

THE HOW, WHAT AND WHY YOU SHOULD SPY ON COMPETITORS



How much do you really know about your competitors? Do you know what their strategies are, how well they're performing, what traffic their website is getting and what people like about them? As a business owner, you need to always stay one step ahead of the competition, and the best way to do is to monitor your competitors' online marketing activities. In this blog post, I'm going to go into the how, what and why you should spy on your competitors.

WHY SPY?

As I mentioned before, businesses need to be constantly aware of what their competitors are up to in order to grow and scale their business.

Competition is a good thing; it forces businesses to grow and evolve and it helps build better products and services for the consumer.

Monitoring your competitors is all about learning their strengths and their weaknesses, about what works and what doesn't. It's about learning and growing.

For example, spying would help you learn what type of content works best for your competitors, which you can then use to create better, more targeted content in the future.

Or, it can help you find the best places to advertise your business, by checking to see where your competitors are placing ads.

Basically, spying on your competitors is there to help you improve your business and get better results.

LILACH BULLOCK
GENERATE LEADS THAT CONVERT

It's not about being threatened by your competitors' presence in the marketplace; the truth is, except for very, very few companies around the world (and even those still struggle to keep up the pace), there will always be someone that is a little more successful than you are at something – maybe they're getting new leads more easily, or maybe they have a more engaged audience. But rest assured, they might also look at you and say "argh, why can't we have their traffic!"

Plus, it's very likely they're keeping an eye on you too...like, right now.

WHAT TO SPY ON

Now that we've gone through why spying on your competitors is so important, let's now look into all the different aspects that you should be spying on:

WEBSITE TRAFFIC



GENERATE LEADS THAT CONVERT

One of the first things that many of us want to know is...how much traffic are my competitors getting? Other marketing activities of theirs – social media, their blog and website, their ads – are clearly visible, but traffic is pretty much a mystery, so it's only natural that we really (like, *really*) want to know. But, there's more to traffic than that – here's what to look out for:

- Total traffic numbers: what type of traffic do they get on average?
- Monthly unique visitors: how much of their traffic is formed by unique visitors?
- Traffic sources: where is their traffic coming from, particularly the main sources?
- Traffic demographics: who is visiting their website? Where are they from and what are their interests and occupations?
- Time on site: they can get a lot of traffic, but if that traffic isn't actually spending time on the website, then it's either not the right traffic, or the website didn't deliver what it promised.

Look for consistency; if they have big occasional spikes of traffic, try to find out what their cause is – chances are, it's probably something like an ad somewhere online. If, however, they consistently get more traffic, try to find out why that's happening – is it where they promote their website? Is it the content?

SEO



Monitoring your competitors' SEO can help you improve your own search engine ranking and optimisation. When you learn more about the keywords they're bidding for, what backlinks they're getting and so on, you'll be better equipped to optimise your own website, as efficiently as possible.

Find out:

- What keywords they're ranking for: if your competitors have a better search engine ranking than you do, this very useful information can help you improve your own. See what organic and paid keywords they're ranking for and use this to inform your SEO keyword strategy.
- Their backlinks: which websites are linking to them? What new backlinks are they getting from quality websites and why? How can you get more similar backlinks as well?

All of this information will help improve your SEO – it can help you find great opportunities for backlinks and the best keyword options (based on what your competitors are using) for improving your search engine ranking.

Advertising



How much do you know about your competitors' online advertising strategy? Just like with search engine optimisation, keeping an eye on their advertising strategy can help you improve your own.

You can use different tools (you'll find them at the end of this post) to find out:

- Where they're advertising: what platforms they're using to advertise, where they've taken out a banner ad and so on. Should you also consider advertising on some of the platforms they're using?
- Best converting ads: which ads convert the best? What is it about their ad copy and visual content that got people to convert?
- Best converting landing pages: success is not just about the ad, but also about the copy; which landing pages convert the most?

Use all of this information you've gleaned from your competitors for your own marketing and advertising strategy. This way, you can go directly for the biggest and best publishers and platforms, and you can also improve your ads' copy so as to convert at a higher rate.

Social media



How popular are your competitors on social media?

Keeping an eye out on your competitors' social media activity can ultimately help you improve your own – but I'll get to that in a second.

First, how do you monitor their social media? You most likely already have a tool that you can use for this; for example, if you use a social media dashboard, it probably has a monitoring function which allows you to set up monitoring for certain keywords or users.

Use it to:

- Keep track of all the social networks your competitors are on: what are their most popular accounts? Should you consider joining other social networks, based on their overall performance?
- See what they're posting: what types of updates are they posting on their social profiles? Which ones get them the most engagement, the most shares and retweets?

You can use this information to learn from them and from their performance – but don't copy them – and improve the types of updates that you post.

- Check their followers and their engagement: how engaged are their followers? Why are they getting more/less engagement than you do?
- Keep an eye out on their followers and customers: by keeping an eye out on their followers, you might discover some opportunities for getting leads. For example, customers complaining about your competitors' service.
- Keep an eye on their ad campaigns: are they using social media ads, and if so, which types of ads? Most importantly, how successful are their ads? This can help you discover better ways to advertise your business on social media.

When it comes to social media, you should try to look beyond vanity metrics like follower numbers, and instead focus on actionable metrics. For example, if a particular competitor is getting a lot of engagement on their updates, consistently, that can help you gain some important insights: what types of updates work well, what gets people to share and comment and so on. If there are any big spikes in numbers, it's quite possible it's because they paid for ads to boost a post.

LILACH BULLOCK
GENERATE LEADS THAT CONVERT

Website/blog content



You should also monitor your competitors' website, and most importantly, their blog content. This can help inform and improve your own content strategy for your website and blog.

To keep track of them, you can simply visit their website regularly; or, better yet, use an RSS reader (some examples in the tools section at the end of this post) where you can follow as many blogs and websites as you like and get their latest posts automatically. You can then also order all of your competitors into one category, so it doesn't mix with all your other news and sources.

Keep an eye out on:

- What types of content they publish: are your competitors posting different types of content (infographics, videos, how to guides, etc.)? But most importantly, how successful are their posts? Which ones get the most attention? Use this knowledge to help you improve your own blog
- Social media shares: which blog posts get the most shares? Are they getting more than you do, and if so, why?
- Posting frequency: how often do they post new content? Should you consider posting more often, or can you actually cut down on your weekly blog posts?
- Engagement: do people comments on their blog? What makes them engage?

- Traffic: which posts and pages get the most traffic? Why?

By keeping an eye on your competitors' website and blog, it can help you improve your own content strategy. It's easy to keep track of – it would only take you minutes to check what new content they've published, especially with a tool to help – and it can help keep you one step ahead.

Media mentions



Another important thing to monitor is your competitors' media mentions. Basically, any mention of their business name online: from blogs to news outlets, just like you would do for your own business name.

This way, you can keep an eye out on all of the moves they're making; what new press releases have they put out? What new products are they releasing? Which major websites and blogs are mentioning your competitors?

LOOK BEYOND VANITY METRICS

A lot of the information you'll find by spying on your competitors will most likely be vanity metrics. Meaning, metrics that aren't exactly helpful to you – they can't help you make a decision that will help grow your business in any way.

And, in some cases, those numbers might be a bit skewed. A good example is social media; for example, let's say that one of your competitors had over 100k fans on their Facebook Page, while you have a few thousand. But, look beyond that: are those followers engaged? Are they liking their updates, sharing their content and retweeting their tweets? If they aren't, then it's quite likely that they bought those followers.

Another important thing to remember is that you should always look for consistency; they might be getting the occasional big spike in numbers, but that's usually due to another factor (such as advertising).

For example, maybe one of their blog posts got a big boost in traffic and/or social media shares – much more than their usual posts. If that happens, that doesn't necessarily mean that their post is so incredible it went viral – in fact, if their other posts don't get nearly as much attention, it could be that they boosted that post with advertising and other paid promotional methods. That said, in this case you can learn something else of importance: where to promote your posts in order to get big boosts in traffic.

But, as a rule of thumb, whenever you see a big spike in numbers for one of your competitors, look beyond the numbers to find out exactly *why* they got that boost.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, reading this blog post, monitoring your competitors can bring a lot of benefits. Most importantly, it can help you improve your overall online marketing strategy, from your social presence to your advertising strategy, and it can help you always be one step ahead of the competition.

About Lilach Bullock

Highly regarded on the world speaker circuit, [Lilach Bullock](#) has graced Forbes and Number 10 Downing Street with her presence! In a nutshell, she's a hugely connected and highly influential serial entrepreneur – the embodiment of Digital Intelligence.



Listed in Forbes as one of the top 20 women social media power influencers and likewise as one of the top social media power influencers, she is one of the most dynamic personalities in the social media market and was crowned the Social Influencer of Europe by Oracle. A recipient for a Global Women Champions Award (by the Global Connections for Women Foundation, GC4W) for her outstanding contribution and leadership in business.

After launching her first business within three years of becoming a mother, her financial success was recognised by being a finalist at the Best MumPreneur of the Year Awards, presented at 10 Downing Street. Following a resultant offer and wishing to spend more time with her daughter, she sold her first business to focus on social media, developing a multi-site blog and online marketing portfolio that generated in excess of 600,000 + visitors per month.

Lilach is consulted by journalists and regularly quoted in newspapers, business publications and marketing magazines (including Forbes, The Telegraph, Wired, Prima Magazine, The Sunday Times, The Guardian, Social Media Today and BBC Radio). What's more, her books have achieved No 1 on Amazon for Sales and Marketing and Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

When Lilach isn't working she enjoys spending time with her family and is an avid fan of Zumba.