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Dig Online for Competitive Pay Dirt

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You can learn bushels from your competitors about how to market your brand. All it takes is the right tools, and a little analysis know-how.

In today's saturated market, a competitor analysis provides an insightful and actionable look into your organization. Read on to learn how assessing the other players in your field can begin with some basic ideas and a few readily available online tools. You'll find that your competitors are serving up pointers for marketing your (or your clients') businesses online.

Define the competition

Start by choosing similar organizations in your industry by looking at each one's size and functions. Also consider those deemed the "thought leaders" in the marketplace; they might demonstrate best practices you can learn from or mistakes you can avoid. After defining your list of competitors, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and compare those to your own.

A useful, visual tool for understanding the competitive landscape is a conceptual map, such as a delta model showing quality, service and price positioning. Plot where your competitors fall. Is there a gap that your organization can fill? Define your competitive advantage before moving into the next phase.

Research the competition

Begin your research by investigating competitors' websites, noting the pros and cons of their shopping cart functionality, site structure, search engine optimization (SEO) data and everything else that's pertinent to what you do. Which competitors show up in Google or Yahoo when your brand keywords or other important industry keywords are searched? Keep track of relevant terms that your competitors have cornered, and use this data to improve your current Pay-Per-Click (PPC) or SEO program.

Leverage free tools such as [Quantcast](#), which provides advertisers with audience profiles for millions of websites and services, and [Google's new blog search site](#), which reveals what bloggers are saying about your organization and others.

Make your company more competitive

Here's the hard part. After reviewing competitors' strengths and weaknesses, use the data to improve your own online program. Put a plan in place to update your website or landing pages based on what you learned from your usability and SEO analysis, whether that includes developing a forum for customer feedback or re-writing the descriptions in your meta data.





Consider your competitors' innovations as well. What are they doing online or in their media promotions to stand out? How can you leverage those ideas in ways that best benefit your brand?

Now that you've got the basics down, let's dig into acquiring detailed data. For a snapshot view of your competitors' website analytics, visit Ask.com. Search for your competitor's name, and then roll your mouse pointer over the binoculars icon that appears to the left of the search result. Click "Statistics" to view the month-by-month trends in site visitors. Also sign up for [Google Alerts](#) so that every time your competitors do something newsworthy, you're in the loop. Google sends linked snippets directly to your inbox on a weekly, daily or as-it-happens basis depending on the amount of inbox traffic you can handle.

Finally, get a quick, straightforward snapshot of the competitive landscape through [Google Trends](#). Enter the name of your organization, as well as up to four of your competitors' names, to evaluate how many of the internet's vast pool of users are searching for each term.

Although a competitive analysis is often a time-intensive process, you capture your company's position in the competitive landscape and have a launch point for optimizing your online marketing plans.

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