

13.8: Using Keywords to Analyze Competitors

Using Keywords to Analyze Competitors

We conclude this chapter by examining how keywords can be used to analyze your competition. To frame what follows, we will assume that competitors know and follow the same rules as you should when creating webpages and choosing keywords:

- Your competitors are creating specific webpages to rank on specific search queries
- They know where to put the keywords to communicate with people and search engines
 - Page title
 - Meta description
 - Page URL
 - Headings (the titles) in the webpage
 - The 'body' (the text)
- They write their page title, URL, and meta descriptions to 'sell' their webpage to people on SERPs

This is useful from a competitive analysis because it means you can easily study your competition based on specific keywords. It is also important to understand here that you should think of ranking on search queries in a way that is similar to selling products: you need to find a positioning that is optimal for your webpage. That means finding a search query that is not overly competitive and on which you believe you will rank high. Hence, the first step is to understand how to analyze the competitiveness of specific keywords and associated search queries

Keyword competitive analysis

We should understand well, at this point, that we are creating webpages with the goal of ranking high on specific search queries. We also understand that not all consumers will use the exact same search query to address a specific need. Let's go back to the search queries we introduce this chapter with and assume we are trying to create a webpage that will address the consumer need of wanting to know how to bathe a cat:

- how to bathe my cat
- easiest way to wash my cat
- wash a cat
- cat wash soap

These are different search queries, and how competitive they are will thus be different. A few easy steps can help you understand how likely it is to rank high on a specific search query. The first step is to understand how old the domains that show up on the first SERP are. This is because the older the domain, the more time they had to build content and backlinks, and the harder they will be to displace from the first SERP. The older domains show up on the first SERP, the more competitive the search query.

To know how old domains are, pick the keywords you want to rank on. Search these keywords on a search engine (e.g., Google). Then, use a whois service (e.g., who.is) and check the "registered on" date. For example, for the search 'how to bathe my cat,' the first websites are:

- .com, registered on 2004
- .com, registered on 1999
- .com, registered on 2000

It seems that most domains for this search query have been registered before 2010, which makes it a likely competitive search query. Additionally, most of these webpages seem to have been created to rank on this exact search query, on something closely related:

- Wikihow page title is: How to bathe a cat
- Bhg page title is: How to bathe a cat
- .com page title is: How to bathe a cat

This combination of webpages clearly positioned on specific keywords that compete against yours and older domains means that trying to rank a webpage on "how to bathe my cat" might thus be a rather hard exercise. It doesn't mean it is impossible to do, but it will require a lot of work to create backlinks and a page that answers consumer needs better than other pages. Trying to position the

webpage on other keywords might be an easier path. You can repeat this exercise with new keywords until you find a search that you believe consumers will be using and that is not overly competitive.

Another approach to study keywords is to search for webpages that are exactly positioned on the keywords you are aiming for. A few **Boolean search operators** can help you here:

- **Allintitle** (e.g., allintitle:how to bathe a cat) returns results where the keywords are in the page title
- **Allinurl** (e.g., allinurl:how to bathe a cat) returns results where the keywords are in the page URL
- **Allinanchor** (e.g., allinanchor:how to bathe a cat) returns results where webpages are linked to, with the keywords in the anchor text

These are useful because, as we just covered, search engine optimization should lead webmasters to put the keywords for which they want to rank on in the page title and page URL and because being linked to keywords in anchor text helps our rankings. In short, using these Boolean search operators lets you get a clear list of exactly who your competition is for a specific search query. This becomes useful, for example, if you want to understand what kind of content pages offer, how the pages are structured, whether they have multiple types of media, and so on. Or, put differently, you can analyze the webpages of your competition to create a general benchmark to beat and create a better webpage that will more clearly and fully answer consumers' needs.

? Exercise 13.8.1

Background persona

You are a real estate company in Montreal specializing in first-time buyers.

Let's assume a quick draft of a persona.

Bill and Jane are newlyweds and are looking to start a family. They want to have some space because they plan to have two kids and, ideally, a backyard. They would also like their house to become the family house. In other words, they would like the family to 'grow' in the house. Ideally, that means finding a family-friendly neighborhood where the schools are good and accessible. Their budget is somewhat limited because they are quite young, which can be a problem when wanting to find a home. Finally, they are also first-time house buyers and are quite unaware of the whole home-buying process.

Understanding searches

You are a real estate company in Montreal specializing in first-time buyers.

- Identify an informational search your target market might do.
- Identify a transactional search your target market might do.
- Identify a navigational search your target market might do.

Creating content with SEO in mind

Pick one search out of the three searches you have identified prior. For this search, come up with an idea for a webpage, concentrating on:

- Page title
- Meta description
- Headings
- URL
- Keyword synonyms in body

Backlinks

How can we boost backlinks for our real estate company?

- Identify five concrete ways to do so

Competitive analysis

Reverse engineer the SEO efforts and content marketing strategy of competitors

- Title, page description, URL, headings, keywords in content, alt tags

Go to news.shupilov.com

- Pick three blog articles

- Identify
 - The keywords on which these articles are supposed to rank
 - Who you think they are targeting

Finding novel competitive spaces

- Based on the searches we previously talked about, find five alternative, less competitive searches to rank on.

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