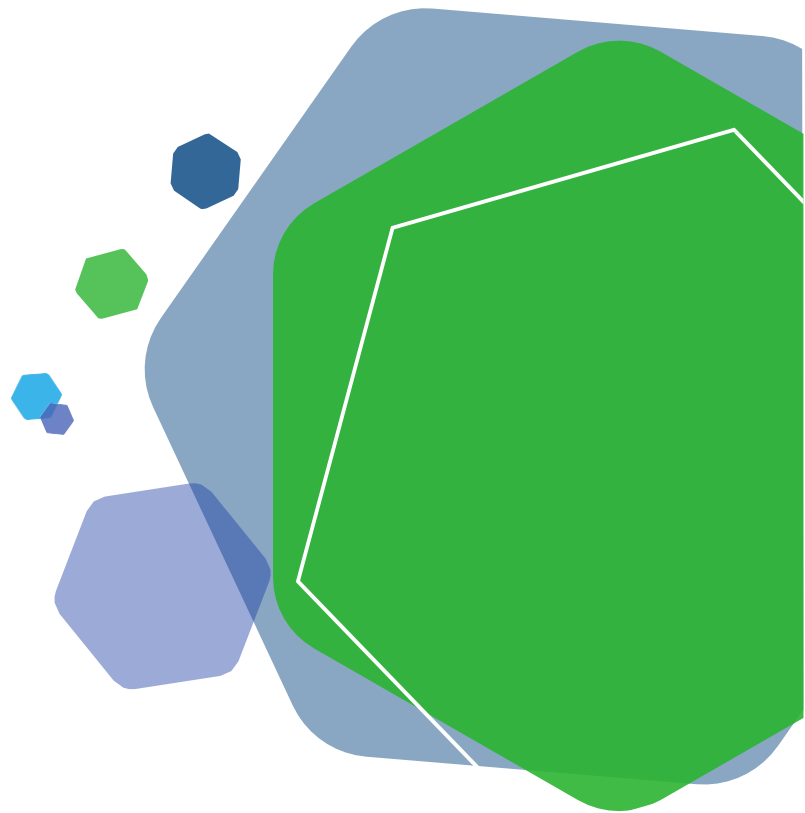


Business Information: The Essentials

A Scottish Enterprise Research Service Guide

March 2025



Business Information - The Essentials

The internet can provide a wealth of information, but at times it can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate. This guide is designed to help you identify reliable and informative sources of business information and covers the following topics:

- Scottish and UK Statistics
- Company information
- Market research
- Primary research
- International and country research
- International trade resources
- Further useful resources
- Support available to Scottish companies and individuals based in Scotland



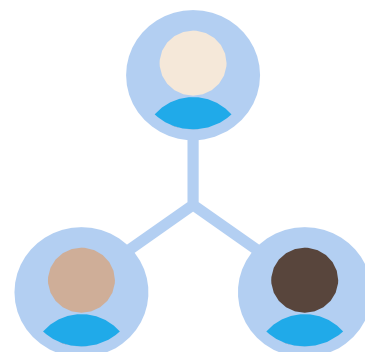
Scottish and UK Statistics

Demographics

When starting up or expanding a business, demographics on potential customers can be vital to marketing and generating sales. Below are some key resources that can provide this information and more:

- The [National Records of Scotland](#) is responsible for the registration of births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths and adoptions in Scotland and publishes statistics on these topics.
- [Scotland's Census](#) is the official source of data from the 2011 census and provides access to data on a wide range of topics including area profiles. The 2022 Census was conducted in March 2022 and the Scottish Government will start to publish that data in 2023.
- [Understanding Scottish Places](#) breaks down Census data to local level which allows characteristics of different areas across Scotland to be compared.
- [Scottish Government Statistics](#) provide an up-to-date range of statistics specific to Scotland including education, health, and housing. [The Scottish Household Survey](#) provides information on the structure, characteristics, attitudes and behaviour of Scottish households at a national and at a local level.
- [The Office of National Statistics](#) (ONS) is the recognised national statistical body for the UK and covers a wide range of demographic, economic and social issues at UK level.

Demographics are statistics that describe key characteristics of a population, such as age, gender and ethnicity.



Business population

There are several key sources that estimate the current stock of businesses in Scotland and the UK. The resources below also provide information on business survival rates:

- [Businesses in Scotland](#) is an annual Scottish Government publication which provides information on the number of businesses operating in Scotland and is broken down into different groupings including area, size and industry. [Growth Sector Statistics](#) provides Scottish sector data.
- [Business Demography](#) is an annual ONS publication on the birth, death and survival rates of businesses in the UK.
- [Business Population Estimates for the UK and Regions](#) are official estimates of private sector businesses in the UK, provided by the Department for Business, Energy and Industry Strategy, published annually.

The economy

According to the ONS, UK economic activity can cover a number of different areas including production, distribution, consumption, and trades of goods and services. Individuals, businesses, organisations and governments can all have an impact on the development of the UK economy.

[The Office of National Statistics](#) and [Scottish Government Statistics](#) are good places to start for official statistics on the economy.

Company Information

When researching a company, a useful starting point is the company's website if they have one. Although it might seem obvious, an official website can provide a wealth of information from biographies on key members of staff and executives, to annual reports.



Structure of companies

The level of information available on any UK company may depend on the structure of the company. The three main legal forms are:

- **Public Limited Company (PLC)** - PLCs are usually large, well-known businesses. They also trade shares on the Stock Exchange, and as such, information is usually more readily available.
- **Limited Company (Ltd.)** - Limited companies do not trade shares, however, they are required to submit annual accounts to Companies House.
- **Sole Traders and Partnerships** - Information on these companies is often fairly limited. They file their accounts with HMRC for VAT purposes, however these accounts are not publicly available.

Business Gateway's [guide on legal structures](#) is a useful starting point for further information on the types of legal structure that a company may take.

Registers

[Companies House](#) is an online service that can be used to search for company accounts and scanned documents. Information available includes registered office address, filing history, financial accounts, annual returns, officers, charges and business activity. A company's annual accounts should detail their turnover. If this information isn't provided, it may be that the company is small and is therefore entitled to submit Abbreviated Accounts. Please note that the Companies House search will not give information on sole traders.



Companies House has a directory of [Overseas Registries](#) which is grouped by region. It is not a comprehensive list of directories but is a helpful starting point to find out more about overseas competitors and provides an insight into company structures and forms, particularly in the United States.

Company directories

Company directories can be used to identify potential clients, competitors and business partners:

- [Yell.com](#) - the online version of the traditional Yellow Pages
- [The Wholesaler](#) - a directory of UK suppliers and traders across a wide range of sectors
- [Europages](#) - listings of over 2 million companies in 35 countries
- [Kompass](#) - a worldwide Business to Business (B2B) company directory
- [Alibaba](#) - an international directory of manufacturers, suppliers, exporters, importers, buyers and wholesalers
- [OpenCorporates](#) – open data on over 85million companies in over 75 jurisdictions
- [ScottishIndustryDirectories](#) – SE's list of Scottish manufacturing companies and [supply chain mapping directory](#)
- [Buy from the UK](#) – Department of Business and Trade supplier directory
- [thewholesaler.co.uk](#) – directory of UK suppliers and traders

Tools like [GoogleMaps](#) can help you to search for businesses in your area offering similar products or services. Additionally, customer review sites like [Trustpilot](#) and [TripAdvisor](#) can give you insights into how customers perceive competitors.

Trade associations

Trade associations are groups of companies or individuals working in the same industry with common goals and interests. They can act as a representative body for their industry, speaking on behalf of their members to government, the media or regulators. An association for your industry of interest will often have directories of members and may have industry reports or latest news. For some regulated professions such as dentists or architects, it might be required for your business to join a trade association, but generally there is no requirement to join one.

[British Services](#) and [Trade Association Forum](#) have lists of UK trade associations.



Market Research

Market research can help you to better understand your customers and what they need, as well as helping you to make informed decisions about your business and find out what your competitors are doing.

Market research reports from established providers can be expensive, however you can obtain free extracts and summaries from aggregators such as [Market Research World](#). Websites that distribute and monitor press releases, for example [PR Newswire](#), also often publish report snippets.

Most market research companies often provide a free executive summary or extract to allow consumers to "try before they buy" so it's a good idea to visit the provider's website. Examples of companies that provide free information without purchasing the full report include [Mintel](#), [IBISWorld](#) and [Statista](#).



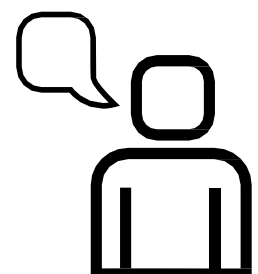
In addition to commercial providers of market research reports, the types of resources listed below can provide free information on a number of different markets:

- [Euromonitor International Blog](#) posts webinars, podcasts and analyst commentaries that cover consumer industries and services across different international markets.
- Large multinational accountancy and consultancy firms often publish some of their research findings online for free and publish reports on a wide range of industries:
 - [KPMG](#)
 - [Deloitte](#)
 - [EY](#)
 - [McKinsey Quarterly](#)
 - [PwC](#)
- [YouGov](#) is an international internet-based research firm which provides information on the latest public opinion research.
- The [British Library's Business & IP Centre](#) publishes free industry and intellectual property guides which highlight authoritative sources including useful databases, websites and publications.
- In addition to research and statistics available from the [Scottish Government](#), the [Scottish Enterprise Learning Zone](#) is a library of business intelligence including webinars, podcasts, case studies, guides, industry reports, comments, and insights. Free [Business Gateway Market Reports](#) help market sector understanding.
- Industry events are listed on [Events Eye](#), [Visit Scotland](#), [The List](#) and [Eventbrite](#)

Primary research

Market research reports can provide you with an insight into your industry, but you may need to supplement this information with your own field research. Primary research (or field research) can help you to understand customer reactions and attitudes, and the local market for your products and services by talking directly to your target audience.

The [Business Gateway Guide to Market and Customer Research](#) provides guidance on interpreting market information, the different types of research you can undertake, planning field research, and analysing your results.



International and country research



The following resources are sources of statistics that will be useful when looking for demographic, economic and other information on international countries:

- [Eurostat](#) is the statistical office of the European Union (EU) and published statistics on topics including the economy, population, industry, transport and the environment.
- [The CIA World Factbook](#) provides information and comparisons on the history,
- [World Bank Open Data](#) is a source of information on development topics on countries around the world which can be viewed by country or by indicator, including health, education, gender, climate change, economy & growth, infrastructure and trade. [Business Ready \(B-READY\)](#) (which replaces '[Doing Business](#)') assesses business and investment environment worldwide annually.
- [OECD Economic Surveys](#) are useful economic overviews of a range of countries and each one covers an analysis of economic development with chapters on economic challenges. OECD also provides [population statistics](#).
- The [United Nations Statistics Division](#) publishes data on the economic, demographic and environmental issues facing countries around the world. Their [Comtrade Database](#) provides detailed global trade data.
- The [Export and International Markets](#) guides from Scottish Enterprise provide useful insights on exporting for the first, investigating new markets, selling online and export training programmes.
- [Ernst & Young's Attractiveness Survey](#) examine attractiveness of regions/countries for investment.

International trade resources

The following resources provide statistics on UK and international imports and exports:

- [UK Trade Info](#) provides detailed figures from HMRC on exports and imports between the UK and many countries around the world. Data can be broken down by industry codes and by [region](#) - including Scotland - and you can build your own data tables.
- [Great.gov.uk](#) by the Department of Business and Trade provides a list of export opportunities and also offers a [Find online marketplaces](#) directory.
- [Trade Map](#) has statistics on exports and imports between the UK and a range of countries around the world for broad industry sectors.
- [European Commission Market Access Database](#) provides information to companies exporting from the European Union to a range of countries around the world; covers topics including tariffs, procedures, and formalities; and statistics on trade flows of goods between EU and non-EU countries for specific products.
- The [Observatory of Economic Complexity](#) is an online resource that provides interactive visualisations of international trade data for different countries, cities & regions, and products as well as exploring trade relationships between countries - for example between the United States and China.
- Published by the Department of International Trade, [Exporting Country Guides](#) are aimed at UK businesses who want to develop their overseas trade.
- [CBI Market Information](#) provides sector and product insights within Europe.
- [Public Contracts Supplier Finder](#) provides a directory of Scottish public contract opportunities.

Further Resources



Search engines

Aside from popular search engines such as [Google](#), you may want to consider searching for information via metasearch engines - such as [Dogpile](#) - which aggregate searches from several search engine providers and deliver the results (minus duplicates) in one list.

[Ecosia](#) is a search engine which uses its profits to plant trees with every search.

[Google Scholar](#) is an extension which provides a way to search for academic literature and research from theses, books, articles, academic publishers, universities and professional societies.

Business Gateway's guide on [Search Engine Optimisation](#) provides further information on tools that can help you gain insights into your competitor's SEO efforts.

AI

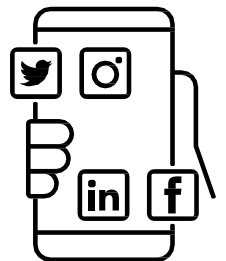
AI tools have transformed how businesses approach research and decision making. You should always verify the data provided by AI and cross check it with other reliable sources. It's essential to understand the limitations of AI and be prepared to intervene when necessary. However, AI tools may be able to assist you in your research. Useful AI tools include [ChatGPT](#), [Microsoft Co Pilot](#) and [Google Gemini](#).

News, media and blogs

Official media sources such as [BBC News](#) and [Sky News](#) can be useful for up-to-date, authoritative information if you cannot find business information elsewhere. However, don't forget that social media sources such as [Twitter](#), often report on breaking news long before newspapers are printed.

Blogs are often an overlooked information source. There is no reason why you can't rely on information taken from blogs, provided they are up-to-date, trustworthy, impartial and backed up by secondary sources. As well as the opinion pages of [The Guardian](#) and [Reuters](#), look for blogs by industry experts.

We live in an age where the internet is frequently the main source of our news and information meaning news audiences are at a higher risk of encountering and sharing fake news. UK consumer organisation **Which?** has created a guide on [How to spot fake news](#) and ensure your sources are reliable.



Intellectual property

Protecting your intellectual property with the right kind of protection can help to stop other people from stealing or copying the names of your products or brands, your inventions, or the designs of your products. Some types of intellectual property protection you get automatically, while others you may need to apply for which may incur a cost.

Copyright, patents, designs and trademarks are all types of intellectual property protection.

What is intellectual property?

Intellectual property (IP) refers to creations of the mind, including inventions, literary and artistic works, designs, symbols, names and images used in commerce.

- World Intellectual Property Organisation



- [Business Gateway's intellectual property introduction](#) covers the basics and looks at the kind of protection you might need for your products or brands.
- [Espacenet](#) provides free access to over 140 million patent documents which allows you to check if your product or idea has already been invented and patented by someone else.
- The [British Library Business and IP Centre](#) provides guides to intellectual property, covering trademarks, copyright and patents.
- The [UK Government](#) provides some information on the different types of intellectual property protection as well as things to think about before you apply.

Individuals

As we increasingly rely on the internet for information we can find instantly, we often forget about another important source of information - other people! On one hand, the internet does make it easier to get in touch with experts and academics, even in other countries. However, it is also important to check the source of information is trustworthy so you may want to check professional networking sites such as [LinkedIn](#) for mention of any potential contacts.



Libraries

Not everything can be found through a search engine. It may be worth visiting the business information services at Scotland's reference libraries which can provide access to market research reports, databases, international directories and industry journals:

- The [National Library of Scotland Business Service](#) includes a collection of dedicated business [e-Resources](#). If you have a residential address in Scotland, you can register online and access some of these resources from home, while others can be accessed in the Library's [Reading Rooms](#) at the National Library's buildings in Edinburgh, or in Glasgow's [Kelvin Hall](#).
- The [Business & IP Centre at the Mitchell Library](#) in Glasgow has resources covering market research, British manufacturing standards, patents, and trademarks.



Support available to Scottish companies

For companies with a registered address in Scotland -

- **Scottish Enterprise** can provide research on international opportunities if your company is interested in doing business out with Scotland. You can contact Scottish Enterprise on **0300 013 3385** or visit www.scottish-enterprise.com.
- **Business Gateway's Information Service** provides research and support to start up and grow your business. You can contact Business Gateway on **0300 013 4753** or visit www.bgateway.com.
- **Find Business Support** provides information on the public sector support available in Scotland including funding, training, self-help guides and information on the cost of doing business. You can contact Find Business Support on **0300 303 0660** or visit www.findbusinesssupport.gov.scot.

If you are an individual, for example a student, an academic, or a job seeker, the [National Library of Scotland](#) and the [Mitchell Library](#) can provide help with business research.

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