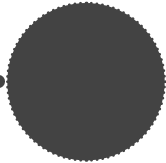




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Introductory content is for marketers who are new to the subject. This content typically includes step-by-step instructions on how to get started with this aspect of inbound marketing and learn its fundamentals. After reading it, you will be able to execute basic marketing tactics related to the topic.



INTERMEDIATE *This ebook!*

Intermediate content is for marketers who are familiar with the subject but have only basic experience in executing strategies and tactics on the topic. This content typically covers the fundamentals and moves on to reveal more complex functions and examples.



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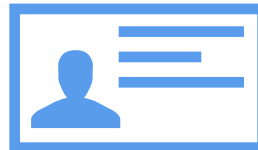
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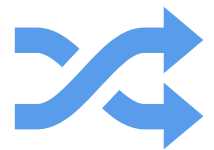
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CONTACTS



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THE MARKETER'S GUIDE TO COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE

By Corey Eridon

Corey Eridon manages the HubSpot Inbound Marketing Blog, creating content about SEO, social media, analytics, business blogging, marketing automation, and email marketing. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in English and History from Boston University. Before joining HubSpot, Corey worked as a marketer and consultant for businesses in both the B2B and B2C space, ranging in size from startup to the Enterprise.



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“ *Keep your friends close, and your ‘enemies’ closer.* ”

Effective marketing starts with understanding the buyer, and the fact that buyers shop differently today. That means our sales and marketing tactics need to follow that transformation, too. That’s something marketers dipping their toes in the digital and inbound space have already embraced.

What’s even better? When other companies in your industry are slow to adapt. I’m sure we’ve all seen – and are still seeing – these growing pains with industry competitors. That presents an opportunity to win big for early-adopters of inbound marketing techniques.

That’s why we think it’s important to stay abreast of what your competitors are doing; but not to let it veer you off your company’s marketing, product, or business strategy. In fact, harping on your competitors can distract you from meeting your larger goals. It wouldn’t make sense just to compete on a micro-level with competitors ... for no real gain. But it is important to see when they’re putting their foot on the gas pedal, what they’re succeeding at, what they’re failing at, and what they’re experimenting with.

You know, keep your friends close, and your “enemies” closer.

CHAPTER 1

TACTICS: HOW TO PERFORM A COMPETITIVE MARKETING AUDIT



This section will discuss the tactics you'll need to audit your competitors' marketing. This is excellent for a marketing manager or director who is trying to assess how their marketing execution stacks up against industry competitors. If your marketing role is far removed from day-to-day execution, I recommend a quick scan of this section, at which point you might want to move on to the next chapter of this ebook that covers more strategic aspects of competitive analysis.



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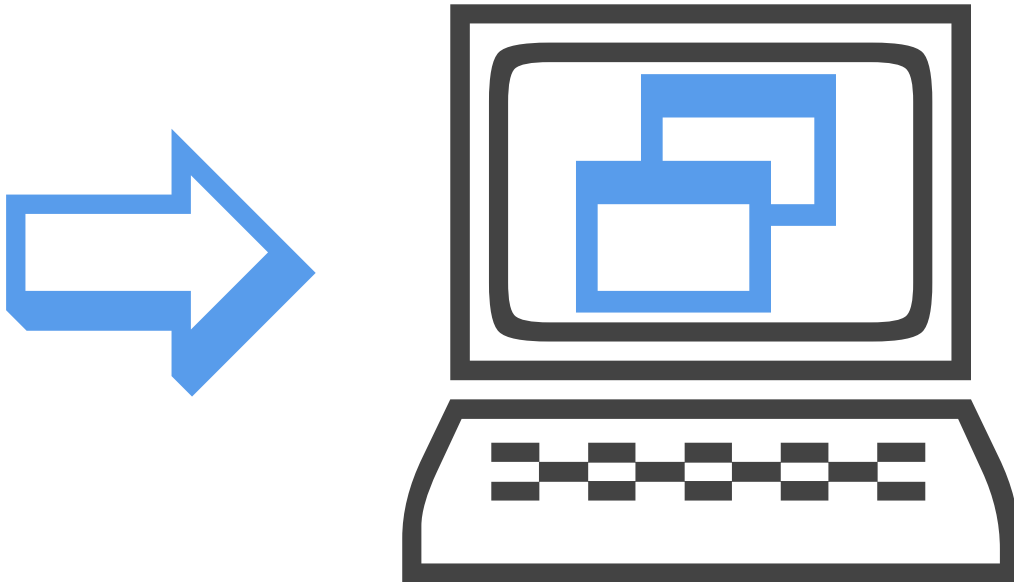




HOW TO AUDIT YOUR COMPETITOR'S CONTENT STRATEGY

.....

Start with a website audit:



Begin by performing a website audit of your competitors with the aim of determining where content is housed on their site. This stage requires the most “poking around” to find what you’re looking for, but here’s a structured approach to help you be more efficient.

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Visit the site's navigation to determine where content might be housed. Clear indications of content repositories are navigation and sub-navigation items like 'Resource Center,'

'Case Studies,' or 'In the News.' Double check each section of the site's navigation – even if it doesn't seem like it would house content – to ensure you're not missing any important stockpiles. Continue to click through the navigation and sub-navigations, noting where on the site content is housed.

2

When you've completed this step – how long it will take depends on the breadth of the site -- return to the site's homepage and continue to explore.

Scroll to see if there are any other places content would be housed that weren't in the main navigation or linked in the sub-navigation. A common hiding spot is below the fold on the homepage, or in a footer on the homepage. The bigger the site, the more likely it is you'll encounter important content repositories in this section of the navigation.

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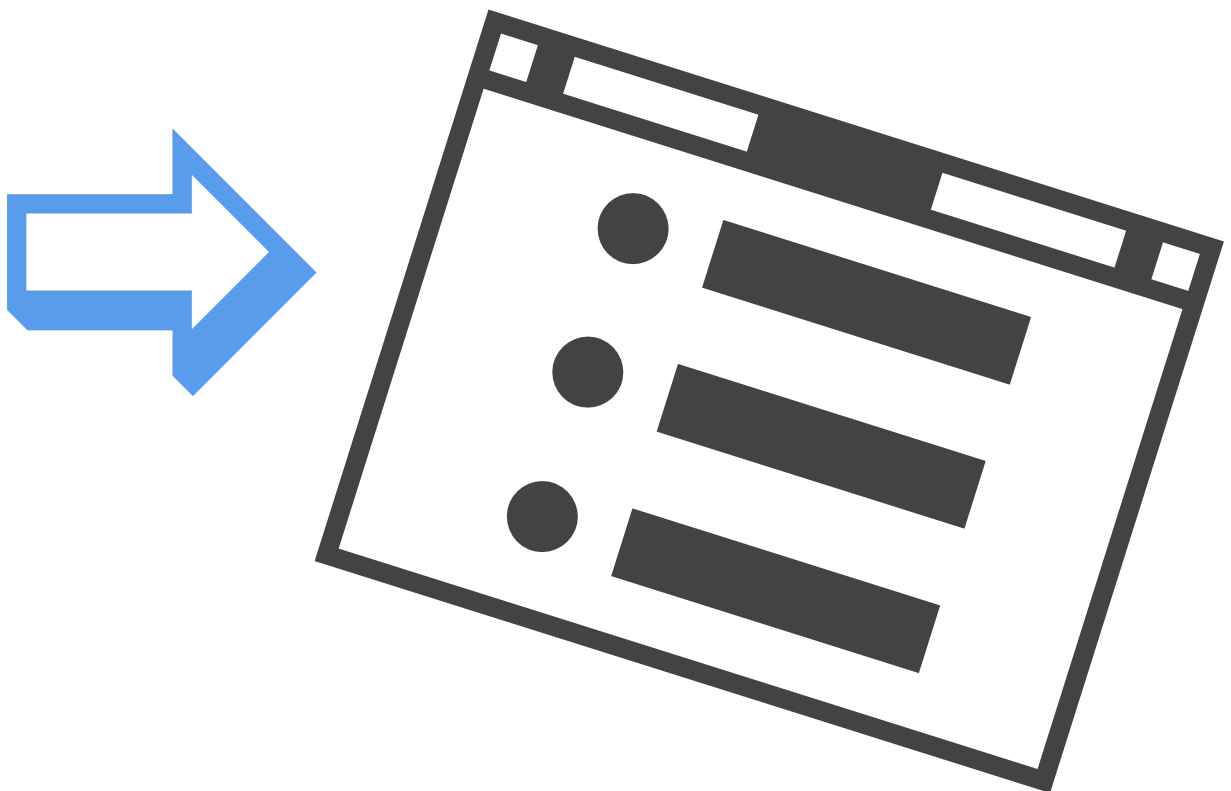




3

Finally, check out your competitor's sitemap, which is often found in the bottom navigation.

These are created for search engines to more easily crawl and index a website's content, but some companies choose to publish an HTML version, as well. This will help you fill in any blanks you may have missed during these exercises.



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Here is a list of the content asset types you may encounter while performing this website audit. Simply note the URLs on which these assets are housed, but keep in mind that during the next step of your content audit, you may come across more places on the site where content is housed.

- Blog posts
- White papers
- Ebooks
- Videos
- Webinars
- Podcasts
- Slide decks
- Static visual content (i.e. infographics, cartoons)

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- FAQs
- Feature articles
- Press releases
- Kits
- Case studies
- Buyer guides
- Use cases
- Data sheets

Tip: Be sure to research whether your competitor has more than one blog, and if so, note how those blogs are used. For example, many companies maintain a product blog or a support blog that's separate from their marketing blog. Knowing the object of your competitor's blogs will obviously change your assessment of their marketing prowess and your understanding of their marketing strategy.

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Audit your competitor's content:



Now that you know where content is published on your competitor's site, it's time to begin the heavy lifting phase of your content audit. This is the most time-consuming part of your competitive content analysis, but it will give you the best indication of how you stack up to their content creation efforts.

There are three things you'll want to tally in your audit: Quantity, frequency, and distribution of topics discussed.

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Quantity:

Determine the quantity of each content asset type published. How many blog posts has this competitor published? Case studies? White papers? Ebooks? This will help you gauge whether you're up against a formidable content arsenal that will require a giant content creation team to surpass, or whether your content development is on par (or further along) than your competitor.



Frequency:

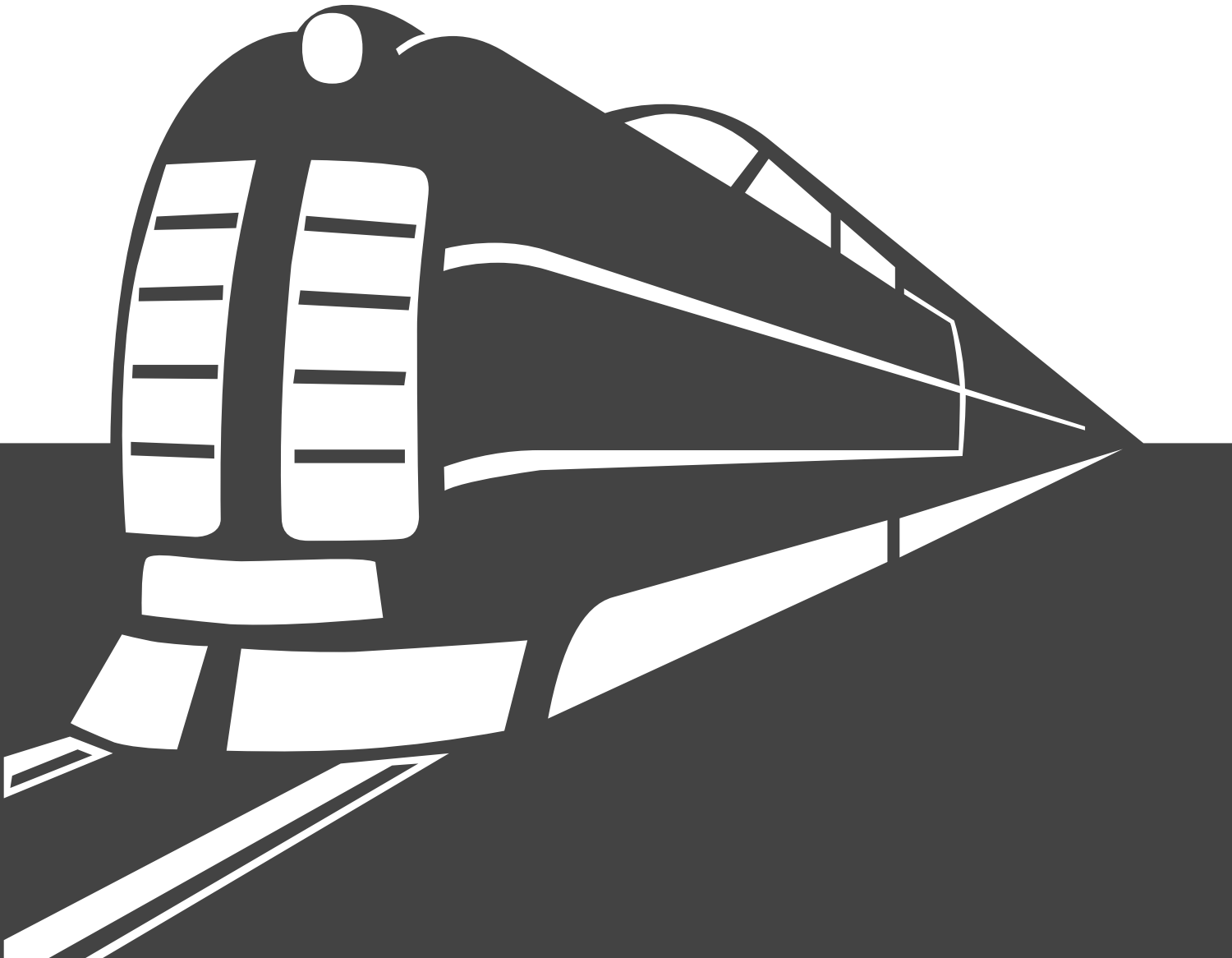
How often is each content asset type published? Do your competitors publish blog posts twice a week? Twice a day? How frequently do they come out with a new ebook? While not everything will have a publish date on it, do your best to gauge their publishing frequency for each content asset type, so you know how well they're doing keeping up a consistent publishing volume.

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Distribution:

What breadth of topics are they covering in their content? You don't need to break this down by content asset type, but if you find it helpful you can. For example, you might want to know what topics they're covering in their lead generation materials. This will help zero in on your competition's lead generation focuses. The topics discussed in blog posts will offer insight on their areas of SEO and thought leadership focus.





Tip:

Leverage free site crawling tools to help appraise the URLs on a competitor's website. You can export these crawls into a spreadsheet to perform your analysis from there. Use this to determine topic and content asset types either based on URL architecture and keywords, or by clicking through to the URLs.

For example, you would know this URL houses a case study without having to click through:

www.hubspot.com/customer-case-studies/bid/31264/Education-Success-Story-Davidson-Academy

Similarly, you could gauge the topic from URL architecture, particular in blog post URLs. Take this URL for example, which we can tell is about Facebook from the URL slug: blog.hubspot.com/blog/tabid/6307/bid/31633/The-Complete-Guide-to-Setting-Up-the-New-Facebook-Page-Design.aspx



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Evaluate content quality:



Now comes the subjective component of your competitive content audit. While you can't evaluate every single piece of content published by a competitor, you should select a sample of content offerings from each asset type your competitor publishes. To be thorough, make sure to span a variety of published topics. Then, evaluate how good that content is.

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SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN EVALUATING THEIR CONTENT QUALITY:

How accurate is their content?

Are there spelling and grammatical errors?



How in-depth does the content go?

Does it just scratch the surface at an introductory level, or does it go into advanced concepts?



What tone do they adopt in their content?



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Is their content structured in a readable way?

Are they making use of bullets, bold headings, and numbered lists?



Is their content largely gated, form-free, or a mix?

Which content assets do they put behind forms?



Who is writing their content?

Do they have multiple contributors? Are they all internal, or are some of them guest contributors? What are their areas of expertise (do some social media sleuthing)? Are their authors thought leaders? Senior or executive management?

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Content engagement:



You can also gauge the quality of the content based on how readers share and interact with it. Which topics resonate most? How engaged are readers with the content? Are people tweeting about some topics more than others? Sharing long form content on LinkedIn? Are they responding heavily to your competitor's Facebook posts about certain content? Are people commenting on any particular blog posts? What's the sentiment around their responses – is it positive, negative, or a mix?

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Blog structure:



Pay attention to the way your competitor's blog is structured. A site's blog is one of its most important inbound marketing assets, so determining how well it is structured will give you keen insight into how much effort they are putting into it – and how successful their efforts are.

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Look for the following in your evaluation:



Social Media Follow & Share Buttons:

Are they giving readers the opportunity to share their content for greater reach? Do they ask readers to follow them on their social media networks to consume more content?

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Content Categorization:

Do they categorize the content on their blog with tags that denote different topics? This helps readers identify content most applicable to their interests.



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Bylines or Bios:

How do they cite their content creators? Can readers learn who the writer of the blog content is, or is content anonymous? Are they touting big name authors?



[How to Be a Spammer in 20 Simple Steps - HubSpot](#)

[blog.hubspot.com/.../How-to-Be-a-Spammer-in-20-Simple-...](#)



by Corey Eridon - in 115 Google+ circles - More by Corey Eridon

Jan 4, 2013 – Learn how to be the best **spammer** on the internet, in just **20 steps!**

How to Be a Spammer in 20 Simple Steps

Posted by **Corey Eridon**

Fri, Jan 04, 2013 @ 03:00 PM

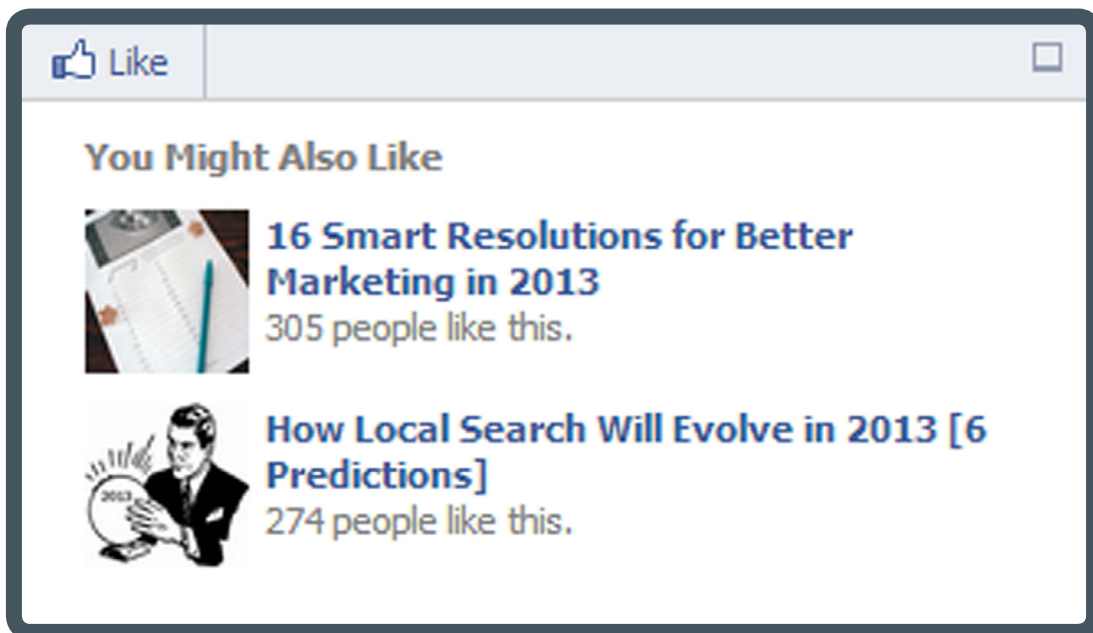
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Content Promotion:

How good are they at moving readers through the blog? Do they surface other content that is relevant for readers to consume?



After asking yourself these questions across all the content asset types your competitors publish, generate a grade that you think exemplifies how good their content is. Yes, it is subjective, but you'll likely find a wide range on the quality scale as you research more competitors. Having this quality measure will help you compare competitors among one another, and with your own content.

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AUDITING A COMPETITOR'S SEO

Establish the SEO focus:

The effectiveness of your competitor's content – and overall marketing – hinges not only on quality and frequency of publishing, but also on how well optimized their content and website is for search. You can perform a more qualitative assessment of your competitor's SEO by evaluating how keywords are used in the content samples you selected.

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Look for keyword optimization in the following areas:

- Page title
- URL architecture
- Title
- Header tags
- Copy's keyword density
- Image ALT text
- Use of internal linking



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Website	Website Grade	Traffic Rank	Indexed Pages	Linking Domains	Facebook Fans	Twitter Followers
www.acme-corp.com	98	6.5	655	3,190	16,946	62,682
www.vandelay.com	96	6.0	7,774	1,820	1,804	9,859
www.initech.com	98	5.9	5,231	2,130	2,723	4,677
www.hanso.com	99	6.7	259	85,020	48,849	16,043
www.oceanicair.com	98	7.0	235	16,043	65,855	4,950
www.lexcorp.com	98	4.5	2,444	893,000	4,950	1,766

You can also use several free and paid tools to help you more comprehensively evaluate your competitors' search engine optimization. [If you're a HubSpot customer](#), for example, you can input competitor sites into our Benchmarks and Competitors tool for a more quantitative and in-depth approach, giving you insight into meaty data like the number of inbound links they have coming to their site, the pages being indexed in the SERPs, and their traffic rank. These are all key indicators of both their SEO chops, and the quality of their content. You'll also notice, you get a little help with Step 5 with this tool, which calculates a competitor's social reach, too – another critical component of good SEO.

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AUDITING YOUR COMPETITOR'S SOCIAL MEDIA

.....

Research the integration of social media into content strategy:

Social media is innately linked to content strategy, so it's crucial to gauge how your competitors are using social media.



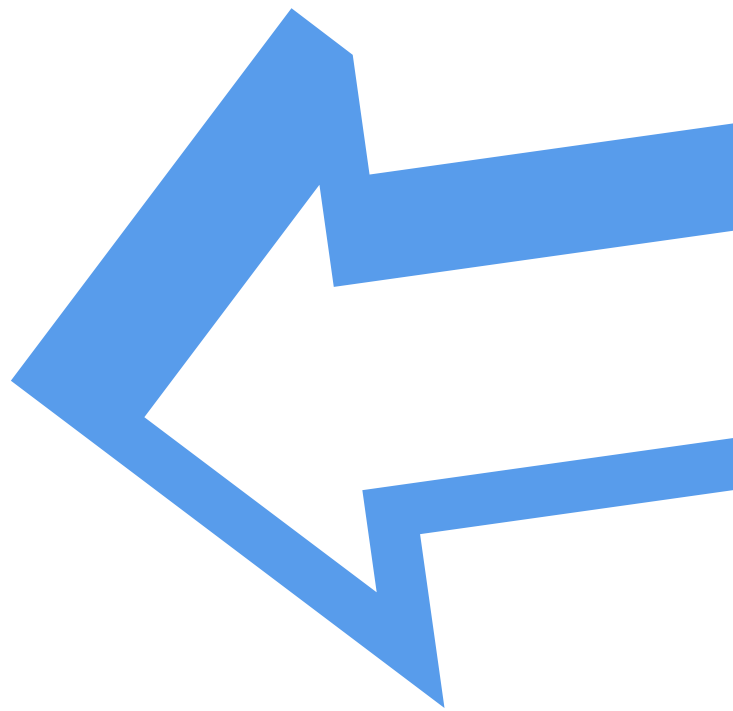
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Visit the following social media sites to determine if your competitors have a presence:

- Facebook
- Twitter
- LinkedIn
- YouTube
- Google+
- Pinterest



Perhaps not all of these are relevant to your business – but it's better that you double check, right? If a competitor is using a social network creatively and effectively, when you thought that channel wasn't applicable to your brand or industry, you might want to get in on the game.

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Quantitative social media data to collect:

For each competitor's social network, make a note of the following:

- Number of fans/followers
- Posting frequency and consistency of publishing
- Content engagement
- Content virality (such as shares, repins, or retweets)

You should also browse their homepage, blog, and other main pages of their website for social media follow and share buttons to determine how seriously they take social media marketing. If they're using counters, indicate how widely their content is shared, and on which social networks.

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“ *90% of US marketers claimed social media as part of their strategy in 2012.* ”

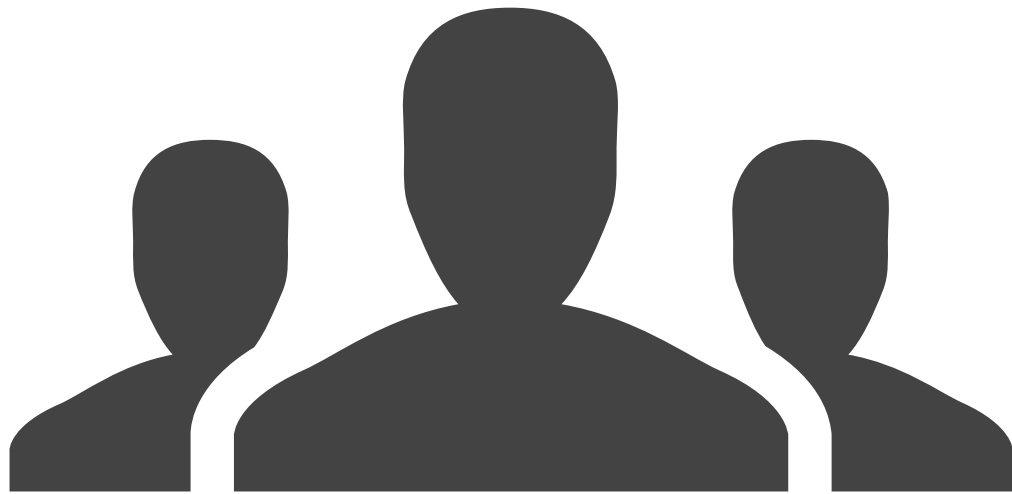
When asked back in '07 how many marketers were using social media in their marketing, only 20% of marketers raised their hand. [Fast forward](#) to today, and a whopping 90% of US marketers claimed social media as part of their marketing strategy in 2012.

That's why it's critical to consider some of the following qualitative measures, alongside the quantitative measures we just reviewed. Although most companies are “on” social media, that doesn't mean they're using it correctly.

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Qualitative measures to assess include:

- **What kind of content is published?**
Landing pages for lead generation? Visual content for more engagement?
- **How much content is original to your competitor?**
Versus shared from a partner or other source?
- **What is the tone of the content?**
What is the tone of the community manager's interactions with fans and followers?
- **How frequently do fans interact with their content?**
- **How frequently does your competitor interact with fans and followers?**

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AUDITING YOUR COMPETITOR'S SALES AND CUSTOMER SERVICE

Appraise the buying and support process:

There are two methods by which you can thoroughly assess your competitor's sales and customer service. One requires a monetary investment, the other requires some quality time drilling into your CRM and/or working with your sales organization.



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1

First, let's cover the “outsourced” version – an investment in a secret shopping program.

If you're unfamiliar with the concept, the idea is that a third-party business can act as a prospect or customer with the aim of discovering whether your sales and customer service teams are performing to the quality standards you've set. Many organizations invest in secret shopping programs to check up on their own sales and customer service teams. It helps to self-identify the strengths and weaknesses in your sales and customer service practices so you can improve. Some organizations have started to turn those programs outward, applying the methodology to competitors to gather similar intelligence. This method is not for everyone, and some may even feel a little sneaky doing it. We get that, but it is a tool that some companies are using to rate their competitors' processes without their own biases.

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2

If a secret shopping program is not for you, consider this alternative:

Dive into your CRM and ask your existing customer base why they switched to you. This strategy is, conveniently, free! And it arguably provides much more effective insight into your specific competitive advantages than a secret shopping program.

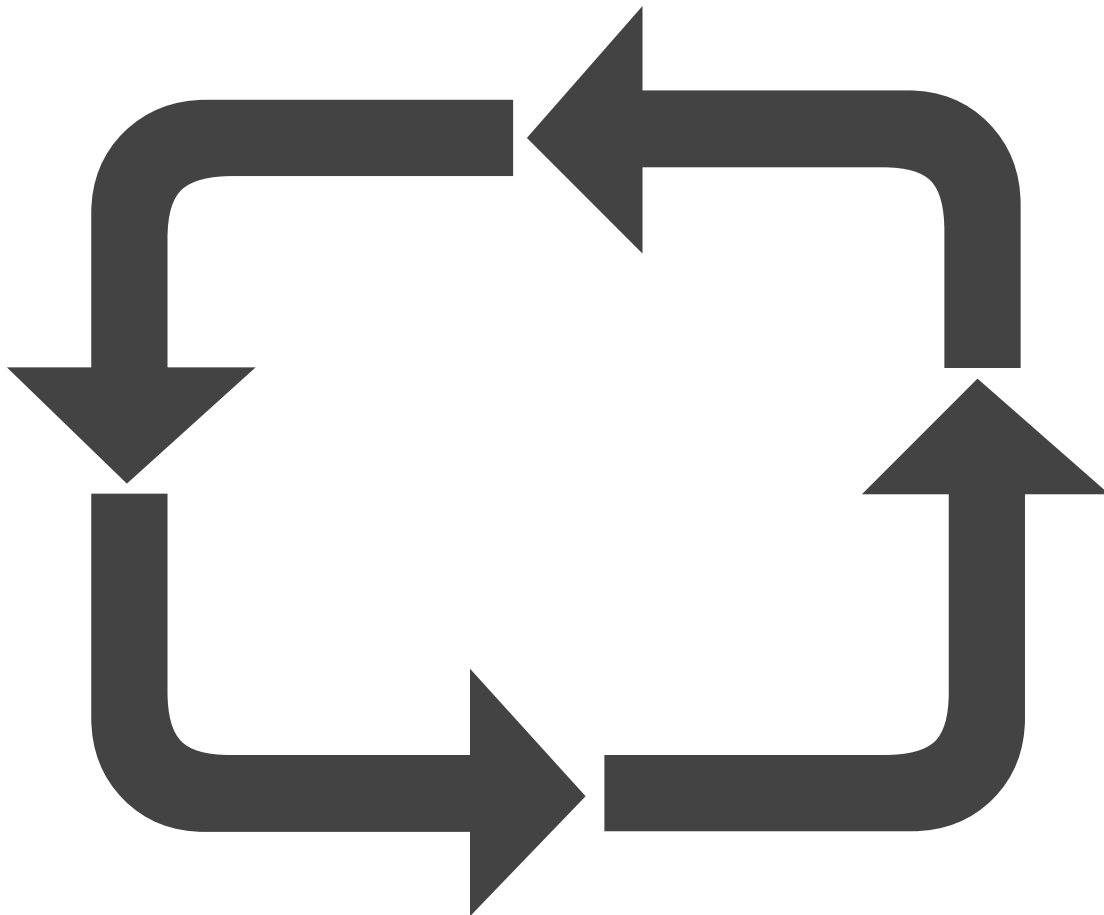
Run a report in your CRM or marketing software to pull all of your current leads and customers that came to you from a competitor. If you don't have this intelligence now, this is where strong alignment between Sales and Marketing comes in – ask leads (either via a form field, or during 1:1 sales conversations) to identify their current service provider or past products they've used. If they identify a competitor, ask your sales team to learn more about why they're considering a switch. If they've already taken the leap to you, find out why they decided to do so.

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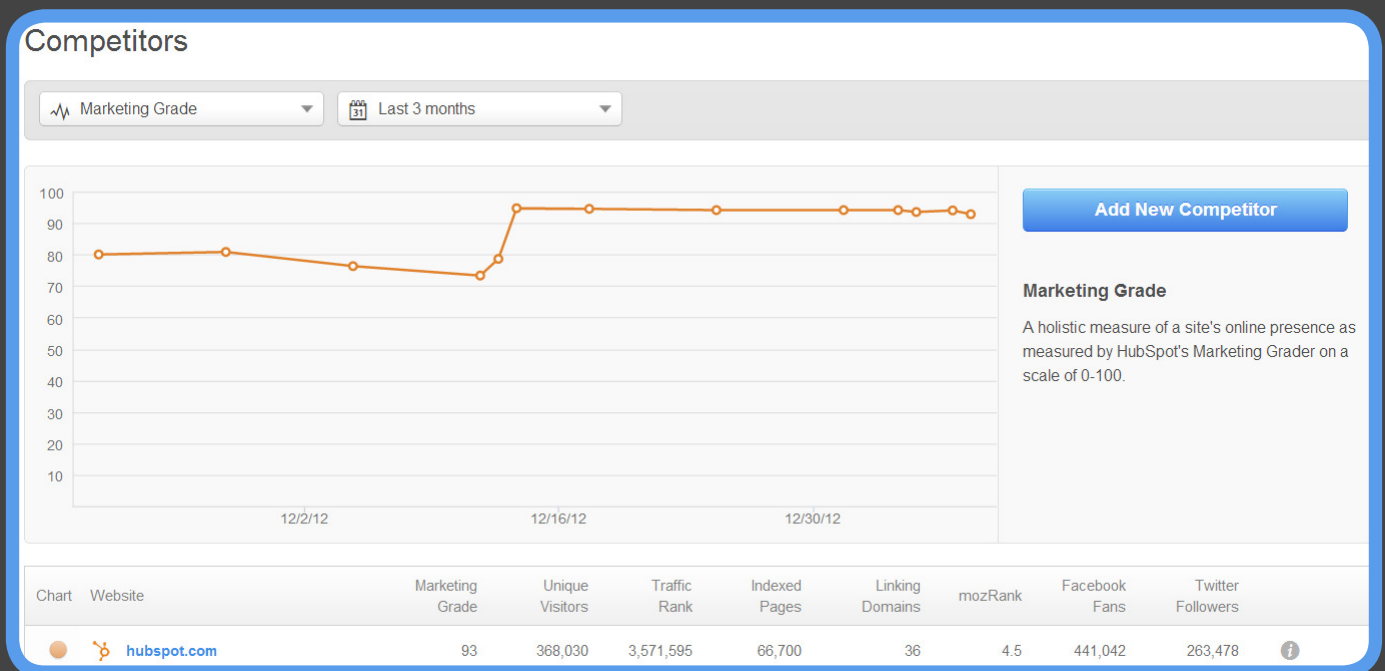
Asking open-ended questions like these are good for sales qualification, anyway – it helps reps build value around your product or service, and identify what leads value. You might even consider asking questions you typically include in an NPS survey as a starting point for discussion. After you've accumulated a significant sample, look for trends around what your competitor is doing well, where they're falling short, how they operate, and what they value.



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TRACK YOUR COMPETITORS WITH HUBSPOT



HubSpot Competitors makes it easy to see how your efforts are paying off over time. Some HubSpot users have been so successful with inbound marketing that they've surpassed companies they benchmarked a year or two ago, and have set their sites on new aspirations. Specifically, you can:

- ✓ Track up to ten competitors
- ✓ Compare important performance metrics
- ✓ See detailed reports of competitors

CHAPTER 2

STRATEGY: HOW TO ANALYZE YOUR COMPETITOR'S MARKETING



This section of the ebook will discuss how to analyze all of the competitive intelligence you gathered in the previous section. This is most appropriate for marketing directors and senior marketing executives, who are usually more removed from the execution of day-to-day marketing initiatives, but are still involved in strategy and positioning your brand in the larger industry landscape.



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ANALYZING YOUR COMPETITIVE INTELLIGENCE TO TEASE OUT STRATEGIC INSIGHT

The problem with just looking at tactics is ... you don't know why what they did worked, or if it worked. Once you have completed your data compilation, look at your competitors' marketing from a strategic standpoint: What is working? What can you learn from the data that's been collected? What can you use to inform your marketing strategy, and what do you leave behind?



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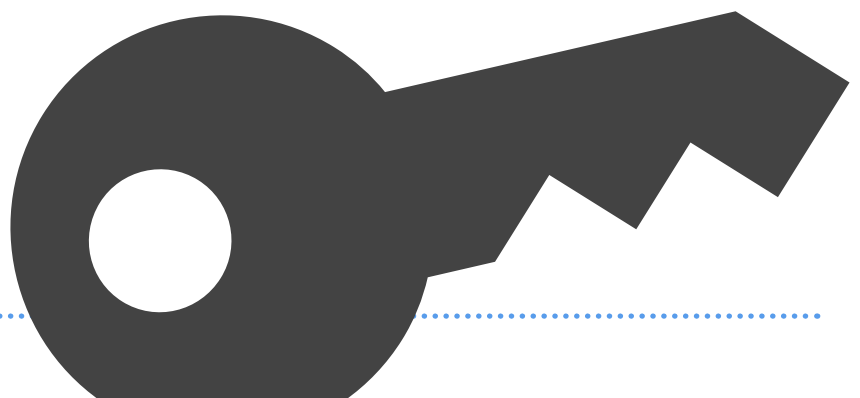




First, determine if you're ahead, behind, or on pace with any of your competitors, and in what areas. Let's take the data from your hypothetical audit here. Do you want to know if you are losing in the SERPs to a major competitor? The first place you might look is at a comparison of your content publishing volume. Is your competitor outpacing you in content creation volume? If not, move on to assess your content quality – is the quality of their content higher than yours (remember, a qualitative assessment was performed across several elements of your competitor's marketing)? These are the kinds of decision trees you should be walking through when handed competitive intelligence data about competitors' marketing. Once you have these answers, place them right alongside your own marketing to see how you measure up.

The key, of course, is acting upon your analysis. You might need to hire more content creators to start competing on sheer volume of content. If your competitor's success seems to be stemming from content quality, or if their highest performing content discusses certain subject matters that you aren't addressing, your next step may be to 1) authorize the hire of more senior writers that can elevate your brand's content quality, or 2) authorize the hire of subject matter experts that can elevate your brand's thought leadership around specific topics that you need to establish credibility in your space.

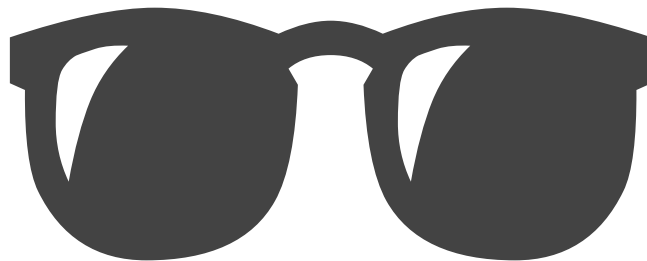
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POSITIONING YOUR FINDINGS ALONGSIDE INDUSTRY TRENDS

Consider new trends
competitors are embracing:



Identifying and auditing what competitors in your industry are leveraging in their marketing is how you'll discover what you need to adjust – or not adjust – in your company's strategic positioning of products, services, and overall messaging. It's also a way you can assess how effective new strategies are for your industry. To do this, take the information gathered using the tactics in your competitor's audit, and overlay it with what's going on in your space.

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For example, do you notice a competitor has just set up a business account on, say, Pinterest? That's pretty interesting. What's even more interesting, however, is checking back three months later to see a presence 3X more robust than the one they started with. Knowing Pinterest as a marketing tactic is being explored across industries, and a competitor is investing more in it after their initial toe-dipping a few months prior, is an indication that they're probably seeing something from it. That could mean a couple of things for you:

- 1** You might want to start using Pinterest, too.
- 2** The subject matters they're publishing on Pinterest are reaching an intended audience, people you might want to be reaching in some manner, as well.
- 3** These aren't people you want to reach, or subject matters you specialize in – your competitor may be exploring another product or service line, or establishing a new value proposition.

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DRILLING DOWN INTO MESSAGING

Read between the lines for new positioning or partnerships:



How a competitor feels and thinks about important topics in your industry, and positions themselves on those issues, is critical for you to understand so you, your team, and your sales organization can properly position your brand in the marketplace.

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The data you've retrieved from your content audit can tell you some of this. For instance, from simply signing up for email marketing content and reading public-facing content they've published, you can gain a very strong understanding of their positioning. Keep in mind, often competitors will automatically remove competitors' email addresses from their lists, so you may need to sign up from a personal email address.

But you can dig a little deeper than just perusing content, whether online or via email. Speak with your industry contacts – if you're competing in the same space, you all probably run in similar circles– to understand who competitors are forging relationships with. With whom are competitors investigating partnerships? Who are their co-marketing partners? While it might seem many of these relationships are just to leverage one another's reach, partnerships are typically more strategic than that. Some will reaffirm a competitor's current positioning, but others will indicate future positioning, and product and service offerings they're considering introducing. When you come upon these tidbits of juicy intelligence, it often behooves marketers to strengthen their own marketing messaging in preparation for such competitive launches – if it's an area in which they intend to compete and will be co-existing.



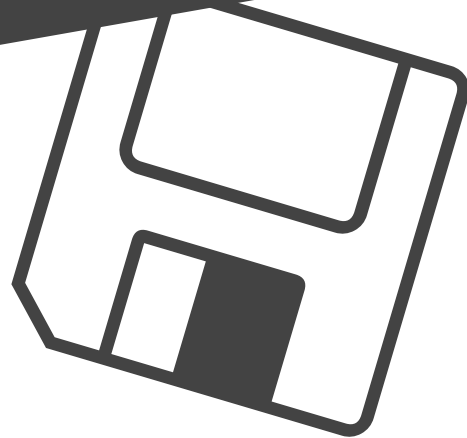
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MARKETING SOPHISTICATION

Use competitors' technology as a leading indicator:

Determining the software and technology competitors are using can give you a final touch of insight into their level of marketing sophistication.



For instance, is a competitor using a CRM? Marketing software? How sophisticated is the marketing software – is it a basic ESP? Does it provide full-fledged automation? If so, can you identify if their campaigns utilize that automation to its fullest capabilities, or have they purchased technology that's more than they need for their level of marketing sophistication? Knowing what marketing technology a competitor has at their disposal can clue you into future plans – whether that means they're planning for fast-paced growth, or keeping their marketing activities status-quo.

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CHAPTER 3

MONITORING AND BENCHMARKING



Even after your audit and analysis is over, you'll need to continue to monitor your competitors' marketing performance – and how yours compares – periodically so you can benchmark your performance. There are two tools, one free, one paid, to help you do this. We'll start with the free tool, first.



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MARKETING GRADER & HUBSPOT'S COMPETITORS

HubSpot's Marketing Grader

Grade your marketing. Make it better. Outpace your peers.

Enter your website address and we'll work up a full report on how you're doing with your marketing online.



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Ongoing benchmarking data will give you a better directional standpoint from which to move. We've set up a free tool called [Marketing Grader](#) that allows you to monitor and benchmark the following data points for you and your competitors, to make monitoring and comparison simple over time:



Overall effectiveness of competitors' marketing (with a grade that considers their top-of-the-funnel marketing, middle-of-the-funnel marketing, and analytics)



Unique website visitors



Traffic rank



Indexed pages



Linking domains



mozRank



Facebook fans



Twitter followers



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Set up your Marketing Grader account for free to monitor this information for yourself and your competitors, and see how your marketing activities change and improve over time. Or, if you're looking to do some more detailed data display, you can use [HubSpot software's Competitors tool](#), which will allow you to track up to 10 competitors, and provide head-to-head comparison reports of you and one competitor -- helpful for businesses competing on multiple product or service lines.

Regardless which tool you select, you should come back and monitor your progress on a quarterly basis, or even more frequently, if your competitors are very active.

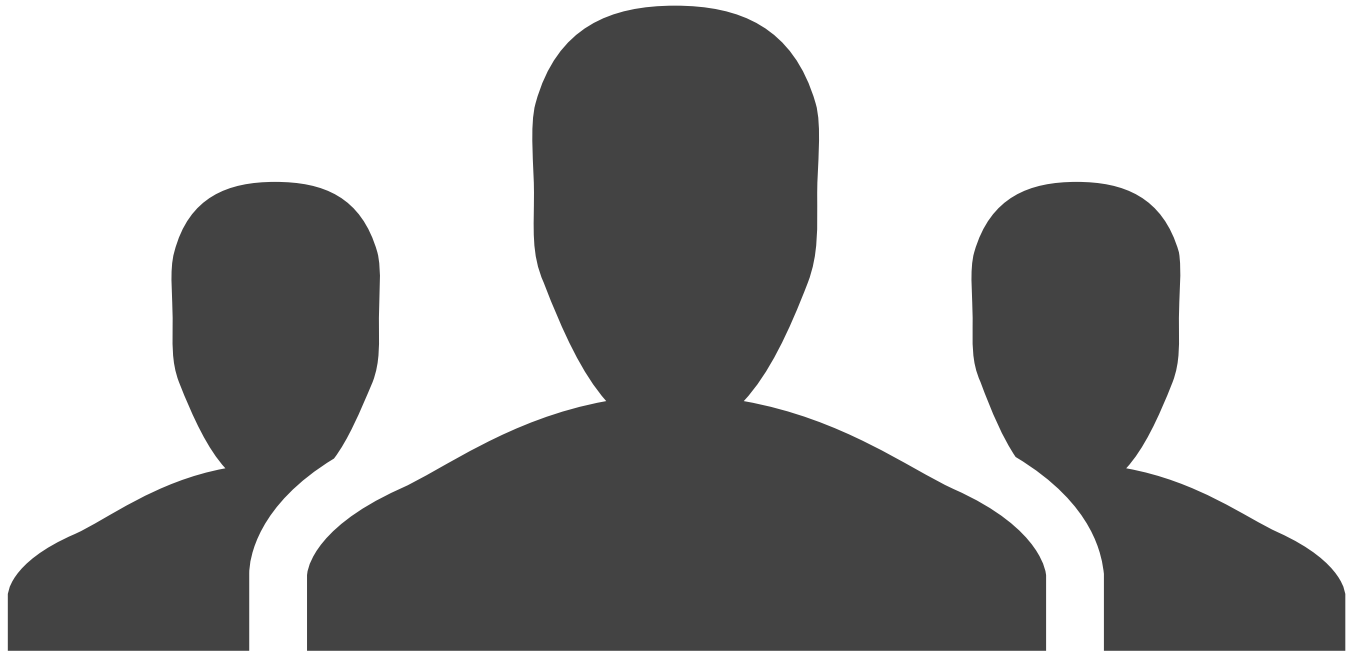
Top of the Funnel ✔ Top 3 Action Items	81%
Middle of the Funnel ✔ 1 Action Item	75%
Analytics ★ Nothing left to do here (see report)	100%

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CONCLUSION AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



It's important for marketers and business owners to perform some competitive analysis to orient their own marketing with their competitors', develop new marketing tactics, and sometimes, guide strategic marketing decisions. But remember, it is not productive to harp on every action competitors take. Your business, and your marketing, is successful because of how you've differentiated yourself from your competitors. Using competitive intelligence to dictate your entire marketing strategy will only serve to guide you off course, when really, it should be used to keep your eyes on the right course for your business.



TRACK YOUR COMPETITORS WITH HUBSPOT

HubSpot's competitor tools makes it easy to see how your efforts are paying off over time. [Request a demo of the HubSpot software](#) to see how your competitors are faring.



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