

Consumer Information Resource Guide

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This guide is meant to suggest useful materials and websites for finding consumer information. That is, reliable information to help evaluate and select common everyday products and meet everyday human needs in a wise and safe manner.

This guide is NOT designed to provide you with consumer demographics or other information needed to market products to the public. For that type of information, see our [Marketing and Advertising](#) and our [Demography and Population](#) and [Massachusetts and Boston Statistics](#) Resource Guides.

Library Databases

[LexisNexis Academic](#)

This excellent, wide-ranging database is designed to provide news articles from major, regional, and international newspapers, as well as wire services and trade magazines. Most articles are available in full-text. "Quick News Search" is available from the opening screen, but you are better off clicking on the tab for a "Guided News Search" for more targeted research. LN Academic includes the text of *Consumer Reports* back to 1988 (with a one issue embargo), as well as national news sources like the *New York Times*. Daily newspapers often do a good job of consumer reporting--especially on stories that impact a particular region or consumers in a particular community. For Boston area stories, you may wish to search for articles in the *Boston Globe*, or the *Boston Herald*. To do so most easily, click on the "Sources" link near the top of the opening page and search for the title you are interested in. According to what you're looking for, you might also want to explore the Business or Legal Research areas by clicking on the appropriate link in the left-hand column.

[General Reference Center Gold](#)

Although NOT a good database for most academic research--since it covers very few "scholarly" journals--this is still a good database for those interested in consumer issues and news because it covers so many general interest magazines. Since articles evaluating products often have "Product Information" in the subject heading, you can always add this phrase to your searches for a particular brand or type of product. General Reference Center Gold will allow you to go directly to [Consumer Reports](#), but does have a full-text block on the latest three issues. However, unlike LexisNexis, GRCG presents articles with a PDF option, so it will include all the illustrations and charts as they appeared in the magazine. GRCG also includes full-text for *Consumer Reports Buying Guide*.

[Academic Search Premier](#)

Our best general research database, this resource provides full-text and indexing for thousands of academic journals, as well as news magazines and selected newspapers. This database is often a good place to start, no matter what topic you are researching. And that includes consumer research and health information. Like the two databases above, ASP provides the full-text for [Consumer Reports](#), but with the three issue embargo. PDF reproduction of pages is available. ASP also includes full-text for *Consumer Reports Buying Guide* as well as CR's specific newsletters on Health and Travel. Database subject headings often include the word "Evaluation" in articles reviewing or discussing consumer products. So adding that word to your general search can be useful.

[Business Source Premier](#)

Like its sister index, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier provides full-text for all but the latest three issues of *Consumer Reports* and its annual *Buying Guide*. It also provides access to more than 8,000 business journals. Because so many products people are interested in are in the consumer electronics field and so many of the general interest and trade publications in this area are indexed and reproduced in BSP, this can be a useful research tool. Just be aware of the source of a specific article when you use any index. If an article is coming from a trade publication, it may be "puffery" (publicity), more than true evaluation.

Selected Websites for Consumer Information

[Federal Citizen Information Center](#)

<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov/>

Here is the official Federal website for consumer information. In the pre-internet days, people had to write to Pueblo, Colorado to get government brochures on anything from car safety to nutrition tips. Now that material is available online in HTML. Browse one of the many categories listed in the left frame or use the site search engine. Besides general information, FCIC also provides information about current product recalls and known scams. And a related website provides an online version of the [Consumer Action Handbook](#). Yet another useful Federal

website is [Consumer.gov](http://www.consumer.gov), which has a good presentation of government/consumer news, and icon links to various agencies with a consumer-support function.

[Where to Write for Vital Records](#)

<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/howto/w2w/w2welcom.htm>

The CDC's National Center for Health Statistics maintains this handy page. Consult it when you need to get an official copy of birth, death, marriage or divorce records. Basic state-by-state information will usually be provided here, along with a link to the appropriate local agencies.

[Better Business Bureau](#)

<http://www.bbb.org/>

The Better Business Bureau, or BBB, was founded in 1912, and claims that "the BBB system has proven that the majority of marketplace problems can be solved fairly through the use of voluntary self-regulation and consumer education." Although that may be debatable, certainly many consumers go to BBB to check out businesses (contractors, services, and the like) and see if there are any complaints against them prior to hiring. And this is also where many consumers come to file a complaint when they have had a problem with a business transaction. General consumer information is also available from the group. Besides the national website, it is worth visiting the website of the [BBB for Eastern Massachusetts, Maine and Vermont](#).

[Massachusetts Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation](#)

<http://www.state.ma.us/consumer/>

For the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation is "the state watchdog charged with educating, informing and protecting consumers." Consumer tips are organized by specific service or product types, including Banking, Credit and Debt, Autos, and Home Construction. Individual pages will link you to publications from State and Federal agencies and to appropriate complaint forms.

[Massachusetts Division of Insurance](#)

<http://www.state.ma.us/doi/home.html>

"The primary mission of the Division of Insurance is to monitor the solvency of its licensees in order to promote a healthy, responsive and willing marketplace for consumers who purchase insurance products." The agency is charged with "resolving complaints against insurers, agents, brokers and other licensees." So, this is a good place to visit to either find information or file a complaint related to coverage of anything from your family's healthcare to your car.

[ConsumerReports.org](#)

<http://www.consumerreports.org/>

The Consumers Union identifies itself as an organization dedicated to providing information on products and services, and educating the public. It does this by sponsoring "the scientific testing of products, to sort out the shoddy and the unsafe from the solid and the excellent." *Consumer Reports*, the group's monthly publication, is the nation's best known consumer magazine. Only a limited amount of current information is available for free to non-subscribers at their website.

But, remember, current Suffolk students and faculty can also find full-text to the magazine from our [Academic Search Premier](#), as well as other Sawyer Library databases.

[ConsumerSearch.com](#)

<http://www.consumersearch.com/www/>

One should always be skeptical of the content on a commercial site. Still, this webpage can be very useful as part of your preliminary research before purchasing a product. Categories cover everything from home electronics to infant car seats. Select a category, then look at the Fast Answers, Full Story, or All Reviews pages to scan the ratings and responses. Since reviews paraphrased here are culled from *Consumer Reports* and other consumer groups, magazines, websites, and books, you can get some idea of what the general opinion is on a particular consumer good by browsing here.

[Edmunds Car Buying Guide](#)

<http://www.edmunds.com/>

Edmunds is a familiar pricing guide for both new and used motor vehicles. Provide a zip code (for regional price adjustment), then step through selecting type, model, and year and get retail or re-sell value on a car or truck. Editor and consumer ratings and sizable reviews from Edmunds editors are also often available--especially on current models. Look at the tabs at the top of the pages for links to other website areas like "Tips & Advice."

[Kelley Blue Book](#)

<http://www.kbb.com/>

Here's the other popular pricing guide for cars, trucks, and motorcycles--in its online form. Covers much the same ground as Edmunds, so it is useful for comparison. The "Ownership Cost" function is handy. It projects less obvious costs like depreciation, financing, fuel and insurance for a five-year period.

[NADAguides.com](#)

<http://www.nadaguides.com/>

Last but not least, here is the website for the orange NADA guides, which also provide valuation information, not only for autos, trucks and motorcycles, but even for classic cars, boats, RVs, and manufactured housing (aka mobile homes). However, be warned, for some items in some categories, the site will not provide an estimate without payment of a fee.

[Insurance Institute for Highway Safety / Highway Loss Data Institute](#)

<http://www.hwysafety.org/>

Home of the crash test dummies--no, not the rock band, the real ones--the IIHS/HLDI sponsors all those independent crash tests of current vehicles. The auto manufacturers are not fond of these folks. But checking the "Vehicle Ratings" section of this website isn't a bad idea before purchasing a motor vehicle.

[FindLaw for the Public](#)

<http://public.findlaw.com/>

FindLaw is the most popular of the public access law resources on the web. This version of the website is specifically designed as a starting point for the public facing legal issues. It covers Family Law Topics (like living together, adoption, and divorce), Personal Injury Topics, and also posts guides and articles on Elder Law, Immigration, Bankruptcy, Lemon Laws, and many other personal law categories. The content here can be useful for basic background in legal issues, but is no substitute for professional assistance.

[Federal Reserve Board: Consumer Information](#)

<http://www.federalreserve.gov/consumers.htm>

The Federal Reserve, the nation's central bank, provides this page of useful consumer information on money matters. Publications/pages cover topics like Bank Accounts, Identity Theft, Leasing, Mortgages, and Personal Finance.

[Hoaxbusters](#)

<http://hoaxbusters.ciac.org/>

Sponsored by the Department of Energy-Computer Incident Advisory Capability division, this website tries to de-bunk hoaxes and urban myths and expose the many scams flying around the internet. They also try to help the public separate these from real computer viruses and "Trojan incidents." You can browse hoaxes by category, use the index or search. There are even tips on how to recognize a web hoax. Symantec, a leading manufacturer of anti-virus software also has a useful [Hoaxes Page](#). If you get an email warning you that you have been infected by a virus and telling you to delete one of the files on your hard drive, check this page first.

[healthfinder](#)

<http://www.healthfinder.gov>

healthfinder is the "Federal Web site for consumers, developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services together with other Federal agencies. Since 1997, healthfinder has been recognized as a key resource for finding the best government and nonprofit health and human services information on the Internet. healthfinder links to carefully selected information and Web sites from over 1,700 health-related organizations."

[www.FoodSafety.gov](#)

<http://www.foodsafety.gov/>

Here is the federal government site that provides industry, educators and general consumers with food safety information. Especially useful is the [Consumer Advice](#) page which links to information on proper food handling, advice related to power outages, and food-specific advice. Information about specific state agencies for Massachusetts can be found in [this PDF file](#).

[Internet Public Library: Consumer Information & Advocacy](#)

<http://www.ipl.org/div/pf/entry/48457>

Internet Public Library provides this "Pathfinder." It will be a good next step if you are interested in exploring more websites than those listed on this page. IPL's guide "is designed to help

consumers locate information on the value, pricing, and reliability of goods and services with a focus on consumer advocacy." Specific headings cover areas such as Children's Products, Automobiles, Health, and Government Sources.

Print Consumer Resources

[Consumer Reports](#)

Periodical Stacks, Microfilm Cabinets

Even though we have online access to *Consumer Reports* through several of our databases (see above), we also maintain a paper subscription to this well-respected consumer magazine. Paper is sometimes handier for browsing. And--little known fact--there is actually a handy one-year index to the magazine at the back of every issue.

[Consumer Reports Buying Guide Issue](#)

Latest Kept at Reference Desk

This annual condenses and reproduces a wide variety of reviews on everything from household appliances to cars. It provides some graphs, but no photographs or other illustrative materials that might have been in the magazine. The annual also includes an eight year index to the magazine, for those who want to delve in the original articles themselves.

[Gale Encyclopedia of Everyday Law](#)

REF KF387 .G27 2003 (also an e-book)

This two volume set does a good job of giving basic, easy to understand, overviews of a variety of legal topics from "Retirement and Aging" to "Immigration." It is also available online through [Gale Virtual Reference Library](#). And speaking of GVRL, there are other online reference books that might be of interest, including the [Gale Encyclopedia of Medicine](#).

[Johns Hopkins Symptoms and Remedies : The Complete Home Medical Reference](#)

REF RC81 .J66 2003

Although diagnosing yourself is never a smart idea, this useful reference volume has a first section that details symptoms (e.g., "Headache") which lists the various ailments that produce the symptom (e.g., "Stroke"). The second half of the book explains the various diseases and disorders and suggests how to treat them and when to call a doctor.

[American College of Physicians Complete Home Medical Guide](#)

REF RC81 .A5386 2003

Another handy medical handbook. This one has numerous color illustrations.