

WEBLOGGER

How to be the James Bond of the Web: 37 Best Marketing Tools to Spy on Your Competitors

I've always liked the idea of being a spy, complete with gadgets, fast cars, and an attractive significant other. It would be a great way to get secret information.

Well, it may be too late for me to join the Secret Service, but I can indulge in a bit of undercover information gathering – and you can, too – by taking a sneak peek at competitors.



**SECRET
INTELLIGENCE
SERVICE MI6**

We're not talking industrial espionage, but there are plenty of good reasons to see what competitors are doing. You can:

- Get inspiration for new ways to connect with customers and thereby improve customer retention.
- Find out if competitors are doing anything better than you and how you can match it.
- Look under the hood of their search and marketing optimization strategy and see what you can legally steal.
- Improve your own plans to beat the competition based on data rather than assumptions.

There are dozens of marketing tools that you're probably already using to monitor your own performance. These can be used to get competitive intelligence. Let's assume you already know who the competition is. All you have to do is monitor these different areas.

Ad Monitoring Tools

Do you want to know where your competitors are advertising so you can do the same? Would you like to know which keywords they are targeting? If you want to troubleshoot your PPC and display ads, this set of tools will help you:

1. [Adbeat](#) is an enterprise tool that lets you see all of the ads that particular advertisers are using, split test their ad copy to help you with strategy, and find competitors you didn't even know about. The introductory package starts at \$99 per month, though that monitors only Google ads. There's a 30-day free trial.
2. [AdGooroo](#) is a multifunctional tool that includes a Display Insight feature. The basic service lets you monitor ads for up to ten competitors, ranked by page views. Its Industry Insight allows you to figure out ad placements, too. Pricing is not stated.
3. AdGooroo also has an [SEM Insight](#) tool that incorporates keyword research, competitive intelligence, PPC and SEO tools, and traffic data. Pricing is not stated.

4. [MixRank](#) allows you to see the mix of ads that companies are using. You can see a snapshot of this data (without registering) that covers display ads, text ads, advertisers, and demographics, though you will have to create an account for the full report.
5. [Moat](#) provides a free ad search tool that allows you to key in your competitors' brand names and see what ads they have shown recently. You can see the size and some of the places the ads have been seen recently, giving you a good guide for where to place your own advertising.
6. [SocialAdNinja](#) has a database of 400,000 social PPC ads. It's a great tool for monitoring global Facebook advertising. It includes fine-grained search features so you can identify ads targeting your key demographic and find out which links they point to. There's a single membership level at \$147 per month.
7. [WhatRunsWhere](#) helps you monitor competitors to figure out their advertising strategy and where they are placing ads. As a bonus, it can help with advertising research and split testing, finding new sources of traffic, and ad buying.

Keyword Monitoring Tools

Related to ad monitoring tools are those that help you check out the keywords your competitors are targeting in their search marketing campaigns. Do this, and you can improve your own ROI by figuring out what's working for them. Here's a selection:

8. [iSpionage](#) looks at how your competitors are advertising with Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo search marketing tools. You can view ads and track spending. It also includes SEO competitive research and a social monitoring tool for Twitter and Facebook.
9. [KeywordSpy](#) helps with competitive keyword discovery. You can find out how much your competitors are spending on AdWords and discover which combinations of keywords and advertising copy are working for them.
10. [KeywordCompetitor](#) helps you spy on organic and paid keywords, ads, and landing pages for your competitors, with daily updates in rankings. The site also has tools for monitoring competitors and working with affiliate marketing.

11. [SEMrush](#) lets you monitor competitors' organic keyword positions, find relevant long tail keywords, see your competitors' PPC ads, and more. It also includes SEO tools. There's a wealth of data available from the free search bar on the homepage, though you will have to upgrade (\$69.95 per month) for more queries and results.

12. [SpyFu](#) lets you see up to six years of data on your competitors' keywords, ranking, and ads helping you with SEO and PPC advertising. There's a limited free tool, though you have to subscribe for access to advanced competitive intelligence.

13. [The Search Monitor](#) looks at paid and organic search and even how you look against your competition in comparison-shopping engines. This multifunctional tool also monitors affiliates and trademarks as well as who's discussing your brand. It starts at \$299 per month.

Link Popularity and Backlink Tools

All of the tools you use to check who's linking to your site can be used to research your competitors' backlinks. All you have to do is plug in their URL. There are dozens of backlink checkers out there, but here are three excellent ones:

14. [Ahrefs](#) provides a wealth of information on external links, referring domains and IPs, top pages, main anchor text, linked domains, and more. There's a limited free account covering 3 reports and 10 results, but for fuller data you'll need to upgrade to the \$79 per month package.

15. [Majestic Site Explorer](#) provides a detailed link profile for any site. In addition to working with current data, you also can check its historical index to see results over time. There is a limited free version.

16. [Open Site Explorer](#) describes itself as a search engine for links. It provides information on page and domain authority, linking domains, anchor text used, and more; you also can compare link profiles for up to five sites. It is free, though signing up for Moz Analytics gives you access to (much) more data.

Web Ranking Tools

How are people interacting with your competitors' sites? The next set of tools provides website competitive analysis on consumer data to help companies improve their targeting in different segments.

A free search gets you data on unique visitors, rank, and competitive rank, but you'll need to sign up for more in-depth tools.

17. [Alexa](#) has been tracking global web traffic for a couple of decades and using it to provide website ranking on a global and country basis. The traffic sources and other data can help with benchmarking your site against your competitors.

18. [Compete](#) describes itself as a "digital intelligence" tool which uses online consumer behavior.

19. [SimilarWeb](#) is a competitive analytics-monitoring tool that provides data on traffic sources, top content, social mentions, and more. There's a lot of data available for free, including referral sites, search traffic, key topics and more. Pro packages start at \$99 per month.

Monitoring and Mentions

Often recommended for monitoring mentions of your own brand, [social media monitoring](#) tools work equally well for seeing what people are saying about your competitors.

20. [Google Alerts](#) saves you the trouble of visiting the site to repeatedly perform the same search. Set up an alert and have the latest news about your competitors delivered to your inbox. It monitors news, blogs, video, discussions, and books, and it is free.

21. [Mention](#) combines media and social monitoring. It tracks content published on web pages, news sites, blogs, and forums in 42 languages. It provides real time social alerts and has an excellent mobile app. There's a free plan, with the upgrade starting at \$6.99 per month.

22. [Social Mention](#) provides real time search of brand mentions on blogs, microblogs, images, videos, questions, and bookmarking sites. This free web search tool also provides a broad brush sentiment analysis.

23. [Talkwalker](#) offers a service similar to Google Alerts, giving you the choice of monitoring news, blogs, discussions, or everything. You also can monitor content in different languages. It is free.

24. [Topsy](#) allows you to search tweets from 2006 forward, looking at links, photos, videos, influencers, and more. The free online search can provide a snapshot of a competitor's Twitter presence, but you will need the pro version for real time results and alerts, reports, and identification of key influencers.

25. You also can use [Twitter's own search](#) tool and save your searches, though the basic search doesn't provide the depth that Topsy has.

Social Engagement and Social Sentiment Tools

This next batch of tools will help you to see how your competitors are building engagement and how their key audiences feel about them.

26. [Commun.it](#) is best known as a free tool for building engagement on your own Twitter account. Why not plug in the URL of your top competitor to see how that company is performing online?

27. [Fanpage Karma](#) allows you to input the URL of any Facebook fan page and assess the number of fans, growth, and a range of other performance metrics. There's a 14-day free trial of additional features, and the premium package includes Twitter monitoring, too.

28. Login with your Twitter account and you can analyze any profile's followers for free with [Followerwonk](#). There's a wealth of detail available on the authority of followers, recent tweets, bios and locations, enabling you to build a comprehensive picture of your competitor's Twitter presence.

29. [Open Social Buzz](#) provides real time search of Twitter, Google+, Facebook, and LinkedIn. Plug in your competitor's name and see how much social prominence they have.

A Mixed Bag

There are a few tools that don't fit in any of the categories above, which can provide additional insight into what your competitors are doing.

30. [BuiltWith](#) investigates the technology behind your competitors' sites, covering servers, content management, underlying technology, analytics, advertising, and much more.

31. [Marketing Grader](#) is a free HubSpot tool that assesses websites in terms of blogging, social media, SEO, lead generation, and mobile, giving an overall score. It's a good way to see what your competitors are getting right, and wrong

32. [Simply Measured](#) rolls many of the tools on our list into one, including analysis of influencers, brands, trends, traffic, conversions, competitors, and more. It covers all the main social media channels with 35 different reports. The basic plans start at \$500 per month, though there are free reports available for your own accounts.

33. [The Wayback Machine](#) from the Internet Archive lets you see how your competitors' pages looked in the past. You never know, you might learn something about how website changes improved conversions.

34. Check out your competitors' direct mail, email, and social campaigns with [Who's Mailing What](#). It's a good way to keep track of trends, get ideas, and see what the competition is up to. This tool costs \$747 per year.

Final Thoughts: Other Ways to Spy on the Competition

Don't forget that there are three more ways you can find out what your competitors are doing, and they are all free.

35. Follow them on social media, add them to a list or interest group, and track what they are talking about.

36. Subscribe to their blogs so you can see what kind of content they are covering and check out announcements of forthcoming launches.

37. Sign up for their newsletter, which is hands-down the best way to see how they are targeting your ideal customers.