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"Can You Handle the Truth?"

CRO Websites

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An organization's website is one of its most valuable assets. One of the best Internet services* scanned the websites of ten leading contract research organizations (CROs) on December 14-15, 2005 to determine how well they maintain their websites. Table 1 presents the results.

Table 1. CRO Website Links

Company	Website (www.)	Pages Scanned	Internal		Outbound		Inbound		Total	
			Total	Broken	Total	Broken	Total	Broken	Uncheckable	In/Out Ratio
Covance	covance.com	711	81,104	0	2,460	0	613	0	206	25%
i3 Research	i3research.com	107	1,003	0	575	0	257	0	0	45%
ICON Clinical Research	iconclinical.com	555	7,903	4	501	0	56	0	9	11%
Kendle	kendle.com	391	2,662	3	149	12	614	7	0	412%
MDS Pharma Services	mdsps.com	1,042	2,931	113	288	0	279	3	0	97%
PAREXEL	parexel.com	444	3,484	1	126	1	262	6	0	208%
PPD	ppdi.com	2,592	32,141	0	1,011	1	1,232	0	23	122%
PRA International	prainternational.com	179	1,751	0	79	0	96	0	0	122%
Quintiles	quintiles.com	1,000	7,404	0	110	1	585	13	2	532%
SFBC	sfbc.com	900	6,221	7	107	1	87	4	22	81%

A review of the data yields the following conclusions:

- The number of pages per website varies substantially. (Not all pages were scanned and counted for this study.)
- Internal link counts range from 1,003 to 81,104. (Covance (81,104) and PPD (32,141) have a large number of menu links on each page.)

- Outbound link counts range from 79 to 2,460. Outbound links may be to other sites operated by the same company, or they may be to useful websites and other resources.
- Inbound link counts range from 56 to 1,232. The largest companies do not necessarily have the highest inbound link counts. A high inbound link count may indicate a useful site or an active marketing or publication program.
- The ratio of inbound to outbound links varies from 9:1 to 1:5, a very broad range. A high ratio indicates that more sites link into that site than vice versa.
- MDS Pharma Services has many more internal broken links than the other sites.
- Kendle has the most broken links to other sites. It is a small number but a high percentage – 8% – of outbound links.
- Half the sites have zero inbound link errors, suggesting that (a) the structure of their site is very stable, (b) their site is architected so all inbound links come to pages that never change address, or (c) they actively communicate with other sites about broken links.
- Use of a good link-checking service is advisable. The sites with the fewest broken links may already employ one of the available services.

* Contact the author for a referral to the service. It has been very helpful in maintaining the quality of the www.firstclinical.com website.

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