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MORE LEADS, MORE PROFITS, REVOLUTIONARY MARKETING



# DIGITAL FORENSICS

How to Analyze Your Customers and Competition,  
Identify Opportunities, Duplicate What Works,  
and Win on the Social Web



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# You Don't Need to Reinvent the Wheel to Dominate

Have you looked at the most successful players in your chosen niche and wondered what they have that you don't? Chances are you share a few things in common: a terrific product or service, a great website with valuable content, and a comprehensive social media campaign. So why do they come out on top, while you continue to lag in the middle—or even worse, fester at the bottom in search results?

Organizations that are looking for an edge to position their business, enjoy top search engine rankings, become an authority to the right audience, get more and better customer leads, and experience exploding profits don't have to look too far. All they have to do is look at their competition.

Becoming an industry leader is not as difficult as you think. One of the best vehicles for determining why—and how—your competition is ranking ahead of you is the reverse engineering process. You don't need to reinvent the wheel. Instead, you need to find out what's working, and duplicate it. The factors that allow a successful business to get lots of free search engine traffic—and to move lots of dollars from their prospects' pockets to their bank accounts—are completely transparent. As long as you know where to look and how to look, you can figure out exactly what's working for others, and apply those methods to your own practices. You can even tweak those methods and leave your competition in the dust.

This report will show you how to analyze your competition, by reverse engineering, using their “digital forensic footprint.” We outline six critical steps you can take right now to secure a leading edge in your niche. By the end of this report, you'll have the knowledge necessary to quickly, thoroughly, and effectively research the leaders in your field, so you can use that information to catapult your own organization to success. In the pages that follow, you will learn:

- a) How to understand potential customers completely—from the problems they are trying to solve to the dialogue going on in their heads when they search;
- b) How to identify the top players in your niche—those whose success you want to emulate, and surpass;
- c) How to determine your competition's site structure and strategy;
- d) How to analyze links, and why this is necessary;
- e) How to identify untapped areas so that you can win big; and
- f) Tools that will help you easily and effectively complete the reverse engineering process.

Your competition can *try* to run from you, but you'll soon realize that they can't hide! Researching your competition allows you to deconstruct and utilize the sales and marketing processes that are *proven* to work in your marketplace.

# Six Steps to Meet and Beat the Competition

There are six essential steps to effective competitive analysis:



### Step 1: Deconstruct your customers.

Find out what your customers want and need by examining how competitors talk to them. Understanding what the customer is searching for, as well as how customers are being addressed by the competition, not only identifies how your company can successfully attract customers, it also identifies the gaps that you can fill to outperform your competitors.

### Step 2: Identify the players.

Your competition doesn't comprise all the players in your niche. Rather, the competition is those players who have risen to the top. In this step, you'll learn how to separate the wheat from the chaff.

### Step 3: Understand what your competition is doing.

Examine their site structure and strategy. In this step, you'll learn about the integral elements to examine.

### Step 4: Analyze links.

You can have page after page of quality content, but without the right links, your content will not exist in the search engine index.

**Step 5: Know the killer keywords.** Unless your website is incredibly popular, content and links won't be enough to get you the traffic you desire. Learn how to find out what keywords *your* customers are using. In addition, learn the *real secret* of digging down deep enough to find keywords underused by your competition—keywords used by your customers that you can use to propel your company to the very top!

### Step 6: Monitor the Competition.

Once you've identified the competition and analyzed them, keep tabs on them. This step will teach you how to find out what they're doing, so you can keep pace.

### Step 1: Deconstruct Your Customers

One of the primary ingredients for any successful website is a specific target audience that is already buying similar products and/or services. Once you've honed in on potential customers, you must analyze their behavior.

What are potential customers talking about? You absolutely must pay undivided attention to the dialogue in the market. This dialogue will reveal how customers are experiencing pain, urgency, or passion; what they desire in a solution; and what they respond to.

Researching your potential customer base doesn't need to take a long time, and can be accomplished quite simply by becoming a member of the audience. Access forums, chat rooms, blogs, and social networking sites to find out what potential customers are talking about. And then, simply, listen.

But listen hard. Paying attention to forum and blog discussions won't just turn you on to the major themes being tossed around by your customers. You'll also be able to identify keywords.

**Try this:** Find as many blogs and forums as you can, and spend an afternoon reading them. Identify the major themes discussed by your customers, and cut and paste the blogs and forums related to those themes into one document. Do the same words and phrases crop up again and again?

These are your keywords. Some of these keywords may already be in heavy use by the competition. Others may not. If you are a small business trying to win with big keywords, chances are you're not going to be successful. But chances are you'll also be able to identify some *missed* keywords. And this is where the *huge* opportunities lie. These keywords are gems—they are less obvious and more tangentially related to your niche, and therefore they are underused by the competition. We'll tell you exactly how to identify and tap into these missed keywords in Step 5. At this point, just make note of the keywords and phrases that your customers are using over and over again.

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### Step 2: Identify the Players

When doing a competitive analysis, it's important to dissect your most successful competitors. How do you find out which of your competitors get the most traffic, and earn the most money?

**Keywords and Search Engines** — If you've already done some relatively basic keyword search, you can determine who has the highest search engine rankings by plugging words into [Google](#), [Yahoo](#), [Bing](#), or into a search engine that you advertise on. The top ten websites that appear are the competitors you should analyze. Or, you could use a tool like [OptInLink](#) to tell you which sites are getting the most traffic for the keywords you are using.



**Directories** — Directories are a great way to identify your competition, because unlike search engines they are edited by people. This means that a lot of attention is paid to which sites are included. Try directories like [BOTW](#), [DMOZ](#), [Pegasus Directory](#), or [Yahoo Directory](#). Depending upon your niche, there may also be directories specific to your industry.

**Ranking Sites** — Sites like [Alexa](#) rank traffic and the speed levels of sites. While [Alexa](#) won't tell you the exact number of hits a website receives, sites that have an [Alexa](#) ranking of below 100,000 typically have good traffic. [Compete](#) is another site you can use to find general information about competitor traffic.

Once you've done the above, pick five or ten sites to begin to analyze, element by element. The sites you choose should be the ones that consistently appear as winners in your research—the absolute best competing websites. To go a step further and learn exactly who your competition is—who they are, where they are located, what other domains they own—try using competitive intelligence tools such as [DomainTools](#) or [DNSStuff](#).

### Step 3: Examine Site Structure and Strategy

Once you've identified the absolute best competing websites, you'll want to find out exactly what they're doing—element by element—so you can duplicate it.

This portion of the analysis should identify the competitor's offer and selling process, and should answer very specific questions like:

- Do they have a product virtual image, and if so where is it located on the page?
- How many pages of content do they have?
- What kind of content do they have—sales letters, articles, blogs, interactive, e-books?
- What markets are they targeting?
- What is their “story,” and how do they portray it?
- What kinds of repeat traffic techniques do they use?
- What kinds of viral marketing techniques do they use?
- How long does it take for the site to download?
- What is their cross-browser and cross-platform compatibility?
- What forms of payment do they accept?
- What kinds of quantities, discounts, or bonuses do they offer?
- Do they offer a cross sell product?
- Do they offer a continuity product?
- Do they offer up-sells during the purchase process?
- Do they have opt-in offers such as whitepapers, reports, and ebooks?
- What guarantees are offered?
- Do they have an affiliate program?
- Can you find the product on Amazon or eBay?
- Do they have offline promotion and marketing materials, and if so how are they used in the purchasing funnel?
- Do they have a presence on Facebook, Twitter, or other social networking sites?
- What other innovative elements do they use?



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### Step 4: Analyze Links

Links are crucial to online competition. For some search engines, like Google, quality links are the top-ranking factor. And it doesn't matter how well designed your site is, or how many pages of terrific content it has. Without links, you basically don't exist. How many links do you need, and where should they come from?

Figure out how many links your competition has, as well as the type of sites their links are coming from. Not only will a detailed links analysis tell you how many links your own site needs in order to compete, it should also reveal link opportunities.



There are a variety of tools you can use to conduct a detailed analysis:

[Yahoo Site Explorer](#) — Use their linkdomain command to determine amount of links, as well as where they are coming from.

[LinkVendor](#) — This tool allows you to check your competitors' number of social bookmarks, as well as their backlink anchor text.

[Linkscape](#) — This tool shows you all of the links found on a specific domain, and also shows you what keyword phrases are most important to your competitors. This tool can also help you find the sites with the best links.

[Xenu Link Sleuth](#) — This tool allows you to check for broken links — on competitors' sites, on potential partners' sites, and on your site.

[AllinAnchor Search](#) — This tool shows keywords that have the most successful anchor link campaigns. It also allows you to find your competitors' hidden link networks.

[SEOquake](#) — This tool shows you how many links a site has, as well as which types of sites the links come from.

### Step 5: Know the Killer Keywords

Chances are you've already done a bit of keyword research. But when it comes to following your competitors' digital footprint, it's time to get really detailed. You'll need to find out exactly what keywords your top competitors' pages are optimized for. Once you figure out what those keywords are, you can use them on your own site to work your way up the search engine results page.

Figuring out which keywords your competitors' sites are optimized for is fairly straightforward. As a general rule of thumb, most sites include the main keyword on the page's title, in its description, in the first sentence of the page, in links pointing to the page, and in the keywords meta tag.

Anyone can determine the meta tags of a page. Just go to the page you want to analyze, right click on it, then select "View Page Source."

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Once you've determined a page's main keyword, you can find other relevant keywords linked to the main keyword using a tool like [Kwbrowse](#). Tools like this will allow you to see how the site builder chose high-ranking keywords. Other tools that will make your keyword research easier include:

[Google Trends](#) — This tool helps identify trends for markets and keywords.

[SpyFu/Keyword Spy](#) — This tool allows you to look for keyword phrases that are driving traffic to your competitors' sites. Correct use of this tool will allow you to completely "reveal and steal" your competitors keyword strategy.

[Google Alerts](#) — This tool sends you an email anytime a keyword you are following gets hit by a competitor. It will also allow you to keep track of potential new competitors who are using the same keywords.

#### Be sure to use the Search Engine Results Page (SERPs) for target keywords:

- Using the [Google Keyword Tool](#), [Wordtracker](#), or another tool, identify keywords that are the big reach, broad keywords; secondary keywords with big volume; and long tail keywords.
- Print the SERP for the top 50 keywords, and look at who is dominating various terms. Study the trends. Look for the keywords the big players are focused on, and where they are not. This is the time at which you may identify some untapped keywords—keywords that will help you compete with—even surpass—the big players in your niche.
- Run your primary and secondary keywords through the [MSN Commercial Intent](#) tool, and drop any keywords with less than .65 commercial intent. Prioritize remaining primary and secondary keywords by weighting estimated search volume with the percent of commercial intent.

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- Be sure to use carefully selected secondary keywords (based on your understanding of your customers, as well as what they are talking about) to put yourself in a winning position. Your competition will be keeping their eye on *you* as much as you are keeping your eye on *them*. When they see you winning with these keywords, they will adjust. When they start letting up on the primary keywords in order to focus on the secondary, you can start working on the primary.

### Step 6: Monitor the Competition

Once you've identified and analyzed the competition, it's important to keep up with them. It's a sure bet that the leaders in your field know how to keep up with change, and are employing the most cutting-edge strategies to stay on top. If you want to keep up with them—or better yet, surpass them—you'll need to employ these same strategies. Rather than spending tons of time on your own figuring out what these strategies are, let your competition tell you.

You can keep tabs on virtually any time your competition is mentioned in the media—and keep up to date on press releases and other publicity they are sending out—with tools like [Google Alert](#), [SpyFu](#), and [WhosTalkin](#).

Tool like [BlogPulse](#) allow you to search for your competitors' blogs, and keep track of what they are up to. Connecting with bloggers can also help you hone in on important keywords, as well as what's important to them.

Pay particular attention to what your competition is offering potential customers in terms of content, give-aways, and sales tools. Keep track of how long your competition keeps using particular ways of engaging with customers. For example, if a competitor has been giving away a free whitepaper on its landing page for several months, there's a good chance it's working. As a general rule of thumb, anything that's been used for three months or more is probably working. Keep tabs on what your competition is doing, and check in frequently. If you are keeping track of more than a couple of competitors, an Excel document or other chart that shows conversion techniques, and how long they have been used, can come in handy.

Finally, you will notice a wide variety of strategies your competitors use to convert. Think of your own strategy as a puzzle. Instead of duplicating a successful strategy of one competitor, take what works from a variety of different competitors. Pay as much attention as to what they're NOT doing as to what they ARE doing. These are the untapped areas that you can take advantage of.



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# Let Digital Marketing Compass Lead the Way

GenNext Media has demystified the entire reverse engineering process through its research and analysis tool, **Digital Marketing Compass**.

**Digital Marketing Compass** is a research and planning system that puts you on the right track when it comes to the right strategy and positioning of your business. To learn more about how we can help you better understand your customers, competitors, and your own brand positioning, visit [www.GenNextMedia.com](http://www.GenNextMedia.com). While you are there be sure to take advantage of our free ebook, *Disrupted: In the Face of Unprecedented Changes in Media Consumption and Uncertain Economics, Use the Social Web and New Technologies to Dominate Your Market*.

## About Us

Chris Marentis is the Founder and CEO of GenNext Media LLC, a revolutionary information services and interactive media and marketing company. His corporate mission is to create authoritative new media brands to build market share for partners and his own properties, through innovative customer acquisition and monetization strategies.

Chris is the former CEO of Clearspring Technologies, one of the most widely adopted venture-backed Web 2.0 technology platform companies in the world. During the Web 1.0 boom, Chris led the industry as Senior Vice President of America Online's (AOL) Interactive Marketing group. Working with some of the world's most progressive and successful companies, Chris and the AOL interactive marketing team created the blueprint for online marketing, ecommerce and content branding in the new medium.

Chris has spent the last 27 years working with some of the largest media and ecommerce brands in the world, and provides a unique perspective toward developing communications products and strategies that takes into account a completely new environment. Powerful, low-cost technologies (including web services, cloud computing, semantic web and AJAX)—combined with new techniques like crowd sourcing, viral marketing, social media, educational marketing and search engine marketing—have completely disrupted existing media and marketing models. New rules are in place for winning in this environment, and new brands and media channels will be created to displace existing brands.

GenNext Media LLC is focused on helping existing brands re-think their business paradigms and become innovators in this new “distributed web.” Chris’s years of experience as an innovator in both traditional and interactive media have allowed him to develop proprietary processes and techniques—processes and techniques that bridge technology with accountable marketing and social media principles in order to drive revenue growth. GenNext Media LLC also builds new information service brands by partnering with leading experts in niches.

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