

Tobacco industry documents: How to find them on the internet



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www.emro.who.int/tfi/tfi.htm

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Introduction

In the late 1990s, a series of lawsuits were filed by several American states against the biggest American tobacco companies. The companies—which included Philip Morris Incorporated, RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company, Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation, British American Tobacco Industries, Lorillard Tobacco Company, the American Tobacco Company and the Liggett Group—were being sued by the states for fraud (for hiding from the public that they knew tobacco was dangerous), and recover the costs of providing medical care for sick and dying smokers.

During the course of one of those trials, the companies were forced by the Supreme Court of the United States to release about 2000 internal documents related to the case. These documents had to do with the companies' research on the properties and effects of nicotine and other ingredients in cigarettes, as well as the companies' marketing techniques and several other important and relevant issues.

In order to avoid a court verdict, and as a way of stemming the tide of expensive lawsuits, the tobacco companies ended up settling their cases with the various states by agreeing to pay a large sum of money and to make public some six million formerly secret documents relating to the intricacies of their trade.

These documents are now available to the public. Most of them are searchable on special websites run by the companies themselves. The websites, which are of varying degrees of user-friendliness, include documents that explain what the companies knew about tobacco, when they knew it, and what they concealed from the public about their dangerous product.

The documents include fascinating information about these companies' worldwide plans, strategies and activities. They feature revelations regarding the companies' plans to counteract tobacco control forces, and to confuse the public about the evidence showing the tremendous health damage caused by tobacco products.

Exploring the documents

Exploring these documents is not particularly easy, but it is not exceedingly difficult either. Anyone with a basic understanding of the internet can, within minutes, find themselves reading a once confidential memo, for instance, from a tobacco company senior scientist describing the way a cigarette can be manufactured to deliver the highest possible nicotine dose to the user.

Imagine being able to review an extremely detailed mid-1990s Marlboro marketing plan for the Middle East, with figures on how much was to be spent on advertising in each of the various Arabic newspapers for that year. Both of the above examples, and much more, are readily available by following the simple instructions below. The more time spent searching, the more familiar the searcher will become with the way the documents are arranged, and the different tricks and techniques that can be used to explore them successfully.

The following is a list of some of the various websites that house these documents:

Philip Morris
www.pmdocs.com

RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company
www.rjrtdocs.com

Brown and Williamson Tobacco Corporation
www.bwdocs.aalatg.com

Lorillard Tobacco Company
www.lorillarddocs.com

General tobacco industry
www.tobaccoarchives.com
www.tobaccoresolution.com

Private nongovernmental organization site
www.tobaccodocuments.org

This last site includes almost all the documents appearing on the company-controlled sites as well as various collections that different researchers have compiled over the years.

Most researchers choose to begin with the Philip Morris (PM) site, which is recognized as one of the user-friendliest of the group. For optimum searching, the browser used should be a recent version of either Internet Explorer or Netscape Navigator. A program that allows the user to magnify, save and print the text of documents viewed, such as Adobe Acrobat, should also be installed on the computer.

In searching the tobacco company documents, it must be kept in mind that these documents are not like ordinary, searchable web pages. These are all actual printed pieces of paper that have been scanned by hand by clerks, who then labelled different identifying fields for each document to help with the search process. In other words, just because a word is in the document itself, does not mean it will come up if included in a search. In fact, it will only come up if the clerk deemed it an important part of the document, and thus included it in one of the various fields.

A sample search

The best way to begin exploring the documents is to do a sample search. Go to www.pmdocs.com on your browser. At the top of the page you will find the search field. Enter the word “egypt” (remember to use only lower case letters) and press return.

Click on “Proceed with Search” at the bottom of the “Please read” page that then comes up.

You will then get your first Search results page, displaying 600 or more documents that relate to your search term—“egypt”.

Obviously this is a huge number of documents to look through, so you will probably want to refine your search.

Try “egypt and marketing”.

By putting the word “and” between “egypt” and “marketing”, you are asking the search engine to find documents that have been labelled with both of those words, but not necessarily next to each other.

(If you were to type those two words next to each other—as in “egypt marketing”—you would get a nonsense response indicating thousands of matches. The problem is, they do not necessarily have anything to do with your particular search. In fact, the first few documents that come up with “egypt marketing” are about a new PM cigarette brand called “Pyramid”).

This time—with “egypt and marketing”—the search turned up about 25 documents, definitely a much more reasonable number to look at. Still, you can try to narrow it down even more.

Try “egypt and marketing and ahram”.

This time only one document comes up. Now, look a little more closely at the different fields in the document identifier. The first field is the most important. Labelled DOCUMENT ID, it is called the Bates number. Every one of the millions of pages was given a unique so-called Bates number as it was being scanned into the archive. In this case, the DOCUMENT ID is 2501084399/4554—meaning the document is very long, encompassing some 155 pages (the first number is the first page’s Bates number, and the last number is the last page’s Bates number).

You can view this entire document by clicking on the DOCUMENT ID number itself. Here you have the option of looking at the document page by page (which helps if you occasionally need to rotate the pages when they are horizontal instead of vertical), or else all at once (however, in that case the horizontal pages will remain as such).

The document turns out to be an in-depth market research report on smoking in Saudi Arabia. You may be wondering why the Saudi marketing report came up with the search terms “egypt and marketing and ahram”. If you look back at the document fields, you will notice that the words “egypt” and “ahram” both appear in the ORGANIZATION field, which is where the clerks noted all the important terms which are mentioned in the document.

If you look at the second field, the MASTER ID—you can find out if the document is part of a longer series of documents with continuing Bates numbers. The MASTER ID for this document is 2501084399/4780—meaning the document is part

of a group of documents that were all in the same folder, and are most likely related to each other in some way.

Most likely, then, the next set of documents, which would start with Bates number 2501084555 (i.e. the number following the last page number of the item you just looked at), would be something similar to the document you are looking at now.

And indeed it is. While the first document was an in-depth market research report on smoking in Saudi Arabia, the next document, which is also several pages long, is a questionnaire that seems to be attached to the marketing report.

If you look back at the other search fields for the original document (the Saudi market research report), you will notice that the different fields

include terms like AUTHOR (BOS,M), and RECEIPIENTS (ATTINGER,F; GEMBLER,A; NELSON,C; REBIB,M; SCHEDEL,H; TOINET,JM; WHITE,J), and PERSONS MENTIONED (BAKHASHAB,A; HAJRI,SA; KHAYAT,M; MALKI,MA; SABBAN,AA; SULAYEM,MB).

All of these, as well as any of the terms in the other search fields, present nearly infinite opportunities to search for a variety of things on the site in a variety of ways.

More advanced searches can use combinations of terms like “and” and “ddate” and “**” and “p” and “not”—all of which are explained by pressing the Advanced Search link near the top of the Search Results page.

For more information regarding beginner and advanced searches, go to:

<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/campaign/global/docs/searching.pdf>