

TECHNOLOGY
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Website of the Month: Yahoo Tax Center

By Susan B. Anders

Yahoo Tax Center (taxes.yahoo.com) is part of the Yahoo Finance family of Internet resources. Although Yahoo Tax Center is aimed at nonexpert taxpayers, practitioners will find several time-saving materials, plus a few hidden gems. Some resources are available via links to well-known websites. Yahoo Tax Center offers quick, easy links and provides a variety of different materials that tax practitioners use on a regular basis.

The homepage is less busy than the main Yahoo and Yahoo Finance homepages, and the simplest way to access the tax resources is to start directly at the Tax Center website. The homepage and main webpages are organized with hyperlinked topic headings. A vertical index on most pages makes navigation simple.

The materials on Yahoo Tax Center are organized under two categories, "Tools" and "Resources," although the distinction is not particularly useful. The categories of interest to tax practitioners are "Federal Tax Forms," "State Tax Forms," "State Tax Profiles," and, especially, "U.S. Tax Law."

Federal tax forms. The Federal Tax Forms page can be accessed directly via a hyperlink in the center of the homepage or from the index that appears on most of the webpages. Approximately 100 of the most common, and uncommon, forms relevant to individual taxpayers are available in .pdf format. Unfortunately, the forms are not offered in a fill-in format. A direct link to the IRS "Forms and Instructions" webpage is at the bottom of Yahoo's forms list.

State tax forms and profiles. Tax forms for the 50 states and the District of Columbia are available through links to the tax form pages on the individual state websites. The New York link, for example, connects to the New York State Income Tax Forms homepage.

The screenshot shows the Yahoo Finance Tax Center interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with 'YAHOO! FINANCE' and a search bar. Below that is a banner for T.RowePrice with the slogan 'INVEST WITH CONFIDENCE' and a call to action: 'CLICK HERE TO UNDERSTAND YOUR OPTIONS OR CALL A ROLLOVER SPECIALIST NOW' with the phone number '1 - 800 - 250 - 9136'. The main content area is titled 'Tax Center' and includes a search bar for articles, a 'Tools' sidebar with various links, and a central section for TurboTax. The TurboTax section includes the text 'Do your taxes with TurboTax® for the WebSM!' and 'The quick and easy way to do your taxes. Coming soon: TurboTax for the Web available in January 2004 for 2003 taxes.' Below this, there are four feature boxes: 'Tax Calculators' (Get the good (or bad) news before you file), 'Electronic Tax Payment' (Pay online or over the phone!), 'Federal Tax Forms' (Forms, schedules, and instructions), and 'State Tax Forms' (Forms by state, for individuals).

An extremely useful feature of the website is "State Tax Profiles." A table of state profiles provides a summary of each state's individual income tax rates, tax brackets, and personal exemptions, as well as the state sales tax rate. The table is linked to a more detailed profile covering personal income, sales, property, and estate taxes on Bankrate.com.

U.S. tax law. This group is the most valuable set of practitioner resources on the Yahoo Tax Center website. Accessing this group of online resources requires drilling down through several webpages, but links to useful resources for tax practitioners can be found here.

The "United States" hyperlink leads to "Federal" and "State" subcategories. The "Federal" link leads to an outstanding offering of Treasury Department hyperlinks, the "Federal Tax Law" webpage on the Tax and Accounting Sites Directory, and the U.S. Tax Code On-Line website. Clicking on "State" connects to a hyperlink listing of 48 states (Montana and Nevada are missing), the Federation of Tax Administrators "State Tax Comparisons"

webpage, and the Tax and Accounting Sites Directory "State and Local Tax" webpage. There is also a link to the "Legal Information Institute," an excellent tax law resource from the Cornell Law School.

The tax practitioner resources on the "U.S. Tax Law" webpages are not particularly well organized. Nonetheless, exploring this section of the website is worth a small investment of time.

Other features. "Tax Calculators" offers about two dozen calculator schedules for computations such as average tax rate, marginal tax rate, filing requirements, and required minimum distributions. "Tax Guide for Investors," authored by Kaye Thomas, provides basic information on a variety of areas, including stock options, capital gains, and the alternative minimum tax. "Tax Glossary" is a dictionary of pertinent terms. □

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