



internet browser

How to Find People on the Internet

by Hon. Jefferson Lankford

One asset of the Net is its ability to find people. It offers both postal and e-mail addresses as well as telephone numbers. Information for United States residents is widely available, but people and businesses around the world can also be found. For example, I recently looked up the residential telephone number of a former judge who is now a member of the House of Lords in the United Kingdom.

U.S. Telephone Numbers

U.S. residential and business telephone numbers are readily available. Borrowing familiar terminology, residential databases are often referred to as “white pages” and business databases as “yellow pages.”

A name search is ordinarily used to access residential numbers. Some search engines require that you also specify a state or city, others make that information optional, and still others search the entire U.S. Some searches are for exact name matches, while others are “fuzzy” searches for similar names.

A search may produce few or many matches, depending on whether the search is fuzzy and whether it is geographically limited. The size of the database also affects the number of matches. However, most Internet telephone directories claim huge databases containing tens of millions of telephone numbers.

The databases mainly incorporate the published phone company directories from around the country. As a result, unlisted telephone numbers are not included. The databases do vary in age, so you may need to try more than one. Some indicate when each entry was last updated.

Many of the Net directories provide street or e-mail addresses, or both, when returning a telephone entry. Others conduct a further search for the e-mail address with the click of a button after finding the telephone number.

Some services also offer “reverse number lookup”—you enter a phone number and the search returns a name and address. A few offer reverse address lookup: you enter an address and a telephone number is returned. And others have a map feature, allowing you to get an area map of the vicinity of the address.

The accompanying box shows some of the best Internet telephone directories. In a limited, single-name test of the major directories, WhoWhere performed best, returning an accurate, current result.

E-mail Addresses

Many telephone search engines also offer e-mail searches. But some Web sites emphasize or specialize in e-

mail addresses. Try a search for your own name. If your e-mail address is not found, you can register it with the search site so that others can find you. Beware, however, that this may increase unwanted commercial e-mail to you.

Searching Usenet

You can search Usenet—the newsgroups—for names of either the authors of posts or names mentioned in the posts. Of course, many posters use nicknames, so you may not find the person by searching for their real name even if they have posted a message. This search can produce the author’s e-mail address.

These searches can be conducted on Usenet search engines, such as Dejanews: www.dejanews.com.

Specialty Searches

If you are looking for a lost adult relative or friend, you can try posting a message in the newsgroup “alt.missing-adults.” Former schoolmates might be found in alumni directories at the school’s Web site. Most of these directories are voluntary, however; you must ask to be included. If you want to be found by classmates, you can register here. For links to alumni directories try: www.halcyon.com/investor/alumni.htm and www.infophil.com/world/alumni.

Some government databases can be accessed. For example, many Maricopa County civil case histories can be searched at www.supcourt.maricopa.gov/esp/casehistory.html. Maricopa County recorder documents are found at recorder.maricopa.gov/recorder/imaging. Most government documents cannot be accessed, however. Motor vehicle files, vital statistics records, voter rolls and criminal records are generally unavailable.

Many fee-for-service search providers do business on the Internet. They offer credit or background checks or

U.S. Phone and E-mail Directories

WhoWhere	www.whowhere.com
Planet All	www.planetall.com
Lookup USA	www.lookupusa.com
411	www.four11.com
Switchboard	www.switchboard.com
Bigfoot	www.bigfoot.com
Infospace	www.accumail.com
Yahoo	yahoo.com/phone
Info USA	www.databaseamerica.com
US West	wp.uswestdex.com
Anywho	www.anywho.com

missing-person searches. A more recent development is software that performs people searches. Although I have not tested any of these programs, some advertising suggests that they can access otherwise unavailable data—a doubtful claim.

Lawyers can be found in two principal directories: Martindale-Hubbell (a listing somewhat different from the published directory) and West's lawyers' directory. Two URLs can be used to access the former: *www.martindale.com* and *www.lawyers.com*. West's is available at *www.wld.com*. Links to law faculty directories are collected in the Directory of Legal Academia, *www.cornell.edu/dla*.

Outside the U.S.

Many sites offer telephone and e-mail information for non-U.S. locations, or collections of links to directory sites. Here are some of the most useful:

Canada—*Canada411.sympatico.ca*

Europe and World—Netscape (links): *infospace.netscape.com/info/netctr/index_int.htm*; Eurocall (links) *www.eurocall.net/world*; WEB (links) *www.worldwmail.com*; Phone Numbers: *www.phonenumbers.net*; Telephone Directories on the Web (links): *www.teldir.com*.

Search Several Databases From One Site

A few sites enable searches of several databases from their location. Unfortunately, they require that you enter the name or phone number separately for each database to be searched, and they search one database at a time. However, they are convenient because they collect several search sites in one location. These include: Search Gateway: *www/searchgateway.com*; Trackem: *www.toolcity.net/~richreen/trackem.html*; Steve's Place: *www.netcentral.co/uk/steveb/smail.html*; and *www.freeality.com/ps.html*.