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PACER Party Name Search: Company Litigation Due Diligence

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Executive Summary

A party-name hit in the federal court index answers one narrow question: a name resembling the target's appears as a party in some federal case. It does not establish that the party is the acquisition target, that the case concerns the target's business, or how the case ended. This report sets out a repeatable triage for private equity origination analysts: search the nationwide index, open the court-level docket, anchor identity with registry and filing details, classify party role, case type and status, and record each finding as a separate, bounded claim. It is early research triage, not legal advice and not a judgment about liability.

The mechanics are specific. The **PACER Case Locator** (PCL) is a national index of district, bankruptcy and appellate cases (pacer.uscourts.gov), fed by nightly data collection from the courts (www.ilsb.uscourts.gov), while a court's own system updates in real time (pacer.uscourts.gov). A result shows party name, court, case number, date filed and date closed (pacer.uscourts.gov). Searches cost **$0.10 per page** as of October 2026 (pacer.uscourts.gov), a zero-match search still costs one page, and name-search results have no maximum fee. The judiciary has announced a temporary rise to 12 cents per page on January 1, 2027 (www.wieb.uscourts.gov), with the quarterly exemption moving from $30 to $40 (www.gasb.uscourts.gov).

Identity is the weak link. State registries test name distinguishability only against their own records (delcode.delaware.gov) (sos.ga.gov), and California does not check entity names against fictitious business names (www.sos.ca.gov), so identical names can belong to unrelated entities. The strongest docket-side anchor for a corporate party is the Rule 7.1 disclosure statement naming any parent corporation (www.govinfo.gov). Party-role codes are assigned by each court (pacer.uscourts.gov), so role filters are a convenience, not a standard.

Scope matters as much as method. District courts received 303,563 civil filings in fiscal year 2025 (www.uscourts.gov), but state courts hear most contract and tort cases (www.uscourts.gov) and are outside PACER, and most federal cases created before 1999 are paper only (www.uscourts.gov). A clean federal search is a bounded negative, never a clearance. The report supplies a cost-planning table, a match-status matrix and a fictional completed worksheet, and it names the conditions for handing a hit to counsel.

Introduction and Background

Origination teams screen long lists of private companies against a mandate. At some point an analyst types a company name into a federal case index and gets rows back. The practical question is not "does this company have litigation?" but a chain of narrower ones. Is this party the legal entity under review, a subsidiary, a parent, a sibling, or a stranger with a similar name? What kind of case is it, and in what role? Is it open or closed, and does the docket itself show how it ended? Treating those as one question is the most common source of both false alarms and false comfort.

This report addresses queries such as "pacer party name search company litigation due diligence", "how to search PACER by company name" and "PACER civil case search for business due diligence". Official portal documentation explains where to click, not whether a hit is the right company. The reference asset is a one-page party-hit adjudication table that keeps five claims separate: identity, case existence, allegations, disposition and business impact. An analyst can usually support the first two from public docket data in minutes; the last three often cannot be settled by a name search at all.

Two framing points apply throughout. First, the evidence base is official and independent: PACER help pages, court clerk pages, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, state registry pages and judiciary statistics, all read in October 2026. Where sources disagree or are silent, the report says so. Second, every example company here is **fictional** and labelled as such; no real company, case or outcome is described. The working position throughout is that a federal index hit is a lead to be adjudicated, not a finding, and uncertainty is recorded rather than resolved by assumption.

Defining the Screening Question

What a party-name hit can and cannot show

The Case Locator exists to determine whether a party is involved in a federal case (www.mied.uscourts.gov). That is a statement about a name appearing in an index. The result carries party name, court, case number and filed and closed dates (pacer.uscourts.gov). A closed date says the case is no longer pending. It does not say whether it ended by dismissal, judgment or settlement. The judiciary's glossary defines a settlement as parties resolving a dispute without a trial (www.uscourts.gov) and a judgment as the decision finally resolving it, and these are different docket events.

The Federal Rules supply a useful reminder. A voluntary dismissal is without prejudice unless the notice or stipulation says otherwise (www.govinfo.gov), and a state court self-help page notes that after such a dismissal legal time limits continue to run as if a case were never filed (selfhelp.courts.ca.gov). A partial judgment on fewer than all claims or parties requires an express finding of no just reason for delay (www.govinfo.gov), so "judgment" in a multi-party docket needs reading in context.

The five separate claims

The worksheet assigns each hit up to five findings, each with its own evidence and confidence:

- **Identity:** the party is, is affiliated with, or is unrelated to the screened entity.
- **Case existence:** a federal case with this number exists in this court and lists this party.

- **Allegations:** what a pleading says. This is a litigant's claim, not a fact about the company.
- **Disposition:** how the docket shows the case ended, if it did.
- **Business impact:** whether the matter bears on the mandate. This is a judgment for the deal team and counsel; a docket cannot establish it.

The evidence ladder

Evidence quality rises from the index row to the docket to a primary filing:

- **Level 0:** the PCL row only (name, court, number, dates).
- **Level 1:** the court-level docket sheet, with parties and counsel.
- **Level 2:** a specific filing on that docket, such as a disclosure statement or a dismissal notice.
- **Level 3:** an independent cross-check, such as a state registry record or a securities filing's subsidiary list.

A finding is only as strong as the highest level actually reviewed, and the worksheet records that level in the "docket document reviewed" column.

Searching the Federal Index

Step 1: run the nationwide search

The PCL is the right first tool when the filing court is unknown. The nationwide index is built for that case (pacer.uscourts.gov), and a bankruptcy clerk page describes the national search as returning party name, case number and jurisdiction (www.canb.uscourts.gov). Registered PACER users get access with their existing credentials, and registration has no fee (www.almd.uscourts.gov).

The basic party search takes a party name, a party role and a court type, with an "Exact Matches Only" option (pacer.uscourts.gov). If no court type is chosen, all courts are searched. An advanced search adds case status, case number, region and date filters, and civil searches add a Nature of Suit field. A company name goes in the last-name or organization field, which the API guide says is also used for a non-person entity (pacer.uscourts.gov).

Matching deserves caution. In the API, a name search without the exact-match flag returns any party whose name starts with the value entered (pacer.uscourts.gov). The web manuals reviewed do not document wildcard or alias handling, so analysts should run several deliberate variants:

- the full legal name as registered, with and without the entity suffix (Inc., LLC, Corp.);
- known former names and doing-business-as names;
- the name with and without punctuation and "The";
- the brand name, logged as a lower-confidence variant;
- the parent and principal subsidiaries, searched as distinct targets.

Role filters need the same caution. Role codes are created by individual courts (pacer.uscourts.gov), and the dropdown lists only the most common ones. Running with no role filter and classifying roles manually is the safer default.

Step 2: move to the court-level docket

The case number in a PCL result leads to the court's own records. Each court maintains its own case information (pacer.uscourts.gov). In a court's own query screen, a business goes in the Last/Business Name field with at least two letters (pacer.uscourts.gov). One district's guide advises narrowing date ranges because querying years of data at once can strain the system (www.ctd.uscourts.gov).

Clerk's offices will explain procedure but not research the company: staff are prohibited by law from offering legal advice (www.okwb.uscourts.gov), and one district lists legal research among tasks staff will not do (www.med.uscourts.gov).

Step 3: plan the cost before searching

Searching is not free. PACER charges by the page, and the rate is $0.10 per page as of October 2026 (pacer.uscourts.gov); a library guide describes the charge as per page viewed (libguides.uclawsf.edu). On the PCL specifically, 54 lines count as one billable page. The official pricing pages govern.

The rate is about to change. The judiciary announced a temporary increase effective January 1, 2027 (pacer.uscourts.gov), from 10 cents to 12 cents per page (www.wieb.uscourts.gov), with the automatic quarterly exemption rising from $30 to $40 (www.gasb.uscourts.gov). The increase runs five years (pacer.uscourts.gov) and is the first adjustment in nearly 15 years (pacer.uscourts.gov). As of October 29, 2026, the pricing page, FAQ and fee schedule reviewed still showed $0.10 and $30 and did not mention the change, and the announcement does not say whether every fee type moves.

Table 1 converts the rules into planning cells. The dollar figures are arithmetic on the published rates and the 54-line page, assume one line per result row, and apply the 2027 rate to every page type, which the announcement does not confirm.

Search or retrieval step	Billing rule (official)	Today ($0.10)	From Jan 1, 2027 ($0.12, illustrative, not published)
Search with no matches	Charged as one page (pacer.uscourts.gov)	$0.10	$0.12
Result list of up to 54 rows	54 lines per billable page (pacer.uscourts.gov)	$0.10	$0.12
Result list of 540 rows	No cap on name-search results (pacer.uscourts.gov)	$1.00	$1.20
Result list at the 5,400-row immediate ceiling	Batch option above 5,400 rows (pacer.uscourts.gov)	$10.00	$12.00
Re-sorting a result list	A new search that likely will be billable (pacer.uscourts.gov)	Another full charge	Another full charge
Case-specific document or docket sheet	Capped at 30 pages (www.uscourts.gov)	Up to $3.00 (pacer.uscourts.gov)	Cap amount not stated; 30 pages would be $3.60
Judicial opinion	No fee (www.uscourts.gov)	$0.00	Not addressed

Search or retrieval step	Billing rule (official)	Today ($0.10)	From Jan 1, 2027 ($0.12, illustrative, not published)
Quarterly position	Fees waived at or below the threshold (pacer.uscourts.gov)	$30	$40
Paper file at a Federal Records Center	Retrieval fee for viewing (www.uscourts.gov)	$64	Not addressed

Three cautions follow. The uncapped line means broad, unfiltered name searches can cost more than a single docket, which is why PACER advises searching by case number where possible (pacer.uscourts.gov). The 2026 PACER User Manual says docket reports are capped at 30 pages but case reports are not (pacer.uscourts.gov), while the FAQ describes a cap on single documents; budget to the stricter reading until a displayed charge confirms otherwise. And a team running many screens can exceed the waiver quickly, since a CRS summary describes the waiver as applying to accounts incurring $30 or less in a quarter (crsreports.congress.gov). Cost is controlled by narrowing the query before paying for pages and by logging each search so none is bought twice. PACER also prohibits collecting data in a manner that avoids billing (pacer.uscourts.gov).

Cross-Checking Entity Anchors

Why names collide

A federal docket records the name the filer typed; nothing forces it to match a registry record. Registry rules explain why identical names are common. Delaware requires a corporate name to be distinguishable on the records of its own Division of Corporations (delcode.delaware.gov). Georgia applies the same test against its own records (sos.ga.gov), and Virginia against its Clerk's Office records (www.scc.virginia.gov). California checks names only against like entities registered there (www.sos.ca.gov) and not against fictitious business names (www.sos.ca.gov). Colorado allows a trade name to be registered even if it is exactly the same as another (www.sos.state.co.us). The Small Business Administration notes that multiple businesses can go by the same DBA in one state (www.sba.gov). The inference, which no registry states in so many words, is that one string can lawfully belong to different entities in different states or entity types: the common-name false positive.

Registration does not settle ownership of a name either. Virginia says a name on file gives no protection in a commercial environment (www.scc.virginia.gov), and the USPTO says authorization to form a business under a name does not also give trademark rights (www.uspto.gov). Florida names of inactive entities can become available to another party after holding periods (dos.fl.gov), so a name seen on an old record may now belong to someone else.

The reverse also happens: one company may appear under a brand, former or assumed name. Texas requires an assumed name certificate so the public has notice that an entity does business under a name other than its legal name (www.sos.state.tx.us), and a business formed in one state is "foreign" in every other state where it

registers (www.sba.gov). Illinois, for example, requires an out-of-state corporation to qualify there (www.ilsos.gov), so one company can have several state records. A search on the legal name alone can miss a docket that uses the brand.

Anchors, ranked by how well they travel to a docket

Not every registry identifier appears in a federal case. The anchors below are ordered by how often they are visible on the docket side.

- **Disclosure statement (strongest):** a nongovernmental corporate party must file a statement identifying any parent corporation and any publicly held corporation owning 10 percent or more of its stock (www.govinfo.gov). It is due with the first appearance or filing (www.law.cornell.edu) and must be supplemented if the information changes (www.law.cornell.edu). It directly tests the parent-versus-subsidiary question, but it is a filer's statement (Level 2), and a missing one is not evidence of no parent.
- **State of organization:** a corporation's capacity to be sued is determined by the law under which it was organized (www.law.cornell.edu), and a corporation is a citizen of its state of incorporation and its principal place of business for diversity purposes (www.law.cornell.edu). A pleading stating the state of incorporation can be matched to the registry.
- **Address and counsel:** compare a docket address to the registry, but registry addresses are often agent addresses. Delaware requires a registered agent with a physical in-state address (icis.corp.delaware.gov), and New York's address of record is where the Department of State mails served process (dos.ny.gov).
- **Tax identifiers:** do not count on these. Rule 5.2 limits taxpayer identification numbers in filings to the last four digits (www.law.cornell.edu), and the clerk is not required to review filings for compliance (www.law.cornell.edu).

Using registry and securities records as the cross-check

The cross-check is a Level 3 step. A state registry gives formation state, entity type, status and an identifier; Delaware's file number is a unique identifier assigned to each entity (icis.corp.delaware.gov). Its name search returns both active and inactive entities and does not provide entity status (corp.delaware.gov), so a hit must be read for status. A Georgia administratively dissolved entity continues its corporate existence in limited form (sos.ga.gov), so "dissolved" is not "gone". There is no single national register: Secretaries of State oversee the 50-state incorporation process (www.nass.org) and the United States has no centralized federal register for ordinary business entities (blog.opencorporates.com).

For a public company or a subsidiary of one, Regulation S-K requires a list of subsidiaries and their jurisdictions of incorporation (www.ecfr.gov) and the names under which they do business (www.ecfr.gov), though insignificant subsidiaries may be omitted in the aggregate (www.law.cornell.edu), so absence is not proof. EDGAR's CIK is permanent and never expires (www.sec.gov), the submissions data carry former names (www.sec.gov), and not all companies that offer stock must file electronically (www.sec.gov), so many private targets have no filings to check. A Legal Entity Identifier is unique and represents only one entity (www.gleif.org), though parent data exists only where the parent also holds one (www.gleif.org).

The match-status matrix

Table 2 defines four statuses and the minimum evidence for each. The statuses describe identity only; they say nothing about the merits of any case.

Status	Minimum evidence before assigning	What the note may say	Next step
Confirmed same entity	At least two independent anchors agree (for example state of organization plus a disclosure-statement parent matching the registry or a securities record), and nothing contradicts them.	"Docket party is the screened entity on the anchors listed."	Record case type, role and status; apply the mandate rule.
Plausible affiliate	The party shares a parent, address or counsel with the target, or appears in the same group list, but is a different legal entity.	"Related entity, not the screened entity. Group-level relevance to be decided by the deal team."	Record the relationship; escalate only if the mandate covers group matters.
Name collision	A registry record or docket detail contradicts the match: different state of organization, different parent, or an unlinked address.	"Same or similar name; different entity on the anchors listed."	Log the reason so the hit is not re-reviewed.
Unresolved	A Level 0 row or thin docket gives fewer than two anchors, or the anchors conflict.	"Identity not established. Docket review incomplete."	Pull the court-level docket and any disclosure statement; if still open, send to counsel with the evidence gathered.

The matrix rewards a disciplined default: when evidence is thin the status is "Unresolved", not "Confirmed" and not "Name collision". A parent or sibling appearing in a case is a different legal entity: a parent hit is a parent-level fact, a sibling hit is a group fact, and only the target itself yields a target-level fact. Rule 10(a) requires the complaint's title to name all parties (www.law.cornell.edu), but later pleadings may name only the first party on each side (www.law.cornell.edu), so analysts should read the party list, not a short caption.

Classifying Party Role, Case Type and Status

Party role

Role codes are set by each court, so the worksheet records the role as displayed and then normalises it to plaintiff, defendant, counterclaimant or third-party party, intervenor, or other. State court glossaries define the terms in plain language: a defendant is the party being sued and can be an individual or a corporation (mncourts.gov); a third-party complaint lets a defendant bring in another party who may be liable (www.mass.gov); and intervention lets a third person join an existing suit with the court's permission (www.courts.wa.gov). A target appearing as plaintiff signals it chose to bring a claim; as defendant, that someone brought a claim against it. Neither says anything about merit.

Civil case type

The civil cover sheet (form JS 44) is used by the clerk to initiate the civil docket sheet (www.uscourts.gov), and if several nature of suit codes apply the filer chooses one (www.uscourts.gov). The form neither replaces nor supplements the pleadings, so the code is a coarse, filer-supplied classification: use it for sorting, then confirm

from the docket text.

Jurisdictional categories help. In fiscal year 2025 there were 157,421 federal question civil filings (www.uscourts.gov). A practical screening grouping:

- **Commercial and contract matters:** usually a Level 1 review of role and status suffices.
- **Intellectual property matters:** patent, trademark and copyright cases.
- **Civil rights, employment-type and prisoner matters:** large categories that are rarely relevant to a company screen unless the company is a named party.
- **Multidistrict litigation (MDL):** related cases transferred for coordinated pretrial proceedings (www.jpml.uscourts.gov); the party may be one of many.

Procedural status

Status is read from the docket, not inferred from the closed date. The clerk must enter each civil action in the docket (www.govinfo.gov); one state glossary calls a docket a written list of all important events in a case (www.mass.gov). A dismissal notice, judgment or stipulation would appear as an entry. The worksheet labels the disposition only in the docket's own terms (for example "notice of voluntary dismissal filed"). A dismissal with prejudice is final (selfhelp.courts.ca.gov), a voluntary dismissal is presumptively without prejudice (www.govinfo.gov), and a default judgment is entered without hearing from a defendant who failed to take a required step (www.mass.gov). None is a finding about the company's conduct. If the docket does not show how the case ended, the cell says "not shown in docket reviewed."

The Party-Hit Adjudication Worksheet

Columns and rules

The worksheet has one row per hit. Columns: searched legal name and aliases; court and district; case number; party role; filed and closed dates; identity anchors; case type; docket document reviewed; finding supported; confidence; source; access date; and counsel escalation. Four rules keep it honest:

- **One finding per claim:** identity, existence, allegations, disposition and business impact are logged separately.
- **Bounded wording:** each finding names the document reviewed and stops there. "Docket sheet shows a notice of voluntary dismissal" is bounded; "the matter was resolved favourably" is not.
- **Dated access:** the index updates nightly while court records are real time (pacer.uscourts.gov), so every row carries an access date.
- **No inference from silence:** an absent disclosure statement, an omitted subsidiary or an empty search is "not shown", never "none".

A fictional completed worksheet

Table 3 shows a **fictional** worksheet for a fictional screened company, "Alder Ridge Components, Inc." (a Delaware corporation, principal office in Ohio, parent "Alder Ridge Holdings, LLC"). Every company, case number, court assignment and event in the table is invented for illustration and corresponds to no real case.

Searched name / aliases	Court	Case no.	Party role	Filed / closed	Identity anchors	Case type	Docket document reviewed	Finding supported	Confidence	Source	Access date	Counsel escalation
"Alder Ridge Components Inc" (legal name; alias "ARC Parts")	D. Del. (fictional)	1:25-cv-90001 (fictional)	Defendant	2025-03-04 / 2025-11-18	Disclosure statement names "Alder Ridge Holdings, LLC" as parent (matches registry and target group); Delaware incorporation stated	Trademark, NOS 840 (fictional)	Docket sheet, disclosure statement, notice of voluntary dismissal	**Identity:** confirmed same entity on two anchors. **Existence:** case exists. **Disposition:** docket shows notice of voluntary dismissal; no merits entry. **Allegations and impact:** not assessed.	High (identity); not applicable (impact)	PCL row, court docket (fictional)	2026-10-29 (fictional)	None on identity grounds; deal team applies mandate rule on IP matters
"Alder Ridge Components LLC"	N. D. Tex. (fictional)	3:24-cv-90002 (fictional)	Defendant	2024-06-10 / 2025-01-22	Texas LLC; Texas address; no parent link; different industry (fictional)	Contract, other (fictional)	PCL row, docket sheet, state registry record	**Identity:** name collision. **Existence:** case exists. **Disposition:** closed per docket.	High	PCL row, registry record (fictional)	2026-10-29 (fictional)	None; log reason so the hit is not re-reviewed
"Alder Ridge Fabrication Corp." (sibling name found via parties list)	S. D. Ohio (fictional)	2:25-cv-90003 (fictional)	Plaintiff	2025-08-01 / open	Disclosure statement names the same parent "Alder Ridge Holdings, LLC"	Contract, other (fictional)	Docket sheet, disclosure statement	**Identity:** plausible affiliate (sibling), not the screened entity. **Existence:** case exists, open.	Medium	Court docket (fictional)	2026-10-29 (fictional)	Only if mandate covers group-level matters
"Alder Ridge Components" (no suffix)	PCL row only (fictional)	1:26-cv-90004 (fictional)	Not shown	2026-02-17 / open	None retrieved; no address, parent or state	Not reviewed	PCL row only	**Identity:** unresolved. **Existence:** index row only.	Low	PCL row (fictional)	2026-10-29 (fictional)	Pull court-level docket first; send to counsel with evidence if still unresolved

Table 3 is deliberately mixed. Only the first row reaches "confirmed same entity", and even there the finding is limited to identity, existence and a docket-visible event. The second is a name collision closed out with a reason, which saves re-review. The third is a sibling: a real hit for the group, not for the target. The fourth is unresolved because the analyst has not yet bought the docket, so the right output is a next action, not a conclusion. Recurring false-positive patterns are suffix drift (Florida, for example, advises searching without suffixes because they do not distinguish names, per dos.fl.gov), brand versus legal name, group naming where parent and subsidiaries share a stem, and thin index rows, which are "Unresolved" and never "Collision".

Limits: Federal-Only Scope, Sealed and Older Files, Lag and the State-Court Gap

Federal courts only

PACER covers federal appellate, bankruptcy and district courts. The federal government and each state have their own court systems (www.uscourts.gov), and state courts hear most contract and tort cases (www.uscourts.gov). A federal search is therefore a partial view of any company's civil docket. The Court Statistics Project reported about 70 million state court filings of all types for 2024 (www.courtstatistics.org), a figure that includes traffic and criminal matters and cannot be compared directly with federal civil filings; NCSC counts "total incoming" as new, reopened and reactivated cases (www.ncsc.org). The point is order of magnitude, not a ratio.

There is no single national state index; data definitions and rules vary from state to state (cosca.ncsc.org). The portals that exist differ in scope and depth:

- **New York:** eCourts is a free case information service (iapps.courts.state.ny.us).
- **Texas:** the statewide portal covers e-filed cases and documents from 2016 onward (research.txcourts.gov), and data vary court by court (research.txcourts.gov).
- **California:** county courts run separate portals; San Francisco directs users to departments for other case types (sf.courts.ca.gov), and Alameda County's portal requires registration (www.alameda.courts.ca.gov).

State-level searching is its own workstream, and a federal-only result should say so in the worksheet's scope note.

Sealed, redacted and older files

Sealed material will not be in the picture. Court-level access covers non-sealed, non-restricted cases (www.utd.uscourts.gov), and docket-entry feeds omit restricted and sealed information (www.ohsd.uscourts.gov). Courts sometimes seal documents containing sensitive material (www.uscourts.gov). A Federal Judicial Center study found 576 sealed civil cases among 245,326 filed in 2006 (0.2 percent) (www.fjc.gov), and notes a policy to post redacted docket sheets for sealed cases (www.fjc.gov); that study is dated, so practice may differ. No current official page reviewed says whether a fully sealed case appears as an index hit, so an empty result is recorded as "not found in the index searched", not "no case".

Older files are a second gap. Most federal cases created before 1999 are paper only (www.uscourts.gov), and one district places cases filed before January 2004 in paper records at the National Archives and a Federal Records Center (www.mied.uscourts.gov). Coverage start dates vary by court: a county law library guide lists one district's earliest available case as 1970 (guides.jenkinslaw.org), and the PCL manual says a court's daily-coverage date may differ from its earliest-cases date. Redaction is the filer's responsibility, and the clerk is not required to review filings for compliance (www.law.cornell.edu).

Lag and completeness

Official descriptions of index timing differ in wording but agree in substance: the database updates at midnight each day (www.uscourts.gov) or by nightly collection from the courts (www.ilsb.uscourts.gov). A recent filing may be visible in a court's own system first. The index is therefore a lead generator, not a guarantee of completeness.

Free and complementary sources

The RECAP Archive describes itself as the biggest open collection of federal court data on the Internet (www.courtlistener.com) and holds every unsealed federal case (www.courtlistener.com). It is partly built from users' own PACER purchases (www.courtlistener.com), its operator says it cannot always provide complete coverage of everything new in PACER (wiki.free.law), and a Stanford guide notes it offers no free way to update a docket (guides.law.stanford.edu). A Georgetown guide calls PACER usually not the cheapest or easiest way to obtain documents (guides.ll.georgetown.edu). RECAP is a free cross-reference, not a substitute for the court-level docket on a decision-relevant hit.

Data Analysis and Evidence

The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts reports that district courts received 303,563 civil filings in fiscal year 2025 (www.uscourts.gov), terminated 407,539 (www.uscourts.gov), and ended the year with 432,923 pending (www.uscourts.gov). Multidistrict litigation moves the headline: excluding MDL cases, other civil filings rose 9 percent, or 22,382 cases (www.uscourts.gov), and 197,118 MDL actions were pending in 45 transferee district courts at year end (www.uscourts.gov). A party in a large coordinated proceeding may be one of very many, so party count alone says little about a specific company.

Time and outcome data frame how to read a "closed" date. The median time from filing to disposition for civil cases was 15.6 months in fiscal year 2025 (www.uscourts.gov). Civil trials completed numbered 3,377 (www.uscourts.gov), under 1 percent of the 407,539 terminations (arithmetic on the two cited figures). A Congressional Research Service explainer likewise notes that the vast majority of federal cases terminate before trial (www.congress.gov), and the American Bar Association says most civil cases are settled by mutual agreement (www.americanbar.org). The disposition cell must therefore be read from the docket and never assumed.

On cost, a single immediate result list at the 5,400-row ceiling is 100 pages, or $10.00 today and $12.00 from 2027 (arithmetic, *Table 1*). The $30 waiver equals 300 pages at $0.10, and the $40 waiver equals 333 pages at $0.12 (arithmetic). The judiciary says PACER fees currently generate about $147 million a year in

collections and that the increase reimburses development of a new case management system (www.uscourts.gov). These are planning ranges, not a forecast of a team's spend, which depends on how many names, variants and dockets are pulled.

Implications and Future Directions

Three practices follow. First, adopt the five-claim structure so that a hit is never summarised as "the target has litigation". Second, treat "Unresolved" as a legitimate end state with a next action, because it prevents both over-reading and dismissal of thin evidence. Third, budget broad name searches explicitly: narrow before paying, and log queries so none is bought twice.

The boundaries matter as much as the steps. A federal index search cannot reach state court, sealed matters or most pre-1999 paper files, and it cannot say what a pleading's allegations mean for value. Those questions belong to counsel and the deal team, and the escalation column routes them. Sensible escalation triggers are:

- **Unresolved identity** on a matter type the mandate cares about.
- **Confirmed identity** where the docket text is needed to understand the issue.
- **A pending matter** with a recent entry that cannot be interpreted from the sheet.
- **Sealing or redaction** that blocks identity confirmation.

Several things could change the picture. The fee change takes effect January 1, 2027, and official pricing pages may be updated, so the rate should be re-checked before costing a large project; the $0.10 per-page rate has not changed in nearly 15 years (pacer.uscourts.gov), and the current fee-schedule document has been in effect since January 2020 (www.uscourts.gov). Alias and wildcard behaviour in the web search is undocumented in the manuals reviewed, so any team automating this workflow should test matching on known cases first. Free archives and commercial docket services may reduce cost, but their coverage statements are their own and should be tested against the court-level docket on any hit that matters.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How can an analyst search PACER by company name?

Register for a PACER account, open the Case Locator, choose party search, enter the legal name in the last-name or organization field, and consider "Exact Matches Only". If the court is known, search that court directly, where a business name goes in the Last/Business Name field. Run name variants, then open the case number to reach the court-level docket.

What are the best PACER party name search tips?

Search the legal name with and without the suffix, search aliases separately, leave the role filter open and classify roles manually, and log every query. Narrow by court type or date range before paying for result pages, because name-search results are not capped (pacer.uscourts.gov). Where possible, search by case number, which PACER says goes directly to the case without a charge.

How can an analyst verify that a defendant is the target, and treat a parent or subsidiary?

Use at least two independent anchors, such as the state of organization and the Rule 7.1 parent disclosure (www.govinfo.gov), matched to the state registry or a securities filing. Record the status as confirmed, plausible affiliate, name collision or unresolved, as in *Table 2*. A parent or sibling is a different legal entity and is logged as such.

Does a common company name produce false positives?

Yes. Registries test distinguishability within their own records (www.scc.virginia.gov) and do not compare names with trade names (www.sos.ca.gov), so unrelated entities can share a name. Log the contradicting anchor when classifying a hit as a name collision.

Is a PACER civil case search a full litigation history?

No. It covers federal courts only, state courts hear most contract and tort cases (www.uscourts.gov), and most pre-1999 federal cases are paper only (www.uscourts.gov).

Does a name hit, complaint or settlement show wrongdoing?

No. A name hit shows a name in an index. A pleading states a party's claims, a voluntary dismissal is without prejudice unless stated otherwise (www.govinfo.gov), and a settlement is a resolution without a trial (www.uscourts.gov). None is a finding about conduct.

When should an analyst escalate to counsel?

When identity stays unresolved on a matter type that matters to the mandate, when the docket text is needed to interpret an issue, or when sealing or redaction prevents confirmation. This report is research triage and not legal advice.

Conclusion

A federal party-name hit is a lead that needs adjudication. The Case Locator can show that a name appears in a nationwide index of district, bankruptcy and appellate cases, with a filed date and a closed date. It cannot say that the party is the screened company, how the case ended, or whether it matters for a deal.

The method is therefore a sequence of bounded steps: search the legal name and its variants, open the court-level docket, anchor identity with registry and filing evidence, classify role, case type and status, and record each finding separately with the document reviewed and the access date. The match-status matrix and worksheet keep identity, existence, allegations, disposition and business impact from collapsing into one conclusion. The limits are structural: state courts, sealed matters, older paper files, index lag and fees. They are best handled by stating the scope of every search plainly and routing unresolved or consequential hits to counsel.

Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

1. https://pacer.uscourts.gov/find-case/search-national-index
2. https://www.ilsb.uscourts.gov/pacer-case-locator-pcl
3. https://pacer.uscourts.gov/find-case/search-specific-court
4. https://pacer.uscourts.gov/help/faqs/find-a-case
5. https://pacer.uscourts.gov/help/faqs/pricing
6. https://www.wieb.uscourts.gov/node/515
7. https://www.gasb.uscourts.gov/node/657
8. https://delcode.delaware.gov/title8/c001/sc01/index.html
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