



The Duck of Convergent Validity™

As every good information researcher knows, we look at more than one source to ensure appropriate breadth of viewpoints, and to confirm key findings or conclusions. We walk a fine line between overwhelming our clients with repetitive information, and missing some key piece that might appear in an unconventional spot.

Dr. Ruth Corbin is an eminent survey researcher and lawyer, who writes a regular column for the Market Research & Intelligence Association. She introduced me to the Duck of Convergent Validity, who would make a great mascot for ISBN members.

"If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck ..."
-- yes, *that* Duck. As she writes, "That is the principle of convergent validity. One piece of evidence may be tentative, two more persuasive, and, as independent pieces of evidence pile up, all of them converging on the same result, they give the decision-maker more and more confidence."

Dr. Corbin has written extensively on the role of statistically valid surveys in revealing any confusion that might exist between two trademarks that are



the subject of litigation, and in that regard the research must be held to a much higher standard than most of our own clients would need.

Left on their own, I doubt our clients go past the first few Google hits. I expect they scan only a couple of pages of abstracts from the standard lit search that we provide, though perhaps some might "quality check" the entire printout for items they already know about. And I'm sure most of them won't read many whole articles on a topic, or collect and analyze tons of data -- even really, really pertinent articles and data -- before coming to a decision or conclusion.

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Of course, we know that the online aggregators we use are just that -- they pull together information from many sources. A "companies database" may include material from annual reports, official filings, news sources, corporate websites, press releases, analysts' reports, interviews, and syndicated market research reports. But we can't rely on the aggregators, if only because their Canadian content is limited.

As a Dialog trainer, my favourite illustration of the need for multiple sources was to compare a company's press release about its AGM, to the news items generated by the press who were present at that meeting. A flamboyant CEO (such as Frank Stronach) or a controversial issue (such as directors' compensation) can result in wildly different viewpoints. A more recent example is competing prospectuses sent during a takeover bid of a stock that I own -- now that I have more time to read the small print I realise I was missing a lot.

Move from fact to opinion, or from national to local viewpoint, or from anglophone media to francophone, and it's even clearer that using multiple sources adds both richness and credibility to our research.

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Our role is to encourage our clients to gather enough evidence to make sound decisions. But not just duck-like evidence. We must also help our clients find the "unknown unknowns". We can learn to do that from our colleagues in journalism, who find nuggets of information

in the most unlikely places, that not only juice up a story, but also shed light on events and motivations. (Sometimes you can see evidence of these unusual sources in a newspaper article written to a tight deadline or in a tight space, when perhaps there hasn't been time or space to smooth the transitions between factlets.)

You can read more about the Duck of Convergent Validity in "[Surveys on a Tightrope - The Convergent Validity Net](http://corbinpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/IntellectualPropertyJournal-November2012.pdf)", Ruth M. Corbin & Fiona Isaacson, *Intellectual Property Journal* (Carswell), vol.24 no.3, November 2012, p.265-278 -- available on CorbinPartners Inc. website at <http://corbinpartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/IntellectualPropertyJournal-November2012.pdf>