

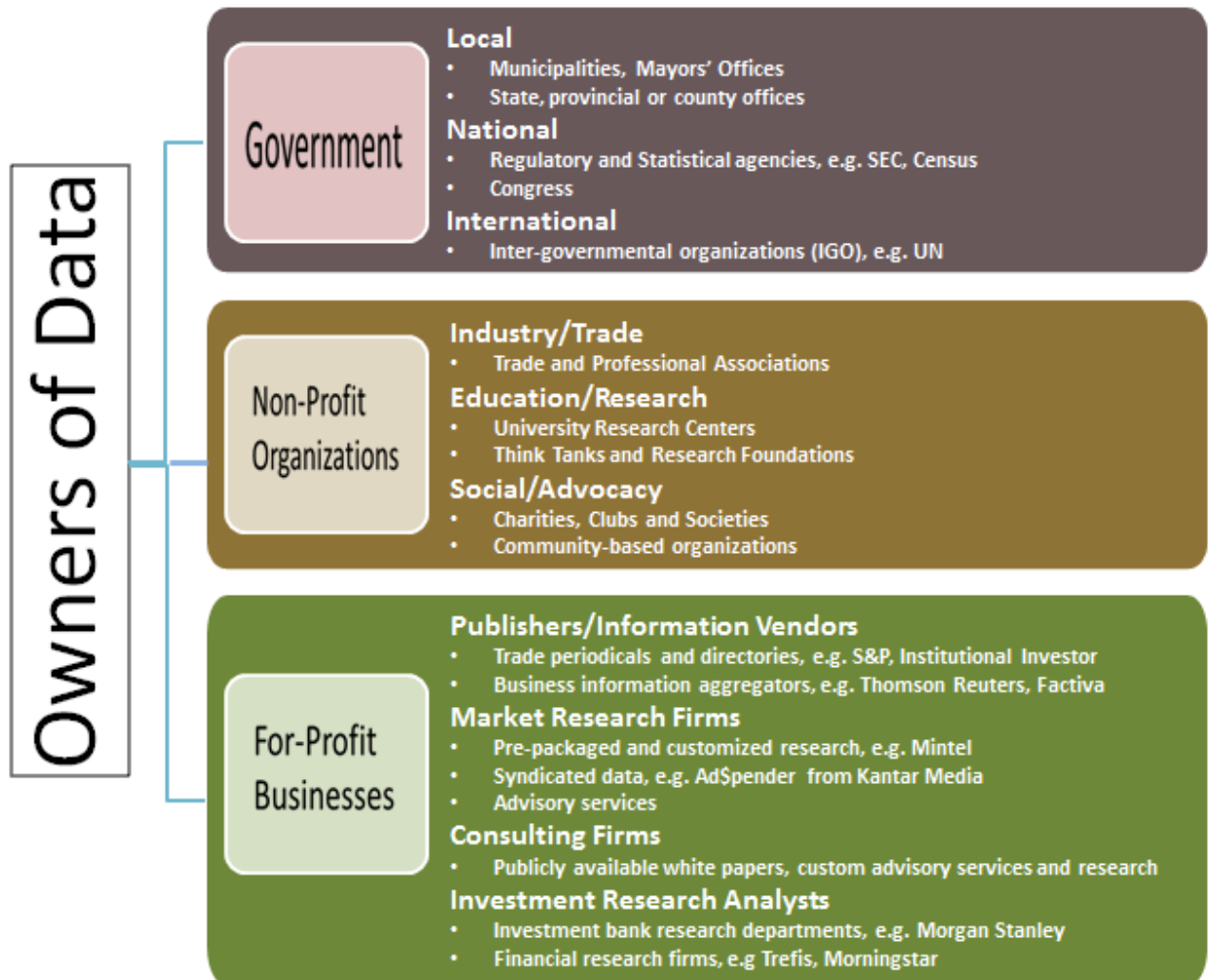
# Goizueta Business Library

*Creating Bridges to Knowledge*

## ***Business Intelligence BRIEFS(5)***

### Owners of Information and their Motivations

**Key Idea:** A good way to identify and evaluate sources of information is to consider *who* might have created relevant information, what would have been their motivation, and who their key “customers” might be.



When having difficulty finding information on a topic, we might step back and think about what type of *owner* also might be motivated to have an interest in that topic.

For example, suppose our research questions include estimating the number of people with an obscure form of cancer. Information may not be available from *for-profit* providers because they would see no financial gain in it. However a *non-profit* organization might specialize in and be dedicated to advocating for that issue, and thus would be motivated to produce research and information about it.

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Recall Brief 4's discussion of developing an Information Gathering Plan (IGP): After we determine our questions, the next step is identifying the sources that could provide answers to them.

We can distinguish three categories of data owners or producers of sources, each of which has different reasons for providing information:

1. **Government bodies**, which serve the public and consequently may provide information as part of their public service. In fact, regulations created to serve the public interest often *require* that certain information be made publicly available.
2. **Non-profit organizations**, which collect and disseminate information to support their organizations' mission. Although they may charge for some of the information they provide, their focus is sharing information that is most likely to promote their mission, not because it's the most profitable.
3. **For-profit businesses**, which collect and disseminate certain types of business information because they know there is a market that wishes to buy it, or because it helps them advance their business interests in other ways (by developing relationships or other opportunities).

*A central paradox of information gathering is how to determine what is needed when the researcher has no clear understanding of what is available. A familiarity with basic categories of information and the forms in which they appear can greatly reduce such "information paralysis."*  
*-The first question every researcher should ask is: "Who knows what I need to know?"*

*Michael Lavin*

The first category is frequently overlooked and deserves a bit of further attention.

Much information is available because some governmental or inter-governmental organization requires its disclosure. For example, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission requires that companies publicly listed on U.S. stock exchanges routinely publish financial reports on their operations.

International Governmental Organizations (IGOs), in compliance with the focus of their organization's mandate, provide data from a number of countries in one place. The major organizations we can rely upon for comparative international statistics are the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

	Government Bodies	Non-Profit Organizations	For-Profit Businesses
Motivations	Regulatory obligations, informing citizens, promote trade, development and economic stability, etc.	Promote mission, gain members, etc.	Profit, creating future opportunities, developing business partners
Key Customers	Citizens, regulated targets, elected officials, member nations, etc.	Members, advocacy targets, donors, etc.	People and organizations willing to pay.

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## **Additional References:**

- Abels, E. G. & Klein, D.P. (2008). *Business information: Needs and strategies*. Bingley, UK: Emerald. Chapter 1 "Introduction to Business Information" (p. 5-23 only)  
*[Describes the different categories of business information.]*
- Lavin, M. (1992). *Business Information: How to Find it, How to Use it*. Phoenix, Arizona: Oryx Press. Chapter 1 "Sources and Forms of Business Information" (p. 1-9 only)  
*[Despite its date, this still provides a very good overview of the characteristics of business information and the different types of players involved in providing it. However, please note that many of the business publishers mentioned no longer exist, or now have different names. The quote highlighted in this Brief appears on page 7.]*
- Rivkin, J. W. & Cullen, A. (2008). *Finding Information for Industry Analysis* (HBS No. 708-481). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.  
*[Research guidance, as well as a description of common producers of information.]*
- Weinzierl, M., Schlefer, J. & Cullen, A. (2010). *GUIDES: Insight through Indicators* (HBS No. 710-044). Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing.  
*[Provides guidance as well as recommending common sources used in country economic analysis. It includes information on the IGOs and other producers of this sort of data.]*