



ONLINE COMPETITOR RESEARCH

BOOST YOUR ORGANIC SEARCH PERFORMANCE
WITH HELP FROM THE COMPETITION



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INTRODUCTION

While the majority of brands will begin with a unique vision, there are very few that will be creating a new sector. As such, what we are doing when we either found a new business, or when we begin looking at developing that business, is trying to establish within an existing ecosystem of brands fulfilling the same or similar niches.

One of the issues faced in the digital age is that it's possible to end up competing with brands from anywhere in the world for all but services reliant on a local presence, and even those will have service areas that overlap with several others – all of which are discoverable from a mobile device in a matter of seconds.

The days of knowing your competitors based on location ended some time ago, but many brands confuse the relatively egalitarian nature of the digital age to mean that they are therefore competing with the largest players in their sector and that can end up warping their strategy and can lead to businesses failing when they might otherwise thrive.

AMBITION ≠ COMPETITION

While the eCommerce boom of the 2000s and 2010s has been supercharged by the global pandemic, there remains a limited pool of consumers for whom brands are competing. This often leads founders to set their sites on the main players in their sector and attempt to win custom from those businesses.

However, while Dave's DIY may technically compete in the same theoretical space as B&Q, in reality they may be able to win significantly more business from Tim's Tools, Rob's Repairs and Mike's Maintenance by properly positioning themselves in their niche. That doesn't mean that the ambition shouldn't be to eventually outcompete B&Q, just that the short-term success of a business requires winning custom from direct competitors rather than from these industry leaders.

For that reason, a thorough online competitor analysis is vital for any brand looking to succeed not just online, but in modern business.

WHAT IS AN ONLINE COMPETITOR ANALYSIS?

An online competitor analysis is a way of establishing benchmarks, helping to develop an understanding of the competitive landscape and, overall, improve your business strategy using the successes and gaps uncovered by close examination of the most similar brands in your niche. This will tend to use one or more of a number of Software as a Service (SaaS) tools to help uncover otherwise inaccessible information.

While each of these SaaS tools all offer their own templates for competitor research, we're going to try to distil the information you need from each of these to help you build the most useful analysis possible.

WHAT TOOLS YOU'LL NEED

This is one of the SEO processes that really do require tools and, while we try to present free options for most of the techniques we cover in our resources, on this occasion you'll need one or more of the following to avoid excessively long research time:

- Ahrefs
- Screaming Frog
- Semrush

In addition, you'll need to make use of some of the free tools that are available – such as:

- Google Lighthouse Report (via Developer Tools)
- [Schema markup checker](#)

We'll try to offer non-tool alternatives where possible but, in many cases, you will need access to tools in order to get the best results.

FINDING YOUR COMPETITORS

Although your general knowledge of the vertical your brand operates in will be useful, the tools listed previously all have the option of automatically discovering competitors based on shared keywords. For brands newly entering the market, this will be replaced by looking at brands competing for target keywords, but for the most part, one or more of the competitor research options will reveal your present competitors in the SERPs.



One thing to remember here is that you'll need to have your proverbial SEO ducks in a row before these reports will offer a true reflection of your position – if you're not competing for the right keywords or your content is poorly targeted, you'll receive irrelevant competitors.

Once you've run one or more of the competitor tools, you'll have a list of likely candidates – the benefit of using multiple tools is, of course, that you can cross reference the results. Those that appear multiple times will be the best candidates.

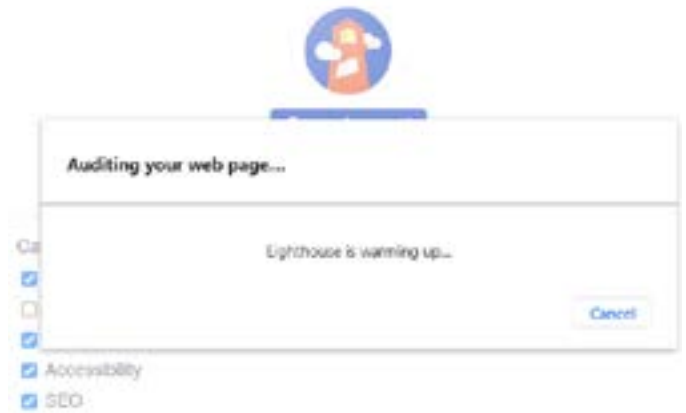
TOOL FREE OPTION

The best results will come using a tool on a site with already optimised content. However, for brands without access to these tools, you can achieve similar results by simply using the search terms from your keyword research (see our [keyword research guide](#)) has developed a list of 50 or so terms and making a note of the brands that appear in multiple SERPs. This does require comprehensive and sensible keyword research, however, as it can lead to the issue outlined previously – that you may choose unrealistic competitors and skew results.

PERFORMANCE

While it's pretty commonly referred to as a tie-breaking metric, [Core Web Vitals](#) are a handy thing to establish as a baseline for where you sit among your competition. The easiest way to take a quick look at your competitor's performance is to open their site in an incognito window and use the Developer Tools option to open Light House Reports.

You don't need to take all of the information for every site, but the performance data will give you an indication of where the site sits in relation to the Core Web Vitals updates and the rest of the information is there if you choose to take it.



Metrics					
	First Contentful Paint	1.4 s		Time to Interactive	24.1 s
	Speed Index	8.4 s		Total Blocking Time	5,790 ms
	Largest Contentful Paint	1.4 s		Cumulative Layout Shift	0.101

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

This is a fairly simple benchmarking exercise. You're just looking to record the scores of your own and competing sites to see how you would perform in the event of any 'tie breaker' situation.

KEYWORD GAP ANALYSIS

While your keyword research will look to identify potential keywords to monitor and target, a keyword gap analysis project is an often overlooked and beneficial next step.

WHAT IS KEYWORD GAP ANALYSIS?

Keyword gap analysis is a process that allows brands to use the rankings of their competitors to help generate targets for content, products or services that are either poorly served by their website or that have been missed entirely.

CONDUCTING A KEYWORD GAP ANALYSIS

Whether it's referred to as a keyword or content gap, the idea is the same – you're looking to discover what your competition is targeting that you're not. The only tool that has a comprehensive and easy to use tool for this (that I have access to, at least) is Semrush, which has a specific option for 'Keyword Gap' under its 'Competitive Research' section.

Obviously, offerings and positioning vary from brand to brand, so there's no need to compete for search terms that go against your branding, but a keyword gap will always reveal some overlooked gem that might help you to improve performance.

Keyword Overlap



By entering a few of the identified competitors and clicking 'compare', you'll return a list of keywords for which you and a competitor rank, that are unique to a single competitor, and that are presently 'untapped'. This can be reduced to a more manageable number using filters for keyword difficulty, search volume, position spread etc.

					Volume	KD%	CPC (\$)	Com.	Re.
0	0	54	0	0	112,000	79	0.00	0.32	
0	0	58	0	0	33,700	100	4.57	0.41	
0	0	0	0	28	27,700	78	0.12	0.21	
0	0	0	22	0	22,200	58	0.00	0	
0	0	74	0	0	18,700	54	1.43	1	
0	0	22	0	0	18,700	60	1.17	0.32	
0	0	73	0	0	18,700	40	1.41	0.43	
0	0	31	0	0	14,800	47	0.00	0	

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

As with a paid media campaign, what you're looking for from a keyword gap analysis is a group of relevant keywords which have a high volume and relatively low keyword difficulty (bear in mind that keyword difficulty is a rough metric and should be used only as such). By looking for between 50 and 100 keywords for which your brand does not yet rank, you can quickly improve the levels of traffic to your site – all with a little help from the competition!

Even better still – Semrush's keyword gap tool will also provide the page that is ranking for that keyword, allowing you to begin your content research there.

TOOL FREE OPTION

Honestly, the free option is a bit of a chore but, depending on your patience, you can Google each of your keyword targets with a [site:] requirement to see what their best matching page is for the term, then run the query again and search for those pages specifically (mobile being marginally easier since the introduction of infinite scrolling). Don't misunderstand, this is a long and arduous road to take, and will not provide data of the same quality, but it's an option.



LINK GAP ANALYSIS

Link gap is an interesting piece of competitor research and, like techniques such as broken link outreach, is often overlooked in favour of more creative methods like digital PR and campaign outreach.

WHAT IS LINK GAP ANALYSIS?

Link gap analysis is the process of identifying gaps in your link profile by examining the inbound links of competing brands. By building a list of sites which link to competitor websites, it's possible to identify 'quick win' targets for future link building targeting domains which have already linked to similar brands.

CONDUCTING A LINK GAP ANALYSIS

In this case, both Ahrefs and Semrush both have similar tools (Link Intersect for the former and Backlink Gap for the latter), so one or the other or both can help you with this task. On this occasion the UX of the Ahrefs tool is actually easier to use than the Semrush alternative. However, the information is much the same, and Semrush allows a greater degree of filtering to remove low scoring or irrelevant sites.

Link Intersect How to use

Show me who is linking to these domains or URLs

+ Add target

But doesn't link to (optional)

Show link opportunities

	AS %	Monthly Visits	Domains %						
	77	1.3M	1/5	1	0	0	0	0	0
	74	3.3M	1/5	0	0	155	0	0	0
	60	1.4M	1/5	0	0	0	0	0	0
	65	1.4M	1/5	0	0	0	1	0	0

While neither of the tools will output a list, you can export a filtered list and organise the data later.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

You're filtering for the best authority (most tools tend to use a 1-100 scale, so you can take an average if you're using multiple tools without worrying too much) with the most relevance. Ideally there'll be sites dedicated to the specific products or services you offer, but if not, site search the domains to see when and why they were linking to your competitor and top help establish whether they'll make a worthwhile target for potential outreach.

TOOL FREE OPTION

As with the previous tool free option, it's a long road to travel but, by searching for the brand names of your competitors with a [-site:] selector, you'll be able to find mentions of those brands occurring on the pages of other sites (it's also a good way to find unlinked mentions for outreach). Again, it's far from quick and painless, but it does allow you to make some progress if you can't access the required tools.

STRUCTURED DATA

We’ve covered the reasons for using structured data [elsewhere](#), so we won’t cover the basics here again; instead we’ll skip to how it fits in to your competitor research.

WHAT YOU’RE LOOKING FOR

With this, you can use either Screaming Frog or another crawler with a schema checker (for speed rather than necessity) or run each page type for each site through the schema checker on the Schema.org website. What you’re looking for is any markup that goes above and [beyond the standard org schema types](#). Are they using FAQ or HowTo schema? Are they marking up products and pricing?



Screaming Frog will give you an overview of whether there’s structured data present and in what form, it will also give you a breakdown of the types. For the most part, you’ll be competing with a fairly basic level of implementation, but on the rare occasion it’s been implemented properly, such an exploration can provide you with ideas as well as information.

rs	Warnings	Total Types	Unique Types	Type-1	Type-2
1	0	2	2	Organization	website
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	Organization	website
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization
1	0	2	2	article	Organization

TOOL FREE OPTION

While more long-winded a process, the schema checker linked toward the beginning of the eBook will give you much the same information, however you’ll need to go template by template (resource page, product page, etc).

RECORDING THE INFORMATION

Ideally, you want to store the information gathered from this process in one place – this is for ease of review by yourself and other stakeholders. For this reason, a spreadsheet of one kind or another is the best place to put it in the first instance, before using it as a data source for a data visualiser or creating a dashboard page.

CLICKCONSULT™									
PERFORMANCE									
	SITE ONE	SITE TWO	SITE THREE	SITE FOUR	SITE FIVE	SITE SIX			
FCP									
TIME TO INTERACTIVE									
LCP									
SPEED INDEX									
KEYWORD GAP (POSITION)									
KEYWORD	SITE ONE	SITE TWO	SITE THREE	SITE FOUR	SITE FIVE	SITE SIX	VOLUME	RDN	URL CURRENTLY RANKING
Keyword1									
Keyword2									
Keyword3									
Keyword4									
Keyword5									
Keyword6									
Keyword7									
Keyword8									
Keyword9									
Keyword10									
Keyword11									

FINAL THOUGHTS

While online competitor analysis should take place as part of a comprehensive marketing analysis, it is really useful to be able to identify your position within the broader industry ecosystem. By compiling this information, you can place yourself accurately among your competitors, but more than that, you can begin to learn from them and use that to power your growth.

There's a blank copy of our basic online competitor research sheet [here](#), so you can get going and start growing.



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ABOUT US

Click Consult is a multi award-winning search & digital marketing agency with a focus on organic (SEO) and paid search (PPC). Part of global consumer brand business Ceuta Group, we have a team of 70-plus specialists and a portfolio of more than 60 clients worldwide.

Our complementary services include content marketing, social media and analytics. We can also offer training and consultation to support your teams or existing strategy.

Click was named both SEO Agency of the Year and Organic Search (SEO) Team of the Year 2020; ranks within Econsultancy's 'Top 100 Digital Agencies', and Prolific North's 'Top 50 Digital Agencies'. We're also a Google Premier Partner, and a Microsoft Advertising Select Agency Partner.

HOW CAN WE HELP YOU?

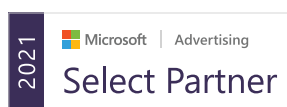
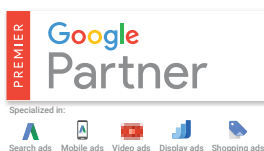
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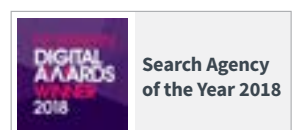
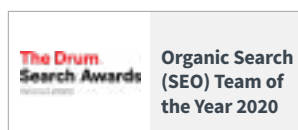
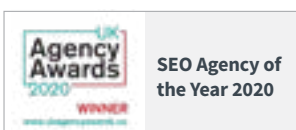
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OUR AWARDS



OUR TECHNOLOGIES

monitor **TRAX** rank **TRAX** feed **TRAX** link **TRAX** pro **TRAX** page **TRAX**