HOW TO SPY ON YOUR COMPETITORS

WEBSITEMUSCLE

Introduction

Analyze any reputable business that's dominating their online space, and you'll see that they don't just focus on one particular method of online marketing. Instead, they use a number of tactics depending on their goals, budget, and how competitive their industry is.

At Website Muscle, we believe the best approach to online marketing is a holistic one. Your marketing plan should include more than your message and branding. You need to account for who you're marketing to, how to reach them, what you want them to do and how they'll do it - and how you'll be different (and better!) than the competition.

EVALUATING YOUR COMPETITION

A well-executed, holistic online marketing strategy must include your competition. Focusing only on yourself and your own goals without considering what other businesses in your industry are up to is a big mistake. You may have X, Y and Z in mind, but if your competition is doing the same or better than you, your efforts might be in vain.

You need to be able to answer the following questions:

- Who are your competitors?
- How are they ranking online? For what keywords and phrases?
- What are their online marketing strategies?
- How effective are they at reaching your target market and why?
- What areas are they missing out on that you can swoop in and dominate?

How do you find out how your competitors are ranking?

Here are 5 tips for "spying" on your competitors and getting an inside look at their marketing efforts[1].

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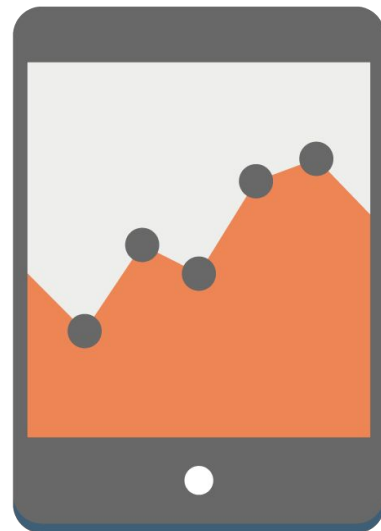
[1] These are completely legal and ethical. Don't be creepy.

1. Google search your industry and location.

A simple Google search of your industry, services and locations will reveal your online competitors.

Here's what to search: Let's say you are a donut shop in Costa Mesa. Start by typing "donut shop costa mesa" into Google.

Who shows up in the search results, both organically and for paid ads? Do *you* show up also? Write down the names of these competitors, the searches they rank for, and what spot they hold in the rankings.

Try several variations on services and locations as well: "gourmet donuts costa mesa", "orange county donut bakery", and so on.

Note: Many of our clients find there is a difference between their online competitors and their offline competitors, so this step is crucial to know who you're competing against for those coveted spots in the Google rankings.

Also note whether your online competitors are doing a pay-per-click (PPC) campaign. This will give you an idea of how competitive your industry is online, and who is trying to establish their brand.

2. **Google your competitors' names.**

Next, perform a search of the competitors that were revealed in Step 1 above, as well as any other competitors that you know of. What comes up? Their website, Yelp listing, local directories, or social media profiles? Now dig deeper and answer the following questions:

- Are they on Yelp? What are people saying about them?
- What social media channels are they on?
- Do they interact with customers?
- Do they have paid ads?
- Are users sharing their articles and information?

Again, we recommend recording your findings in a list or spreadsheet. (Make notes of what they do *and don't* have.) Keeping the data organized and easy to review will come in handy later when you begin strategizing your own online marketing.

3. Evaluate their website.

Now it's time to analyze your competitors' websites for design, content, and user experience. Put yourself in the shoes of a customer and answer these questions:

- How does it look?
- Is it easy to navigate?
- What offers and calls-to-action (CTAs) do they have?
- What information/education is on their site?
- Do they blog regularly?

In short, what are they doing that you aren't, and vice versa? Then ask: how are those things working out in light of Google rankings, Yelp reviews, and what you know about their reputation and the success of their business?

4. View page source.

If you want to take the website analysis one step further, right click on any web page you are viewing and select "View Page Source." Now don't freak out, the gobbledygook that comes up is meant to be there. That's the code that created that particular page.

If you look near the top of the page, you'll see something that looks like this:

<title>

After that you'll see some text, and at the end you'll see </title>. This is the page title, which will give you insight into what keywords and phrases they wanted to rank for on that page.

Look down a bit further and you'll see the meta description. It looks like this:

<meta name="description" content=" [meta description goes here] "/>

Again, it's useful to see what your competitor is writing to grab a reader's attention, and how they get readers to click onto the page from an organic search.

5. Use an online spy tool like Spyfu.

Spyfu.com is an online tool that will report your competitors' keyword strategies and paid ads campaigns. There are monthly plans (starting at $79) for a super detailed analysis of your competitors' online marketing campaigns, but even the free tool offers some really interesting information that can help you get going.

There are lots of similar tools out there with varying functions, so shop around for what works best for your needs. Some other popular spy tools include SEMRush, Keyword Spy, iSpionage, and Wordtracker.

Final Thoughts

In the end, the goal of spying on your competitors is to help give you dos and don'ts for crafting your own marketing strategy. Since you are presumably going after the same target audience, you can take your competitors' weaknesses and turn them into your own strengths.

If your competition is already dominating a set of keywords and phrases, go after different ones.

Finally, if you're in a highly competitive market, devote a ton of your marketing resources to **long-tail phrases**. That means rather than going after general keywords and phrases, you get very specific and niche.

So instead of trying to corner the market for "donut shop", focus on "gourmet donut and coffee shop costa mesa" or "bacon maple donut costa mesa". Besides, these are typically the things people type into Google anyway, so if you have a match for them on those specific topics, BOOM! You're in!

Happy Spying! (in a legal, professional way, of course).