Competitor content analysis: Here’s what you can learn

It’s 10 pm – do you know where your competitors are?

Like the effect those PSAs had on parents in the 80’s and 90’s, this message likely brings up feelings of concern and uncertainty, especially if you’re a brand fighting for your spot in the marketplace.

Competitor analysis is an integral part of running a successful business and this holds true for online brands as well, particularly when it comes to search marketing and SEO. While it may take quarterly or even annual studies to discover when you’re losing market share to the competition in terms of positioning or share of mind, you can see your competition start to outrank you in the search results immediately.

Since search engines largely rely on algorithms to determine the results they show searchers, these results are constantly updating, and if you’re standing pat with SEO, you’re losing ground.

To mitigate these losses – as well as find growth opportunities – you need to monitor competitor strategies, and one of the best places to start is with their content.

Analyzing competitor content to identify content gaps

Keeping an eye on the competition is important because it can help you find gaps within your own content strategy and where your pages might be missing the mark.

Start by identifying your competitors’ top pages. One way to find these pages is to use a tool like Screaming Frog to see

which pages have the most internal links pointing to them. Internal links signal importance to search engines, so these are the pages your competitor has flagged as their most important. Review these pages to see if there are any relevant pages you need to add to your site.

Another great way to find missed opportunities through competitor content is to identify which pages are driving organic traffic to competitor sites. Tools such as SEMrush or Ahrefs make it easy to identify top pages based on what percentage of organic traffic they earn.

If you see a page that is responsible for a substantial percentage of your competitor's traffic – and you don't cover that subject on your site – it may be worth exploring what it would take to create your own page on the topic. Furthermore, if your competitor's content is thin, poorly structured, or you are otherwise confident you can create something equal or better, you've just found a prime opportunity to capture more search visitors.

Analyze your competitors' top pages, and the keywords associated with those pages, then examine your own content to see if there are any gaps you could fill to create new sources of organic traffic.

Competitor content analysis for content improvement

Analyzing competitor content can also empower you to improve your existing pages.

As you analyze your competitors' top pages, don't just focus on keywords – scrutinize the structure and organization of the page to understand why it might be performing so well.

Does the page go in-depth and perhaps it's ranking based on thoroughness? Or is the page answering a specific question

quickly and succinctly? Or does it do both?

These are important questions to answer if you want to understand why their page is ranking, and more importantly, how you can improve the performance of your pages.

You should also pay attention to the formats and types of content used. Is the content broken up with images or screenshots? Do they use bullet points and sub-headers to make the page easy to scan? Is video or audio present on the page? Again, these are your competitor's top pages, and that short video they've embedded on their page might be the difference between their content's performance and yours.

However, don't stop at your competitor's page. Go examine the corresponding search results where they rank and analyze the other pages featured there. While these pages might be from brands you don't consider traditional competitors, these *are* the pages you're competing with for visibility in search. Also, these pages can provide further insight into how you can tweak and improve your existing content.

Other information you can glean from competitor and current ranking pages includes:

- Primary intent that search engines associate with the given topic.
- Relevant and related sub-topics or questions.
- Associated SERP features (rich snippets, knowledge graph, local packs, etc.)
- And credible external sources and relevant citations.

With this information, you will have all the tools necessary to update your page to best answer the query you're targeting.

At this point, the only thing standing between your content and page one rankings might be backlinks. However, with backlink tools like Majestic and Moz you can identify the

sites linking to those top pages – if you work to improve your page to the level of quality of the ranking pages, it's likely these sites would be open to linking to your page as well.

Leveraging competitor content for linkable asset ideation

Speaking of backlinks, analyzing competitor content can help you generate ideas for link-worthy content too.

Before, you were scrutinizing competitor pages based on organic traffic, but many of the tools I've discussed here will also help you identify your competitors' top pages based on backlinks. Just as you analyzed their top trafficked pages to understand why they rank so well; you can analyze these top linked pages to understand why they attract so many backlinks.

This analysis provides you with a host of topics that generate links and interest within your niche. You can also dig into the backlink profiles of these pages to learn *how* they are linked to gain insight into what types of pages and websites would want to link to this content.

For example, your competitor may have executed an original study that produced one interesting statistic that is being cited by numerous websites. It's likely you won't be able to replicate that study – and if you do, other sites are more likely to find your competitor's site when searching for a citation – but you can analyze their study and identify what made it interesting to springboard ideas for tangential or supportive research.

Of course, improving on their idea, also known as the skyscraper technique, is an option as well, but this approach typically requires significant investment.

The key to this analysis is identifying linkable topics and pivoting them to be unique while maintaining the attributes

that made your competitor’s pages link-worthy.

Benefits of competitor content analysis

Content marketing continues to be an integral part of successful digital marketing and SEO as search engines constantly provide the advice to “create good content.” However, consistently generating quality content ideas and executing them well is difficult, particularly if your goal is to rank your content in competitive SERPs.

Fortunately, your competitors are here to help! Through competitor content analysis you can learn:

- Which pages and topics your competitors identify as important.
- How your competitors earn organic traffic from search.
- Where gaps exist within your current content marketing strategy.
- Which low-investment content opportunities are available.
- Ways to improve existing content for better search performance.
- Which topics generate interest and backlinks within your niche.
- And how and why websites link to content within your space.

Understanding your competitors’ content strategies will help you outperform them where it matters most, in the search results.

Opinions expressed in this article are those of the guest author and not necessarily Search Engine Land. Staff authors are listed here.

About The Author

Andrew Dennis is a Content Marketing Specialist at Page One Power. Along with his column here on Search Engine Land, Andrew also writes about SEO and link building for the Page One Power blog. When he’s not reading or writing about SEO, you’ll find him cheering on his favorite professional teams and supporting his alma mater the University of Idaho.

http://feeds.searchengineland.com/~r/searchengineland/~3/2C18co0Ebak/competitor-content-analysis-heres-what-you-can-learn-322714