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online resources
& how-to guides inside



How to spy on your competitors (without leaving your office)





Thanks for downloading!

There is a wealth of information about your competitors available online – if you know where to look for it and how to interpret it. You don't need a big budget to get a competitive advantage, just the right spy tools.

Who is this eBook for?

The book is for any business owner or manager wanting to learn more about their competitors using social media and online channels.

In this eBook you will learn:

- ▶ How to identify your hotel's key competitors
- ▶ How to find competitive intelligence about other hotels online
- ▶ How to turn your intelligence into actionable insights



PLUS

We have included a list of handy free online spy tools



What we'll be covering in this ebook...

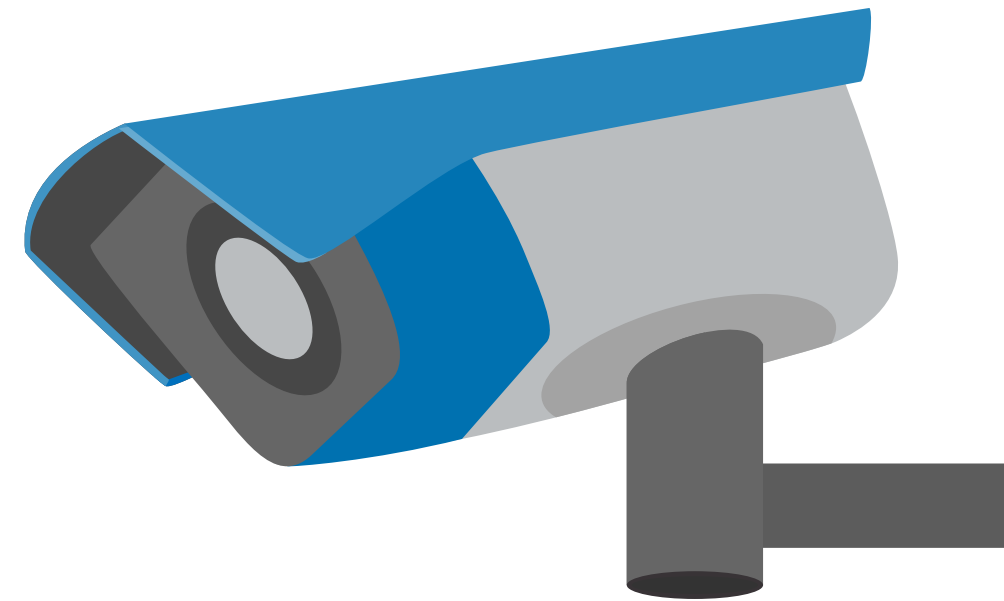
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- p .26 What to do with your data
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***All mentioned online
resources (free and paid)
PLUS bonus social media
how-to guides***



Why you can't afford *not* to spy on your competitors



Anyone in the travel industry knows that the internet has revolutionised the way travellers dream about, plan and book their trips. Word-of-mouth is now a phenomenon that happens on a global scale, and online resources allow travellers to make far more informed decisions than ever before. The online space hasn't just opened up a new world

of knowledge for travellers – hoteliers have access to all this data as well. In this eBook, we will describe the kinds of competitive intelligence you can find online about your competitors, where to look for it, and what to do with it. We will also give you a list of online tools that will help you in your online espionage exploits.



Before we get started with all that, however, you might be wondering why you should bother spying on your competition at all. There are a few very good reasons:

#1 The big players are doing it to understand their performance

Leading hotel brands do in-depth competitor analysis exercises to provide them with the context to understand their performance in the market. Monitoring competitors can shed light on a hotel's relative occupancy, average daily rate (ADR) and revenue per available room (RevPar) performance, among other things.

Using complex software or having external teams to manage your competitive intelligence can be enlightening – but not everyone has the budget. There is, however, a middle ground – you can, without leaving your desk, use online reviews and ratings to perform your own competitive intelligence gathering and analysis.

#2 It helps you monitor the market and your performance in it

Monitoring how your competitors are performing by analysing their online reviews, ratings and other online activities will help you to keep up to date with what your market expects from you, and where your competitors are delivering and where they are falling short.

Focussing on your own carefully selected set of competitors rather than the hospitality market as a whole also provides a more useful context in which to analyse your own guest feedback and offerings. This will also mean you will be able to better anticipate market changes that directly impact your business.



#3 It gives you a competitive advantage when setting yourself apart

When you know what the competition is selling, you can be certain of where your product outstrips theirs, and you can discover your unique selling points more easily.

When you can talk knowledgeably about your competition with potential customers, it boosts your authority in their eyes. This point is especially relevant to hoteliers who host organised events like conferences and weddings, or for whom tour operators are a target market.

If you believe in your product and are confident of its merits, potential guests will sense this, and be more inclined to choose to stay at your hotel.

#4 It helps you get to know your neighbours and take advantage of them

Your competing hotels are not always the enemy; they can sometimes be valuable allies in the quest to improve your guests' experiences.

You have a pool, and they don't, but they have a souvenir shop and you don't.

Consider setting up referral agreements and let your guests know that they can pick up some charming knick-knacks at the Royal Ascot Hotel, and let the Royal Ascot know that their guests are welcome to enjoy your pool. When the guests are happy, everybody wins, and sharing the profits of tourism in your area will help your area to grow as a tourist destination in the long-run.



So, now that
you know how
valuable it is to
**know about your
competitors,**
you need to
figure out who
your competitors
actually are...



What will I learn in this chapter?

What the top things to consider are when deciding which hotels you are going to be spying on.

CHAPTER ONE

How to find out who your real competitors are

It can be tempting to draw a circle around your hotel on a map, and include all the hotels within a certain distance from your hotel that have a similar room rate to yours on your list of competitors.

While any list is better than none, this is not the optimal way to discover who your real competitors are. In order to get a real and representative list of competitors, you have to think like a guest.





Can't pay the high price of a full competitor analysis?

Do your own analysis by taking these into account

Location in relation to attractions

When someone decides to travel, they seldom travel in order to stay in a specific hotel. They travel because there is something in an area that they want to do or see that they can't find at home. For instance, they might want to visit the beach, climb a mountain, see friends and family, or attend a business meeting. Your location certainly does define who your competitors are, but it is your location in relation to whatever it is that guests are visiting.



This map of Yangon shows the location of several hotels in the city, as well as the location of a popular tourist attraction, the Shwedagon Pagoda. If the hotel in the south of the city was to draw a radius around itself and include hotels within that circle, they would miss what is clearly a competitor, as the hotel in the north of the city is also close to the Shwedagon Pagoda.

The type of experience you provide

A hotel that is part of a massive chain and a quaint, independent boutique hotel may be situated near one another and have fairly similar room rates, but the experience that they offer and therefore the market segment that they are catering to will differ greatly.

The grading of your property is also important. A five-star hotel and a two-star hotel are probably not catering to the same target market and therefore are not in direct competition with one another – although grading is not as important as it once was.

Your room rate

Of course, travellers shop within a budget, so price is also an important factor to consider when you are deciding which hotels to include on your competitor list. However, bear in mind that travellers, especially leisure travellers, are often after an experience, and will be prepared to spend more if they think the experience will be worth it.

The perceived quality of the experience you provide

More important than star grading is the perceived quality of the experience. A five-star hotel may not be meeting guests' expectations, leaving them dissatisfied and less likely to recommend that hotel, while an ungraded establishment might be consistently exceeding guests expectations, creating passionate promoters of that establishment.

Travellers no longer have to rely solely on star-ratings to evaluate the quality of accommodation, and many rely much more heavily on online reviews (or your online reputation) than they do on star ratings. So, when deciding who your competition is, don't just include properties with the same star-grading as you. Use online review sites to find out who your closest competition is in terms of guest satisfaction.



What will I learn in this chapter?

- (1) How to analyse your competitors social media followers (and why you should)
- (2) What you can learn from watching what content your competitors post
- (3) What to look for when analysing your competitor's website for information
- (4) Why understanding the "sentiment" of a review is as important as the review itself

CHAPTER TWO

How to dig out data on your competitors



You don't have to don your balaclava and black turtleneck for this one; tonnes of useful information on your competition can be found simply by going online – if you know where to look.

 [how to guide >>](#)

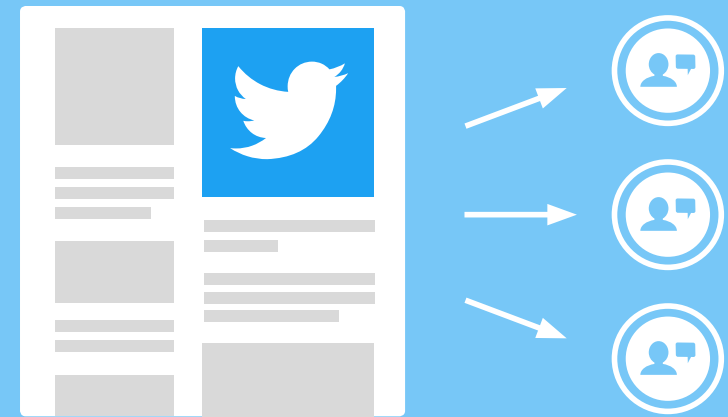
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Twitter snooping

Let your competitors do the leg work for you in seeing exactly who your Twitter target market is, what kinds of content they are engaging with, and when they are engaging with it. Have they done any advertising? What are they promoting? Are people talking about it?

By now it's no secret that social media is an invaluable sidekick when it comes to building a brand and engaging with customers. And there are almost no platforms better than the little blue bird.



BONUS HOW-TO GUIDE

How to set up a Twitter list

Put a sneaky tag on specific accounts you want to follow

How to set up a 'saved search'

A more detailed approach that will let you filter to exactly what you want to know about your competitor

click here to
skip to guide

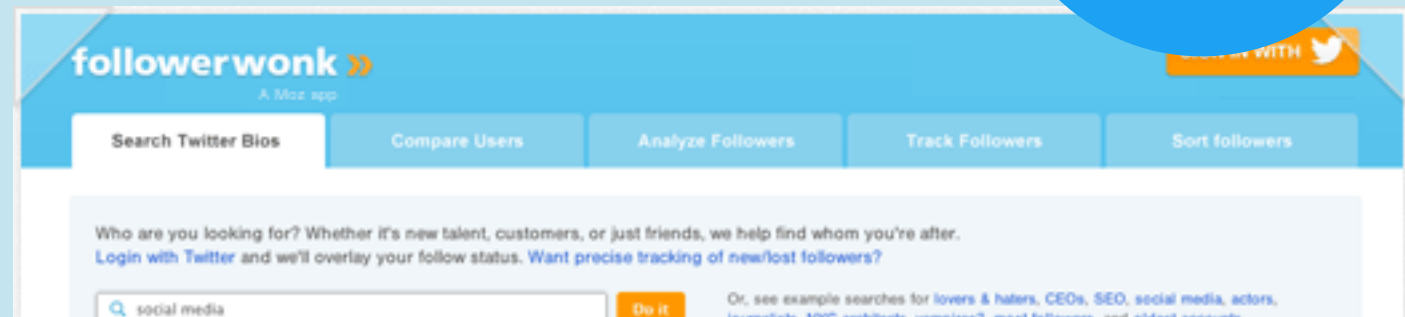


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“With this information, you can decide not only when you should be tweeting and what you should be tweeting about, but you can also begin to create a target customer persona – more about that later!”



Twitter follower analysis

Analysing your competitors' followers is a great way to not only get an understanding of who their markets are, but also who your own market is.

The wonderful thing about taking a look at your competitors' followers is that you do not need to analyse market segments to try to guess who might be interested in your competitors' offerings – and therefore yours as well. Your competitors' Twitter followers have already raised their hands and said that they are interested – to find out what your market is, all you have to do is take a look at the people who have already said that they are interested in accommodation like yours.

With the information you can gather from analysis of your competitors' followers, you can paint a fairly clear picture of who your target market is, what they are interested in, where they are, and when they are online. With this information, you can decide not only when you should be tweeting and what you should be tweeting about, but you can also begin to create a target customer persona – more about that later!

There are online tools that allow you to perform fairly comprehensive analyses of competing hotels' followers. Moz's [Followerwonk](#) is definitely one of the top options for taking an in-depth look at who is interested in your competitors on Twitter, and while there is a paid option, you can get a lot of information for free. Followerwonk allows you to analyse the followers of any Twitter user – all you need is their Twitter





“By monitoring what types of content, such as links, images, plain text tweets etc., your competitors’ followers are engaging with, you can do more of what’s working when you post your own content, and less of what isn’t.”



Twitter content analysis

handle.

Using lists and saved searches to keep an eye on your competitors’ posts is useful for staying in touch with what your competitors are up to, but you can also learn a lot by keeping an eye on what types of content they are publishing, when they are publishing, what types of content people are engaging with, and when they are engaging with it.

By monitoring what types of content, such as links, images, plain text tweets etc., your competitors’ followers are engaging with, you can do more of what’s working when you post your own content, and less of what isn’t.

The same thing goes for finding out the best times of day to

tweet. A paid tool like [Fanpage Karma](#) can show you what times of the day and days of the week your competitors are posting on, and which days and times see the highest engagement. If you notice that their followers engage most with tweets that are posted around lunchtime, try tweeting at this time as well.

If you are lucky enough to spot a time at which your competition get a lot of engagement but doesn’t post very often (shown on Fanpage Karma as a smaller, greener dot), you have a gap where you can be the one to provide content at the right time rather than your competitors.

If you don’t have the budget for Fanpage Karma, you can also try using [LikeAlyser](#) to check when your competitor’s



followers write to them, which will show you when they are online and most likely to engage with your content.

One of the best ways to reach new people on Twitter is with #hashtags

Hashtags, like [#summerholidays](#), [#travel](#), [#wanderlust](#), [#safari](#), etc., allow people to easily search through the multitude of tweets on Twitter for whatever interests them. Hashtags can relate to events, people, places, activities, interests, or anything else. By including the hashtags that your guests are searching for in your posts, you make it easier for people who don't know about you to find you.

Of course, unless you are creating your own hashtag, which can also sometimes be a good idea if you have a strong enough following, you have to make sure that whatever hashtag you use is one that people are actually engaging with and searching for.

By checking out what hashtags your competitors are using, however, you don't have to go and do all the research yourself – let them figure out which hashtags are working.

You can easily use a tool like [Twitonomy](#) to see what hashtags your competitors use most frequently. If you want to go the extra mile, you can also use Twitonomy to search hashtags and find out who else is using the hashtags your guests are interested in. Then, you can engage with those who seem like they could be influential in steering guests to your establishment, such as travel bloggers or tour package



“By including the hashtags that your guests are searching for in your posts, you make it easier for people who don't know about you to find you.”



Facebook stalking

coordinators.

Facebook has made stalking your competition almost too easy – they provide a “pages to watch” function that you can access right in your insights tab.

Scroll down to the bottom of your insights overview and add competitors. Facebook will then let you know how many followers your competitors have, what kind of engagement their posts have earned recently, and where you stand in comparison to them. You can also keep an eye on your competitors’ top posts, which allows you to keep track not only of what they are up to, but also what people are interested in.

There are plenty of online tools that allow you to analyse your competitors’ Facebook pages in more detail.

For example, Fanpage Karma’s paid option allows you to analyse the performance of your competitor’s Facebook page over any timespan you set, and it not only allows you to see which of their posts were most successful, but also which ones performed the worst, so that you don’t make the same



BONUS HOW-TO GUIDE

How to use Facebook ‘pages to watch’
*List your competitors under ‘pages to watch’
and let the spy games begin*

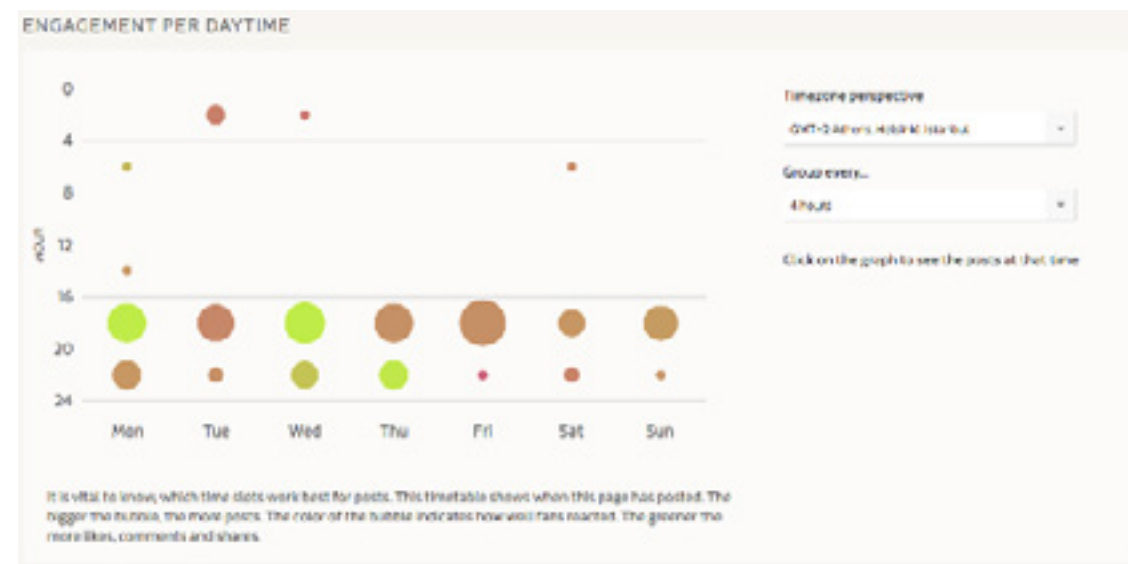


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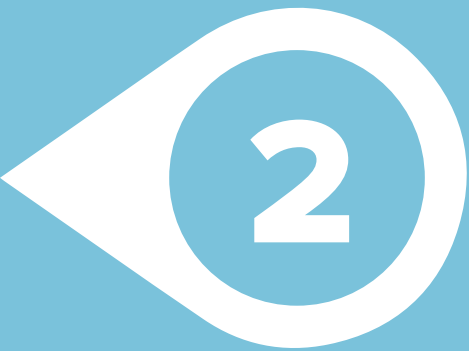


**fanpage
karma**

You can also view which types of posts got the most engagement – images, links, videos, etc. – and take a look at how much your competitors' fans engaged with posts compared to the day of the week and the time that your competitor posted.

Fanpage Karma also collects data on where a page's followers are from, and can even estimate the advertising value of posts on a page.

For a free (although less comprehensive) glance at your competitors' Facebook pages, try LikeAlyser, which allows you to see basic stats like how long your competitors' posts usually are and what types of posts are performing the best. It also gives recommendations for you to use of you analyse



Strategy 2

What website stats say

your own Facebook page.

The value of doing some digging on your competition's website stats cannot be understated. Your hotel's website is the window into your hotel that anyone anywhere in the world can look through at any time.

Savvy hoteliers use this to their advantage in their marketing, but this also means that you can have a peek into your competitor's hotel while sitting in your office. And, better yet, you can get information on the other people who have had a glance through the same window.

Analysing your competitors top organic keywords allows you to see what your competition is talking about, and what your target market is interested in.

By finding out which keywords are leading people to your competition's website, you can also focus on those keywords

A couple of the most useful things to find out about your competitors' websites are:

- (1) What their top keywords are*
- (2) What paid searches they are running*
- (3) What external pages link to them*

in your own content.

Checking which domains and pages are linking to your competitors' websites can help you to find pages that might want to include links to your own establishment (such as lists of things to do or places to stay in your area) and will also help you to find out what sort of publicity your competitors are receiving.

Finding pages that link to your competitors can also help you to discover what topics are related to accommodation in your area.



“Finding out what paid searches your competition is running is particularly useful if you are up against a competitor with a much bigger advertising budget than you.”

You might find that an article about interesting architecture lists your competitor as a place for architecture buffs to stay while they are exploring the area. You have now discovered an interesting topic to write about on your hotel's blog, and you now know that your area is rich in architectural interest.

Finding out what paid searches your competition is running is particularly useful if you are up against a competitor with a much bigger advertising budget than you.

They have most likely done the research and know what search terms your target market is using to find accommodation like yours in your area. By analysing these search terms and creating content that compliments them, you can get more organic traffic to your own website.

[Semrush](#) is one of the top tools for spying on your competitors' web domains. By taking a look at data that is

openly available from Google, it allows you to view a variety of statistics about your competitors' websites, such as top keywords, referring domains, and some information about any paid searches they might be running. [Spyfu](#) is also a fabulous tool for doing keyword analysis.

If you have particularly large competitors, [SimilarWeb](#) can be remarkably useful, as it shows not only keywords, paid search and referring domain statistics, but also information about where a competitor's site's visitors come from geographically, what the top referring sites are, and even what kinds of interests they have and what other websites they visit. However, a website has to have quite a large number of monthly visits for SimilarWeb to collect data on it.





Strategy 3

Understanding the sentiments in online reviews

Imagine standing outside your competitor's front door and asking their customers what they thought of their stay. You could find out what your competition isn't getting right, and exploit it. You could find out what they are doing right so you can up your game, and you could find out what is important to guests who stay in hotels similar yours.

Reading online reviews allows you to do all this, without being the weird person ambushing hotel patrons as they leave.

Recently, a team from Cornell University did an analysis of the content of online hotel reviews. They compared various factors of the reviews, such as length, tone, star rating, number of topics covered and what kinds of topics the reviewers spoke about. The team then used text analytics to uncover some interesting patterns.

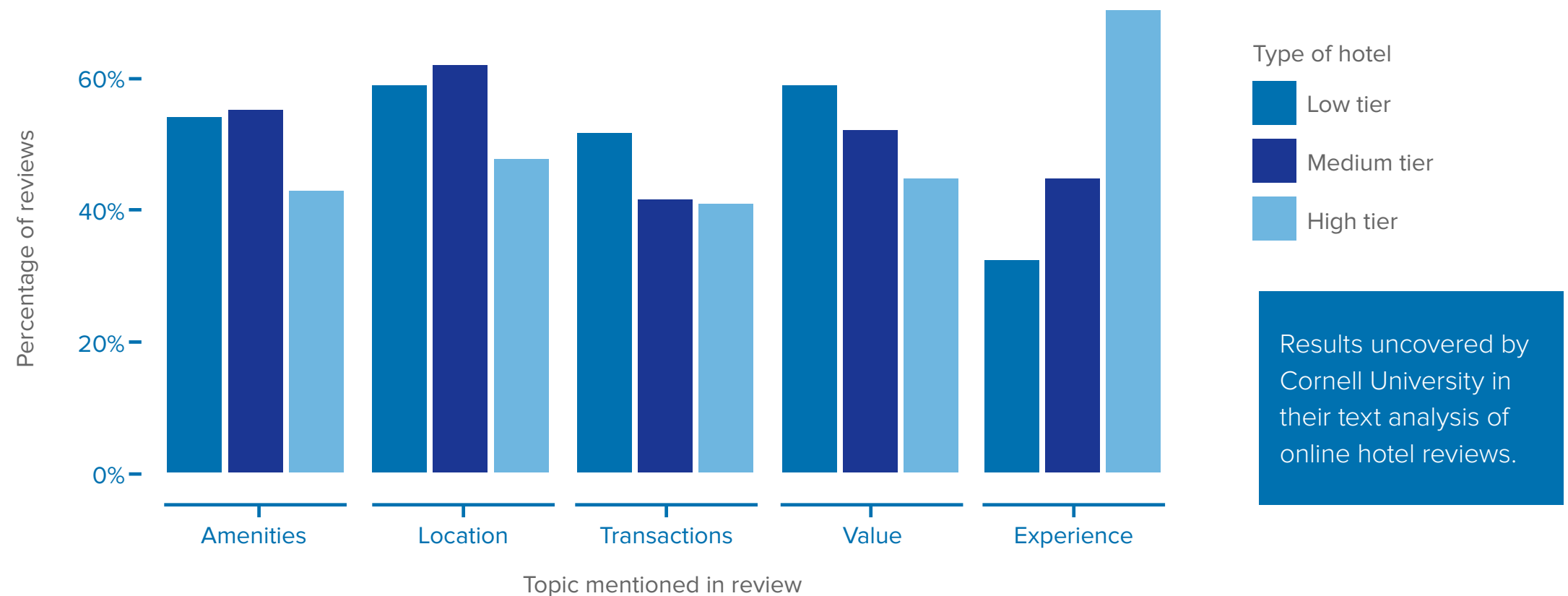
Most notably, the Cornell team found that guests at different tiers of hotels generally tend to care about different things, but unhappy guests tend to focus on the same things, regardless of the type of hotel.

Generally, unhappy guests mention issues of “value” and “transactions”, while happy guests focus on things like “experience” and “location”. Guests at higher tier hotels most often spoke about their experience, and middle tier hotel guests focussed on amenities and location, and value and transactions mattered to guests at lower tier hotels.

The team also found that long reviews that spoke in-depth about just a few topics almost always accompanied low ratings, while shorter reviews that mentioned many aspects of a person's stay were associated with higher ratings. Additionally, they found that negative sentiments tended to have a stronger impact on a guest's overall rating of the hotel than positive sentiments did.



“Remember that while looking at overall ratings is helpful, **they do not always tell the full story**, and that actually reading the content of reviews can provide valuable insights”



When reading online reviews of your competitors, you should be aware of these findings. Remember that while looking at overall ratings is helpful, they do not always tell the full story, and that actually reading the content of reviews can provide valuable insights. Also remember to focus on the issues that matter to your specific hotel – if your hotel is a high tier hotel, look for reviews that mention the guest’s experience, if yours is a middle tier hotel look out for reviews mentioning your competitors’ amenities.

To find out what your competition is doing wrong, pay close attention to longer reviews, as these are likely to give you insights into where your competition is falling short, and are likely to be more detailed and provide more specific information. If you want to know what they are getting right, scan through the shorter reviews.

What will I learn in this chapter?

- (1) The difference between big, small and smart data
- (2) How to uncover themes in your data

CHAPTER THREE

How to analyse your data

Data is only intelligence if it can produce actionable insights – analysing your data is probably the most important step in checking out your competition. You need to find the patterns in the data you have collected that will tell you what you need to do to surpass your competition.

You can do this manually, or use tools to help you, or use a combination of these approaches.



Pro tip: It is possible to analyse data manually, but it is labour intensive – think about getting a competitor-monitoring tool (like GuestRevu) that collects and interprets data for you.



The first thing to understand, though, is the different types of data, what they can tell you, and how they can work together.

Small data, big data, and smart data

Knowing the difference between small data and big data, and being able to find the valuable insights contained in each will help you to turn raw data into intelligence.

The term “big data” has become ubiquitous in the business world. Information and communication technology has advanced to such a point that we have data collected from thousands, or even millions of individual actions at our fingertips.

TripAdvisor says that it has around 350 million reviews – and it frequently does studies and publishes the results for all to see. In 2012, Google received 1.2 trillion searches, and it uses data from these searches to produce publicly available reports and studies. This is the power of big data; it allows one to find correlations in a massive collection of information.

In your competitor spying, big data would be an aggregate of your competitors’ scores across a number of review sites, or their overall TripAdvisor scores compared to yours.

Collecting and analysing big data is where software tools become invaluable. A good online reputation management solution, for instance, will collect, aggregate and perform basic analyses on your competitors’ scores across different review sites and pick up on trends in different aspects of guest satisfaction, such as cleanliness, location, value for money, etc., allowing you to compare your hotel’s scores with your competitors using the same criteria.

While big data certainly does offer some amazing possibilities for gathering intelligence, small data can be just as valuable. Small data is what big data is made up of, and it is much easier to analyse manually.

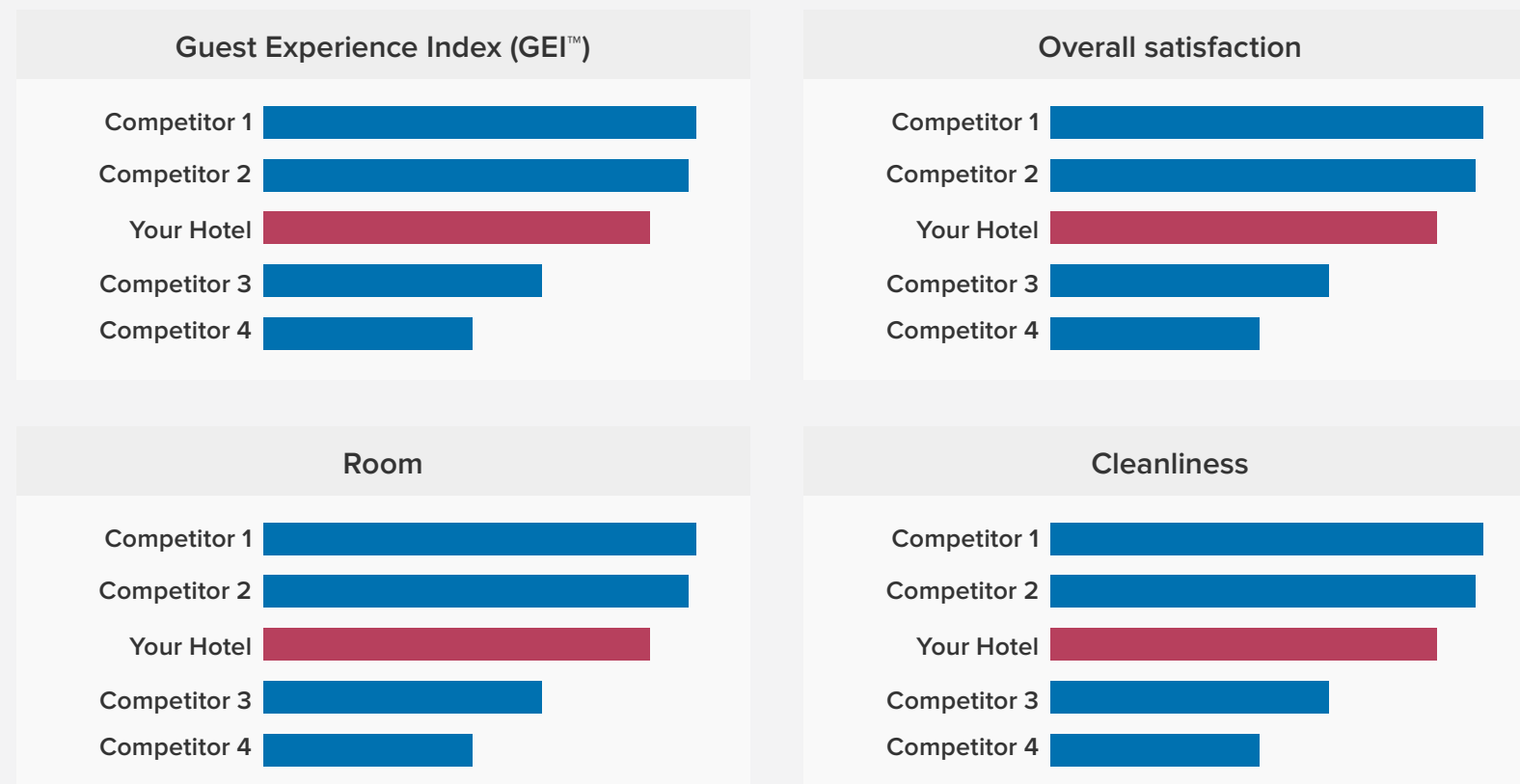


While big data can provide you with insights about correlation, small data is what can help you understand why those correlations exist. In the case of your competitor spying, it is inside each review that you will find the details of guest's experience - the small data - that have lead people to give your competitors the overall scores that they have - the big data.

When gathering information on your competitors, both small data and big data are valuable, and they should be examined in tandem with one another.

The trick is not so much finding the data as figuring out how to use it – how to turn your big data into smart data that will provide you with actionable intelligence that you can use to inform your business decisions.

Don't have time analyse your data manually? [GuestRevu](#) makes comparing yourself against your competitors quick and easy, plus it automatically turns your big data (online ratings and reviews) into smart data for you.



Text mining methods

Andrew D. Banasiewicz describes text mining as the process of “reading and summarising participants’ text-expressed opinions and comments with the goal of arriving at a set of findings, commonly referred to as ‘emergent themes’”.

By using software that automates the process, you can analyse vast amounts of data quickly and easily. However, there are some ways to do basic text mining without sophisticated software with free tools available online, if you are prepared to put in a bit of manual effort.

Naturally, doing anything manually with large amounts of data is challenging, which is why narrowing down the text you will be analysing is a vital part of your intelligence gathering process. As we discussed in the previous chapters, different guest types and different aspects of feedback are more or less relevant to different types of accommodation. Negative and positive reviews will

also naturally cover different topics.

TripAdvisor is a great place to start your text mining project, as it allows you to filter which reviews you see by traveller type and overall rating. Reading through reviews written by your most important traveller type - whether that’s business travellers, families, couples etc. - will give you an idea of what those travellers like and dislike about your competition, and what you can provide that your competition doesn’t.

However, depending on how many reviews your competition has, this can be a tedious process, and you may find yourself unintentionally ignoring the things you don’t want to hear and

focussing on the critiques that reinforce your current strategies. This is where the magic of online text analysis tools comes in. There are a few different text analysis programs freely available online that can provide a bridge between manual and automated text analysis, if you follow a few simple steps.



“This is where the magic of online text analysis tools comes in.”

[click here to skip to guide](#)

BONUS HOW-TO
GUIDE

How to manually analyse
reviews online



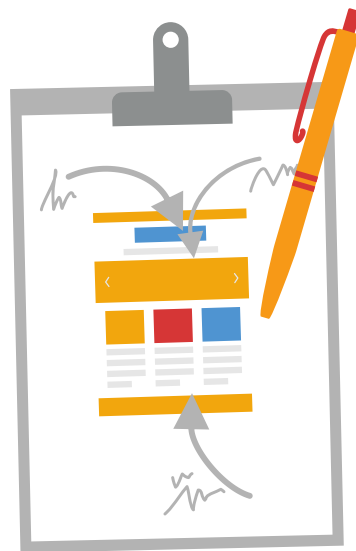
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What will I learn in this chapter?

- (1) How to compare and contrast your hotel against your competitors
- (2) Where you should be spending your budget
- (3) How to find out what your target market wants to hear

CHAPTER FOUR

What to do with your data



So now you know about your competition – you have slept in their rooms and spoken to their guests via their online reviews, you have observed what kinds of people are interested in staying at their hotel in their website and social media analytics, and you have eavesdropped on their conversations with past and potential customers on social media.



Now it's time to take what you've learned and use it to get your hotel performing in top form.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Where does your competitor excel and what are they particularly good at? Strengths can be real or perceived.	Where does your competitor fall short, what should they be fixing? Weaknesses may also be real or perceived.
Opportunities	Threats
How could your hotel overtake your competitor to gain more customers, acquire a higher ranking or a better reputation?	How could your competitor harm your business?

The SWOT analysis

The SWOT analysis is a fantastic way to organise your thoughts and condense your insights into more easily comprehensible information. It works for almost any business, and the hospitality industry is no exception.

Once you have gathered the right intelligence, you will easily be able to perform a SWOT analysis on each of your competitors. Ideally, pick your top three competitors for this exercise, as too much data at this stage may become unwieldy and overwhelming.

SWOT stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Analysing each of these areas for your competitors

will help you to see what you need to be doing to keep up, and where you may have the chance to overtake your competition.

Once you have analysed each of your competitors individually, draw up a summary of your findings in a competitor grid that encapsulates all your competitors' key strengths, key weaknesses, and key differentiating factors. You can then use this information to derive themes, and spot areas where you can fill a gap and differentiate yourself from your competition, and where your competition has the upper hand.





Informing your operations

Using guest reviews to inform your operations is not a new concept, but it is one that is often overlooked. Guests are, after all, the epicentre of any hospitality business, and it is their opinions that will make or break your reputation and therefore your business.

Take note of what your competitors' guests are focussing on - the good, the bad and the ugly. By keeping an eye on your competitors' guest feedback, you don't have to make mistakes yourself to learn from them – just watch what your competitors get wrong and make sure you don't copy them. Similarly, you don't have to experiment with every aspect

of your guest experience to find out what works, let your competitors do the hard work for you. As you work your way through their reviews and online guest feedback, you will notice repeated themes in positive reviews. Use what's working for your competitors to work for you.

If people often compliment your competitors on their luxurious bed linen, then you know that that is what they care about. Instead of spending your extra budget this year on fancy bathroom amenities, put it towards better linen. And silently thank your competitors for the market research.



Optimising your online presence

This is the simplest and most easily actionable thing you can do with the information you have collected from your online spying.

Take note of what your competitors' guests are enjoying, and if you can offer the same or better, then this is what you need to be marketing to your prospective guests and highlighting on your website, social media and OTA listings.

When you notice your competitors' guests consistently mentioning the wonderful experiences they have had at tourist attractions in the area, for instance, you know that publicising your proximity to these attractions will make visitors more likely to consider your hotel. In this example you could also use this intelligence to inform your operations; you could consider offering free transport to the most popular attractions, and, of course, publicising this offer as well.



Pro tip: Use [social proof](#) to highlight something that your hotel does better than your competitors

Keeping an eye on what guests are saying about your competition can also help you discover what makes you unique, and therefore what you should be highlighting

on your website, social media, OTA listings and other promotional material.

For example, if travellers never mention the view from your competitor's hotel, but consistently rave about the view from yours, you can capitalise on this. Unless the competition is planning on moving their hotel or building some more storeys, they can't compete!

When you spy on your competitors' social media accounts, you can also use them to test what kind of content works well. Facebook's "pages to watch" function makes it almost too easy to see what kinds of content people in your target market are engaging with and what they aren't.

Understanding your target market

In the hospitality industry, your product is nothing more and nothing less than an experience for people to have. Your guest should be at the centre of every decision you make.

This is why it is important to understand what your target market wants to hear, what experiences they are looking for, what they are interested in, and where you will find them.

In your online spying, you will not only have gathered



plenty of information on your competitors, but also on your competitors' customers. Use your Twitter spying to determine what their interests are by examining your competitors' followers, use your Facebook spying to find out what they are interested in by keeping an eye on your competitor's top posts, and find out what they are looking for in an establishment like yours by analysing their online reviews of your competitors' offerings.

You may even want to create buyer personas for the different segments of your target market. Buyer personas are fictional representations of your ideal customer, and they are used to make sure that all of your marketing material has the right tone, information and content to appeal to your target market.

Most hotels will need to create a few personas to accurately reflect the different segments of their target market. If you often cater to families, you need to be speaking to the member of the family that makes the decisions about their holidays. If your hotel gets a lot of business travellers, you need to be talking to both the businessmen and women, as well as whoever makes the travel bookings for employees at large companies.

For these three personas, you might decide to create Mommy Monique, Businessman Barry, and Travel Manager Trish. You then need to work out what makes these people tick.

Here are a few of the questions you might like to ask about Mommy Monique:

- ▶ What is her role?
- ▶ How does she decide if she is successful in her role?
- ▶ What are her goals and challenges?
- ▶ How old is she?
- ▶ How much does she earn?
- ▶ Where is she from?
- ▶ What is her family like?
- ▶ Where does she go to find information?

With an accurate understanding of your target market, you can tailor your hotel's offerings to meet their expectations and hopes, and you can ensure that your marketing material is getting to the right people at the right time and in the right way.



bonus!



The online spy toolkit

- » twitter how-to: compiling lists
- » twitter how-to: save searches
- » facebook how-to: pages to watch
- » sentiment how-to: manually analyse reviews online
- » the complete resources list



twitter how-to: compiling lists

With a little preparation, a lot of social media spying can be automated. Twitter allows you to create lists of people you want to keep an eye on. You don't even have to “follow” these people to add them to a Twitter list – perfect for keeping an eye on the competition.

1. To compile a Twitter list, sign in to Twitter, and click on the icon of your hotel in the top right corner (next to the compose a tweet button) and choose “lists”. Once you click on this, you will be taken to your lists page. From here, you will be able to create a new list to which you can add your competitors. Be careful to make your list private, though, so that other people can't see who you are spying on.
2. Once your list is up and running, head over to a competing hotel's account. Next to the follow button, you will see a little gear icon. Left click on it and click “Add or remove from lists...”. Choose which list you would like to add your competitor to, and voilà, Twitter will do your spying for you.
3. You can add as many competitors as you like to your Twitter list, and all you have to do is check on the list every now and then - you can get to it the same way you got to the page where you created your list, or via your profile page.

1

Create a new list

List name

Description

Under 100 characters, optional

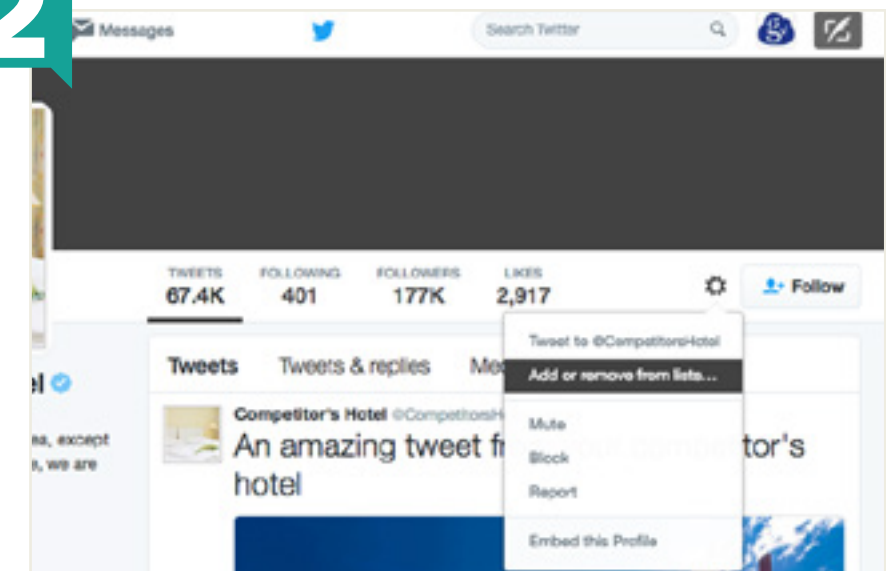
Privacy

☐ Public - Anyone can follow this list

☒ Private - Only you can access this list

Save list

2



3

Your lists

Include @CompetitorsHotel in:

☐ Promoters

☒ Competitors

☐ Influencers

☐ Properties

Create a list

12

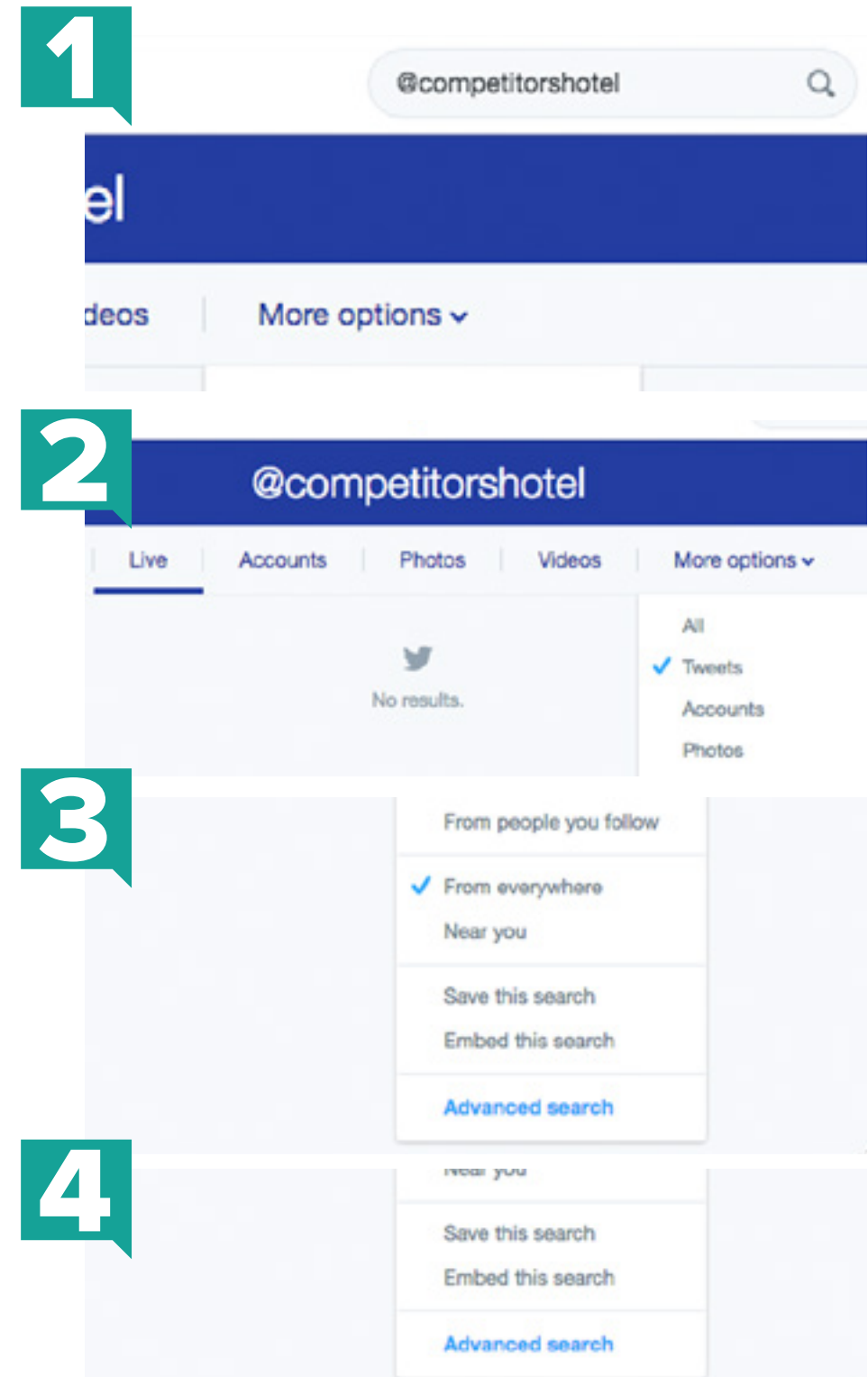
While we are on the subject of Twitter lists, these can be useful for more than just spying. Try compiling lists of accounts that often advertise events in your area, so that you can let guests know about interesting things to do, or accounts that offer good hospitality advice.



twitter how-to: save searches

While a list is great for seeing what information your competition is putting out on Twitter, it is not the easiest way to keep track of what others are saying about your competitors, or to them. However, you can do this by setting up saved searches for your competitors' names and their Twitter handles.

1. The simple way to do this is to just search your competitor's name in the search bar at the top right of your screen when you are logged in to your twitter account. Once you have searched, you will be presented with a screen where you can choose what kinds of information you are looking for – top results, live tweets, accounts, photos or videos.
2. The “live” tab will show the most recent tweets that meet your search criteria as they come in. In the same bar as these options is “more” which, when clicked, produces a dropdown where you can tailor your search, like filtering your search to show only tweets originating near you.
3. If you want to go more in-depth, there is also the option to do an advanced search. The advanced search includes fields that act as Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT), the option to only view tweets in specific languages, or from or to particular accounts, and other ways to refine your search even further.
4. Twitter can store your searches for you so that you can access the information at any time. In the same “more” dropdown, there is the option to “save this search” – easy as that.

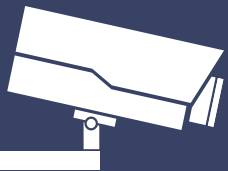


f facebook how-to: pages to watch

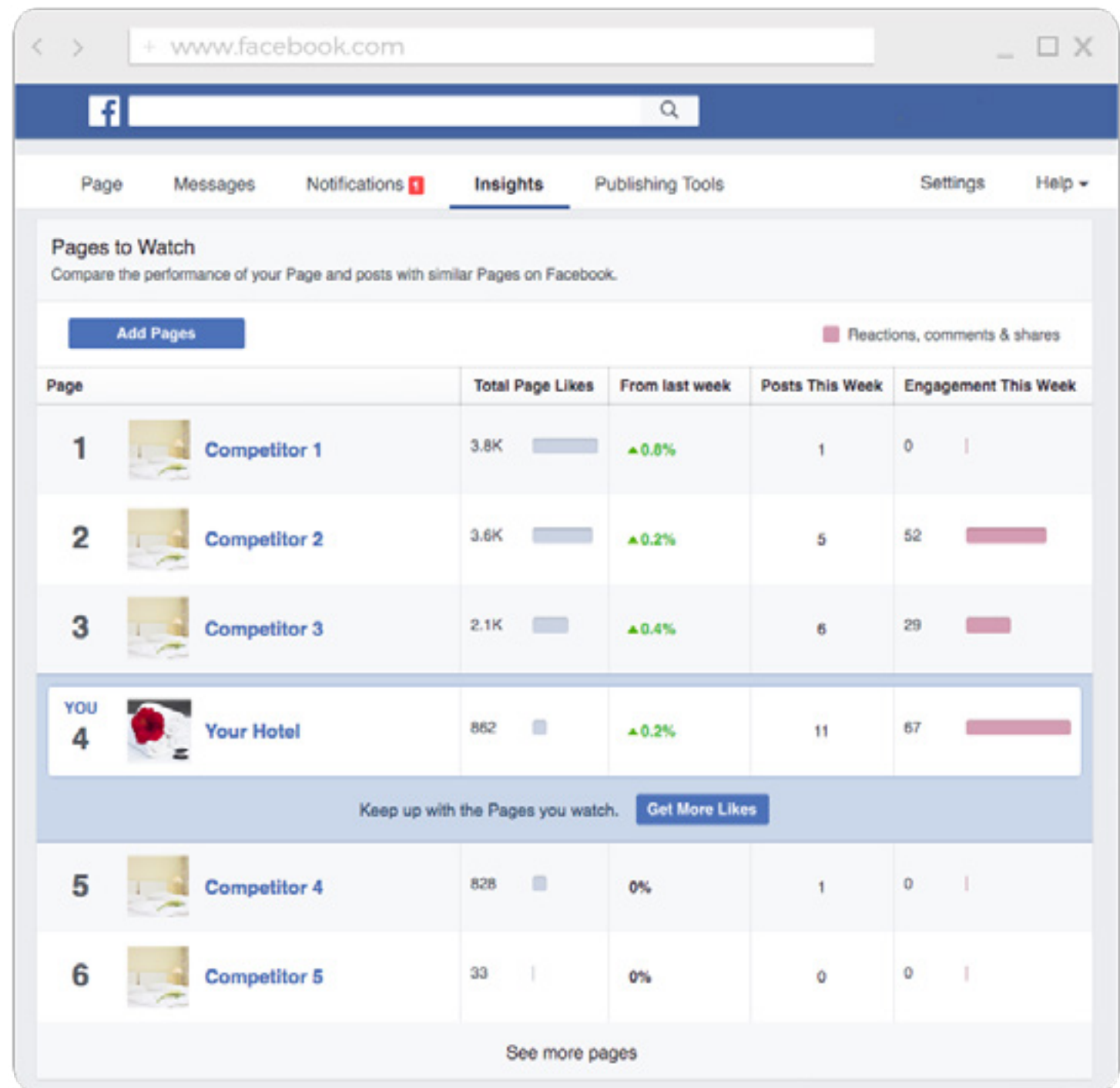
Facebook has made stalking your competition almost too easy - they provide a “pages to watch” function that you can access right in your insights tab.

Scroll down to the bottom of your insights overview and add competitors. Facebook will then let you know how many followers your competitors have, what kind of engagement their posts have earned recently, and where you stand in comparison to them. You can also keep an eye on your competitors’ top posts, which allows you to keep track not only of what they are up to, but also what people are interested in.

Social media accounts to keep your eye on



- » [HospitalityNet](#)
- » [Tnooz](#)
- » [NetAffinity](#)
- » [Fuel Travel](#)
- » [GuestRevu](#)





sentiment how-to: manually analyse reviews online

Step 1: filter reviews

Decide which traveller type is most important to you, and filter your competitor's TripAdvisor reviews accordingly. Then filter by only positive reviews or only negative reviews (you should probably do this process for both).

The next two steps are the tedious, manual part. Suffer through it, the results will be worth it.

Step 2: capture your data

In this step you need to extract the text of multiple reviews so that you can aggregate it. Basically, what you want to acquire is a text-only compilation of a number of reviews of your competitor. You can do this by simply copying the text of each review into a word document, or you can use a site like www.textise.net to turn the page into text-only document, and delete everything besides the reviews – the choice is yours.



Pro tip: Make sure that you have clicked “more” on one of the reviews, so that the full text will show.

Step 3: clean your data

Make sure that the text compilation of reviews that you have collected is clean, that you have not accidentally included the management responses, the labels of the bubble ratings below the reviews or any other leftover text that is not part of the actual review text.

Step 4: enter your data into your chosen tool

Word clouds allow you to take large amounts of text and process them into a visual format that is easy to understand. Words mentioned often are displayed larger, and words mentioned less often are shown in smaller font. It is an easy, though not fool-proof, way to check what happy and unhappy guests mention the most in their reviews of your competition.

While not as visually striking, analysing your collected review text with a **text analyser** is also a useful way to interpret data, as it allows you to see phrases that are often repeated. Try Online Utility's text analyser to see which multiple word phrases come up most often in the reviews you have selected.





the complete resources list



GuestRevu

Designed specifically for the hospitality industry, GuestRevu provides online reputation management technology that allows you to monitor not only your own online reputation across a number of different review sites, but that of your competitors as well.

<http://www.guestrevu.com>

Facebook

Facebook insights provides one of the easiest ways to keep an eye on your competition – just include your competitors in your “pages to watch” section (see page 34) and you will be able to check out their top-performing social media content whenever you like.

<https://www.facebook.com>

Fanpage Karma

Fanpage Karma allows you to analyse the performance of your competitors’ social media channels like Twitter, Facebook and Google+ and the content they publish on these platforms. There are paid and free options available from Fanpage Karma.

<http://www.fanpagekarma.com/>

FollowerWonk

Moz’s Followerwonk is one of the top options for taking an in-depth look at who is interested in your competitors on Twitter. Followerwonk allows you to analyse the followers of any Twitter user – all you need is their Twitter handle. While there is a paid option, you can get a lot of information for free.

<https://moz.com/followerwonk/>

Google Alerts

Google Alerts is one of the simplest ways to keep an eye on the competition. It allows you to set up alerts so that news stories and other newly published online content that matches your keywords will be delivered in a summarised email to your inbox.

<http://www.google.com/alerts>

LikeAlyser

LikeAlyser allows you to take a look at the performance of any Facebook page, and see basic stats like how long posts usually are and what types of posts are performing the best. It also gives recommendations for you to use when you analyse your own Facebook page.

<http://likealyzer.com/>



Online Utility's text analyser

Analysing your collected review text with Online Utility's text analyser is a useful way to interpret data as it allows you to see which multiple word phrases come up most often in the text you have entered.

www.online-utility.org/text/analyzer.jsp

SemRush

Semrush is one of the top tools for spying on your competitors' web domains. It allows you to view a variety of statistics about your competitors' websites, such as top keywords, referring domains, and some information about any paid searches they might be running.

<https://www.semrush.com/>

SimilarWeb

If you have particularly large competitors, SimilarWeb can show you their websites' keywords, paid search, referring domain statistics, information about where a competitor's site visitors come from geographically, what the top referring sites are, and even what kinds of interests a competitor's website visitors have and what other websites they visit. However, a website has to have quite a large number of monthly visits for SimilarWeb to collect data on it.

<https://www.similarweb.com/>

SpyFu

If you want to know what keywords your competitors are going after, look no further than SpyFu.

<http://www.spyfu.com/>

Textcleanr

Before you use any automated technology to analyse text, you will have to clean it first, removing any formatting and special characters. Textcleanr can remove email indents, text case, HTML, line breaks, spaces, MS Word specific characters and/or URLs.

<http://www.textcleanr.com/>

Twitonomy

Twitonomy is a useful tool for analysing hashtag activity on Twitter, as well as how much engagement competitors are getting from their audience.

<http://www.twitonomy.com/>

Twitter

Twitter's private lists are a great way to keep an eye on the competition – create a list (see page 32) and you can watch your competitors' Twitter activity as if you were a follower, but without them ever knowing. Twitter saved searches (see page 33) are also a good way to keep tabs not only on your competition, but on anything that interests your business, like mentions of your area or tweets by people near to you.

<https://www.twitter.com>

WordClouds.com

Creating a word cloud is one of the most visually appealing ways to use to analyse your competitors' reviews. Wordclouds.com will draw a visual representation of any text you enter into it. Words mentioned often are displayed in a larger font, and words mentioned less often are shown in smaller font.

<http://www.wordclouds.com/>





CHAPTER
FIVE

What we have learned

- ✓ It is important to consider carefully who your competitors really are
- ✓ Social media, website statistics and online reviews can all give you valuable information about your competitors
- ✓ Analysing your data properly, and without bias is important in order to get actionable insights from your spying
- ✓ Your data can help you to
 - gain a better understanding of your target market
 - learn what your target market is interested in, without you having to do the trial and error research yourself
 - optimise your own online presence
- ✓ There are plenty of tools, both paid and free, that can help you keep tabs on your competition





Now you know where to find intelligence on your competitors, how to interpret it and what to do with it, and you have a few tools to help you do this, it's time to get spying and start learning from your competitions' wins and fails.

If you can use your data to ensure that the experience guests have at your hotel is better than the one they have at your competitors' hotels you will soon find your hotel outranking your competition on online travel agents and review sites.

While spying on your competition is an excellent way to make sure that yours is the hotel of choice in your niche, remember

that your competition isn't always the enemy, and in many instances working together can often be more lucrative than working against one another.

As with most things in life, balance is key. You want your hotel to excel, but there is no need to wage war with other tourism professionals in your area. Your goal should always be guest satisfaction, and this means both working with the competition to make sure that guests are having amazing travel experiences, as well as using the competition to inspire you to do better.



Sources and further reading

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Ready to let us do your online spying for you?

New methods can be a bit overwhelming to put in place, especially when you have so much on your plate already.

GuestRevu can help you –

- ▶ Benchmark your performance against your competitors
- ▶ Automate guest feedback
- ▶ Boost reviews on TripAdvisor (Platinum Partner)
- ▶ Publish branded reviews across social media
- ▶ Monitor mentions of your hotel online
- ▶ Group management of feedback and online reviews

[Request my free demo](#)

