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## How To Analyze A Competitor's Website

By James Mahony

Do you ever feel like you know just enough about SEO to be dangerous? Let's see if we can fill in some of the gaps with the latest info from SEO experts.

When you analyze a competitors website, you need to make sure you're prepared to do the job correctly. Competitors' websites, if analyzed properly, can give you all sorts of information that you can use to increase the traffic and the popularity of your site. You can use these sites to analyze your own market. If a site gets a lot of hits it has to be doing something right. Check out where it is ranked, what key words it uses, how it is formatted, and what you can do to exemplify the good and filter out the bad. Also be sure to keep copyright laws in mind as a copyright infringement suit is never good for you, your site, or your blood pressure.

### Identifying the Leaders.

You need to start off by identifying the major players - a good place to do this is Yahoo's directory. It's not as comprehensive as it once was, but it's good if you're looking for the major players. You may want to print out the directory to take a closer look. Look for large companies, as well as innovative approaches and new products. Also use this examination as an attempt to identify the niche markets that the major players have not identified and exploited. If you can find new niches you're basically set as far as traffic goes.

Also consider that since Yahoo!'s directory is the place that you look to find the big players, it may be a good place to get listed in order to become a big player. These little associations are important if you want to start to attain more and more traffic and conquer a niche or category. Try to identify all places that the big dogs hang out and start hanging out there. It's all about who you know in this business so bigger is better. You might not be ready to play with the big dogs, but the only way to get there is to sit down and give it a shot.

Sites like Media Metrix 500 can tell you which companies get the most traffic, and you can learn about the relative traffic by using Alexa. Alexa is a free add-on to your browser that ranks the traffic to each site you visit, telling you whether it's in the top 100, the top 1000, the top 10,000, and so on. This gives

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you a rough idea of where your competitors are in the pecking order.

Scrutinize the Leaders.

The next step is to study the top 5 or 10 competitors very closely. There is a lot that can be learned by looking at competitors website and analyzing them. These are the things that you should look for.

1. Make sure you check to see what products or services they offer, and note anything that's different from your own offerings. Look for gaps that you could fill.

So far, we've uncovered some interesting facts about SEO. You may decide that the following information is even more interesting.

2. Think about the look, feel and functionality of their website.

3. See what advertising campaigns and offers they're running.

4. Look at their strengths and weaknesses, from the customer's point of view.

5. See if you can figure out their strategy.

When you're dealing with publicly traded companies, you can often get detailed information from their SEC filings. Write down the names of their key players and then look for any interviews and speeches they might have made about their website.

Look for Strengths, Vulnerabilities, and Gaps.

Now, summarize the information you've found into a few sentences for each competitor, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each one. Note strategies that are going to be necessary to counter their offering - these will depend on your own website's strengths. If you're small, then you'll need to be resourceful to exploit their weaknesses.

With this research, you can create a marketing plan. Be sure to include how you intend to deal with competition, and what steps you think you'll need to take for you site to come out on top. Once you've finished analyzing your competitors, you need to consider whether it would be better not to compete at all, and find a less-saturated market.

Don't get frightened away prematurely, though - make sure you know what you're getting into before you start, and don't let big companies intimidate you. Remember that you can move faster than they can! All you have to do is offer your customers things they can't find anywhere else. That's how things stand right now. Keep in mind that any subject can change over time, so be sure you keep up with the latest news.

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### **Internet Nielsen Ratings**

**By Bryan Brandenburg**

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What if you were able to have access to your competitor's web statistics? What if you knew how much traffic they had, the average number of page views, what other sites their visitors went to? What if you could tell how successful a campaign was or if their recent press release had any impact? Would that be a strategic advantage?

The Nielsen Ratings of the Internet

There is an incredible marketing research tool called the Alexa Toolbar that you can find at [Alexa.com](http://Alexa.com). Alexa is owned by Amazon and is essentially the Nielsen Ratings for the Internet.

Relative Traffic Rankings

When you install the Alexa Toolbar you will be able to see a ranking of every important website on the Internet. It's a relative ranking and biased towards the US but it's incredibly useful information. A traffic ranking of 10,000 means that there are 9,999 websites more popular and every other website on the Internet is less popular. So if your competitor is claiming they are the most popular website of their kind on the Internet you'll be able to judge for yourself. No Data means that although the website may have some visitors, none of them use the toolbar or it's not significant enough to measure.

Historical Traffic Trends Shown Graphically

As a consumer you'll be able to determine how popular a website is and if "they're real". Alexa shows historical trends graphically for the top 100,000 websites on the Internet so you can see if a website is

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getting more or less popular. You can even do a graphical comparison between two websites, like you and your competitor, to see how you're doing. The site also details reach per million surfers and average number of page views per visitor in both table form and graphically.

### Other Statistics

Alexa also has a variety of other useful statistics about websites. It lists the number of important links to the website which is a factor when it comes to Search Engine Optimization. This would not include most "link farms" and relatively less important website links. It also shows where the visitors are spending their time on a website and what other websites the visitors are surfing.

### Top Website Listings

There is also top website listings and top category listings for a number of vertical markets. Want to find out the top sports sites, business sites or even photography, it's all here. This is really useful when you're looking at the dominant players in your market and trying to emulate the best in your category.

### Install the Toolbar Now

Although anyone can get the great information on Alexa just by going to the website, you'll want to install the toolbar for real-time analysis of every website you visit. Not only will you be able to determine the relative ranking of every website you visit, but you'll instantly see related websites that may aid in finding whatever you're looking for. You can download the toolbar now at [www.alexa.com](http://www.alexa.com).



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