American Directory Assistance. *Access:*
http://www.abii.com/

American Directory Assistance is one of the free services offered at the American Business Information (ABI) Web site, a publicly-held company in business for 25 years that develops products to service the business and marketing communities. They produce a series of directories on CD-ROM for both personal and business use. Their databases are compiled from many sources including 5,200 Yellow Pages and Business White Pages; annual reports; SEC information; federal, state, and municipal government data, as well as business magazines and newsletters. With regard to currency and accuracy, they report that each business listing is verified with 16 million phone calls a year from staff who update and verify information on a continuous, real-time basis.

ABI's free directories are designed for students, businesses, public users, and potential buyers of their products to do everything from direct mail advertising, telemarketing, planning a vacation, or tracking down people who owe you money. Academic users will find this tool useful for basic quick directory assistance. You must first select either the "business" or "people" directory to conduct your search. The people, or residential, directory assistance is actu-

ally a database product of "Database America Companies"—a marketing information company that merged with ABI in 1996. The people directory is simple and direct, featuring a search form screen where you can enter either a name or a number and pull up the full name, address, and phone number. It automatically truncates a name and

will search the entire country or you can limit the search by state and city. The reverse directory feature is useful and not available on many other directory sites.

The free American Directory service for finding businesses is clunky and cumbersome for doing any real business marketing type of research, although you can search by industry type and limit by a geographic area, be it a city, state, or zip code and get a listing of business addresses and phone numbers. However, in order to perform this type of subject search, you must select the link to "yellow pages" or "sales leads and mailing lists" at the bottom of the screen. This latter link offers a more complex search engine and the ability to search by SIC code, major industry group, or yellow page headings and then limit by city, state, zip code, or Metropolitan Area (MSA). This would permit one to locate, say, all the Web design companies in your town or zip code area to either hire a designer or apply for a job. This type of search takes many steps, but you do finally get a results list.

For a charge of $3.00 they will let you then download a company profile of any of the business you select. A search for Web design businesses in the New York city area netted 91 hits and a charge of $45.50 to download the whole list. A similar search of another directory Web site, Big Yellow, (http://www1.bigyellow.com/) netted 14 hits, all free with direct links to each company's Web page. When doing a simple, straightforward search for the number and address of a particular company, however, you are required to enter both the name of the company and the state—which is fine if you know where the company is located. If not, you are out of luck. There other directory sites that do offer this useful feature, including Switchboard (reviewed next).—
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Switchboard. *Access*: http://www.
switchboard.com/

Switchboard provides a simpler interface and
a few more alternative features. This free
residential and business directory service has
been on the Web since 1996, offering ac-
cess to databases provided by the ABI com-
pany noted earlier. This site does offers a
number of additional features, such as the

Switchboard.

ability to search for Web sites and e-mail
addresses, apply for a free e-mail account,
and send flowers or a card to anyone you
choose with a few clicks of the mouse and
a valid VISA card. However, a number of
searches for e-mail addresses came up with
zero hits, so this part of the service isn't com-
prehensive by any means. The business di-
rectory does allow for searching by com-
pany name without having to enter a state,
which is useful, and it does permit searches
by major predefined category that can then
be limited by geographic area. However, it
isn't as sophisticated as the American Busi-
ness Directory's homesite as far as break-
down by zip codes, MSA, or SIC codes.

Switchboard offers a single site for find-
ing friends, family, and colleagues nation-
wide on the Internet while protecting their
privacy. Regarding privacy, they allow us-
ers to delete their entry if they want and
they do not allow for reverse look-ups. An-
other unique feature of this site is the abil-
ity of users to register with the service and
update their own entry with additional in-
formation such as FAX number, hobbies, e-
mail address, etc. Academic users would find
either of these sites useful for basic phone direc-
tory services, and clever and patient business stu-
dents could make use of the more advanced fea-
tures of the ABI site.—*Lucinda R. Zoe, Baruch
College; lrzbb@cunyvm.cuny.edu*

NARA Archival Information Locator
(NAIL) *Access*: http://www.nara.gov/
nara/nail.html

The National Archives and Records Admin-
istration is a vast storehouse of information
holding about 21.5 million cubic feet of tex-
tual material and a huge amount of infor-
mation in multiple formats. Until recently,
this was housed in 33 separate facilities such

as Presidential Libraries and regional archives,
but a prototype Web-based service has ap-
peared. A new Web-site unifies all of these
collections in one location, allowing the user
to search all or selected repositories. The con-
cept of accessing all of this information from
one's desktop is rather exciting, and the first
steps have been taken to make this a reality.

NAIL (NARA Archival Information Loca-
tor) is a searchable database of more than
20,000 items vital to those studying U.S. his-
tory or genealogy. Although this is a tiny
portion of the available records, this pilot
project holds great promise for the future of
access to this material. The heart of this ser-
vice is a search engine that allows one to
search the entire available holdings.

For those of you who are familiar with
Silverplatter's ERL front-end, this search en-
gine looks very similar, although it's cus-
tomized for NARA. The user is offered the
familiar forms for entering keywords and
the use of a full boolean search. It is also
possible to specify the types of materials de-
sired (from sound clips, to text, to still photo-
graphs), as well as the location of the material
and the description level (from record group
to item). Doing a quick search on "Custer"
turned up a list of sound recordings, textual
records, and films held at various locations.
The most exciting feature of this service is that
a few of the items have been made available
online, and it was possible to see some of the
still photos on my screen. The NARA plan is
to make much more of this database instantly
available as development continues.

For librarians, this type of Web service
could be a big step forward in terms of ac-
cess to remote collections and the ability to
help patrons with an interest in unique his-
torical documents. The search engine is
quick, flexible, and intuitive, and the record
display includes titles and brief descriptions.
It is also possible to view full detailed records
at the click of a button.

With the addition of more records and
online documents, as well as the eventual
inclusion of genealogical records, the job
of both the librarian and the researcher
should be made significantly easier. This
project is off to a great start and is a fine
example of the Internet at its most use-
ful.—*Doug Horne, University of Guelph;
dhorne@uoguelph.ca* ■