

Corporate Watch company profile template (1 day)

This is a template for doing initial research into a company, which should generally take one day. The two basic aims are (1) to give a quick snapshot of the company overall; and (2) to flag up any key issues that we might want to look into more deeply with further research.

Write notes answering the questions below, but don't get caught up in too much detail – and just move on to the next question if you're getting stuck. Please clearly reference everything using endnotes.

Don't worry about your language or phrasing at this stage but do make sure the points you're making are understandable to another reader. Bullet points are fine.

Use our Investigating Companies DIY Handbook for sources, techniques and tips. You can download it or read it online from here (scroll down to the bottom of the page for links):

<https://corporatewatch.org/investigating-companies-a-do-it-yourself-handbook/>.

1. What's the business?

1.1 What does the company do?

Clearly describe its business model to a general reader, avoiding jargon and industry or corporate speak. Try to do this in about three bullet points.

E.g., what are its main products or business lines? Does it have any key brands or trademarks (which may be different from the company name)?

1.2 Where is it active?

What are the company's key geographic markets? A summary or list, or link to the relevant page of the company website, is fine.

If possible, identify how much exposure it has to each – e.g., what proportion of its revenues, workforce, or profits comes from different markets?

1.3 Where is it based?

Where is its head office? Where are its other office locations, production plants, etc.?

Are these in the same places as its markets, or elsewhere?

1.4 How is it structured?

E.g., is it a Public Listed Company (PLC), a family business, a private company, a limited partnership, etc.?

Does it have a group structure, a parent company with various subsidiaries, etc.? Are parts of it registered in offshore tax havens? This stuff can get tricky for some companies, so think about about how much you need to go into now, or maybe if this needs flagging for further investigation.

1.5 What is its history?

Any facts that are relevant to understanding the company and what it's up to now. Don't spend too much time on this in your initial research.

E.g., has it been known by different names? Has it gone through mergers or bought up smaller companies?

1.6 What are its aims?

If possible, write a couple of lines on the company's strategy and any key motivations you can identify.

E.g., is it going for rapid growth, or on the other hand "rationalising" and selling off parts of the business? Is it looking to move into new markets or regions?

2. Who runs the company?

PLCs and other big companies usually have a CEO, a Chairman, and a board of directors. Small companies may not have all of these. But in general: the point is to identify the main decision-makers.

2.1 Who is the CEO?

Name, and a quick thumbnail sketch with maybe two or three lines about them.

Do they have an interesting history, e.g., any record of scandals or controversies? Do they have any external interests (e.g., also run other companies or are on their boards, do a lot for charity, etc.)?

2.2 Who is the chairman?

As with CEO.

2.3 Are there any other key managers?

Anyone else who seems to play an important role in decision-making at the company.

E.g., CFO, COO, whoever – if they seem important.

2.4 Who are key people on the board?

Have a quick look at the board members and identify any who look interesting. You don't need to list every one if they don't.

E.g., are there reasons to believe they carry particular influence? Are they appointed by big shareholders? Do they have important external interests? E.g., are they politicians or ex-politicians, civil servants, do they work for other powerful corporations, run charities, are they trade union representatives, etc.

2.5 Who do you think really makes decisions in the company?

If possible, point out who you think are the most important decision-makers from all the above.

This won't always be possible to say, but sometimes you can get a clear impression just from a quick look. E.g., is it clearly a "one man show" run by the CEO? Or is it dominated by key shareholders? Or, e.g., are there signs of tension between managers and the board?

3. Who owns the company

Read the ownership section here for updated tips on how to find out who owns a company:

<https://corporatewatch.org/sources-of-information-companies/>

3.1 Who are the main shareholders?

Do any shareholders have significant control over the company?

If it is a big company, make a list of the top ten shareholders, ranked in order of their percentage shareholding. For each, put a brief line about who they are.

E.g., are they rich individuals? Family members? Big institutional investors? Private equity funds? Government bodies?

3.2 Do any of these seem particularly interesting to investigate further?

E.g., are any of them particularly controversial? Are there any that claim to have ethical commitments, or might care about their reputation (e.g., charities, public sector pension funds)? Have any of the shareholders been critical of the company or its directors? Have there been any 'shareholder rebellions' at recent AGMs?

3.2 Are there any smaller shareholders of interest?

For big companies: also note any smaller shareholders that might be interesting to look at further for those kind of reasons.

4. Financial snapshot

4.1 Is the company doing well financially?

Have a quick look in business media to get a sense of how the company is doing financially.

Write a line or two explaining the company's profitability, as far as it's possible to make a quick assessment.

Are some parts of the business (subsidiaries, business areas) more profitable than others?

If there aren't any media reports, or if you haven't much experience of looking at finances, don't worry about putting very much here.

5. Reputation, risks, resistance

5.1 What are the most obvious problems with the company's activities?

Is there a particular pattern of destructive or exploitative behaviour? Who is suffering, or has suffered, because of its activity, and how?

5.2 Has the company been involved in any particular controversies or scandals?

Make a quick list of any major incidents or issues that have hit the news.

E.g., major environmental disasters, involvement in war atrocities, political corruption exposures, legal cases, etc.

5.3 Are there any big risks or future issues on the horizon?

Note any issues you see flagged up in the news, or any general thoughts for further investigation.

E.g., big contracts it's going for, signs of rumbling scandals, court cases or regulator decisions coming up, geopolitical issues in the areas it's working in, potential problems with its business strategy, ...

5.4 Is anyone campaigning against the company now?

Mention any active campaigns, where they are and who is involved.

5.5 Is there a history of past resistance?

Mention any notable past campaigns. What happened with them?

5.6 Is this opposition effective?

Is the company concerned by current campaigns? If so, why? E.g., is it worried about its reputation, or are actions affecting its profits, etc.? And have past campaigns been effective?