all the Italian companies SpA/Srl (i.e. capital companies: "Società per Azioni" and "Società a Responsabilità Limitata"), company information and history and also information on private persons who register a company. At this link some content is available for free or after authentication: top 1500 companies' list (available also in English), benchmarking examples and some industry reports and statistics.

If you need financial information about a listed company, you'll find interesting information at www.borsaitaliana.it, the website of the Italian stock exchange market. Available only in Italian, you can access information, such as company profile and investors' reports, for free or under subscription.

Another link, www.infoimprese.it (the portal created by the Italian Chambers of Commerce), provides an almost complete list of Italian companies with general information such as the location and the main products.

Industry information and associations

The two main Italian institutions which provide reports and analysis about a variety of industries are **Unioncamere** (www.unioncamere.it, the Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce) and **Confindustria** (www.confindustria.it, the Confederation of Italian Industry). A very deep analysis of local industries is also provided by **Istituto Tagliacarne** (www.tagliacarne.it), founded by Unioncamere in 1986.

In the attempt of defining the characteristics of a specific industry, also industry associations may be useful. In many of them there are offices or departments dedicated to information collection: only some of these information are generally grouped in public reports. Some links to Italian industry associations are: www.farmindustria.it (pharmaceutical), www.ance.it (construction contractors), www.ucimu.it (automation tools and systems), www.abi.it (banks) and www.aaipa.it (food).

Business information

General information about business may be found on the Italian press.

The most important Italian business newspaper is **Il Sole 24 Ore** (www.ilsole24ore.it), which offers online daily news in English about Italy and Europe. It has information on the various Italian regions, a Who's who, Italian government, facts and a few statistics about Italy. Il Sole 24 Ore is used as source for Financial Times, NewsResearch (Thomson) and other online international databases, often abstracted in English.

Other important newspapers are **Milano Finanza** (www.milanofinanza.it; only in Italian; mainly financial information), **Il Corriere Della Sera** (www.corriere.it), **La Repubblica** (www.repubblica.it), **Il Messaggero** (www.ilmessaggero.it) and **La Stampa** (www.lastampa.it).

Among the business magazines, **Il Mondo** (www.ilmondo.rcs.it) and Panorama Economy (...) may be cited. They often contains interviews/profiles about companies and people.

Also the links to Italian government and ministries (for instance, www.senato.it, www.camera.it, www.interno.it) may help you during a research. You can find also links to constitutional organs, local entities and other public institutions. Most of these public sites have information in English. On the homepages of the ministries you can find, always depending on the ministry, laws, researches carried out on the sector, statistics, committees etc. It is important as always the "contact us" bottom if you do not find the information you are looking for.

And last but not least, what you need to know when you are about to search some information in Italy is that you must consider the privacy law which is the most restrictive one in Europe. Implemented in 1997, it states that the use of people references (address, phone number) is legal only with their written authorization; the use of the email contact is particularly protected and you

can hardly contact someone you've have not heard by phone/in person before. The law also states that everybody can ask at any time to be cancelled from a database and many other restrictions. When you try to interview people, they often are very suspicious and want to know from where you had their name. Therefore, personal contacts are very important: you can get more information if you refer to a direct contact or a person you know in common.

Some examples of European online sources

It may be interesting for you a short – non exhaustive - list of some European online information sources. I spoke about Western Europe, because for East Europe you are the teacher!

For statistics, there is the official website of European Community, **Eurostat** (<http://epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int>), which contains statistical data (demographics, population, economic data etc.) on EC countries, mainly free of charge.

There are two other interesting sites, <http://isi.cbs.nl> and <http://clickz.com/stats>: the first one is by **ISI** (International Statistic Institute), one of the more important statistical association in Europe; the second one, called **ClickZStats**, contains statistical information on countries and industries.

For information on companies, there are some websites which give you the possibility to find annual reports, financial accounts and ratios, activities and ownerships of European companies, like **Amadeus** (<https://amadeus.bvdep.com>) and **OneSource** (www.onesource.com). Amadeus, a Pan-European database by Bureau Van Dijk, contains information about 9 million companies in Europe, while Onesource about 400,000 (both are on payment).

There are also websites focused on companies of a specific country like **Axesor** (www.axesor.es) for Spain and **CompaniesHouse** (www.companieshouse.gov.uk) for UK.

For business information, you may find useful some local newspapers and magazines, like **El Pais** for Spain (www.elpais.com), **Le Monde** for France

(www.lemonde.fr); for UK, **The Times** (www.timesonline.co.uk), **The Guardian** (www.guardian.co.uk), The Financial Times (www.ft.com; it contains also free-of-charge annual report of the main companies) and The Economist (www.economist.com). If you don't know which is the main newspapers and magazines of a country you're interested in, you may check on online press directories, like for instance www.newsd.com.

And so what?

As you read, in order to conduct a good research in Italy it is necessary:

- to know the Italian complex market structure;
- to identify the best Italian sources for the information you need (and also know the language, as many sources are written only in Italian or have only a short version in English);
- to know the critical aspects of the Italian privacy law;

and not necessary, but recommended, especially if you need to conduct a field research:

- to have personal contacts inside different companies.

It's not easy for foreigners to overcome these hurdles. You may surely conduct the search by yourself, but consider if it is worth to waste your time in understanding Italian peculiarities or if you can use it in a more profitable way, while relying on local colleagues to help you in your search.

Of course, if you want to learn Italian you're welcome to spend your holiday in our beautiful country!

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