

7 Ways to Track Your Competition Online

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The ancient Chinese wise man, Sun Tzu, once said: "If you are ignorant of both your enemy and yourself, then you are a fool and certain to be defeated in every battle." SunTzu was talking about the military battlefield and not the business battlefield. But if Sun Tzu was a businessman today, he would be thrilled with all the information he could find out about his enemies on the internet.

Business owners have traditionally turned to their marketing department for information on competitors. Now they are better off turning to their webmaster. In fact, one of the first things your webmaster should be asking you is who your top three competitors are.

This kind of information comes at a price. Run a Google search on "competitive intelligence" and over 11,000 results show up. There are literally thousands of consultants who will help you identify and gather information on the competition but it will cost you dearly. Save your money. Here are 7 ways you can be your own online intelligence gatherer and it won't cost anything but time. Because as another ancient wise man once said: "A fool and his money are soon parted."

Check Back Links

A recent survey by the Pew Research found that only 50 percent of internet users actually use a search engine everyday. So what is driving traffic to a website? The answer - back links. In other words, other sites that link to your competition. Find out the back links from your competitor's site and get linked from these sites as well. You will [increase your traffic](#) dramatically.

Look at Keywords

Take a look at the competition's keywords. This is easy information to get from sites like Key Word Density. Another way is to look at the code of their websites. This isn't difficult. Go to the site and click on "View" at the top of the browser, then click "Source" or "Page Source." A page of HTML code will open and the keywords will be revealed in the code near the top of the page.

Monitor Traffic

Just as you are monitoring unique visitors, length of stay, most viewed pages, and where visitors are coming from on your website, follow these same rules on your competitor's site. You can find this information by going to [Quantcast](#) or [Alexa](#).

Google Alerts

Google alerts allows users to set up alerts with keywords and phrases that trigger an email notification every time that word or phrase shows up on a site, blog or press release. For example, if you interested in a competitor, set up a Google alert on that company and their top executives and you will be notified every time they are mentioned online.

Monitor Twitter

It is time to get acquainted or re-acquainted with [Twitter](#) for your corporate spying. This is the place where industry buzz starts. It is where you hear the first low rumble of something that is about to happen. But you can't just watch, you have to participate. Try to update your Tweets on a daily basis. If you are too busy to do this, use TweetLater, one of the best apps out there for accomplishing this.

Monitor Movement

You can learn a lot about a company just by reading their "About Us" page and monitoring their job listings. If your competitor is an auto parts company and they just hired a new CEO with a background in marketing, that may be a clue about how they plan to increase sales. If a company has several listings for jobs in another state, chances are it is expanding or relocating there. If the online bios of the top executives are vague, you can research them on professional [networking sites](#) like LinkedIn or Plaxo.

RSS Feeds

If all this sounds like too many channels of information to monitor on a regular basis, RSS feeds are a good solution. Many experts are fans of feeds for intelligence gathering. You can keep up with industries, customers, and competitors by feeding things like Google Alerts, Twitter, and all of your other RSS feeds into one feed. [MySyndicaat](#) has very effective tools for doing this.

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