

They used to drown in a deluge of data. Now City workers have a souped-up search engine

David Parsley reports on the new breed of 'aggregators' that sift online financial information to bring you the needle but not the haystack

Try to find a specific piece of data on the web and the chances are that you'll get a lot more information than you need and end up not enlightened but completely in the dark.

You may even enter an incredibly precise term but you'll still get millions of results with no clue as to which ones are actually relevant to you. No one in a City job has the time or inclination to sift through that amount of research, so corporate executives, analysts and bankers are now flocking to the crop of web-information aggregators that have sprung up over the past few years.

These websites employ sophisticated software to find exactly what you need - whether it's the latest rumour on a predicted merger or an investment by a private equity house. In a matter of seconds, these sites will produce the information the workers in the financial community require.

One such site is StrategyEye. Nick Gregg launched the business in 2004 after a successful banking career at Donaldson, Lufkin & Jenrette. Also the founder of recruitment group Milkround, which was sold to News International last year

for £40m, he had been developing his web-aggregator software during his time in banking.

StrategyEye offers subscribers a battlefield view of telecom, media and technology (TMT) businesses by gathering rumours, announcements, partnerships and blogs on the topic from tens of thousands of web sources round the globe. Gregg's team of analysts will then check the stories out and write their own views on them, providing subscribers with a snapshot of the information and how reliable it seems to be.

"We are a combination of human intellectual property and technology," says Gregg. "Essentially, we provide subscribers with two things. First, we track 4,000 expert bloggers around the world and assess what they're saying. These guys are often some of the most experienced people in their sectors, letting the world know the latest news before it hits the City pages in newspapers.

"We gather this information from all these sources all day every day and then have our analysts check the rumours out. We rank the bloggers in many ways, including how reliable they are, and our software never misses anything anyone writes. "Second, and unlike some of



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our competitors, we track mergers and acquisitions, venture capital deals and any announcements in the TMT sector.”

In the next month, StrategyEye will begin to cover the energy industry and Gregg is also looking to expand into other sectors, including healthcare and clean technologies, in the next year. Backed by 20 “angel” investors, he has raised £2m for the expansion programme.

“The business is very scalable,” adds Gregg. “We currently cover 10,000 companies across 3,000 sub-sectors. Our software allows us to do much more than that when we're ready to. There's no reason we can't cover 50,000 companies across many new sectors as we expand.”

StrategyEye is set to reach profitability next year as some of Gregg's biggest clients - which include Microsoft, Yahoo!, BSKyB, Fidelity and UBS - pay up to £40,000 for their annual subscription.

Like many others in the sector, Gregg believes that these information-gathering techniques are poised to revolutionise how business people gather their intelligence.

Another “believer” is Devin Wenig, chief operating officer and proposed chief executive of news information group Reuters

following the completion of the merger with Thomson. Last month he told the Future of Business Media conference in New York that bloggers and web chat were becoming critical in news generation.

Wenig talked up what he called “data concordance” and revealed that Reuters is set to overhaul its financial data terminals, which he described as “somewhat archaic compared to what's happening on the web”.

His “next-generation” terminals will be a multimedia experience, fully social network-enabled and collaborative with the internet.

“Part of that is also about aggregating content that we don't have. The terminal of the future is not only going to have Reuters content, it's going to bring in a bunch of information from the web and do it contextually.

“I want to see what the blogosphere is saying about it. I want to see not just what Reuters says about it but what the world is saying. That's a huge shift.”

It is understood that Wenig is already some way along to launching the financial terminal of the future and has held initial talks with potential software providers.

Clearly Gregg is hoping to catch the eye of Reuters, but he

will be competing with the likes of Mergermarket, which claims to produce “pre-news” in the mergers and acquisitions market via its 200 journalists worldwide. Founded by former Scots Guards officer Casper Hobbs and journalist Charlie Welsh at the end of 1999, Mergermarket provides information on M&A activity above £3.7m in Europe or £2.5m around the globe, and in any sector anywhere, to investment bankers and others in the M&A community.

The two men pocketed £10m each in August 2006 when Pearson, owner of the *Financial Times*, bought the business for £101m.

Where StrategyEye looks at every aspect of the companies that it covers, Mergermarket has spread its net far wider but only focuses on M&A rumours - in the same way that another product, VentureSource, a web information group owned by Dow Jones, focuses on investment from venture capital sources around the world.

These three groups are sure to be only the beginning of the revolution in information gathering. When news organisation leaders such as Wenig at Reuters recognise it's the future, you can be sure more bright sparks will jump on the bandwagon.