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COMPETITOR BENCHMARKING FOR SEO



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“Benchmarking your website against your competitors allows you to see where you sit in the marketplace... and get you to where you want to be”

Alan Reeves, Director of Search

If you want to gain an edge on your competitors, you need to know what they're doing online.

- What are their strengths? How can you incorporate what they're doing well into your own strategy?
- What are their weaknesses? And are you repeating the same mistakes they're making?

Analysing your current and potential competitors' SEO activities will allow you to assess your position in the market and provide a context in which to make strategic decisions for your business online. Evaluating their strengths and weaknesses against your own will reveal where there are opportunities for improving your user experience and ranking.

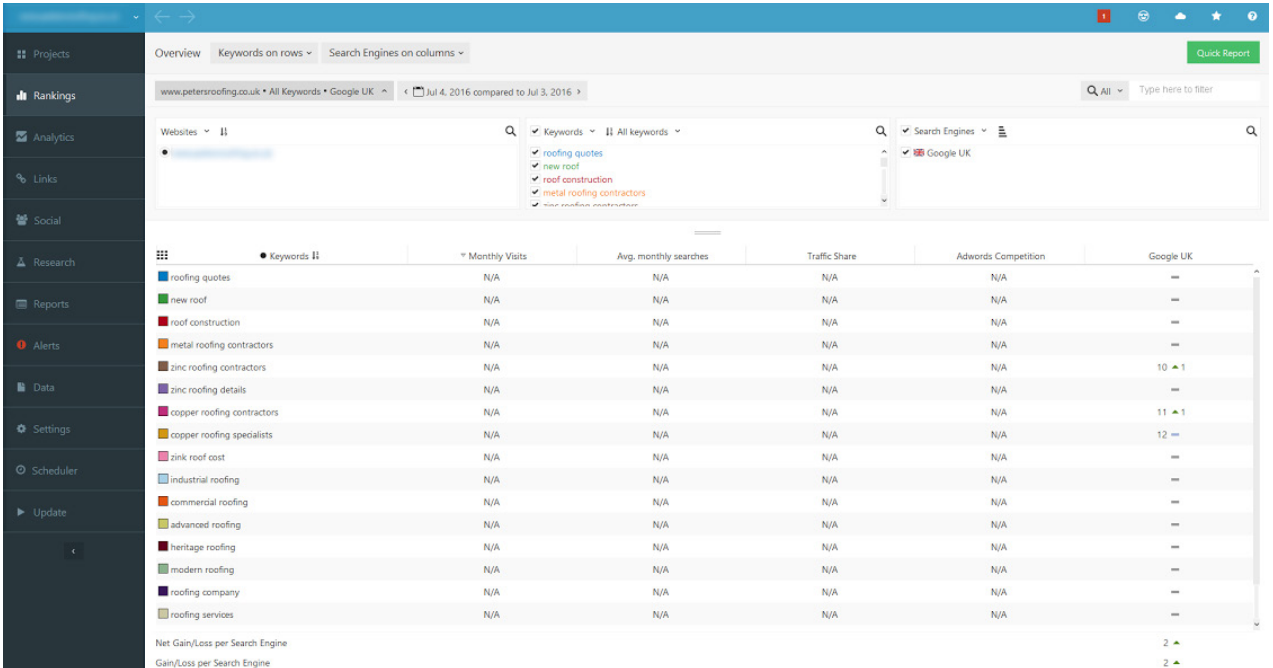
This eBook takes you through how to review your own and competitors' site performance against several fundamental SEO metrics, including top performing keywords, link profile, and commercial offering.



Identify your true competitors

They may not always be who you would first assume – and may not be the offline companies with whom you have traditionally competed.

You can find out who they are using a keyword rank monitoring tool such as [Advanced Web Ranking](#) or [SEMRush](#), which will allow you to quickly understand the top websites ranking for whatever you feel are your most important and valuable keywords, as well as keyword volumes.



The screenshot shows a software interface for keyword rank monitoring. The main area displays a table with columns for Keywords, Monthly Visits, Avg. monthly searches, Traffic Share, Adwords Competition, and Google UK. The table lists various roofing-related keywords such as 'roofing quotes', 'new roof', 'roof construction', 'metal roofing contractors', 'zinc roofing contractors', 'zinc roofing details', 'copper roofing contractors', 'copper roofing specialists', 'zink roof cost', 'industrial roofing', 'commercial roofing', 'advanced roofing', 'heritage roofing', 'modern roofing', 'roofing company', and 'roofing services'. The 'Google UK' column shows numerical values and arrows indicating ranking changes. A sidebar on the left contains navigation options like Projects, Rankings, Analytics, Links, Social, Research, Reports, Alerts, Data, Settings, Scheduler, and Update.

Keywords	Monthly Visits	Avg. monthly searches	Traffic Share	Adwords Competition	Google UK
roofing quotes	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
new roof	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
roof construction	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
metal roofing contractors	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
zinc roofing contractors	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	10 ▲ 1
zinc roofing details	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
copper roofing contractors	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	11 ▲ 1
copper roofing specialists	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	12 —
zink roof cost	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
industrial roofing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
commercial roofing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
advanced roofing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
heritage roofing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
modern roofing	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
roofing company	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—
roofing services	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	—

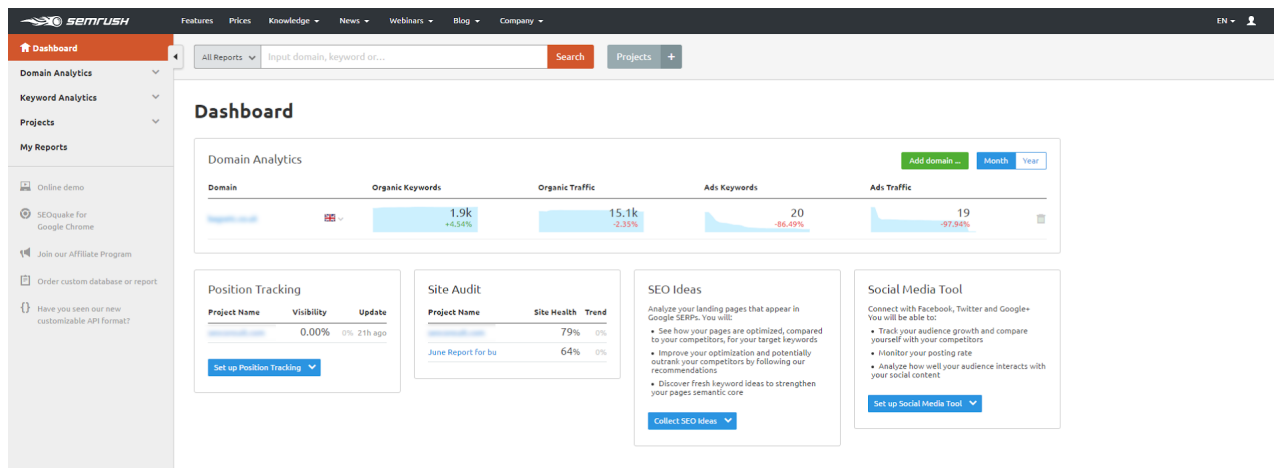
The likelihood is that the more search volume a keyword has, the more competitive that keyword will be.

Once you know what these sites are, you can assess other factors such as the competitiveness of their link profiles and compare them against your own to understand whether you have a chance of ranking for your key terms.

Keyword opportunities

Keyword analysis is one of the most important, valuable and high return activities in search. Targeting the right keywords can make or break a campaign.

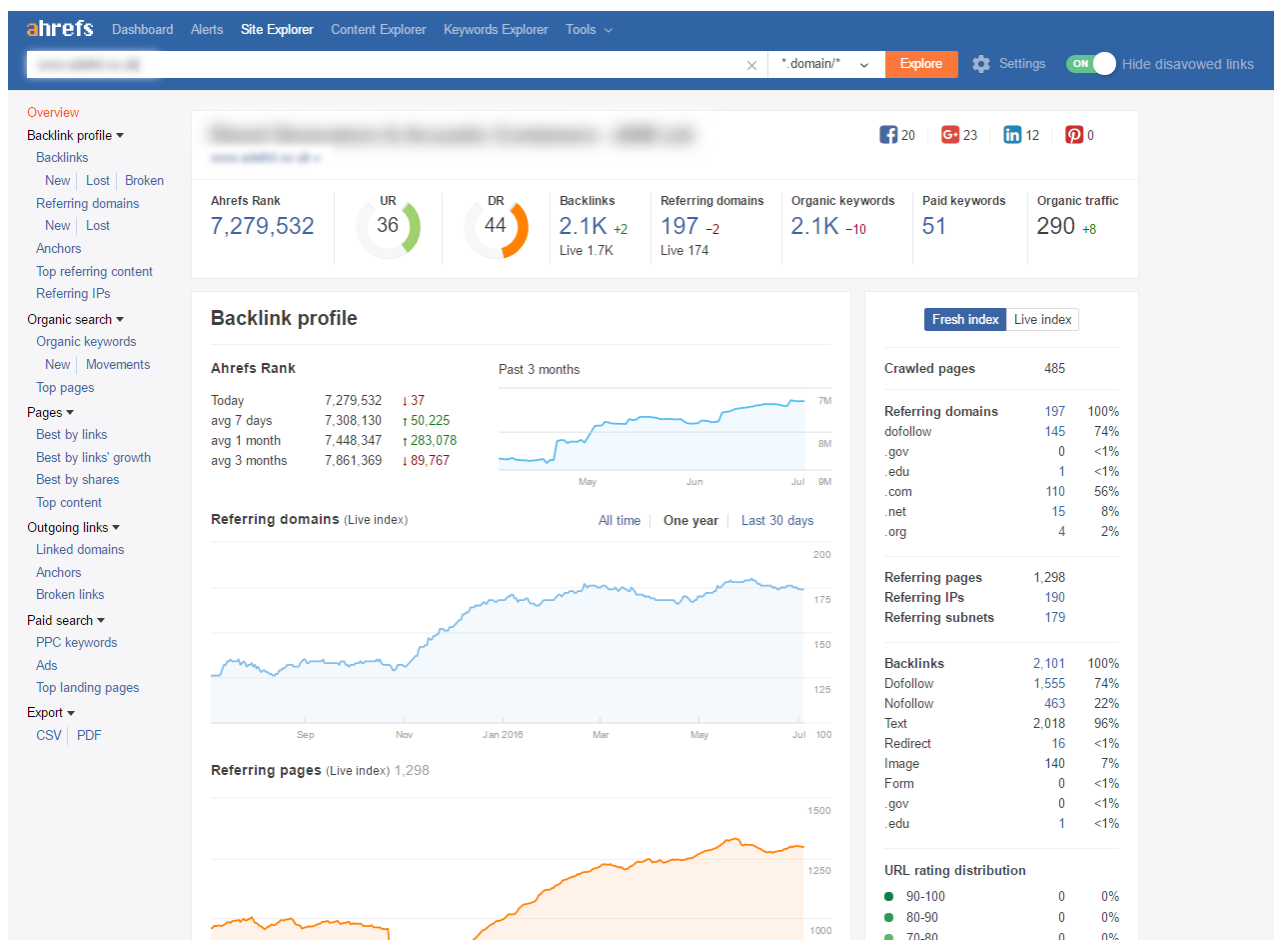
Use SEMRush to identify the highest search volume keywords for each of your competitors. This will provide an indication of competitor keyword strategies and shows which competitors are ranking well for target keywords. It will also allow you to see where there may be gaps in your current keyword list, and to identify longtail opportunities to target.



Link profile analysis

Links are still a vital signal to Google about the relevance and importance of a website. A top level overview of link performance metrics like [Moz's domain authority](#) can indicate how Google perceives your competitors' sites and whether they are likely to rank highly for target keywords. It also shows how active their linking activity is, which can help you plan your own linking strategy accordingly.

[Ahrefs](#) (pictured below) has a feature that allows you to understand how many links from unique domains a competitor has earned over a recent time period, and each domain is allocated a score (similar to Moz's domain authority).



This is really useful when planning a link acquisition strategy because it allows you to ensure enough links are being earned from domains of a high enough quality to outrank competitors organically.

A useful way to compare findings could be:

	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Domain Authority	32	34	36	54	44
External Followed Links	976	956	5,640	63,041	1,200
Total External Links	3,019	1,251	5,722	73,646	897
Total Links	14,708	34,355	19,007	1,277,665	24,156
Followed Linking Root Domains	294	139	101	1,148	140



On-page SEO factors affecting web performance

Taking a top-level overview of fundamental SEO metrics that can affect the performance of an organic campaign can help you get a better understanding of how competitors are optimising their pages and also how they're ranking for particular key terms.

Tools such as [SearchMetrics](#), [Moz's Open Site Explorer](#) and [Google Trends](#), can help you to assess the strength of your domain in the market as well as potential growth opportunities.

For example, you could compare the following factors:

	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Type of website	PHP	.NET	PHP	.NET	PHP
Canonicalisation Issues	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗
Hidden Text on Homepage	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Current Hosting	UK	UK	US	IT	UK
Approx. Pages on Site	3,170	11,100	7,590	2,650	809
Website Domain Authority	23	44	46	34	36
Domain Age	26/5/2011	22/6/2000	25/10/2008	23/3/1998	13/11/1997
Robots.txt	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
XML Sitemap	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
HTML Sitemap	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Last Google Cache	17/5/2016	16/5/2016	15/5/2016	15/5/2016	16/5/2016

Because content plays a key role in achieving organic search success, brands that publish fresh, engaging content on a regular basis are likely to rank highly on search engine results pages for terms included within the context of such content.

You may also want to go into more detail by, for example, drilling down into the technical on-page quality of your competitors' homepages and category pages:

Homepage	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Keyword Selection	Very good	No keywords found	No keywords found	Good	No keywords found
Title Tag	Excellent	Very good	Very good	Excellent	Satisfactory
H1, H2, H3 Tags	Good	No H1 or H3 tags were found	Excellent	Very good	Excellent
HTML Content	Well structured, sufficient content	Lots of content, although not as well structured	Excellent. Well structured, user friendly	Informative and sufficient homepage content	Lots of homepage content
Alt Tags	Some alt attributes are missing	Majority of alt attributes are missing	Excellent	Some alt attributes are missing	Majority of alt attributes are missing
HTML Validation	1 warning, 6 errors	13 warnings, 18 errors	125 errors, 227 warnings	33 errors	24 errors, 10 warnings
Category Page					
Keyword Selection	Satisfactory, would benefit from wider variety of keywords	Good selection of keywords	No keywords found	No keywords found	No keywords found
Title Tag	Very good	Good	Too long	Basic	Good
H1, h2, h3 tags	Excellent	No h1 or h3 tags found	Excellent	Very good	Good
Alt tags	Some alt attributes are missing	Good	Excellent	Majority of alt attributes are missing	Excellent
Url	Too long and includes confusing code	Very good, user friendly	No issues	Very good	Very good
Category content	Very good	Well-structured and guides user further into the site	Very good	Detailed content	Good mix of content types

Content quality

Regardless of which term you try to get a page to rank for organically, the bottom line from a content perspective is to write with the end user in mind. The very best sites will understand the customer journey comprehensively and will provide information for every stage of that journey, from the user's recognition of a particular problem, to their search for information before finally converting. The very best companies even understand and provide information for users after they've converted.

So you really want to understand which competitors are doing this well, and seek to do it even better. Don't get so distracted about aligning this with keywords that you end up creating content aimed at search engines rather than humans. Your site is likely to be rewarded organically for all keywords if your provision of this information is ahead of the game.

User experience (UX)

When comparing your site with those of competitors, it's important to bear in mind that keywords and technical SEO factors are not the be-all and end-all: there's strong evidence that Google and the other major search engines take UX into account when ranking webpages.

In other words, it's feasible that a site with excellent user experience will outrank competitors with higher quality referring domains and better on-page optimisation organically.

If we consider the staggering possibilities afforded to the search engine by [RankBrain](#), the machine learning element of Google's ranking algorithm, it is not unrealistic to hypothesise that user satisfaction variables, such as bounce rate and time on site, etc, could be learned and considered as part of the ranking algorithm to decide organic ranking positions, even without the need for analytics tagging or tracking.

Therefore, the bottom line here is: if you focus on traditional SEO more so than on the overall quality of your website, competitors may outrank you.

You could represent your comparison like this:

UX	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Site Feel	Modern, high quality and designed with users in mind	Not as user friendly, more basic website	Modern, clean, bold.	Modern, simple, young.	Corporate, more serious, like a news website
URL Issues	URL structure becomes too long at category page levels	No issues	No issues	No issues	No issues
Navigation	No issues	No issues	No issues	Navigation relies on internal site search. Traditional navigation bars are limited.	Standard navigation, user friendly
Blog	Multiple blogs available on the site	News section acts as website blog	Regularly updated site blog	Regularly updated site blog	Several blogs available on the site
Summary	Good site with some minor on page SEO issues. Nothing that will have a significant impact on the overall performance of the website.	Not as many visuals and no video content makes this website less appealing and eye catching. No on page SEO issues need urgently reviewing.	Good on page SEO and lots of well-structured content across the site.	Slightly different site to other competitors in terms of content and navigation. No major on page SEO issues. Modern look and feel to the site.	Good on page SEO, and overall look and feel of the website is good. Targeted at an older audience.

Products and services comparison

This involves comparing your offerings to those of your competitors, giving you the opportunity to:

- Spot potential gaps in your current offering
- Identify new viable markets that can be exploited with a new product, or
- Make product variations to fill a gap in an existing market.

Commercial offering

Commercial offering covers the ‘value added’ elements that supplement a website’s product offering. This could include free delivery, newsletters or a mobile app.

Like a product and service comparison, this gives you the opportunity to identify opportunities to enhance your commercial offering and make your site more competitive.

Social comparison

Competitors with high social activity are likely to be reaching a wider audience and have higher customer satisfaction levels. A comparison of top level activity across popular social networks could look like this, depending on your target market.

Our [social media cheat sheet](#) can help you decide which platforms are right for you and your business.

Facebook	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Facebook Account	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage
Post Frequency	Daily. Lots of images, videos and engagement	Daily. Hundreds of shares for each post and lots of engagement	Several times per day. Lots of engagement for each post.	Daily. Most shares and likes are for posts about individuals	Daily. Hundreds of shares and likes per post
Star Rating	4.3	-	4.2	-	-
Likes	250,903	376,187	157,340	247,108	195,195
Visits	19	-	1,100	-	-
Talking about	3,949	3,790	3,824	3,111	6,966

Twitter					
Twitter account	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage	Linked to homepage
Tweet frequency	Several times per day. Lots of images and retweets of followers	Several times per day. Dedicated person tweeting answers to questions followers may have.	Several times per day. Lots of shares and retweets for each update.	Daily. Most tweets are promoting events and case studies	Several times per day. Good variety of topics posted.
Followers	236K	133K	194K	102K	157K

Other Channels	Your site	Competitor 1	Competitor 2	Competitor 3	Competitor 4
Google +	Not linked to homepage 444,078 followers 3,804,727 views	Linked to homepage 169,996 followers 2,283,861 views	Linked to homepage 1,725,693 followers 17,367,552 views	Not linked to homepage 10 followers 24,786 views	Not linked to homepage 4,363 followers 280,892 views
LinkedIn	Basic showcase page. Lots of engagement with posts.	Not linked to homepage. Good showcase page. Updates centre around recruitment activities	Not linked to homepage. 272,879 followers. Dedicated landing pages for different countries Lots of engagement for all posts	Linked to homepage. 5,416 followers. Lots of likes for each post. Updated several times per week	Not linked to homepage. 14,202 followers. Predominantly recruitment drive platform.
Instagram	Linked to homepage and YouTube page 6,169 subscribers 7,129,340 views Last updated 2 weeks ago	Linked to homepage but no videos uploaded	Linked to homepage Last updated 5 days ago 6,076 subscribers 4,340,369 views	Not linked to homepage 407 subscribers 581,812 view Last updated 2 weeks ago	Linked to homepage 11,360 subscribers 7,830,961 views Last updated 1 week ago
YouTube	Basic showcase page. Lots of engagement with posts.	Not linked to homepage	Not linked to homepage	Linked to homepage	Not linked to homepage 14,202 followers
Pinterest	Linked to homepage	Good showcase page	272,879 followers	5,416 followers	Predominantly recruitment drive platform

Other easy ways to keep an ongoing eye on competitor activity

- Sign up to their newsletter/blog alerts (perhaps using a generic address, such as Gmail or Hotmail).
- Like, follow and connect with them on social media so that you receive their updates in your news feeds. You can then study who they follow, who is following them and how they use this space to talk to your shared target market. Maybe they are initiating successful social marketing campaigns.
- Set up a [Google Alert](#) to keep tabs on your online business rivals and send alerts to your email inbox. You can use it to receive notifications each time your rival gets a mention

Conclusion

Like any form of research, competitor monitoring should be carried out on a regular basis – and this is particularly important in the ever-evolving world of search marketing.

As we've explored in this eBook, there's a wealth of analytical information available at your disposal that allows you to track your performance metrics alongside those of your competitors. Benchmarking in this way will help you to understand various important factors which may contribute toward the success of your online strategy, as well as to:

- identify areas for improvement and opportunity;
- determine how other organisations achieve high performance levels; and
- use this information to improve performance.

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"From the outset of the project, Click Consult clearly understood our business objectives and formulated a search strategy that would help to deliver commercial results across key product areas. They have been professional in their approach, shown great attention to detail and the results achieved to date have been thoroughly impressive."

LloydsPharmacy Online Doctor

"Click have really stepped up to the plate when it comes to performance marketing, their tenacity and desire to help us as a company improve is second to none. They're always offering up the best in cost per lead performance, which is seeing our ROI on digital marketing grow exponentially as our relationship goes on. Brilliant project planners, superb project delivery and results to boot, what more could you ask for?"

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