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## Quick access: Find Statistical Data on the Internet

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# Quick Access: Find Statistical Data on the Internet

by  
**Di Su**

In a typical business library, current or historical quotes on interest rates, foreign exchange rates, stocks, etc. are requested frequently, if not daily. Remember those days when we received government releases on official data through regular mail? They sometimes came late, sometimes simply got lost. Now we are happy to know that most of the data are available for free on the Internet. The new medium is fast, reliable, available at any time, and saves physical space in a library, which is particularly important if your library happens to be a small one. We must admit that data providers have made the Internet one of its best usages.

At my daily work in an accounting firm's library, I have been using the Internet to search for statistical data and found a number of sites that deserve bookmarking. The following is a list of annotated sources that provide most-wanted statistical data in my library. I hope the list benefits other business librarians as well. While most of them are web sites, some are ftp or gopher sites. When it is possible, both current and historical data sources are given.

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### Selected Interest Rates

Main: <http://www.bog.frb.fed.us/releases/H15>

Current: <http://www.bog.frb.fed.us/releases/H15/update>

Historical: <http://www.bog.frb.fed.us/releases/H15/data.htm>

Published by the Federal Reserve Board, Federal Reserve Statistical Release H.15 "Selected Interest Rates" contains daily interest rates for selected U.S. Treasury and private money market and capital market instruments. The weekly release is posted on Monday. Daily updates are posted Tuesday through Friday. The release can be viewed by either ASCII or PDF format—the difference is that the former is fast to download while the latter bears better presentation layout. The historical database is updated quarterly. All historical data files can be downloaded into a zip file. The data files were compressed with PKZIP; the software to expand the files is available from PKWARE's web site at <http://www.pkware.com>.

### Consumer Price Index

Main: <http://stats.bls.gov/cpihome.htm>

Current: <http://stats.bls.gov/news.release/cpi.nws.htm>

Historical: 1913-1998

CPI-U: <http://146.142.4.24/cgi-bin/surveymost?cu>

CPI-W: <http://146.142.4.24/cgi-bin/surveymost?cw>

Regional: <http://stats.bls.gov/top20.html>

Also known as CPI, the Consumer Price Index is one of the most important benchmarks the financial world watches. It is an inflationary indicator that measures the change in the cost of a fixed basket of products and services, including housing, electricity, food, and transportation. Hence it is often referred to as the cost-of-living index. The U.S. Department of Labor publishes the Consumer Price Index every month. The main page contains an overview, frequently asked questions, news releases, and contact information. Current

data includes both All Urban Consumers (CPI-U) and Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). Historical data display range can be one, two, three, ten, or all years (1913-1998). Regional data includes the following regional areas: Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas, Kansas City, and San Francisco. You can choose from the categories of CPI-W, CPI-U, unemployment rate, unemployment level, and labor force level.

Telephone access is also available for your convenience. You would appreciate this when your company's network is down. Detailed CPI information is available by calling 1-202-606-7828. Recorded summaries of the Consumer Price Index are also available by calling any one of the metropolitan area the Consumer Price Index hotlines listed at this address <http://stats.bls.gov/cpi1998f.htm>. These hotline summaries typically include data for the United States city average as well as the specified area.

# The PPI measures average changes in selling prices received by domestic producers for their output.

## Producer Price Index

Main: <http://stats.bls.gov/ppihome.htm>

Current: <http://stats.bls.gov/news.release/ppi.nws.htm>

Historical: Various year ranges

Producer Price Index RevisioCurrent Series

<http://146.142.4.24/cgi-bin/surveymost?pc>

Producer Price Index-Commodities  
<http://146.142.4.24/cgi-bin/surveymost?wp>

Release Dates for 1999: <http://stats.bls.gov/ppi99.htm>

Also known as PPI, the Producer Price Index is an inflationary indicator released monthly by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics to evaluate wholesale price levels in the economy. The PPI measures average changes in selling prices received by domestic producers for their output. Most of the information used in calculating producer price indexes is obtained through the systematic sampling of virtually every industry in the mining and manufacturing sectors of the economy. Prior to 1978, this index was called Wholesale Price Index. The main page contains an overview, FAQ, news releases, and contact information. The historical data has various display ranges depending on what index you need.

## Foreign Currency Exchange Rates

Main: <http://www.oanda.com>

Current: <http://www.oanda.com/convert/classic>

Historical: [http://www.oanda.com/convert/cc\\_table](http://www.oanda.com/convert/cc_table)

OANDA's flagship 164 Currency Converter offers current and historical foreign currency exchange rates. You can set up language preferences (currently available in German, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish), and choose cash or credit card rates. The main page offers currency news and analysis, historical tables, current rates, and forecasts for world currencies. The default on current data page is today's quote although you can search any date after 1990. In the historical data page (2,000 days maximum), you can search on a specific date by entering the same date for both starting and ending dates.

## Noon Buying Rates

Main: <ftp://ftp.ny.frb.org/forex/12noon>

Current: <ftp://ftp.ny.frb.org/forex/12noon/latest>

Historical: <ftp://ftp.ny.frb.org/forex/12noon>

Also called Daily 12 Noon Buying Rates, they reflect foreign currency exchange rates. The addresses are ftp sites maintained by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. The noon buying rates in New York City are certified by the bank for customs purposes, such as for cable transfers payable in foreign currencies, as required by section 522 of the amended Tariff Act of 1930. These rates are also those required by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for the integrated disclosure system for foreign private issuers. The information is based on data collected by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York from a sample of market participants. Current rates are also available by calling 1-212-720-6130. Historical data starts from 1994.

## Per Diem Rates

Main: <http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mt/homepage/mtt/perdiem/travel.shtml>

Current: <http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mt/homepage/mtt/perdiem/perd99d.html>

Historical: [http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mt/homepage/mtt/perdiem/previous\\_years.html](http://policyworks.gov/org/main/mt/homepage/mtt/perdiem/previous_years.html)

Foreign areas: <http://www.state.gov/www/perdiems/index.html>

The General Services Administration, Office of Government-wide Policy, Office of Transportation and Personal Property, and Travel and Transportation Management Policy Division establish the maximum continental United States, or CONUS, per diem rates for federal traveler customers. CONUS means the forty-eight contiguous states and the District of Columbia. These rates are reviewed annually. The historical data ranges from 1995 to 1998. Maximum rates of per diem allowances for travel in foreign areas (1995-current) are established by the Secretary of State. These rates apply to all U.S. government employees and contractors.

Foreign per diem rates are also available in other formats:

<gopher://gopher.state.gov>  
<ftp://ftp.state.gov>

## Special Drawing Right

Main: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/tre/sdr/sdr.htm>

Current: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/tre/sdr/drates/rmcdwn4.htm>

Historical: <http://www.imf.org/external/np/tre/sdr/sdr.htm>

The special drawing right, or SDR, is an international reserve asset created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1969 and allocated to its members to supplement existing reserve assets. The value of the SDR is determined daily on the basis of a basket of five currencies: the U.S. dollar, the Deutsche mark, the French franc, the Japanese yen, and the pound sterling. The SDR valuation basket is revised every five years, most recently on January 1, 1996. The SDR interest rate, which is adjusted weekly, is a weighted average of the yields on specified short-term instruments in the domestic money markets of the five countries whose currencies are included in the SDR basket. The financial instruments used in this calculation are the market yield on three-month U.S. treasury bills, the three-month German interbank deposit rate, the three-month rate on French treasury bills, the three-month rate on Japanese certificates of deposit, and the market yield on three-month U.K. treasury bills. The historical data (1996-1998) is also available in PDF format.

## Stock Quotes

Real time: <http://pic5.infospace.com/info/rtq/index.htm>

<http://rtq.thomsoninvest.net/index.sht>

Current: <http://quote.yahoo.com>

Historical: <http://www.stocktools.com>

The listed real time quotes sites are free of charge, but you must register. InfoSpace provides fifty quotes per day. Thomson Real Time Quotes is less comprehensive than that of InfoSpace. For example, it does not provide price at market open, fifty-two week moving range, average volume, or previous closing price. But it offers one-hundred quotes per day. For delayed quotes there are numerous sites out there; Yahoo! is my favorite. It is easy to use and provides added-value information from company profile to insider activities. You can download retrieved quotes in spreadsheet format. Quotes are usually fifteen to twenty



minutes delayed, but good enough for a quick check. For historical data, there are not too many sites around. While StockTools has nice graphic presentations and other charming features, such as one-hundred free real-time quotes per day, it has a limited ability to display historical quotes. For instance, you cannot, at the time of this writing, search for a specific date except for yesterday's quote. The date you entered is considered "start date" but there is no "end date" box for you to type in. As a result, the entire daily quotes after "start date" will be displayed even if you don't want them. If you are AOL user, you will find AOL's "Historical Quotes" more practical.

## Mutual Funds

<http://www.stockmaster.com/sm/funds.html>

[http://cbs.marketwatch.com/funds/mf\\_center.htx?source=htx/http2\\_mw](http://cbs.marketwatch.com/funds/mf_center.htx?source=htx/http2_mw)

StockMaster lets you search funds by "Top Funds" or alphabetical list. Quotes can be displayed as "quote and chart" format with one, three, five, and ten-year return percentage, or "detailed quote" format with day, week, month, quarter, YTD, one, three, and five-year return percentage. CBS MarketWatch offers news, editorial archive, and features like "100 SuperStar Funds". Funds can be searched by rankings, Top 25 for example, or alphabetical order. The fund profile

includes basic data, performance (one-week, thirteen-week, YTD, one, three, five, ten-year, and since inception return percentage), rank in peer group, etc.

## Word to the Wise

Be aware of the nature of the Internet environment. Some links may be changed or even removed without notice. When available, bookmark two or more sites that offer similar information in case one is not accessible at the time of your search. Check your bookmark links periodically in order to save time for a future search.

Some of us used to rely on telephone services to get statistical data. Don't throw out old telephone numbers yet; they are useful when computer systems (whether it's your company's or the ones on the other end) are down.

Adobe's Acrobat Reader is highly recommended to download if you do not have one since some of the files can be read or downloaded or printed only by PDF format. You can download free PDF software from Adobe's web site at <http://www.adobe.com/prodindex/acrobat/main.html>.

The Internet is becoming a necessary resource in information services with its unique features, such as accessibility and timeliness. When it is used properly, the Internet sources can enhance a business library's reference services in an effective way. ☞