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## Introducing NexisDirect

NexisDirect is a new product developed from the stables of the well known LexisNexis Group. This organisation is generally considered to be one of the world's most reputable professional information providers of premium information sources.

LexisNexis has been in existence for almost 200 years and is well known in the UK for its legal and tax publishing brands, Butterworth's and Tolley. The Nexis side of the business has specialised in news and business information since 1975. LexisNexis has been part of the global group Reed Elsevier since 1994.

LexisNexis' 'new guy on the block', NexisDirect, comes with a simple mission: to offer a simple 'Internet style' front-end service with access to premium content sources for news and business publications.

*"LexisNexis has been part of the global group Reed Elsevier since 1994."*

## Focus On – VIP's View

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Premium content</li> <li>✓ Easy to use</li> <li>✓ Simple clean layout</li> <li>✓ Good help menus</li> <li>✓ Alerts easy to set up and test</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Edit searches within search results</li> <li>✗ No customisation</li> <li>✗ No suitcase for building up portfolios</li> <li>✗ Lack of advance features makes searching people and industry poor</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

LexisNexis products have prestige and a reputation for premium content, and the 'new guy' certainly steps up to the mark. This service is directed specifically at the non-professional searcher and aims the service layout squarely at the Internet search engine user who is familiar with clean and straightforward search portals such as Google. In that sense, it does exactly what is says on the tin.

The interface is clean and refreshing for searching, results viewing and downloading and exporting results. It is also backed up by premium content providers, so the results can be meaty and tasty.

However, being so simple to search could also put a spanner in the works. Some of the search options, such as people and industry, suffer by lack of advanced search features and made some search results irrelevant, although the vendor says it is planning future enhancements to improve these. It is a constant problem with quick searching as it is not intuitive. The vendor should be reminded that the 'Google generation' of searchers have very little tolerance for irrelevance and quickly move into other systems where they know they are likely to find what they need. Also, a little customisation could actually improve the service for the user with very little effort. For example, a briefcase would be an excellent addition. Even inexperienced users are used to filing their documents on servers and project folders within an organisation.

Overall, this is an extremely good database in terms of content and ease of use. It meets its target market head on with great success.

*"LexisNexis products have prestige and a reputation for premium content, and the 'new guy' certainly steps up to the mark."*

This review originally appeared in VIP Magazine, No. 64, published March 2009, and was accurate as of that date. Reprinted with the permission of Free Pint Limited <<http://www.freepint.com>>. All rights reserved. For further information, contact LexisNexis: +44 (0)20 7400 2500, [customer.services@lexisnexis.co.uk](mailto:customer.services@lexisnexis.co.uk) <http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/>



## Sources of information and information partners

NexisDirect's main aim is to provide quick and simple access to comprehensive and reliable news and business information. This content is mainly pulled from the Nexis core database of premium content news and business sources. The vendor reports that NexisDirect offers access to over 15,000 authoritative sources. For example, it draws on 2,300 of the world's leading newspapers. The business content is also premium, and includes some of the big names such as ICC, Hoover's, Nelson, Xinhua, Worldscope, Coredata, Extel, Hoppenstedt, and Creditreform.

The vendor provided an extensive list of content sources, and also explained that there will be additions to this throughout the year. There are particular group sources such as the Economist Intelligence Unit, ICC and Time Publications' extensive range of reports and products but these would seem to be core to the integrity of the content.

The use of Web-based sources has also been employed to pull further high quality content. A comprehensive list of over 200 URLs was also provided by the vendor for this review. The vendor reports that the list is also not static and that it could be subject to 'significant additions' in the future. This list covers a huge industry and news selection. It includes sources for Chinese news, Japanese news, general News, Energy and Utilities, Banking and Finance, Telecoms and IT, religion and Community, Charities, Pharmaceutical, African News, Media, Public Sector, and Insurance.

The vendor reports that this product has a full archive, dating back to 35 years, depending upon the source.

## Audience

The audience for NexisDirect is executives and professionals outside the company information centre. This target group may be either light or heavy users, but essentially would be considered to be 'not as confident' as a professional researcher or information professional. The front end of NexisDirect is specifically designed to appeal to the 'Google searcher'; it is simple and clean to look at and should already be familiar in the mindset of this group. NexisDirect specifically consider its audience to be those engaged in the following types of role:

*"A comprehensive list of over 200 URLs was also provided by the vendor for this review."*

*"NexisDirect's main aim is to provide quick and simple access to comprehensive and reliable news and business information."*

- Investment bankers
- M&A specialists
- Competitor analysts
- Marketing & communications professionals
- C-level executives
- Sales managers and executives
- Public Relations professionals
- Business consultants
- Journalists
- Compliance officers
- Strategy managers
- Business development managers.

With all this in mind, it is however just as useful to the professional researcher/analyst as a ready resource of quickly packaged information portfolios.

## Coverage and Content

There is a huge amount of content in this service, either via the database or by email via the alerts process. This is a subscription service, combining premium content with certain hand-selected Web sources. There is no free content.

The main subscription content falls into four broad areas [Fig 1]. These are:

- Quick search (with options for advanced features)
- Research a company
- Research a person
- Research an industry.

There is no customisation as yet; all subscribers get to search the four broad areas.

*Continued >>*

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*"This is a subscription service, combining premium content with certain hand-selected Web sources."*

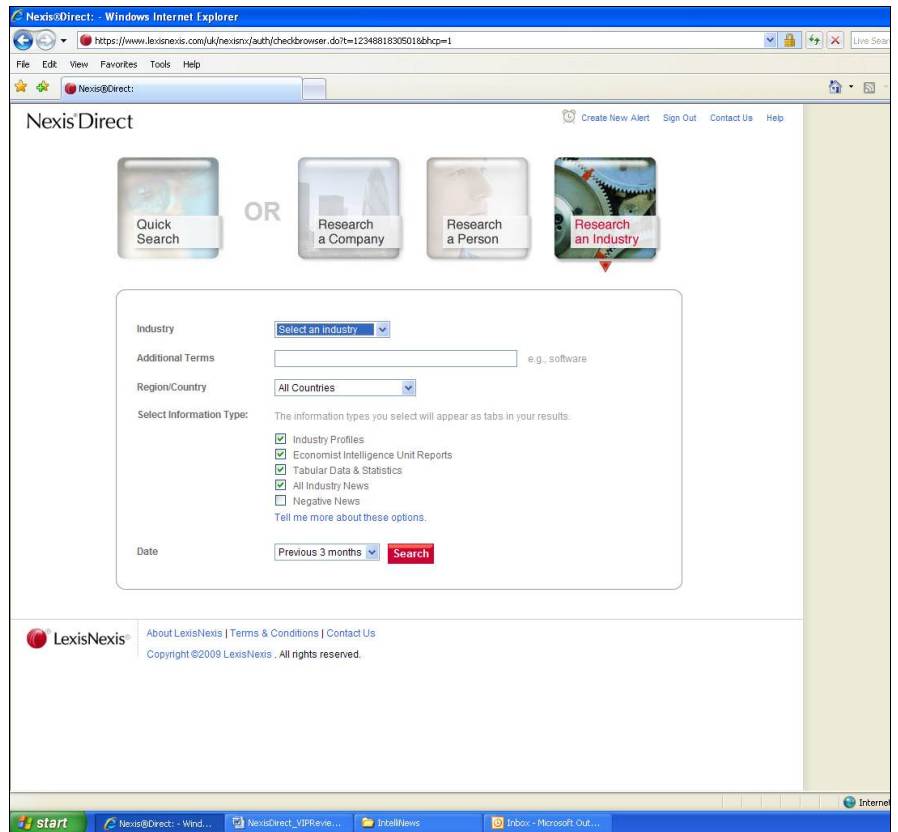
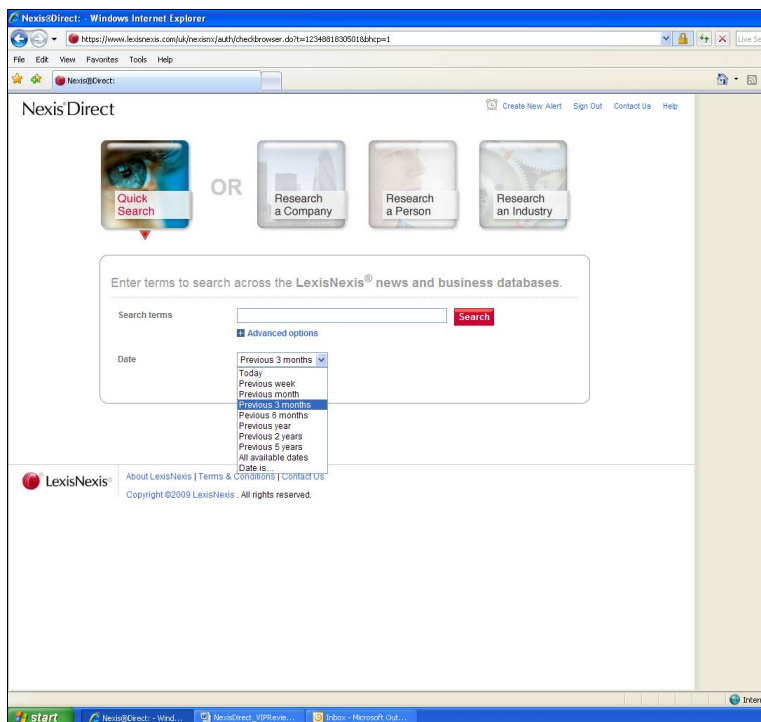


Fig 1 - Front page of NexisDirect

## Main subscription content and search options

The quick search [Fig 2] runs a search across the most popular publications (including news, biographies, and company and industry reports). The search string will allow for up to 300 characters and, although not advertised by the vendor, will accept some Boolean characters such as AND, OR and AND NOT.



Searching is simple. Enter your search terms and select a date range. The date range is automatically set for the previous three months, but there is a selection of various other options including specifying your own date range.

As this method of searching is based on an Internet style of keyword searching, it will find the search term words in any context. However, it is useful to know that the database will stress the first word of the search string. It may be useful to draw this useful piece of advice to the attention of users, as it is not in the help section either.

The results are listed by publication date initially, with the option to switch to relevance order if required; the vendor considers this to be the number of times (or score) the keywords appear in the text.

Fig 2 - Quick Search Interface

A very useful feature in 'quick search' is the ability to 'go back to search' or 'start a new search'. This useful shortcut ensures that the user can be economical with his/her time.

Although the value of such an easy and open search interface and function can be considerable and, in the NexisDirect case, fits with the intended user audience, this could also be a problem. Although popular, keyword searching comes with some caveats and greatly depends on the way you phrase a search string.

For example, I searched for recent news about the UK Estate Agent (Real Estate) Countrywide, including very recent information regarding its financial status and outlook.

*"The results are listed by publication date initially, with the option to switch to relevance order if required..."*

The results were a mixed bag, with some of the results merely mentioning Countrywide or offering the sale of a particular house, but perched at number 1 with the best relevance was the most useful - 'buy in from Oaktree Capital'. Bingo, and very timely, as it was published in the FT the very same day of 17 February 2009.

Although not promoted by the vendor at the moment, I did attempt some Boolean searching. I looked for the organisation Trump Entertainment in relation to golf, but excluding casinos. The results were relevant and timely.

## Advanced Search Features

The 'advanced search feature', in keeping with the 'quick search', runs a search across the most popular publications, including news, biographies, and company and industry reports. The advanced search options allow for more precision searching but again do not encourage Boolean searching. The advanced part is that it allows the user to specify certain aspects of your search criteria. In keeping with the ethos of the databases, the layout is kept very clean and the advanced facility is accessed via a single click from the quick search facility [Fig 3].

This feature allows the user to search by using the following options:

- Exact phrasing: This can be useful if it is a common enough term. I tried "New York Fashion Week", "Serviced Apartments" and "Formula 1 racing" all with good results. As an aside, what is particularly intuitive about NexisDirect is that it will recognise a number and a word, eg one and 1. Small detail, but good

*"The advanced search options allow for more precision searching but again do not encourage Boolean searching."*

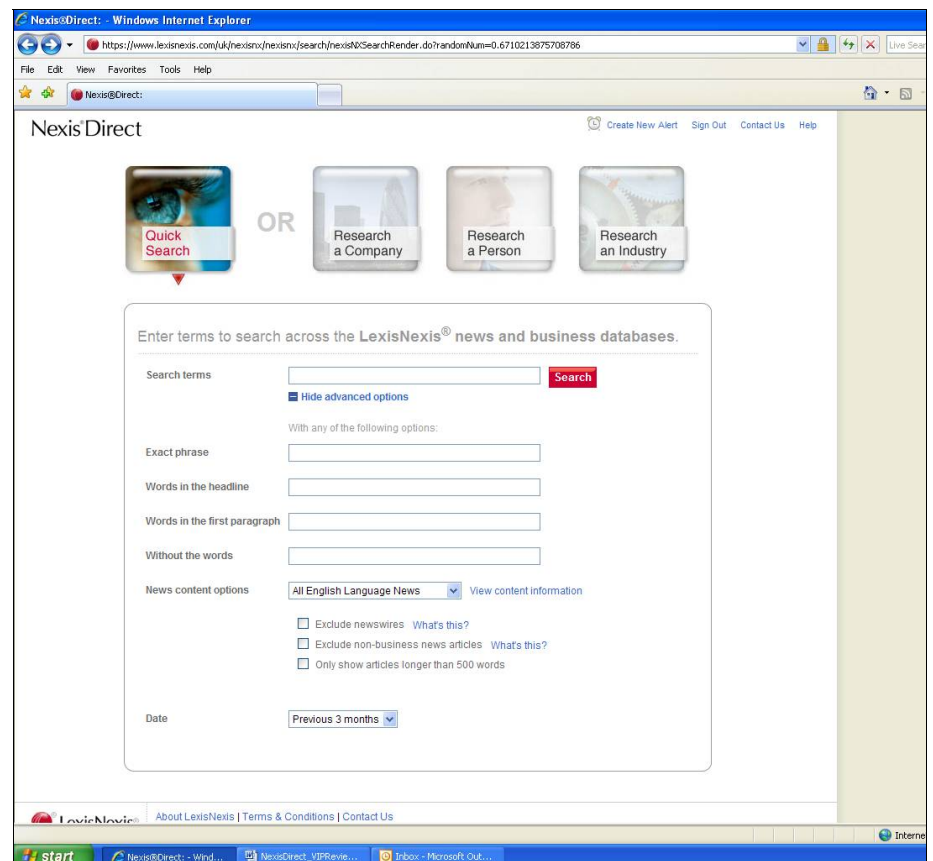


Fig 3 - Advanced Search Interface

*"...what is particularly intuitive about NexisDirect is that it will recognise a number and a word..."*



- **Words in the headline:** I searched for Barack Obama and “homeowner’s package”. Again, good relevant results
- **Words in first paragraph:** I searched for OECD and recession. Good results
- **Without the words:** This is interesting and very useful. You can’t run a search only in this field, and must enter other search terms. I tried searching again for Trump Entertainment, not including the casinos as I really wanted to pull out the golf material. I searched using first paragraph and without words. The results were disappointing. I got better, more precise results using the quick search facility and using some basic Boolean logic. This also gave me the company snapshot report, which was excellent.

I found the advanced searching very easy and, in most cases, I found what I was looking for.

There are also options for limiting the search parameters by content. The options available are:

- All English Language News
- All news. All languages
- All newswires
- All transcripts
- All blogs
- UK news only
- Leading Business Press
- Irish News Only
- UK Regional Papers
- UK National Newspapers.

These content options are particularly useful to the user and are fairly self-explanatory, although a snazzy help jump link is available to explain exactly what these content types include, including the type of publications it covers. In some cases, the publications are listed, such as *Irish News*, *UK Regional Papers* and *UK National Papers*.

A super extra of the advanced search facility is the ability to edit searches [Fig 4] on the same page of your results. This is excellent for amending or changing your search strategy without the bother of having to go back to the search page. If you use ‘new search’ it takes you back to the quick search page.

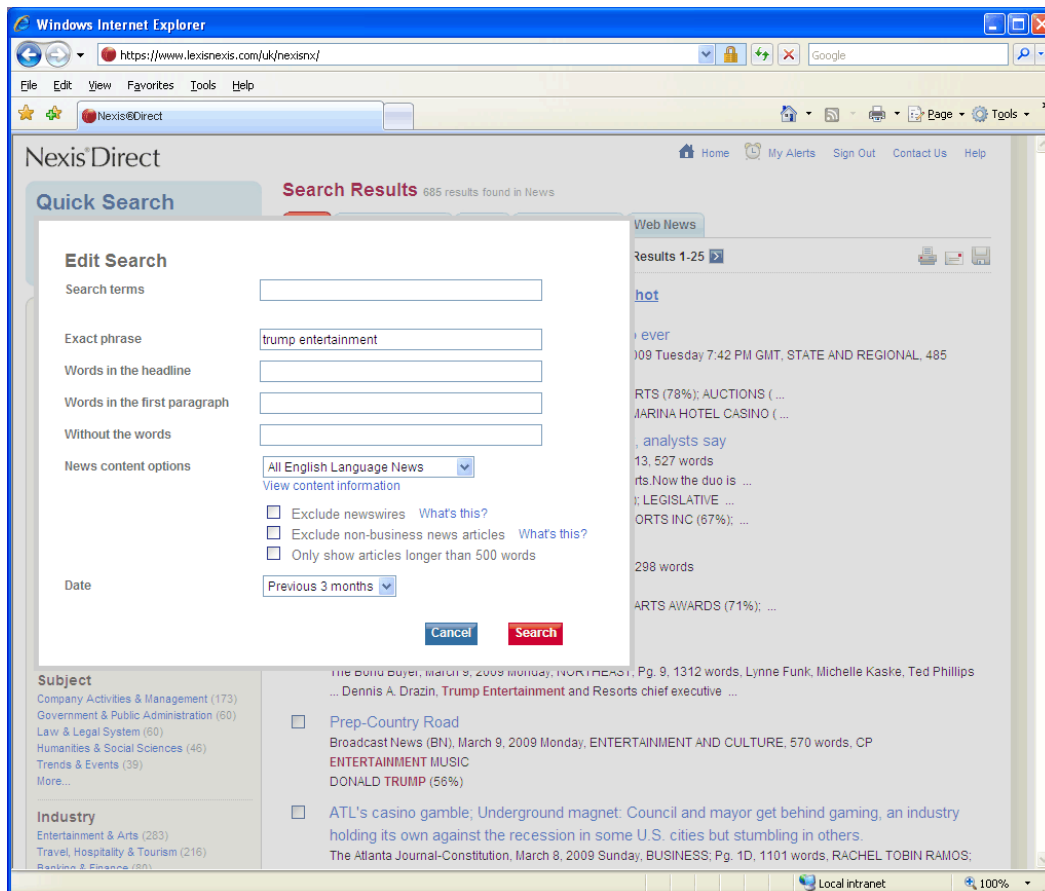


Fig 4 - Edit Search Facility

*“I found the advanced searching very easy...”*

*“A super extra of the advanced search facility is the ability to edit searches on the same page of your results.”*

## Research a company

There are two options for doing this search [Fig 5]:

- A company snapshot report (or dossier)
- In-depth analysis.

If the user decides to employ option 1, the Company Snapshot report, you are taken to the main LexisNexis company dossier pages where your search will be processed. This will return the Top 3 results for your search, with the option to see more companies listed if there are more options available.

The Snapshot report/dossier [Fig 6] is a club sandwich of concentrated business information delight. It provides the following information:

- Company details and employee numbers
- Business description
- Current news
- Auditor and Legal Counsel
- Stock Information
- Board of Director and Executives
- Stock quotes and charts
- Yearly financials
- Key Competitors.

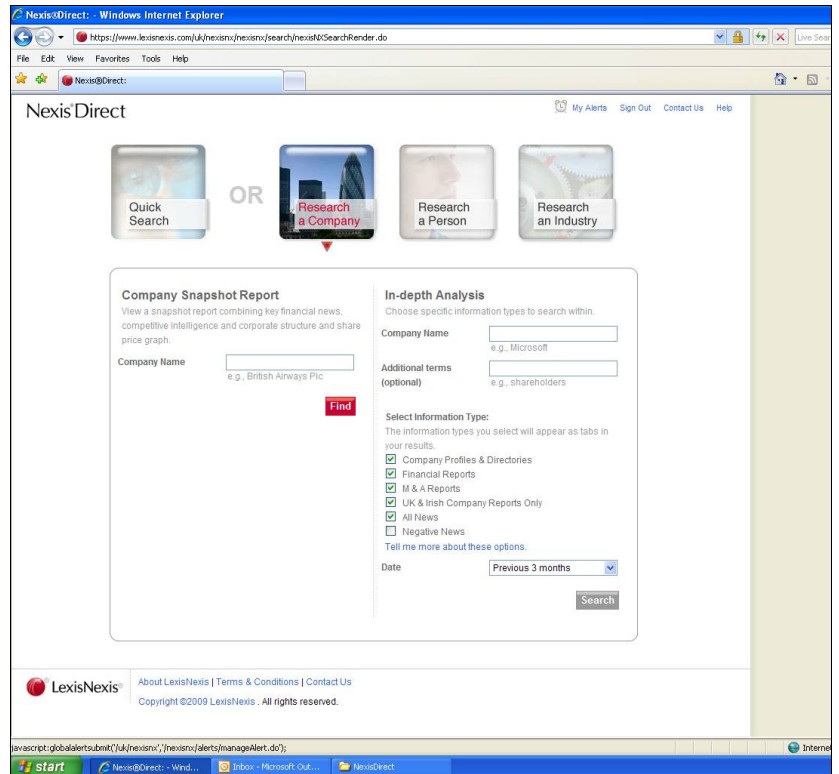


Fig 5 - 'Research a Company' search option

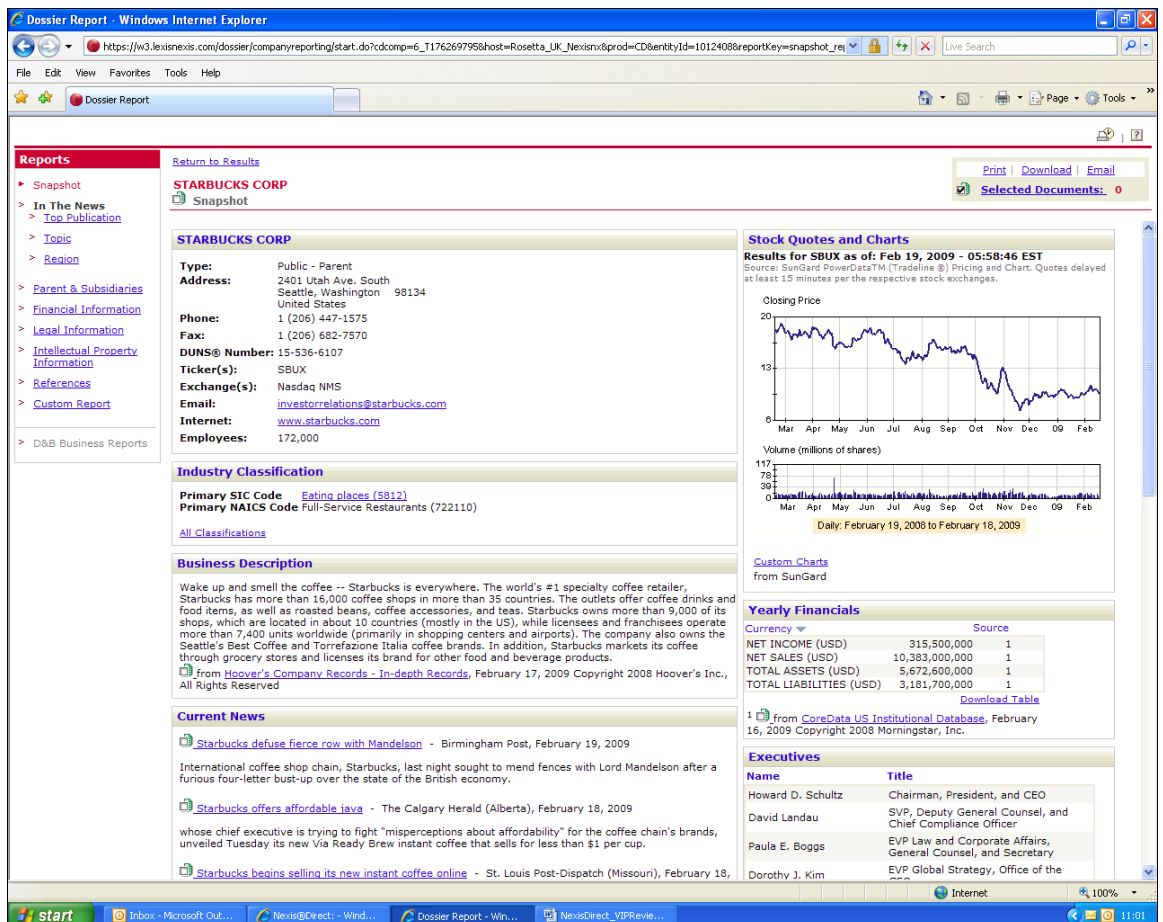


Fig 6 - Snapshot/dossier report features

There is even more ‘jam to this sandwich’. A further menu [Fig 7] allows for extra toppings:

- In the news by:
  - top publication
  - topic
  - region
- Parents and subsidiaries
- Financial Information
- Legal Information
- Intellectual property Information
- References
- Custom report.

Although there is no customisation with NexisDirect, there are a couple of ways of capturing just what you need. Firstly, from the snapshot page you can check boxes for particular reports or articles. Secondly, from the ‘custom report’ option, you can break down what you want or need. This makes it a flexible source if you are looking for key pieces of content.

The ‘In-depth analysis’ section allows for the user to drill down deeper into key sections of a company. It allows

for a certain amount of customisation in terms of the type of content you are looking for. Here are some of the ways in which you can focus in on a company search:

- **Company profiles and directories:** Finding company addresses and content details, histories and descriptions, shareholder reports, products and competitors listings, corporate hierarchies, credit ratings, turnover, emerging markets’ data
- **Financial Reports**
- **Mergers and acquisitions:** Quite self-explanatory, for finding out about mergers and acquisitions
- **All news:** For searching across all news and all languages group file
- **UK financial reports:** For accessing financial facts and figures from authoritative sources
- **UK and Irish Company Reports:** To focus your search on only UK and Irish registered companies
- **Negative news:** This searches across all languages and all news for articles where a company name appears within a select keyword list of negative terms. The vendor reports that this

could include money laundering or fraud, narcotics etc.

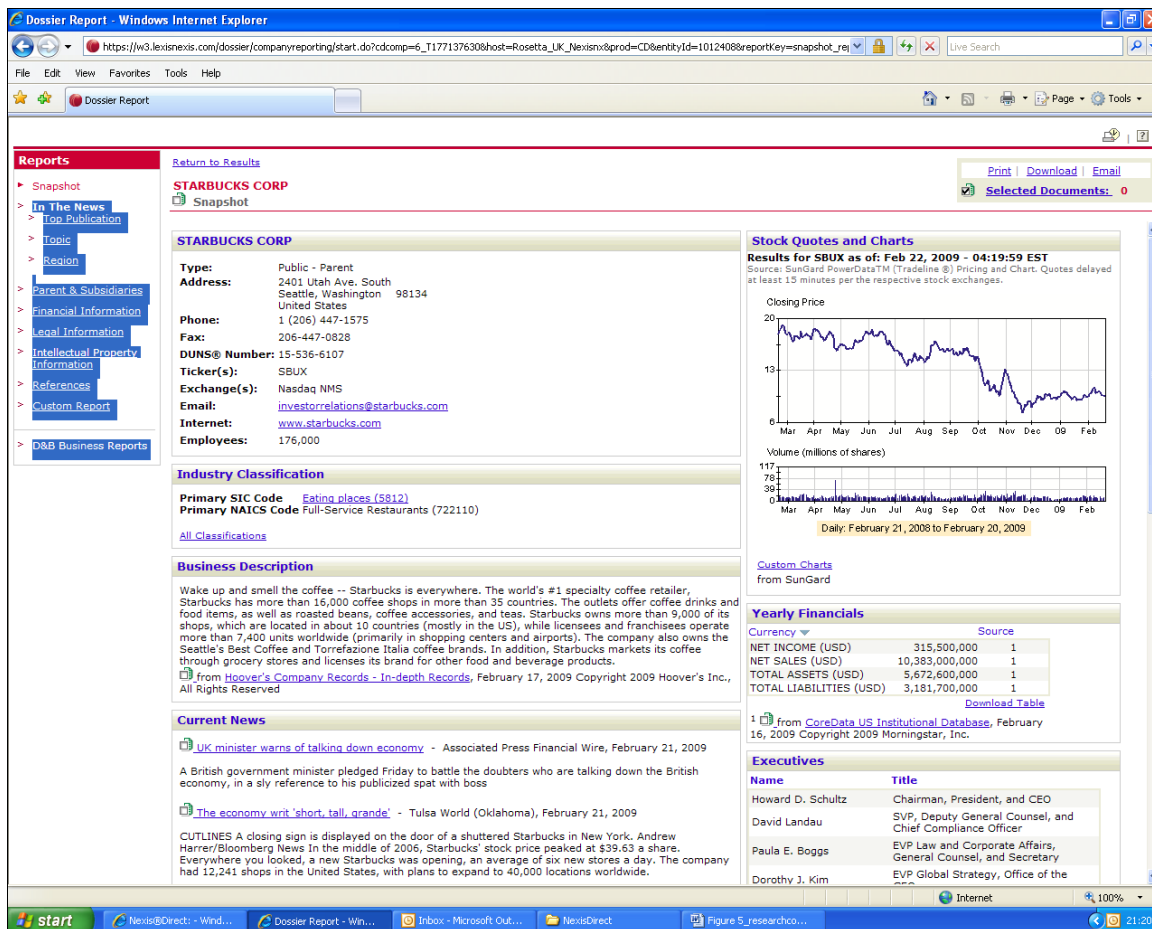


Fig 7 - Further searching in snapshot/dossier reports

“Although there is no customisation with NexisDirect, there are a couple of ways of capturing just what you need.”

Usefully, a help link is provided for information about content sources.

I tried a successful search for the airline Virgin Blue with financials and negative press. The results were relevant and the content was good.

## Research a Person

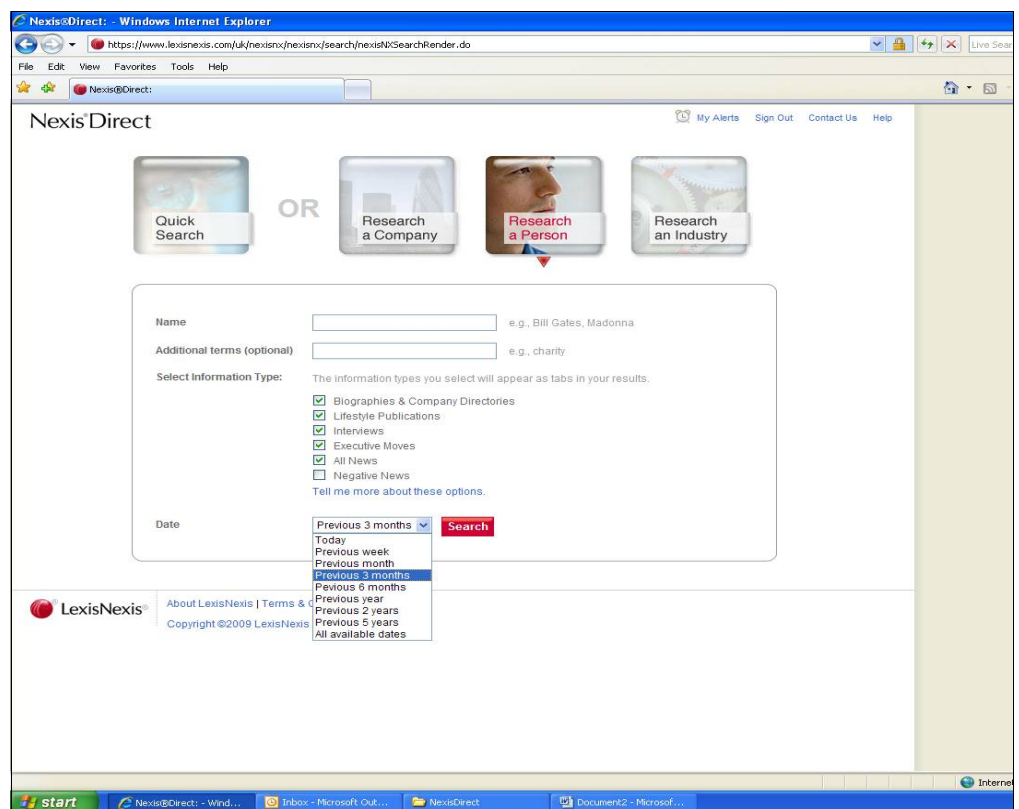
This is a useful search facility [Fig 8] as a stand-alone tool and allows you to create a profile of a person. I tried two very different people searches over the last two years:

- Kanya King Founder of the Music Mobo Awards
- David Childs Managing Partner with Clifford Chance.

*“...a help link is provided for information about content sources.”*

The results provide details across the following tabs:

- biographies and company directories
- lifestyle publications
- interviews
- executive moves
- all news.



*Fig 8 - 'Research a Person' option*

Both the searches had interesting results, but were disappointing. The media search for Kanya King for the past few years proved disappointing in terms of volume and content, although basic company information was there. However, there were only a couple of articles in the lifestyle section where I would have expected much more.

David Childs, not surprisingly, had much more company and biographical details available as he is involved in a major organisation. What was slightly disappointing was really down to the lack of advanced searching features on this tab. For example, much of the content displayed is irrelevant, finding the keywords “David” and “Childs” within a number of words apart. Even tightening the search, by including Clifford Chance as an additional search string, does not help matters much.

I found ‘research a person’ to be one of the least useful features of NexisDirect. Generally, I found more relevant content by quickly using a simple free general Internet search.

*“I found ‘research a person’ to be one of the least useful features of NexisDirect.”*



## Research an Industry

This allows a user to build up a search in a couple of ways to create a profile of an industry. You can search using the following features [Fig 9]:

- Pick list of set industry groups
- Additional terms
- Region/Country
- Information Type
- Date.

I tried looking at the automotive industry and, specifically, the Mini Cooper car, over the last two years. Again, I found the results to be disappointing, especially since it did not seem to pick up on any of the recent job cuts at the Mini Cooper factory. My search did use “mini cooper” as an additional term but without extra precision in the results.

As with the ‘research a person’ feature, perhaps this section would benefit from some advanced searching features. One of the main problems with having such a simple interface and searching capability, just as with an Internet search engine, is the lack of relevance and problems with the way in which users browse through material. It is generally understood, and there is evidence to support this, that

users have a low threshold for happiness when they do not find a useful item quickly. They tend not to browse through pages and pages of material and click throughs are shorter. The professional searcher, however, is more focused in searching and will have the patience for longer browsing and finding the most useful information. The ideal balance for this type of database that is directly marketed to the ‘Internet search engine user’ is to have simple searching capability with good relevant results in the first few pages of results.

It is my opinion that ‘search the industry’ and ‘search the person’ are the weakest links in the NexisDirect service. The vendor reports that enhancements are due later this year to enhance this part of the service.

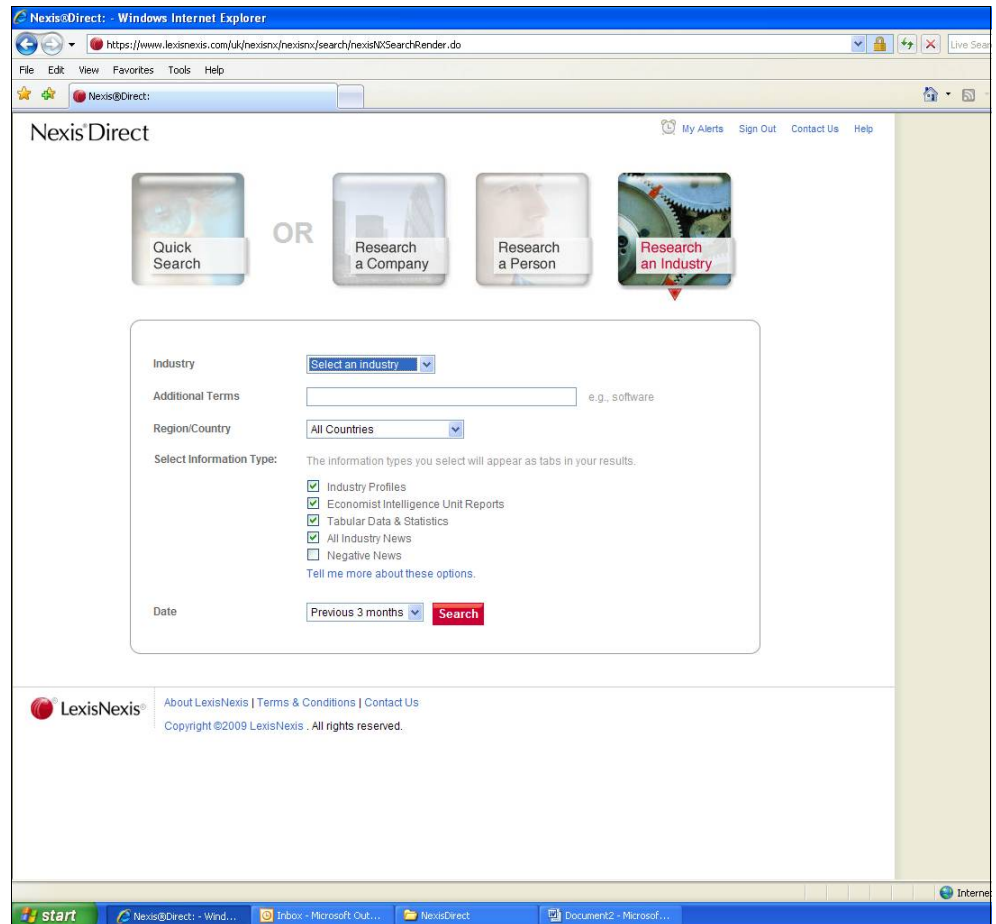


Fig 9 - 'Research an Industry' option

*"...users have a low threshold for happiness when they do not find a useful item quickly."*

*"The ideal balance for this type of database that is directly marketed to the 'Internet search engine user' is to have simple searching capability with good relevant results in the first few pages of results."*

## Search results and output options

In keeping with the NexisDirect philosophy of clutter-free pages, the search results page is clean and simple with two columns of content [Fig 10]. No matter what search tab you are in, your results will be presented in this two-column format.

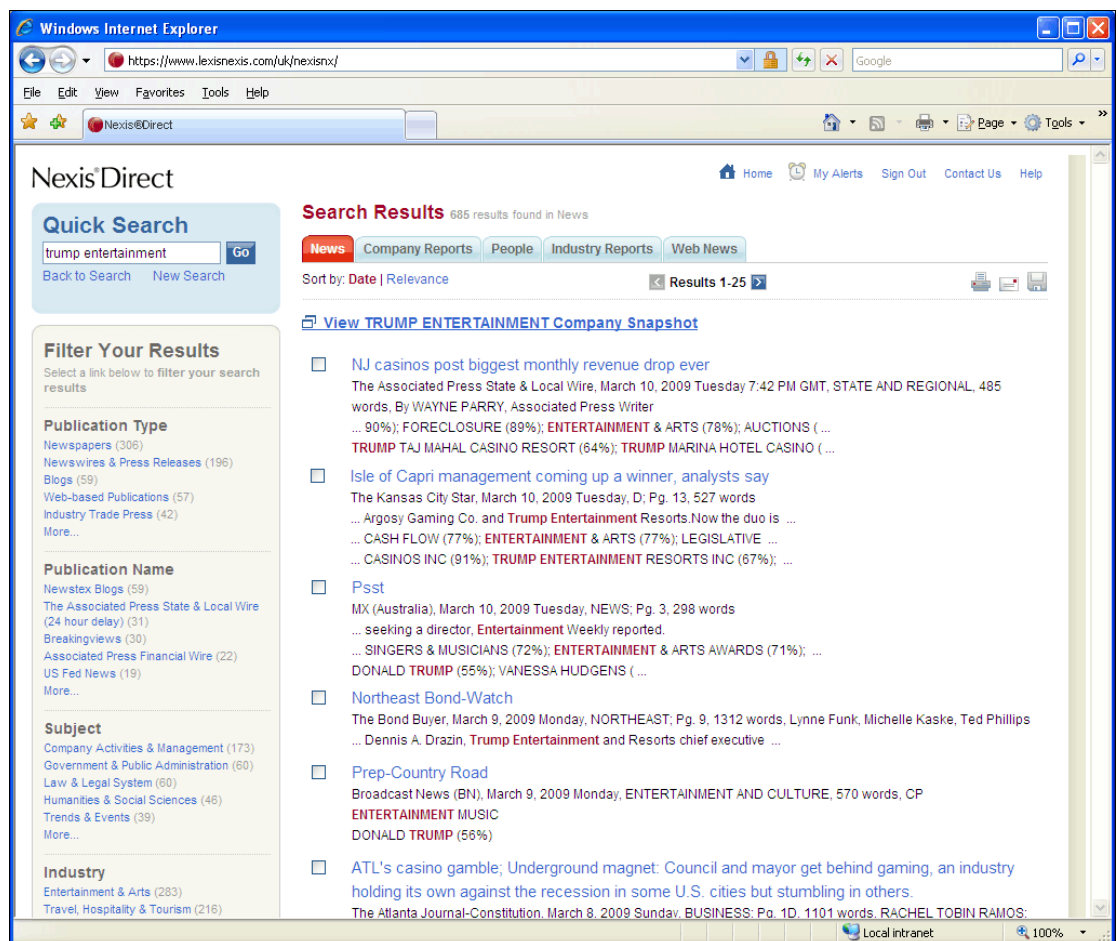


Fig 10 - Results page format

The broadest column, really the main page, is the results, and they are tabbed for your convenience under broad headings. These broad headings will depend on what search mode you are in. Here you can also sort for date or relevance. The actual number of 'hits' is given as you tab across the different section. If there is a 'snapshot dossier report' available this will stand out as a separate entry at the top of each tab. This is a great idea and draws attention to this wonderful report.

Users can tab across to investigate what is in each section. They are all neat in appearance apart from the Web news tab; this is harder on the eye and stands out against the other results not in terms of content but only for looks and design. The vendor reports that this is an area that requires further work and will see enhancements this year on the overall 'look and feel'.

The first column lists all the results again but in a way that you can filter them and make the search work harder for the user.

For example, in the quick search you can filter by:

- Publication type
- Publication name
- Subject
- Industry
- Company
- Language.

The one detail to amend here would be to remind users to remove their filter after use. It is an easy jump link to click, but an untrained eye and inexperienced user would miss this little detail. Users would be left wondering why the results don't change even if they use the news tab again.

*"In keeping with the NexisDirect philosophy of clutter-free pages, the search results page is clean and simple with two columns of content..."*

## Printing, downloading and exporting

For the user, it is easy to export the content required. Just tick the boxes as you move across the tabs, and don't worry, it will remember even if you move tabs. The options are to print, email and save. All three options are straightforward. Email is super in that you can send to up to three people and choose a word or PDF format. You can also include a message which again adds to the customisation. Saving also gives the option for a word document or a PDF file.

## Interface and customisation

The interface is both clean and tidy. There is nothing to divert or offend the eye, and no extra material around the fringes of the page seep to draw your attention away from the job in hand. The vendor is upfront and bold about the type of user it is trying to appeal to: the user will be happy and confident with a 'googlefied front end'. To that extent, NexisDirect wins on all fronts.

There is no customisation of the NexisDirect product. I am divided on this subject. In terms of the remit that NexisDirect is trying to fulfil, aimed at the non-professional researcher or information worker who has no knowledge of or inclination towards searching protocols and who is very comfortable with the Internet searching philosophy, then there will be no expectation of any form of customisation. Most searches will be of the 'quick and dirty' variety: not pretty, not comprehensive, not focused, slightly awkward and clumsy but ultimately finding what you need. You do them once and you are done.

*"Saving also gives the option for a word document or a PDF file."*

*"There is no customisation of the NexisDirect product."*

However, even the clumsiest and most basic searcher may sometimes repeat a search or be involved in building subject knowledge in a particular industry or sector. As any experienced research analyst who has worked in the corporate sector is aware, research needs are not always met by the company information/library unit. It is quite usual for some personnel to be involved in building up knowledge portfolios. I think there is a market for some elements of customisation and for providing a briefcase.

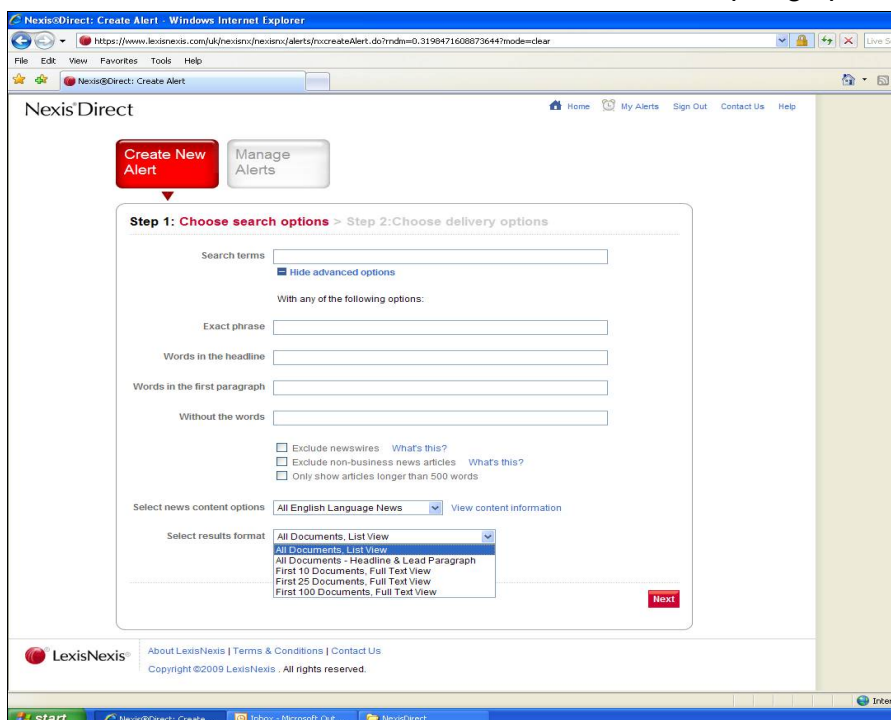
## Types of Reports

All reports appear as either articles or company reports or financial sets of data. The 'Snapshot' report is a stand-alone report, and it can be used as a whole report or customised for the user's preferred needs. All content is in English and available full text.

## Alerts

It is simple to create alerts using the 'create new alert' button across the top bar of the home page. You will be taken into the search options [Fig 11], either quick search or advanced search, where you can choose whatever you want. The only difference is that you can choose your 'results format', such as headline and lead paragraph, or first 10, 25 or 100 full text. Remember to

check the box 'alert me' only if there are new results'



*"I think there is a market for some elements of customisation and for providing a briefcase."*

*"It is simple to create alerts using the 'create new alert' button across the top bar of the home page."*

Fig 11 - Creating an alert

The delivery options are good:

- **Name your alert:** Great if you work across a variety of projects with different cost centres and want to specify a job number, finance code or portfolio name. There will be no problems with managing your own internal data and information streams
- **Email address:** Up to 3 addresses can be entered, which is great for sharing in a team
- **Email format:** Plain or html is the choice. Some really useful information on which format is best for desktop PCs and laptops and BlackBerrys
- **Frequency of alert:** Hourly, daily, weekly, monthly are enough options to satisfy even the most 'information is power' worker
- **Set time zone:** I love this option and, for someone who has worked in a global consulting organisation, this would have been a bonus. We live in a global economy where business can still take place face to face or your colleagues can be across an ocean. There are 26 options worldwide for different time zones; you are bound to find one that suits you and your colleagues.

There is an option to test your alert before you set it. The key here is that even very experienced researchers will sometimes set up a 'bum search strategy' that will give back 'not so good' search results. It can happen, and unfortunately sometimes it only becomes apparent when the alert results start coming back and you get a call from a user asking why their search results seem irrelevant or are producing no results. This gets around this problem, and the inexperienced searcher can see instantly whether they will be getting the 'right kind of stuff'. Simple idea, but brilliant. The test results give you the number of results and display the first five documents. If you are happy, then the options are to save the search or edit the search.

You can also manage your alerts very easily. You can edit or delete your search strategy; you also have the option to run alert 'Now', which is a super option. For example, say your alert is set up to run weekly and you are happy with this option. However, you are called to a team meeting mid-week and have to report on company X and to make sure you have the best up-to-date currency of material for reporting. You can run this option to make sure you are not missing something important that happened very recently, like yesterday or earlier on that day. This gives you extra confidence in having the most up-to-date and relevant sources working the hardest for you. The user may as well get their money's worth.

*"There is an option to test your alert before you set it."*

*"You can also manage your alerts very easily."*

## Timeliness

There is no argument from me regarding the content of NexisDirect. It is true premium content and it is updated in a very timely fashion. The vendor reports that the items added per week to NexisDirect have not been captured yet as this database is so new. However, the vendor reports that this would be similar to that of Nexis UK, and that figure is around 10 million articles per week.

In a more general way, as I was using the database and trying a variety of different searches, I was getting results of articles published that very day. This gives a lot of confidence in the timeliness.

There is also a comment to make about the content and sources. Although the vendor reports that, in some cases, content sources and providers are not a static item, core information providers such as the big company and financial providers and the main news providers will not change. However, an ongoing reassessment of your sources on a very regular basis gives a certain amount of confidence that important content will be captured in the future.

## Help and User Support

This system is designed to have a neat, clean and tidy interface. But how does it manage to provide extensive help and user support without the interface looking a little untidy or crowded? On the home page, there is a very useful help icon across the top browser bar. This takes the user into another screen where you will have access to the index and you will immediately be shown the letter 'A' topics. This screen has a further little menu, where you can access the full index to browse. A series of jump links is provided in the index by letter and it is extremely easy to navigate. The help information itself is comprehensive enough to give a feel for content and also easy enough to explain steps in completing a task.

The excellent news is that this help index is also available scattered around the database as you use it.

*"It is true premium content and it is updated in a very timely fashion."*

*"This system is designed to have a neat, clean and tidy interface."*



There are opportunities to access it, at the 'point of need', such as deciding on what sources to include in a search. Little jump links such as 'what is this' and 'tell me about this' add to a well thought-out and economical system.

## Costs

There was no detailed costing available via the vendor for the NexisDirect Product. The vendor reports that the product cannot be customised for clients, but there is an element of choice for subscription with four on offer:

- Basic
- Basic plus FT
- Legal menu (Including Factiva news content)
- Legal menu with FT enabled.

This review cannot comment on hard costs or content differences of the four options.

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