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## OUTSMARTING YOUR ONLINE COMPETITORS





## INTRODUCTION

We live and operate in a digital world where missing an opportunity can be devastating for a business. If you are putting all of your efforts into marketing, SEO and PPC only to get trumped by a competition it can be pretty frustrating.

Yet this happens on a day-to-day basis and brands and businesses across both the world and individual markets are competing for the same consumers. Part of the work we do here at Click Consult is to look at competition and see how we can best implement a strategy that means our clients get the best from their efforts.

It can be frightfully difficult to come up with the perfect strategy and, in truth, all search marketing is a work in progress. Businesses have to be able to adapt and have the foresight to do so when the time is right. They have to be responsive and have to be alert to changes that could have a business impact. In this eBook, we'll look at the things brands can be doing to get the most out of their search marketing and, most importantly, how they can stay ahead of their competition.

# IDENTIFICATION

Identification or discovery is important for two reasons, it is the foundation on which a business stands, and the on-going research as to where they want to go. The three places that you have to look however when it comes to the identifications phase of your strategy are:

**Your market** – Understanding your market is a vital part of any strategy. It gives you the ability to position yourself in the best possible location, and means that you can really drill down with a highly targeted approach. When it comes to your market you need to understand exactly what products or services you sell and where.

One of the greatest failings that digital businesses have is that they miss opportunities. We've seen in the past that things such as newsjacking are increasingly popular and this form of marketing can put a brand straight into the story and the PR and other coverage generated means that they can open themselves to a new audience.

**Your audience** – It goes without saying, you're not going to sell if you haven't got anyone to sell to! Audience is everything. Ask yourself, do you know who you want to target, are you looking at the right people and are you trying to win new custom? If you can answer these then you are halfway there.

By building a strong client base and showing your ability to grow and develop your audience, you can gain a noticeable advantage over your competitors. When we look at a lead either for our own offering or for that of a client we always use the sales funnel to determine where they are in terms of making a conversion.

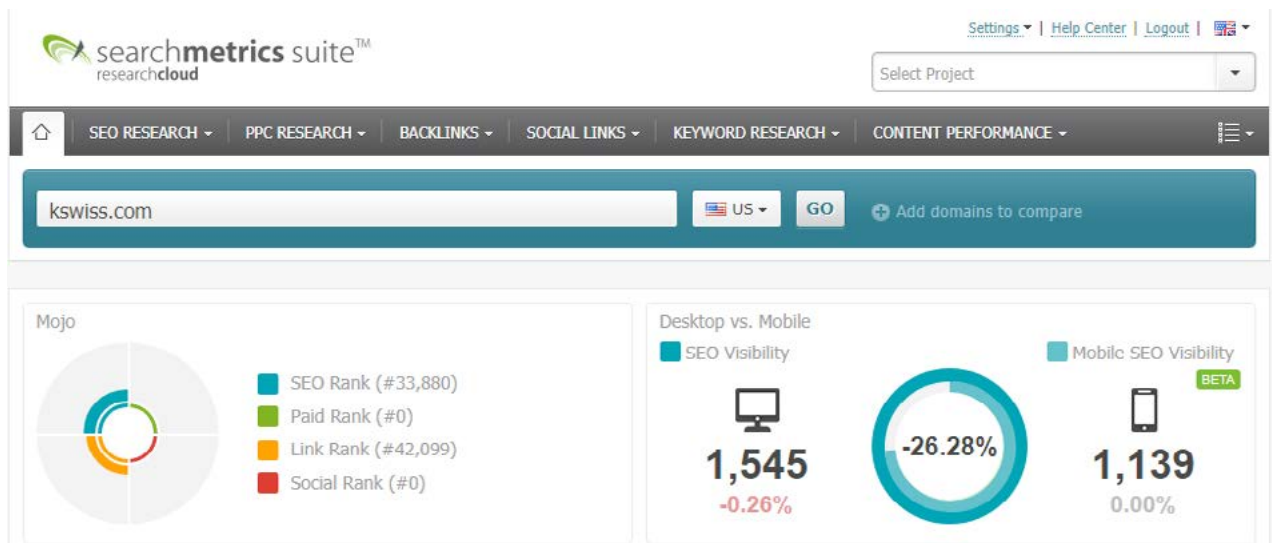
This funnel (as seen in the following infographic) is your roadmap for the journey on which you want to take your customers. Here you can attract, nurture and convert them, in essence you are creating awareness, offering the chance for consideration and facilitating the purchase. In some cases if you are able to jump on a trend then you might only need the awareness phase to introduce what you are offering as the new customer might already be familiar with similar products.



**Your competition** – Before you can take on the competition you need to know who they are and what they are doing. There is no such thing as too much research and, in truth, competitor analysis is a live project so you need to keep monitoring their activity. You do this because you know that they will be tracking you, looking for new avenues in terms of products and services and will be targeting new customers. If you let slip the research phase you will fall loose market share or fall behind.

## SO WHAT CAN BUSINESSES DO?

**Find a starting point** – One of the first things you should do is look at where you are starting from, especially in terms of visibility on the search engine results pages (SERPs). Using a tool such as Searchmetrics you are able to gain a grasp of your standing. In the following examples I'll look at a brand selling sportswear, specifically footwear. For the purposes of the example I have chosen K-Swiss as my test client.



The SEO visibility, based on the scoring system that Searchmetrics use (n.b metrics vary across platforms) for K-Swiss gives us a read of 1545.

This reading is the baseline with which all organic visibility is judged and by adding in some of the key competitors for K-Swiss it is easier to see where they are in the market. We added Asics, Puma and Adidas to the search and generated the following chart.



Here you can see the K-Swiss reading of 1549 in comparison to Adidas (42299), Puma (13474) and Asics (9236). These competitors have a far greater visibility and are more likely to be found than K-Swiss for industry specific terms. The strategy here therefore would be to look at the keywords for which they are ranking and make changes to the content and backlink profile of their corresponding pages.

It could be that the reason these competitors are doing so much better than K-Swiss is that they sell many more products or that they have more services to offer. Obviously brand and spend play a factor but in reality there is little that can be done here, you either have the budget to compete or you don't. What's important is that you compete in the most strategic areas and grow into the market in a controlled fashion.

It is therefore important that you filter all of the key terms that your competitors are ranking for that you may not have an interest in. It is better to rank number one or high on P1 of SERPs for your prized keywords than to spread yourself over generic industry keywords or obscure long tail derivatives.

## Keyword performance

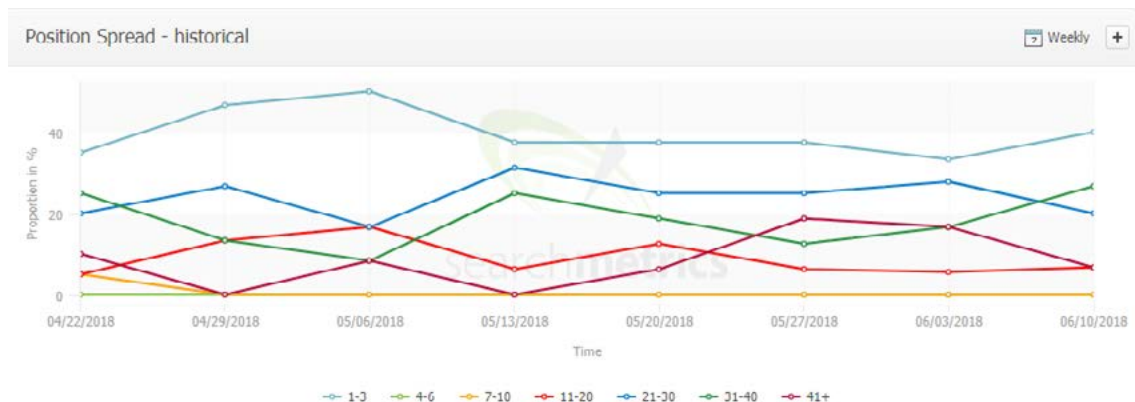
Unless you are talking about voice search where P1 in SERPs is the only place to be, most brands would be happy with positions 1-3. There can be fluctuations in these positions and in truth it can be hard to maintain such a high ranking especially for competitive keywords. In truth page one is the main aim for as many relevant keywords as possible. If we look again at the K-Swiss data you can see that of all of the keywords that they target they have around 33% in the top three positions. This is a huge positive but the problem comes with positions 4-6 and 7-10 where they have no coverage.

In order to steal a march on their competitors they should focus on those keywords that are not on page one and improve their rankings. This could be done through additional content, links to those pages and full optimisation of meta-tags and images.

Position Spread - historical							
	04/22/2018	04/29/2018	05/06/2018	05/13/2018	05/20/2018	05/27/2018	06/03/2018
1-3	35.00%	46.67%	50.00%	37.50%	37.50%	37.50%	33.33%
4-6	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
7-10	5.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
11-20	5.00%	13.33%	16.67%	6.25%	12.50%	6.25%	5.56%
21-30	20.00%	26.67%	16.67%	31.25%	25.00%	25.00%	27.78%
31-40	25.00%	13.33%	8.33%	25.00%	18.75%	12.50%	16.67%
41+	10.00%	0.00%	8.33%	0.00%	6.25%	18.75%	16.67%

This is how the above data would appear if plotted on a graph. Note that any increase in the 41+ statistic does not always mean there has been a drop, it could be that you are now ranking for new terms.





As mentioned in the previous section keyword performance is vital for the overall organic visibility of a site. One of the focal points will be on brand terms and as you would expect K-Swiss ranks in P1 (see below) for these brand terms and these terms link to the home page.

Rankings (13 of 3,610)

Keyword	URL	Pos.	Traffic Index	Search Volume	CPC
kswiss	kswiss.com/	1	3,252	19,909	£ 0.38
k swiss	kswiss.com/	1	11,064	35,972	£ 0.40
k swiss tubes	kswiss.com/products/05483-049-m	1	564	3,463	£ 0.32
k swiss shoes	kswiss.com/	1	2,892	9,404	£ 0.47

K-Swiss are currently ranking for 3610 keywords and if you rank them over half are on the brand or have the brand name mentioned in the query. Ordering these keywords and expanding the list allows you to see areas that you could focus on. Looking down the list produced the following three terms all of which had good search volume and was highly relevant to pages on the K-Swiss website.

<input type="checkbox"/> classic white sneakers	<a href="http://www.kswiss.com/collections/classic-white-sneaker">http://www.kswiss.com/collections/classic-white-sneaker</a>	5
<input type="checkbox"/> wide tennis shoes for men	<a href="http://www.kswiss.com/men/footwear/x-wide-styles?_s">http://www.kswiss.com/men/footwear/x-wide-styles?_s</a>	5
<input type="checkbox"/> mens wide tennis shoes	<a href="http://www.kswiss.com/men/footwear/x-wide-styles">http://www.kswiss.com/men/footwear/x-wide-styles</a>	5

All three ranked in P5 and would be worth targeting. In order to see what I was working with I chose one of these terms, 'mens wide tennis shoe' and expanded it. I could then see who the competitors were for these terms. Sure enough K-Swiss were fifth and faced competition from four other large US sports/fashion retailers.

Organic Rankings (1 to 50) 30 Long Tail +

URL	Pos.
<a href="https://www.dicksportsgoods.com/products/mens-wide-tennis-shoes.jsp">https://www.dicksportsgoods.com/products/mens-wide-tennis-shoes.jsp</a> Men's Wide Tennis Shoes   DICK'S Sporting Goods	1
<a href="http://www.tennis-warehouse.com/Mens_Wide_Tennis_Shoes/catpage-MSWIDE.html">http://www.tennis-warehouse.com/Mens_Wide_Tennis_Shoes/catpage-MSWIDE.html</a> Men's Wide Tennis Shoes	2
<a href="https://www.famousfootwear.com/en-US/Mens/_/_/Athletic+Shoes/Width+Extra+Wide_3E+or+4E+or+2W/Products.aspx">https://www.famousfootwear.com/en-US/Mens/_/_/Athletic+Shoes/Width+Extra+Wide_3E+or+4E+or+2W/Products.aspx</a> Men's Width Extra Wide Athletic Shoes   FamousFootwear.com	3
<a href="https://www.amazon.com/slp/mens-wide-tennis-shoes/8h7jhhbhdpg5jk">https://www.amazon.com/slp/mens-wide-tennis-shoes/8h7jhhbhdpg5jk</a> Men's Wide Tennis Shoes: Amazon.com	4
<a href="http://www.kswiss.com/men/footwear/x-wide-styles">http://www.kswiss.com/men/footwear/x-wide-styles</a> Extra wide shoes, Men's wide Tennis Shoes & sneakers   K-Swiss ...	5

All of this is vital information as it now allows us to look at what exactly is ranking for the key term and how the competitors are performing. One thing that is vital to remember when it comes to your competitors is that they are working towards the top positions too. Learn from them and read their content as you can use this to boost your own performance.

## ACTIONABLE ADVICE

Once you have your research done and understand what areas you need to focus your strategy on in order to outrank the competition you are ready to start 'actioning' the strategy. Here are some of the things that you can do:

### Focus on UX

[User experience \(UX\)](#) is one of the key focal points of search marketing. You need to make sure that you not only attract customers to your sites but that you keep them. Competitors are after your traffic just as much as you theirs. If you offer poor UX then retention can be low and bounce rates can be high. You need to sell to the customer from the outset and not in a pushy way you just need to be able to say: "Hey, this is what we do, this is what we sell, this is how we are doing it and this is why you should choose us."

If your site fulfils both the query and the needs of the customer then they are more likely to become a regular customer.

### Use imagery

Images are vital and not necessarily for SEO but to make the site stand out. Customers are drawn into good looking sites and value the fact that you are showing them something they might not get elsewhere. Galleries for event s can be a big selling point and when it comes to a retail site product images are key. Make sure that these are fully optimised so that they don't have a negative impact on site speed, which is a major ranking factor.

If you are able to show a product from multiple angles, add in a video or offer the option to expand and scroll then you are more likely to make the conversion. Like the previous point images are a big part of UX.



## **Optimise for mobile**

You know by now that we live in a [Mobile-First](#) world and that this type of search has overtaken desktop. If you get your mobile offering right and make the app or mobile version of your site work smoothly you could see huge returns. Look at what the competition is doing and make sure that you are ready to outcompete them here. Large buttons and quick, seamless navigation or search bars can help the UX and boost returns on your strategy.

## **Make sure products are available**

Nothing will irk a customer more than spending their time looking for an item only to find that it is sold out or no longer available. [Make sure that you have plenty](#) of stock because if they go elsewhere they might feel obliged to stay there.

## **Utilise PPC**

[Optimising your ads](#) and making sure that you have wide exposure is a must. When I say ‘wide’ I still mean highly targeted but that those in or around your audience get to see you offering. Well written CTAs will entice customers and by putting a focus on your Quality Score you can guarantee that your ads will show in place of your rivals.

## **Reward your customers**

What better way to say thank you to a customer than rewarding them. Sending promotions is a great way to build loyalty and you can do this without risking profits or much of your margin. If you are able to upsell or upgrade a customer with a new purchase you are taking away a sale from a rival brand. It's better to give a little than to give a customer away.

## **Keep customers in the loop**

Let them know what's happening, when new products will launch and what similar products you have that might interest them. This is a great way to encourage sales and makes the customer feel like they are part of something. Brand affinity is crucial and if you can keep a customer your model is obviously working.

## Focus on social

[Social media](#) is everything and if you really want to make a success of your search marketing strategy and stay ahead of the competition then this is vital. Utilising social in the correct manner can not only help you to reach your audience but identify a new one. You can share messages, respond to queries and build brand image. Think hard about which platforms are likely to resonate with your audience and which reflects the type of business that you are.

## Focus on inbound marketing

[Inbound](#) or email marketing is a proven way to get ahead of the competition as it is one of the quickest methods of contact with your entire database. If you are able to send a one off email that will reach your customers at once you can see a significant rise in traffic and sessions, which in turn will increase the likelihood of moving people along the sales funnel and towards a conversion. Businesses will need to bear in mind the GDPR regulations that came in in May 2018 however.

## Newsjack

Newsjacking is becoming big news. Many brands are looking to piggyback on news in order to make a sale. If you are first to the punch with something that is relevant then you could see rankings improve and sessions/conversions increase. Brands that miss simple, free marketing opportunities risk having customers or potential customers poached.

## Be human

We live in a digital world, the landscape is super competitive and as such much of the focus is put on resolving things in a quick, automated way. This is great if you have FAQ sections that can deal with queries but it doesn't hurt to offer a personal touch. Respond to emails, phone calls, web queries and social posts quickly and let your customers know you are there for them and you want to help. Dropping the ball here is a big no-no and can see you lose out in the long run. The older form of marketing is word of mouth, so make sure your customers are shouting about you not at you.

## Analyse competitor backlinks

According to Search Engine Journal : “Backlinks are the backbone of your and your competitors’ SEO strategy so it’s only logical to review and analyse their backlinks to improve your own backlink portfolio based on this data.”

To obtain a full picture of your competitors’ roadmap and working solutions, you should take into account both the source of the links and the anchor text.

It is vital to pay close attention to the origin of the links, which provides useful information about the power of the domain and what the link is about.

It is really important to map out your competitions backlink profile. For your competition’s top-ranked pages, make sure you have the following answers:

- How many backlinks do these pages have?
- Which domains with high authority link to them?
- Do these domains link to you? If no, you have an opportunity to link to them and raise your rank.
- How does the backlink profile for your competitor’s domain (not just top-ranked pages) compare with you in terms of number of links and value of these links? This analysis might call your attention to a linking project, using white hat techniques) to shore up your backlinks.

# GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY

## ABOUT US

Located in North West England, Click Consult is a multi award-winning search marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC), with over 70 professionals employed and with a portfolio of over 60 clients from across the UK, Europe, Americas and Australia.

Click was named Search Agency of the Year 2018, adding to its long list of other awards and accolades, and also ranks within both RAR's and Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Blog

Click Consult regularly posts actionable insights on its blog – dealing with all aspects of search marketing. From technical SEO to PPC, content marketing and Analytics advice, the Click Consult blog has something for everyone of any ability.

### eBooks

Click Consult produces in depth eBooks on aspects of search marketing on a regular basis, dealing with the latest best practices, changes to standard practices, methods of improvement and more.

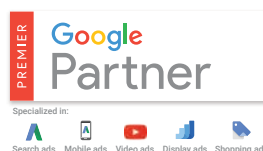
### Infographics

Sometimes what you need is a quick point of reference about complex subjects. Thanks to its team of highly talented designers, Click Consult is also able to distil its vast experience into easy to understand visual content.

Follow us on [Google+](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#), or to find out what Click Consult can do for you, call:

**0845 205 0292**

## OUR ACCREDITATIONS



## OUR AWARDS



## OUR TECHNOLOGIES

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