

Measuring Up to the Competition

From [Ana Rincon](#),
Your Guide to [Online Business / Hosting](#).
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Competitive Analysis Online

How do you make your online business stand out from the competition? A good way to start is to evaluate other online businesses that compete with you.

Competitive analysis is a standard practice that businesses should always undertake. In the online arena it is even more critical. Web sites can change so quickly that you have to keep a constant eye on what other sites are doing. Remember that customers can jump to your competitors' site with a single click.

- To start, identify any direct competitors that you are aware of.
- Next, use a few search engines to look for other companies that you may be unaware of. Use several variations of keywords for your search. Concentrate on sites that appear within the first three pages of results; they are the ones that are succeeding in the search engine game. Also, notice which companies are paying for placement on the search engines.
- Bookmark all the sites under a "Competitor" category in your browser for easy access when you update the analysis.
- I like to actually print out the sites and organize them in a three-ring binder for reference and notation, but use any method that works for you.
- Look closely at the sites and take note of the following items:

Overall Professionalism: Which sites impress you as being reputable and professional? Which ones look like start-ups? What made you feel that way about the site?

Site Content: Do all the sites have generally the same content? Do some have better or deeper information that would attract customers still in the research stage, i.e., whitepapers, FAQs, buyer's guides, newsletters?

Usability: How easy are the sites to navigate and/or buy from? If you sell products online, test the competitors' sites by trying to find a particular item with their catalog or search. Test their shopping carts (up until the actual purchase) to see what features they include.

Search Engine Ranking: Where do your competitors rank in the search results? Check their source code (in your browser, click on VIEW, SOURCE, then look for META KEYWORDS) to discover what keywords they are targeting.

Target Market: What market is your competitor targeting? You can often tell by the language used on the site. Can you identify a niche that the competitors are missing?

Features/Benefits: What features and benefits are your competitors emphasizing? Do you have a stand-out feature or service that they lack?

Offers and Promotions: How do the other sites promote their product or service? Can you get ideas for coupons, promotions, free trials, etc?

Innovations: As you examine the sites, you may identify other characteristics that set them apart, for better or worse, from other similar businesses.

How do you stack up? Now that you've scanned the competition, here's your opportunity to one-up them. Here are some possible strategies:

1. Look for an area where most or all competitors fall short. This could be ease of use, product features, promotions, etc. Consider making this element very strong on your site and using it as a competitive advantage.
2. Use the other sites as benchmarks. Make sure your site is as good as the best of them. Combine excellent elements from several sites into one great site (yours!)?