



Quality Relative Internet Searches

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As we know, the Foster Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 mandates: "...the State shall exercise due diligence to identify and provide notice to all adult grandparents and other adult relatives of the child (including any other adult relatives suggested by the parents), subject to exceptions due to family or domestic violence." Most states have enacted legislation or court rules which describe tools and recommended processes to meet the due diligence requirements, many of which reference the use of "internet technology"³. "The American Bar Association's Judicial Guide to Implementing the Fostering Connections Act suggests that the hearing officer ask whether the agency has used a "combination of good casework and technological resources." The Fostering Connections Act also highlights implementation of "intensive family-finding efforts that utilize search technology to find biological family members." ⁴

Standard practices have developed in many public and private child welfare agency sites to locate family members for children in care. Sites typically use internet resources to link to traditional websites like directory assistance, federal parent locator, and inmate locators. However, these websites are not very effective in identifying relatives currently unknown or determining their current whereabouts.

Listed below are the common categories of online resources, including their strengths and limitations and examples to assist in improving the range, speed and strength of your internet searching. Utilizing a variety of these sources as part of your search strategy for individuals and unknown relatives of families impacted by the child welfare system will broaden your results to improve the effectiveness of your searches:

Public Records - Vital records are publicly available in many states, though it may require a paid subscription to a site that houses this information. Many public agencies have subscriptions to sites such as Global Locator and Inmate Locator, and also search through birth, marriage and death records. If the person you are searching for was born or even married in one of the available states it can provide names of siblings, spouses, and parents for further research. Likewise, obituaries can also provide information on family members. These records are helpful to find known individuals, but again not as helpful in finding unknown relatives.

Free/Standard Search Engines - In some cases the needed information can be found free of charge using a standard search engine like Google, Yahoo or Bing. The advantages of these sites are that they are free, fast and accessible. The disadvantages are that they often link to advertiser (paid) sites to gain the specific information, and they don't narrow search results, especially with common names.

Directory Assistance Sites—411.com and White Pages.com are two examples of Directory Assistance sites, which can provide current addresses and phone numbers associated with a particular name free of charge. Their limitations include narrow source information, and the inability to search by SSN, historical address or DOB. They also do not provide information on other possible relatives.

Free with Paid Style Content—Zaba Search is an example of this type of search site, which provides free information with better data than 411.com, including some historical data and phone numbers. However, the addresses and phone numbers are often out of date and you are required to purchase a premium report to get names and addresses for other possible relatives.

Social Network Sites - Another resource is social network sites like Facebook and Linked In. Not only can these sites provide the names of other possible relatives, but in some cases will actually identify the relationship to the person searched. They can also provide a way to directly message these relatives. However, these sites are limited in coverage to those who subscribe, can sometimes be well protected, and one can only search by name.

Genealogy Sites – Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.com are two examples of genealogy sites. These can provide multiple generations of family members and help in locating obituaries, birth, death and marriage records, however there are subscription charges, difficulty in finding living relatives, and a significant learning curve to effectively use the site.

Paid Consumer Sites—Two examples of paid consumers sites are PeopleFinders and PeopleSmart. For these sites there is no required sign up, you can receive relatives' names without paying and addresses for the person searched as well as the names of relatives and neighbors, friends or other acquaintances for a charge. Even though you are paying a fee, you will not have the access to as many relatives' names as with premium service, and you often cannot use DOB or previous address information to zero in on the correct person.

People Search Engines—Radaris and PIPL are two common people search engines. These services combine results from other major people search sites plus free sites and major social networks sites. They are primarily referral sites however, and you will still have to pay for the data except for 411 and social network links.

Premium Sites—LexisNexis/Accurint and LocatePlus are two of the most well known premium sites. They provide better data with instant results and the ability to search by SSN. The limitations include monthly minimum pricing, complicated sign up process and training is required to achieve maximum results.

Full Service—Seneca Search Services provide premium data and access to the to the search operator to troubleshoot or explore further options in situations in which limited results are found with the first try. No training is necessary to achieve results from this service, which provides customized reports and special features exclusive to child welfare, without paying for searches that fail to yield results. At NIPFC, we also provide search training to maximize your own and free search tools in addition to offering the opportunity to purchase searches directly. Experience using people search databases, as well as searching social network sites and vital records can make a big difference, especially in more difficult cases. Searches can

be obtained through an annual contract or on a per search basis. The limitations are that the results are not free, there can be up to a 24 hour turnaround time, and the subscriber does not have direct access to the database.

It is important to utilize cost efficient and effective data sources to expand the knowledge of breadth and extent of family connections. However, the pursuit of the information does not in and of itself meet the standards of the Fostering Connections Act. In our next blast we will elaborate on how to bridge the internet search results with other discovery tools while braiding those efforts with engagement strategies to better meet the intent of the Fostering Connections Act.

You can find more information about our Seneca Search Services [here](#).

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[3] Some examples include: California, Rules of Court, 5.695(f)(g), "...Employ internet search tools..." Wyoming, Policy No. 5.7, "internet Search Resources."

[4] Read: P.L. 110-351, Title I, Section 102 – Connecting and Supporting Relative Caregivers

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