How to Use SEC EDGAR: A Step-by-Step Tutorial for Investors

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Search EDGAR by company, ticker, or filing type to find S-3 shelves, 424B ATMs, warrants, and dilution signals.

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What Is SEC EDGAR?

EDGAR stands for Electronic Data Gathering, Analysis, and Retrieval. It's the SEC's free, public database of every filing submitted by publicly-traded US companies - 10-Ks, 10-Qs, 8-Ks, proxy statements, prospectuses, insider trading reports, and thousands of other document types.

Every public company is required by law to file with the SEC. Every one of those filings goes into EDGAR. And all of it is available to anyone with an internet connection, completely free, updated in near-real-time.

? Why Most Investors Never Use EDGAR Properly

Most retail investors get their company information filtered through financial news sites, earnings summaries, and social media. By the time that information reaches you, it's been summarized, simplified, and often delayed. EDGAR gives you the original, unfiltered source documents - the same documents institutional investors, analysts, and lawyers read. The information advantage is enormous, and almost nobody uses it.

The main EDGAR entry point is www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar and the newer, more search-friendly interface at efts.sec.gov (the EDGAR full-text search). You'll use both.

Searching by Company Name, Ticker, or CIK

EDGAR supports three ways to find a company's filings. Each has advantages depending on what you know:

Search by Company Name

Go to www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcompany and enter the company name in the "Company Name" field. This is useful when you know the company's name but not their ticker. Be aware that company names can be messy - partial matches work, but you might get multiple results for common words.

Search by Ticker Symbol

The fastest method for most investors. Enter the ticker in the "Company Name" field - EDGAR actually accepts tickers there too - or use the newer search at efts.sec.gov which has a unified search that handles tickers cleanly. A ticker search returns the company's EDGAR page directly.

Search by CIK Number

The CIK (Central Index Key) is a unique identifier that EDGAR assigns to every registrant. Unlike company names (which can change) or tickers (which can be retired or reassigned), the CIK is permanent. Once you know a company's CIK, you can always find their filings directly at: www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcompany&CIK=[NUMBER]&type=&dateb=&owner=include&count=40

? Finding a CIK Number

The easiest way to find a CIK: go to efts.sec.gov, search for the company name or ticker, click on any filing result. The URL will contain the CIK number, e.g., /cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcompany&CIK=0001318605. You can also find CIKs in the header of any filing document - they're listed as "Central Index Key" on the filing's cover page. Pro tip: Bookmark a company's EDGAR page using their CIK URL for reliable, permanent access.

How to Filter by Filing Type

Every public company files dozens of different form types per year. Without filtering, the filings list is overwhelming. Here's how to filter to only see what you need:

On a company's EDGAR filing page, you'll see a "Filing Type" field. Enter the form code to filter:

* 10-K - Annual reports (filed once a year)
* 10-Q - Quarterly reports (filed 3x per year)
* 8-K - Material events/current reports (filed within 4 business days)
* S-3 - Shelf registration statements
* S-1 - IPO/initial registration statements
* 424B3 - Prospectus supplements (ATM activity, PIPE registrations)
* DEF 14A - Proxy statements
* SC 13G - 5%+ ownership filings (passive)
* SC 13D - 5%+ ownership filings (active)
* 4 - Insider trading reports (Form 4)

?? The 424B3 Filing: TraderTools's Most Watched Form

The 424B3 filing is a prospectus supplement - it's what companies file every time they sell shares through an ATM program or register PIPE shares for resale. TraderTools monitors every 424B3 and 424B5 filing across all tracked companies in real-time. This is the document that tells you dilution is happening right now.

How to Read the Filing Index Page

When you click on any filing in EDGAR, you first see the filing index page - a table of contents listing every document within that filing. Understanding this page is essential for finding what you need quickly.

A typical 10-K filing index includes:

* Primary document: The main 10-K form itself (usually an .htm or .htm file)
* Exhibits: Attachments like the articles of incorporation, material contracts, and certifications
* Filing metadata: CIK number, filed date, period of report, company name

1

Look at the document type column

Exhibits are labeled "EX-10.1", "EX-21.1" etc. The main filing document is labeled with the form type (e.g., "10-K"). Start with the main document for the narrative; use exhibits for specific contracts.

2

Check the description column

Each document should have a brief description: "Annual report", "Securities Purchase Agreement", "Form of Warrant", etc. This tells you which exhibit is which without opening them all.

3

For dilution research, prioritize these exhibits

EX-10.x (Material contracts including SPA and warrant agreements), EX-4.x (Warrant certificates and terms), EX-23 (Auditor letters - look for going concern qualifications).

4

Use Ctrl+F liberally

Once you open the main filing document, use browser search (Ctrl+F) to jump to key sections. Search for "outstanding", "dilution", "ATM", "warrant", "cash and cash equivalents", "going concern" - you'll find the relevant sections in seconds.

Setting Up Email Alerts for Specific Companies

EDGAR has a built-in email alert system called EDGAR Filing Alerts that notifies you when a specific company files a new document. This is one of the most underused features on the entire platform.

To set up an email alert:

* Go to efts.sec.gov and search for the company you want to monitor
* On the search results page, click the company name to view their filing page
* Look for the "Get Email Alerts" link (or go directly to www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcompany&CIK=[CIK]&type=&dateb=&owner=include&count=40&search_text= and find the email alert option)
* Enter your email address and select which form types you want to be alerted about
* Confirm your email subscription

? Alert Strategy for Dilution Monitoring

For any stock you hold or are watching for dilution risk, set up alerts for at minimum: 8-K (material events), S-3 (shelf registrations), 424B3 (prospectus supplements), and DEF 14A (proxy statements). These four form types will catch nearly every dilution event before it becomes headline news.

You can set up alerts for specific form types only - you don't have to receive alerts for every

filing. For dilution monitoring, focus on 8-K (material events), 424B (prospectus supplements), and S-3 (new shelf registrations).

The EDGAR Full-Text Search Tool

One of EDGAR's most powerful but least-known features is its full-text search capability, accessible at efts.sec.gov. Unlike the basic company-name search, full-text search lets you search the content of all SEC filings - not just the metadata.

This is enormously powerful for research. Examples of what you can find with full-text search:

* Find all companies using a specific ATM broker: Search "H.C. Wainwright" "at-the-market" to find all companies that recently filed ATM programs with that broker
* Find companies with going concern opinions: Search "substantial doubt about its ability to continue as a going concern" to find companies in financial distress
* Find convertible note issuers: Search "variable rate convertible note" "conversion price" to find companies with toxic convertible structures
* Research specific law firms or investors: Searching a hedge fund name finds every filing where they appear as a selling shareholder

? Full-Text Search Examples at efts.sec.gov

Find recent ATM programs: Query: at-the-market offering program "H.C. Wainwright" Form type filter: 424B3 Date range: Last 30 days Find going concern companies: Query: "substantial doubt" "going concern" "cash and cash equivalents" Form type filter: 10-K Date range: Last 90 days Find specific PIPE investors: Query: "Anson Funds" "securities purchase agreement" Form type filter: 8-K Date range: Last 6 months

The full-text search index is updated daily. It covers the last several years of filings, not the entire EDGAR archive. For historical research, the basic company search is more complete.

RSS Feeds for Real-Time Monitoring

EDGAR provides RSS feeds that allow you to monitor new filings in real-time using any RSS reader. This is especially useful for tracking specific form types across all companies.

Key EDGAR RSS feeds:

* All recent filings: www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcurrent&type=&dateb=&owner=include&count=40&search_text=&output=atom
* Specific form type (e.g., 8-K): www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcurrent&type=8-K&dateb=&owner=include&count=40&search_text=&output=atom
* Specific company filings: www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/browse-edgar?action=getcompany&CIK=[CIK]&type=&dateb=&owner=include&count=40&search_text=&output=atom

For dilution monitoring specifically, the most valuable RSS feed is the 424B filing feed - this catches every prospectus supplement filed by any company, letting you see ATM activity across the entire market in real-time.

? TraderTools Does This For You

TraderTools monitors EDGAR RSS feeds continuously - checking for new filings every 60 seconds - and processes them to identify dilution-relevant events. Instead of managing dozens of RSS feeds and parsing raw SEC documents, you get clean, contextualized alerts with the dilution analysis already

done.

The 10 Filing Types Every Investor Should Know

Here's a quick reference guide to the most important filing types for dilution research:

* 10-K (Annual Report): The most comprehensive filing. Contains audited financials, management discussion, risk factors, and the complete footnotes where dilution details live. Filed 60-90 days after fiscal year end.

* 10-Q (Quarterly Report): Unaudited quarterly update. Check shares outstanding, cash balance, and burn rate. Filed within 40-45 days of quarter end.

* 8-K (Current Report): Filed within 4 business days of any material event - earnings, acquisitions, PIPE deals, officer changes, debt defaults. This is where you find out about dilutive transactions first.

* S-3 (Shelf Registration): The legal framework for future capital raises. Filing an S-3 doesn't mean dilution is happening today - it means the company wants the ability to raise capital quickly when they decide to.

* S-1 (Registration Statement): Used for IPOs and by smaller companies that can't qualify for S-3. Takes longer to go effective and represents more urgent capital need.

* 424B3/424B5 (Prospectus Supplements): Filed every time shares are sold through an ATM program or PIPE shares are registered for resale. This is the most real-time dilution signal on EDGAR.

* DEF 14A (Proxy Statement): Annual shareholder meeting agenda. Contains compensation information, director elections, and - critically - any proposals to increase authorized shares. Proxy votes to increase authorized shares are dilution warnings.

* SC 13G/13D: Filed by investors acquiring 5% or more of a company's shares. A 13G from a known PIPE-focused hedge fund means they just completed a deal. A 13D signals activist intent.

* Form 4 (Insider Transactions): Filed within 2 business days of any insider buying or selling. Massive insider selling ahead of a stock decline - while the public doesn't know about an upcoming PIPE deal - is a serious concern.

* NT 10-K/NT 10-Q (Notification of Late Filing): Filed when a company can't make its filing deadline. This is often the first sign of financial distress - companies struggling to close their books are often struggling financially too.

Let TraderTools Monitor EDGAR For You

TraderTools monitors all SEC filings across thousands of companies in real-time, flagging the filings that matter for dilution risk. Instead of checking EDGAR manually, get timely alerts when a company you're watching files an S-3, 424B, or 8-K disclosing a new offering.

Start Tracking Free ->

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