

SEO Competitive Analysis for B2B – Whiteboard Friday

In the B2B space, it's important to be realistic about who your competitors are.

Keeping that rule in mind, in our last Whiteboard Friday episode before 2021, guest presenter Joyce Collardé of Obility walks you through how to conduct a competitive SEO audit, helping you address your improvement areas and surpass your competition in the SERPs.

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Video Transcription

Hi, Moz fans. Thank you for joining me today as we talk about SEO competitive analysis for B2B businesses. My name is Joyce Collardé. I am the SEO Supervisor at Obility. Obility is a digital marketing agency based out of Portland, Oregon, with offices in Austin and Boston and that specializes in B2B businesses.

So I wanted to talk about SEO competitive analysis because it is a really crucial part of your SEO strategy and of your SEO success. As you know, SEO doesn't work in a vacuum. So if you want to be able to improve your SEO traffic, your click-through rate, your keyword position, and eventually your conversions, you have to be able to take the space of some existing competitors.

Today I'm going to walk you through the five phases of the competitive analysis. We'll start with how to select your competitors. Then we'll discuss the keyword distribution and what is important to understand the keyword distribution. Then

we'll discuss keywords and content gaps and opportunities. Then we'll move on to technical health of your website and your competitors' websites. And we'll finish with backlink analysis.

Selecting competitors

So selecting competitors is the step that is really important, especially in the B2B space, because the B2B space is very competitive, and in this space we have a few marketing giants like Oracle, AWS, Marketo, Google, that can be considered the de facto competitors for everyone.

Unfortunately, with that line of thinking, you are really missing out on a lot of interesting insights because those websites are so huge that they might rank for hundreds of thousands of keywords. Sometimes we see millions of links and have a Domain Authority of 98. So when you compare yourself to them, then it will be really difficult to actually find good nuggets of information about your website. You will always be at the bottom, and it's also really discouraging.

So I really would recommend that you are realistic about who your real competitors are. And nothing prevents you from refreshing your competitors in six months or a year from now if you feel like you've outgrown the competitors you selected in the first place.

One thing I want to highlight as well is that you should have different sets of competitors for each funnel stage. For example, let's say your target keyword list includes definitional keywords like "what is cloud computing." So your competitors for "what is cloud computing" might be ZDNet or TechTarget, for example. But let's say you want to target "cloud computing solution," then your competitors could be IBM. But the intent of the user who is looking for "what is cloud computing" versus "cloud computing solution" or "cloud computing software" is very different, so you cannot target

the same competitors for each level of the stage funnel. You will miss out on a lot of good insights, too.

I also do want to point out that your competitors will be very different in different areas of digital marketing or even offline marketing. Your PPC, your paid search keywords, or your paid social keywords will not be the same as your SEO keywords. Really the best way for you to identify good competitors is just to Google your target keywords. It's really as simple as that. And then see who comes up and see what their strategies are.

Keyword distribution

So let's take a look now at keyword distribution. One thing that I want to point out is that sometimes we audit competitors that seem like they're ranking for thousands of keywords, and it's a little intimidating. But really ranking for thousands of keywords isn't the end-all be-all. You should really pay attention to their keyword distribution. Out of those thousands of keywords, how many are branded, how many are not branded?

Of course, you won't be able to rank for your competitors' branded name. So you really have to focus on the non-branded keywords. Also, those keywords, do they have a lot of volume? Are they really difficult to rank for? Are they ranking for hundreds of keywords with zero searches or 10 searches per month, for example? Are those the keywords that you really want to target? And if you do manage to take their place on the first page, is it really going to help your overall SEO strategy?

Another good thing to look at is diversification. Are your competitors only ranking for one keyword category, or are they targeting different categories? A competitor that, let's say, ranks for only branded keywords or keywords that have very little search volume or that is targeting only one specific

category wouldn't be very dangerous keywords. And as we talked about earlier, you should not have the same competitors for every set of target keywords that you are working with. So make sure that you repeat this step for each set of competitors.

Keyword gaps and opportunities

Next comes the content and keyword gaps and opportunities. So in this stage, you should really think about the keyword gaps – the content gaps between you and your competitors. It's not just how often do they post or what do they target. It's also which topics do they publish on the most, or which topics do they focus on the most on their product or their solution pages. What kind of content type do they prefer? Are they publishing only blog posts? Are they publishing mostly videos, glossary pages, e-books, white papers, webinars? You really have to pay attention to that, because if all of your competitors are using blog posts and then you come in with your webinar that people need to sign up for and give you their information, then you are not going to be able to beat them at their own game. You have to kind of align to what is available in the competitive space.

Frequency is important, too. If your competitors publish twice a week on their blog or have a live demo every week, or release a new e-book every month that they will email to their customer base, you also have to align on that frequency. I would say out of the competitive analysis, this is one of the most important stages because you really have to be aware of the type of opportunities that you are going for.

And it really comes back to what we were talking about earlier with the competitor selection. You have to be realistic. It is very important to know what you're going against. Otherwise, you can keep publishing blog post after blog post after blog post, but if you have not identified the proper competitors or

have not identified the proper type of content that you need to create, all of those blog posts will not amount to improved performance on your site.

Technical health

The fourth stage of the competitive analysis is technical health. So I think we can all relate to how annoying it is when you get to a website and it's full of 404 errors and the links are broken and it's too slow. It's just a really bad user experience. And Google is very smart, and they know that we don't like a bad user experience, and that if the user experience is bad, then they are going to put other websites above you.

So I did mention page speed, so don't be scared. I know it's always a huge ask to fix your page speed. But I would recommend that you use the Google PageSpeed Insights and take a look at those easier things to fix. One thing that comes up all the time is images being too big or too heavy, taking too long to load. So if that's the case, take a look at your main images and see if you can reduce the size of them. Usually, the images that are the heaviest are the ones that will be on your homepage slider or in the background on your product or solution pages. So just by fixing a few pages on your website, you could improve your page speed by several seconds, and we know it means a lot when you're a user. Definitely do those two steps with your competitors, too.

For example (you can do it with Moz or you can do an on-site crawl for any website), let's say that all your competitors are missing H1s or are missing meta descriptions or have a lot of 404 errors, then you know those are the top priorities that you need to fix. Again, think about your competitive advantage. If all your competitors' websites are really slow, then fix your page speed first. If it's a horrible user experience because you keep hitting 404 errors, fix your 404

errors first.

Backlink opportunities

The last part of the competitive audit should be the backlinks opportunities. So you can use the Moz link discovery tool to find out about everyone's lost and discovered new links. This makes link building a little more approachable than just saying, "Oh, I will target The New York Times," because by looking at people's competitors and lost and discovered websites, you can identify websites that probably know you, or know your competitor, or at least know your industry, and so may be more willing to link to you. Especially if they used to link to your competitor or are currently linking to your competitors.

Definitely do this for your own website as well, to identify the links that you have recently lost and that you can try to reacquire. I would recommend that you repeat this step on a monthly basis because you have better chances of reacquiring links that you recently lost rather than if you contact someone saying, "Oh, two years ago you used to link to me. Can you please link to me again?" You're out of that person's thoughts. So try to stay on top of it. And you might have a lot of links at the beginning, but if you do it regularly, then it's much more manageable.

Also, when we're talking about backlinks, I would advise you to look at your competitors' Spam Score and link diversity. For example, I did a competitive analysis recently and I saw that one of the competitor's Spam Score was 23%, which I had never seen before. It was so high. It was ridiculously high. So it made me happy in a way, because it seemed unachievable at first to get to the number of external links that they had, but then it turns out that the majority of their links were spammy. And with a Spam Score of 23%, I don't think they'll be able to carry on much longer.

Link diversity is also really important because you don't want all links coming from blog posts or all links coming from one type of publication. So when you think about new links that you can acquire, definitely make sure that you have different types of websites linking back to you, that they're using varied anchor text, that sort of thing, so that you don't look spammy and you don't end up with a Spam Score of 23%.

Time management

So I wanted to also talk a little bit about this pie chart over there. It was how much time you're supposed to spend on each of these steps. So the biggest one, as I mentioned earlier, was the gaps and opportunities audit. That is really where you should spend the majority of your time.

Something that is also really important is the competitor selection as I talked about earlier. If you don't have the proper competitors to audit, then you won't get the helpful type of insight that you are looking for. Technical health would be the third most time-consuming, important step of this competitive analysis.

As we talked about, good user experience is very important. And the last two that should take you a little less time are keyword distribution and backlinks. So if you're really, really pressed for time, you can forgo the backlinks for now and do it later and focus on that part of the on-site SEO.

Conclusion

So to recap, the five stages of the competitive analysis that you should include in your own competitive analysis are selecting the right competitors, auditing the keyword distribution, looking for content and keyword gaps and

analysis, performing a technical check on your website and your competitors' websites, and auditing your backlinks and the competitors' backlinks.

If I can leave you with one more thing is really to be realistic. That goes back to the competitor selection and even when we're talking about distribution. Be realistic in your target keywords. Don't go for keywords that are extremely difficult if you are a website with a lower Domain Authority or you're just starting with SEO.

And don't go after those B2B giants if you're a mid-market B2B company. Know that you can refresh this at any time if you feel like you've outgrown your competitors. So thank you again for spending time to talk about competitive analysis with me. Now go and audit those competitors.

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