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A list of the most popular smoking cessation web sites and a comparison of their quality. Etter JF. Institute of Social and Preventive Medicine, University of Geneva, Switzerland.

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To identify the most popular smoking cessation Web sites and to compare their quality, we conducted an Internet survey of 706 U.S. current and former smokers who had already visited such a Web site. Participants cited 133 different sites and rated their quality. Surprisingly, two of the three most frequently visited Web sites were owned by tobacco companies: Philipmorrisusa.com and its information resource Quit Assist (cited by 15.9% of participants) and the R. J. Reynolds site (5.9%). However, these two sites were not perceived as helpful. The other most frequently visited sites were QuitNet.com (10.1% of all participants), the site of the American Lung Association (5.2%), and Webmd.com (4.4%). All the nine most frequently visited sites, which together attracted 56% of all visitors, ranked at or below average for quality or helpfulness, and together, the three sites with the highest quality ratings received only 7% of all visitors. Only one-third of participants received follow-up e-mails. Thirteen of the 18 most popular Web sites were for-profit, and several sites promoted unproven methods. Two sites ranked above average for quality, and both were nonprofit: Smokefree.gov and Anti-smoking.org. Quitsmoking.About.com ranked above average for helpfulness. Direct competition radically distinguishes Web sites from other smoking cessation services. However, competition resulted in the selection of tobacco companies sites and commercial sites rather than sites of the best quality. In general, users were not very satisfied with smoking cessation Web sites, and they had difficulty finding the best Web sites. Resources were scattered over dozens of Web sites of often mediocre quality that duplicated each other.