COMPETITIVE SEO ANALYSIS

A METHOD AND CHECKLIST

By Raven Internet Marketing Tools
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Introduction

When it comes to search engine optimization (SEO), you can never have too much data.

Outside of your own analytics and the tests you’re running on your own website, there are opportunities to collect data from an unlikely source: your competitors. Your competitors offer a wealth of information. From learning from their mistakes to analyzing their successes, you can save a great deal of time on your own campaign by taking a deeper look at your competitors’ strategies.

As a Raven customer, you’ll be able to take advantage of various tools in the Raven platform to help you with this process. From identifying competitors to monitoring them, Raven can help speed up the competitor analysis process.

Not a Raven customer yet? Here’s the scoop:

Raven Internet Marketing Tools is a powerful online platform for researching, managing, monitoring and reporting on Internet marketing campaigns.

Raven uses the most trusted data from third parties—including MajesticSEO, SEMRush, SEOmoz, Google Analytics and Google AdWords—to power tools for:

- SEO research, management and reporting, with tools including a SERP Tracker, Link Manager, Backlink Explorer and Site Finder
- Social Media management, monitoring and reporting, with tools including a real-time Social Stream, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube monitors and a Persona Manager
- Google AdWords PPC campaign management, reporting and quality score insights

Try Raven for free for 30 days. Go to RavenTools.com
Identify targets

We all have a general idea of our top competitors. Take Lowe’s, for example. You can name Home Depot as their top competitor. But who else should they be paying attention to? Well, who else is showing up for those top keywords you’re targeting? In a sense, any site that is listed above yours for your most important keywords could be viewed as a competitor. But what if you invest in a keyword that may end up being too competitive for your site? Or what if the keyword doesn’t convert as well as you hope it will?

There are a few simple calculations that can give you a better idea of whether or not to invest time in targeting a specific keyword. From there you can move on to identifying which competitors to analyze more thoroughly. First, you’ll need to collect a few pieces of data:

- Average monthly search volume of the keyword
- Your conversion rate
- A results-analysis plugin like SEO For Firefox by SEO Book
- Goal value (if you have it)
Perform your keyword analysis

1. Decide on which keywords you’re interested in targeting.
2. Use your favorite keyword research tool to gather the monthly search volume estimate.
3. Head over to Google and search for the keyword.
4. Quickly analyze the strength of each competitor in the Top 10. Look for the keyword in their title tag. You also need to look at the inbound link count of both the domain and the page on that domain that is ranking for the keyword that you’re analyzing. Don’t forget to check the age of the domain, too.
5. Compare this data to your site and estimate where you’ll be able to get the site to rank within three months.
6. Using the AOL leaked data listed at right, look at the click-through rate you could expect in that position.
7. Multiply that percentage with the estimated monthly search volume of the keyword.
8. Multiply that number by your site’s conversion rate.
9. (Optional) Multiply the number of conversions you are expecting by your goal value to get an idea of how much money you will make from ranking in that position.

By now, you should be able to answer these two questions:

- Is targeting this keyword worth my time?
- Will I make a strong return by targeting this keyword?

Once you’ve decided on the keywords you plan to target, take the top three competitors ranking for each of those keywords and perform Steps 2-4 of this process on them.

2006 AOL leaked data

Percentage of traffic for each Google SERP position

1. 42.13%
2. 11.90%
3. 8.50%
4. 6.06%
5. 4.92%
6. 4.05%
7. 3.41%
8. 3.01%
9. 2.85%
10. 2.99%

Sources: TechCrunch and Search Engine People

Helpful Resources

4 Steps To Identifying Your True Organic Search Competitors
ClickZ

Analyzing SERP Dominators for Link Opportunities
Search Engine Land
The goal of this next part of our competitor analysis is to understand what your competitors’ internal site optimization strategy is, how successful they are at implementing it and what you can learn from it.

**Keyword Analysis**

We’ll start with figuring out what keywords they are targeting.

We all like to think that we know what our ideal customer is searching for when looking for our product or service. But the reality is, we don’t think like our customers. We’re experts in our own field—whether that be plumbing or web development—and that hinders our ability to think like our customers do.

Your competitors can help you break out of that line of thinking by offering up terms that you hadn’t considered yet. You may think Keyword A is the top keyword you should be focusing on, but what you haven’t considered is Keyword B, which your competitor is focusing their efforts on. I’m not suggesting you change your strategy, but that you consider their approach, too. So how do you determine what keywords your competitors are targeting? Here’s where they’ll be showing their hand in an effort to better optimize their site:

- Title tags and keyword positioning within them
- Headlines in their content (H1 tags)
- Internal link anchor text

Spend time on their site investigating these things and make a list of the keywords it appears they’re targeting.
Content Analysis

In addition to discovering what keywords they think are important, you want to get an idea of the type of content competitors are creating. This can help give you an idea of how active they are on the optimization front (as well as whether you have an advantage over them in quality content).

A few things you should take a look at include:

- Are they focusing heavily on branding on optimization?
- How often are they creating new content?
- What types of content are they creating? Is it link-bait content or branded content?

We can use this information to get an idea of their content schedule and how actively they are using this content to build links to their site and strengthen their optimization strategy.
Technical analysis

Now that we have an understanding of which keywords they're targeting, and a rough idea of their content strategy, we need to take a look at how well competitors have optimized the structure of their website. This is very important, because it can give you a very good idea as to how much they are focusing on their SEO strategy.

It can also give you insight into how difficult (or not) it may be to outrank them, as your site’s technical optimization may give you an advantage over theirs.

You can begin to get insight into their technical site optimization by answering these questions:

• How well does their website render in the search engines (i.e., can the search engines see all their content)?

• How are they optimizing their navigation (e.g., are they including keywords)?

• What are their calls to action—are they obvious?

• How well is their site being indexed in the SERPs? Are all of their pages being properly indexed?

• How clean is their HTML? Does it look like they are actively optimizing their code?

With the onsite optimization analysis complete, we’ll move on to how well they’re optimizing their site externally.

How Raven Can Help

Much of what is covered in this section needs your own set of eyes to do an effective analysis. That said, Raven can help with two aspects of the onsite analysis.

Domain research

First, you can use the Research Assistant Domain Research tool to get an idea of what keywords your competitor is targeting. When you run your competitor through the Domain Research tool, Raven will analyze your competitor’s content to try and pick up on which keywords they seem to be targeting (by looking at things like repetition). Raven will also return where they currently rank for that keyword and what kind of volume they’re probably getting from ranking for that term.

Technical Analysis

Raven can also help with the technical analysis. Using Raven’s Quality Analyzer, you can quickly analyze the strength of a website’s optimization. The Quality Analyzer will look at everything from how well the search engines can crawl your competitors’ sites to how well they’ve optimized their site externally.
Operation: Anchor

There are two goals to external site analysis: determine what your competitors’ strategies are and capitalize on them. This aspect of competitor analysis is never complete. Your competitors will always be generating new links (intentionally or not), and as the line between SEO and social media marketing continues to blur, it will become more important.

Backlink Profile

We’ll start by getting an idea of what kinds of links they’ve built in the past and the frequency at which they build them. Take note of links that appear to hold the most value so you can plan on targeting them later on when you execute your own SEO strategy.

Here are a few things to look at:

- How many backlinks does each of your competitors have?
- From how many unique domains do they have backlinks?
- Can you identify any backlink growth patterns based on when the links were created?
- What keywords are they focusing on the most with the anchor text of these links?
- Are there any pages that receive more links than others (on which they may be focusing their SEO efforts)?

How Raven Can Help

Raven is known for its strong platform of link building tools. With Raven, you can do everything from researching links to managing them to reporting on your progress.

Here are two that can especially help you with competitor SEO link analysis:

**Backlink Analyzer**

You can use the Backlink Analyzer to research your competitors’ backlink profiles. Simply run your competitors’ domains through the tool and Raven will provide you with a quality score for each link, the anchor text of that link and the date it was created. You can even group domains to get insight into the total number of domains they have links from.

**Link Manager**

As you dive deeper into the types of links your competitors are building, you can quickly add them to Raven’s Link Manager to be targeted when you’re ready. You can assign them to team members, even ask Raven to automatically check on the status of those links for you.
Types of Links

It’s not just the quantity of links that a site has—it’s the quality of those links. You want to find the right sites they have links from that you can reach out to, too. Answer these questions:

• What forums are they participating in?
• What associations/organizations are they a member of?
• What conferences are they sponsoring?
• What blogs are they guest posting on?

Link Acquisition

Finally, we need to figure out what their strategy is for acquiring these links. Are they creating viral content in order to attract these links? Are they pushing their content heavily on certain social media channels that appear to generate the most links for them? Basically you need to think as if you were optimizing their site. What would you be doing to attract these links?
Enemy surveillance

Now that you’ve wrapped up your analysis, it’s time to keep an eye on what your competitors are doing. It’s recommended that you revisit your competitor analysis each quarter to look at how your competitors’ strategies have evolved.

Keep an eye out for major shifts in their rankings for important keywords, the total number of links they have—has it increased/decreased?—content growth and any other insights you can get from the SEO work they’re doing.

Think of competitor analysis as free advice. You can learn from both the mistakes they’ve made and what they are doing right. All without having to worry if it will work for you.

How Raven Can Help

Competitor Manager

Use Raven’s Competitor Manager tool to keep track of competitors’ rankings, the number of pages they have indexed and how their backlink profiles have grown.

Helpful Resources

The 5 W’s (and 1 H) of Competitive SEO Analysis

ClickZ

Laser Focusing Your Competitive Analysis with Google Analytics and Webmaster Tools

BlueGlass
1. IDENTIFY TARGETS: ANY SITES LISTED ABOVE YOURS

IDENTIFY BROAD COMPETITORS:
Sites that compete with the majority of your products/services
- Ask client for list of Top 10-20 offline clients
- Perform search for Top 5 most important keywords. Add any repetitive listings to competitor list.
- Survey selection of client's customers and ask who they also considered in their purchase process
- Identify top industry associations and research top companies listed as members

IDENTIFY NICHE COMPETITORS:
Sites that compete with only a fraction of your products/services
- Perform search for Top 10 keywords, adding the top 2-3 listings to competitor list

2. OPERATION: SEARCH

OBJECTIVE: Determine what a competitor's internal site optimization strategy is, how successful they are at implementing it and to learn from it

KEYWORD ANALYSIS
- What keywords are they targeting in their title tags? List the current competitor rank and search volume for each.
- Which keywords are they showing as a priority in their tags (based on keyword positioning)?
- Are they listing any keywords in their meta keywords tag? This shows that they think they are important.
- List current competitor rank and search volume for each

CONTENT ANALYSIS
- What keywords are they focusing their headlines on?
- Are they focusing heavily on branding or optimization?
- What keywords are they using for internal link anchor text?
- How often are they creating new content?
- What types of content are they creating? Is it link-bait content or branded content?

TECHNICAL ANALYSIS
- How well are your competitors' websites rendering in search engines?
- How are they optimizing their navigation?
- What are their calls to action — are they obvious?
- How well is their site being indexed in the SERPs? Are all of their pages being properly indexed?
- How clean is their HTML? Does it look like they are actively optimizing their code?

3. OPERATION: ANCHOR

OBJECTIVE: Determine what a competitor's external site optimization strategy is and to capitalize on it

BACKLINK PROFILE
- How many backlinks does each competitor have?
- How many unique domains do they have backlinks from?
- Can you identify any backlink growth patterns based on the date links were created?
- Which pages on their site receive the most backlinks (outside of the homepage)?
- What anchor text is being used and to what pages?
- What percentage of links are images/no-follow?

TYPES OF LINKS
- What forums are they participating in?
- What associations/organizations are they member of?
- What conferences are they sponsoring?
- What blogs are they guest posting on?
- At what frequency and on what topics?
- Can you tell if they are buying links?

LINK ACQUISITION
- Are they inviting guest bloggers to post on their blog?
- Are they creating viral content?
- Are they creating free tools and/or widgets?
- Are they conducting interviews?
- Are they holding contests?
- Are people reviewing their products on their own sites?
- Where are they getting mentioned and what is the sentiment of those mentions?

4. ENEMY SURVEILLANCE PROGRAM

AFTER INITIAL COMPETITOR REVIEW, REVISIT EVERY QUARTER.

DETERMINE HOW THEIR STRATEGY IS EVOLVING:
- How have their rankings increased/decreased?
- How many inbound links have they built?
- How much has their site grown?
- Did they launch any major link bait programs?
- What were their successes and failures?

HOW DOES THIS COMPARE TO YOUR SITE?

ARE THERE ANY NEW LINKS, COMMUNITIES, KEYWORDS FOR YOU TO TARGET?
How Raven Tools Can Help

- **Discover** new competitors
- **Track** competitor rankings
- **Analyze quickly** which keywords competitors are targeting
- **Research and analyze** a competitor’s backlink profile, including anchor text, creation date and the ability to group domains
- **Discover** what links you need to target based on the backlinks of sites ranking for a particular keyword
- **Track** competitors’ indexed pages and inbound link growth

For more information, visit RAVENTOOLS.COM