Conducting a Successful Competitive Analysis

A Complete Guide for Content Marketers

As a provider of competitive social analytics, social and content marketers often ask us questions about conducting a competitive analysis. What is a competitive analysis? How do I perform one? Where do I find what I need for a content audit? What do I do with my findings?

We built this guide with those questions in mind. After you've read it, you'll be able to build meaningful benchmarks and improve your marketing performance.

What Is Competitive Analysis (and why do you need it)?

Similar to a content audit, a **competitive analysis** — when performed by content marketers — is a deep dive into the marketing performance of the top brands within your competitive landscape. It involves a search for the content produced by competitors, a look into how their content performs, and actionable next steps to improve marketing efforts.

All too often, marketers assume that general marketing best practices can be effectively applied to their own efforts. However, this approach is risky.

True marketing best practices vary by industry, company size, geographic location, and more. An effective competitive analysis must be based on brands within your competitive landscape.

How Often Should You Conduct A Competitive Analysis?

Frequency depends on your competitive landscape. The more content you and your competitors create and promote, the more often you should conduct a competitive analysis.

Remember, marketing best practices change frequently. When it comes to social media, what worked a year ago might see diminished returns tomorrow.

At the very least, you should conduct a competitive analysis once a quarter. Ideally, dig into your competitive landscape weekly so you can stay on top of trends.

STEP 1 Build A Competitive Landscape

You probably already have a good idea who your major competitors are, so start there. Revisit your competitive landscape regularly since new brands pop up frequently. This simple and free exercise can keep you up to speed on your competition.

If you want help identifying competitors, follow the steps below.

1 **Select a "featured company," probably you or your client.**
Let's assume we are building a landscape for Email Marketing companies and your focus company is **MailChimp**.

2 **Search for your selected company in Google.**

The tool here is a Google Search feature you may have seen, but not used in a systematic way. Look for related websites based on what other people have searched when they tried to find your focus company.
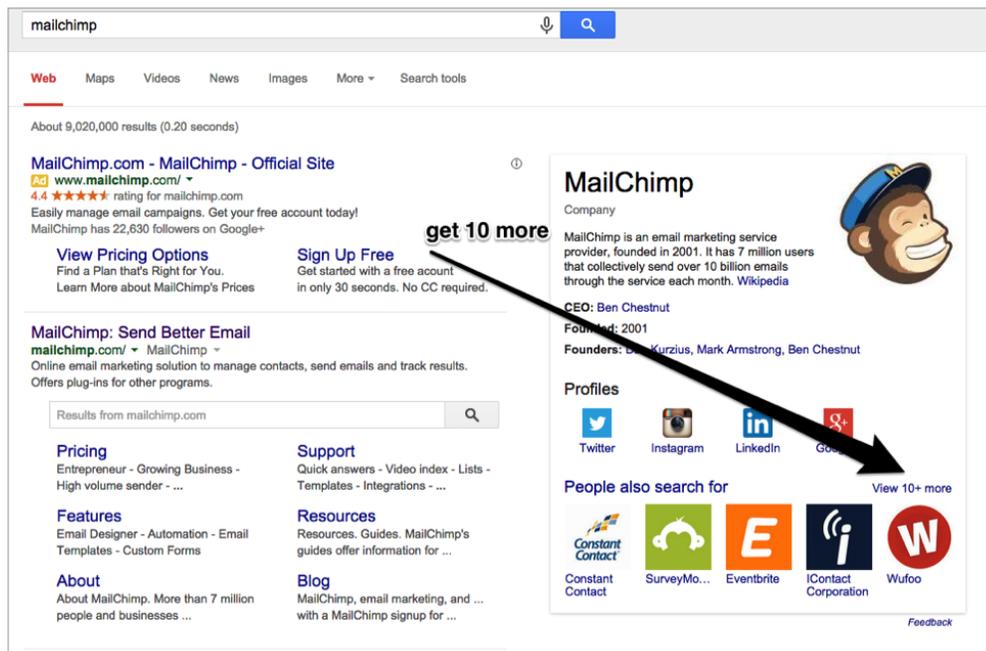
3 Many companies will have a "View 10+ more" link created by Google. Click it and you'll reveal the following view:
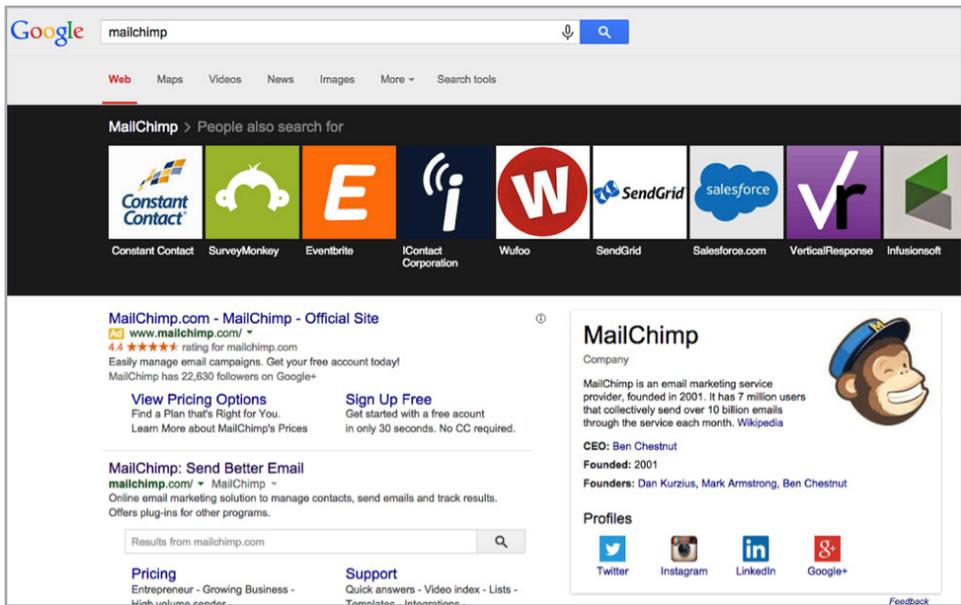
As a side note, use Google Search as a proxy for brand awareness. The results in Google should show us companies ordered by search volume and other ranking factors. That means the top results here are likely the biggest players in your competitive landscape.

4 You're not done yet — there are still competitors out there. To expand your search, click on the first company's link. In this case, the first company listed is Constant Contact. Once you do so, you will see other related companies. You can repeat this step as often as you want.
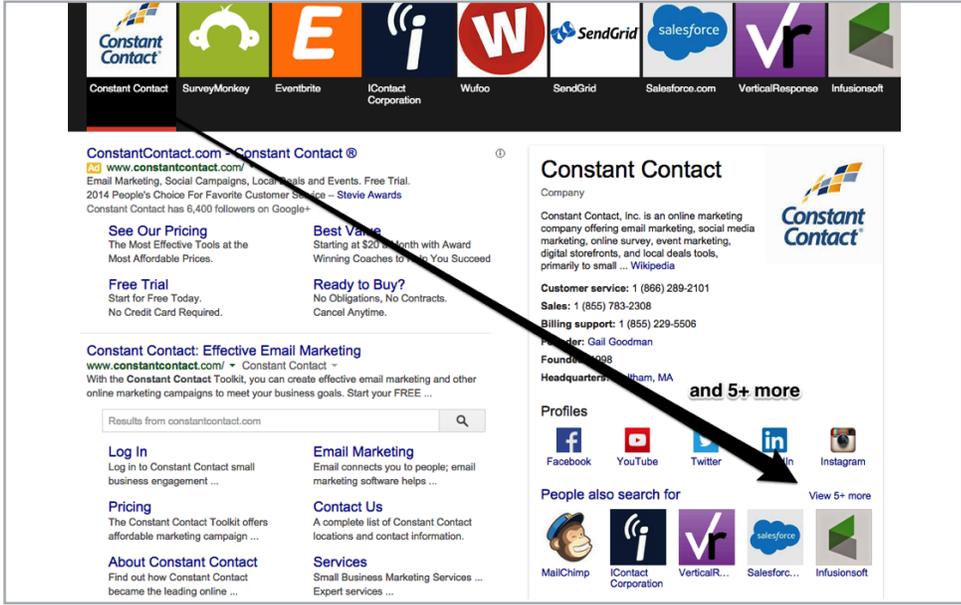
5 It's time to organize your competitors. This search method can leave you with a list of 20 to 30 potential competitors, making it important to filter down to your true top competitors. If you're using **Rival IQ**, you can easily add each competitor to one of your competitive landscapes and add tags as you see fit. If you don't have Rival IQ, this process can be done manually in a spreadsheet.

Now you have a fairly comprehensive list of competitors, filtered and organized in a way that makes sense to you. The next step is conducting research to see exactly what kind of content your competitors have created and shared.

STEP 2: Conduct Competitive Communication Audit

Once you have a list of your competitors, you can **conduct a competitive communication audit.** A competitive communication audit shows how your own messaging compares to that of your competitors. This will set the foundation for your priorities and the overall messaging framework that you build for your brand.

Using Rival IQ can greatly speed up the competitive communication audit process. Instead of visiting multiple websites to get the data you need, you simply need to visit the Company Profile section and select one of the companies. You will then receive detailed content of their positioning and messaging across each social channel as well as their website.

The fastest way to complete the bulk of the competitive communication audit is by exporting Rival IQ's CSV positioning report. This can also be completed manually by visiting each competitor's social profiles using a spreadsheet.

Company	Tagline	Main Positioning	Website Title	Homepage Meta Description	Facebook Bio	Twitter Bio
Constant Contact	Be a marketer.	When we talk about our Promise, we're talking about our commitment to helping small businesses and nonprofits succeed. How? Our customers get real results through email newsletters, surveys, events, Facebook promotions, online listings, and more. But it's not just about the product: we knew our customers wanted to talk to real people when they had a question. And they needed help figuring out the right marketing strategy for their organization. So we made sure it was always just a phone call away, or with network of expert-taught classes and training, their neighborhood. It's how we smooth our customers' path to success.	Email Marketing Software	Constant Contact	With Constant Contact, you can create effective email marketing and other online marketing campaigns to meet your business goals. Start your FREE trial today!	Constant Contact is an award-winning B2B company empowering small businesses and nonprofits to grow and succeed through email marketing: http://ow.ly/NSnca	Constant Contact empowers small businesses and nonprofits to grow and succeed through email marketing. Looking for help? Tweet @CTChelp
iContact	Email marketing for everyone. Smart solutions to maximize the power of your email marketing.	Since 2003, small and medium businesses worldwide have achieved significant results by turning to iContact's best-in-class email marketing solutions and knowledgeable team members. Made scalable to serve the needs of high-volume senders, professional marketers, and businesses new to email, iContact's easy-to-use technology ensures that every customer has what they need – whenever they need it – to succeed. Headquartered in Morrisville, NC, iContact is an award-winning company in the Cision family of brands.	iContact - Email Marketing	Your email marketing starts here. Create, send, and track your newsletters with our award winning email marketing software.	iContact is a professional email marketing solutions provider based in Morrisville, NC.	Professional email marketing and marketing automation from iContact helps businesses of all stages and sizes get results. Moderated by Maria Muniz.
MailChimp	Send better email.	More than 10 million people and businesses around the world use MailChimp. Our features and integrations allow you to send marketing emails, automated messages, and targeted campaigns. And our detailed reports help you keep improving over time.	Send Better Email	MailChimp	[empty]	More than 10 million people and businesses around the world use MailChimp to design, send, and track emails.	Send better email, sell more stuff.
SendGrid	Delivering your transactional and marketing email through one reliable platform.	Founded in 2009, after graduating from the TechStars program, SendGrid developed an industry-disrupting, cloud-based email service to solve the challenges of reliably delivering emails on behalf of growing companies. Like many great solutions, SendGrid was born from the frustration of three engineers whose application emails didn't get delivered, so they built an app for email deliverability. Today, SendGrid is responsible for sending billions of emails for some of the best and brightest companies in the world.	Email Delivery & Transactional Email Service	SendGrid	Learn why more developers choose SendGrid for their email deliverability service to send transactional emails triggered by web apps. Get started for free	We are a proven cloud-based email platform that empowers your apps and drives user engagement.	SendGrid is a proven cloud-based email delivery platform that successfully delivers 25 billion emails each month. Follow @sendgrid_ops for system status
VerticalResponse	Reach your customers. Create, send, and track emails and social posts that look great on every device.	[empty]	Email Marketing. Just Like That.	VerticalResponse	Email Marketing by VerticalResponse makes it easy to send email newsletters, offers, invitations and autoresponders to grow your business. It's free!	VerticalResponse provides a full suite of self-service marketing solutions for small businesses and non-profit organizations.	Email marketing and a whole lot more! Follow for the latest news, special deals, tips, and how-tos for all your direct marketing and social media needs.

After researching each website title, meta description, and social bio, visit the company's website and find their tagline. Then visit the "About Us" or "Company" section and copy the paragraph that best defines the company. **Click here to download the template**.

STEP 3: Take Inventory Of The Content Your Competitors Have Published

Now that you have a solid understanding of how you and your competitors position themselves, it's time to investigate the content your competitors publish. This includes looking for and understanding how the competition is using content.

There are many types of content, so we're going to focus on the ones that are easiest to analyze. Some content types, like email and physical mailers, are difficult to fully research, and gauging success is even harder. For this whitepaper, the most relevant types of content are:

1. Blog

2. Website

3. Social

4. Videos

5. Meta Descriptions

You can discover this content the old fashioned way: by combing through website and social media accounts and evaluating all of the content. Fortunately, tools like Rival IQ and **Content Insights** can automate the process and do more of the work for you.

When viewing your competitor's content, take the following into account:

■ What content formats are most prevalent on their site?

■ Is their content informational or salesy?

■ What themes or concepts tie all their content together, if any?

STEP 4: Gauge The Success Of Your Competitors' Content

You know what your competition's content looks like, now it's time to see how it performed in **social results, keyword rankings, and backlinks.**

Let's take another look at your competitors' content alongside their most visible success indicators:

1. **Blog:** backlinks, social shares and keyword rankings.

2. **Website:** backlinks, social shares and keyword rankings.

3. **Social:** engagement rankings.

4. **Videos:** engagement ranking and social shares. If hosted on a web page, backlinks and keyword rankings.

5. **Meta Descriptions:** keyword rankings.

Metrics To Look At And Tools You Can Use

Social Shares And Engagement

We start with social because that's where **the most publicly available data** is for competitors. Social shares are a signal of content strength. The more shares a piece of content has, the better it has resonated with the target audience. You can also better understand how to best benchmark your own performance.

Tools like Rival IQ offer a detailed breakdown of not just how often a piece of content has been shared, but **how successful your competition's social presence is overall.**

Search

You can use Rival IQ or another tool like SEMRush to see your competition's **organic ranking for various keywords.**

More importantly, this data tells you which search terms your competition doesn't rank for,

showing **what may be missing from their content strategy and where you could potentially swoop in for the win.**

If you've already set up a landscape in Rival IQ, you'll find all this information in the SEO dashboard. Under Detailed Metrics, you can find overall organic keyword count by week for you and your competitors.

Top Keywords by Traffic ⓘ	Traffic ⓘ	Search Volume ⓘ	Position ⓘ
Keyword			
mailchimp	70.8%	450,000	● 1
mail chimp	11.6%	74,000	● 1
mailchimp login	1.9%	12,100	● 1
mailchimp pricing	1.0%	6,600	● 1
chimpmail	1.0%	6,600	● 1
chimp	0.7%	8,100	● 1
mail	0.7%	1,220,000	● 19
mailchip	0.7%	4,400	● 1
mailchimp.com	0.7%	4,400	● 1
mandrill	0.5%	27,100	● 3

Data by SEMrush | Google/US   View All

Moving to the 'My Keywords' dashboard, you'll find your brand's top keywords by traffic, recent ranking changes, and a ranked keyword summary. The Landscape Keywords dashboard features three valuable charts: keywords in common, top keywords by company, and top keywords where you don't rank.

Keywords in Common ⓘ   Export ˅

Keyword	Companies	Search Volume ⓘ
email marketing	■■■■■	14,800
emails	■■	18,100
newsletter templates	■■	12,100
open email	■■	12,100
email templates	■■	5,400

Data by SEMrush | Google/US   View All

Top Keywords By Company ⓘ   Export ˅

Keyword	Company	Traffic ⓘ	Position ⓘ	Search Volume ⓘ
constant contact	■ Constant Contact	62.1%	● 1	368,000
icontact	■ iContact	76.9%	● 1	22,200
mailchimp	■ MailChimp	70.8%	● 1	450,000
sendgrid	■ SendGrid	64.5%	● 1	18,100
vertical response	■ VerticalResponse	38.1%	● 1	14,800

Data by SEMrush | Google/US   View All

Top Keywords Where You Don't Rank ⓘ   Export ˅

Keyword	Companies	Search Volume ⓘ
contact	■ Constant Contact	90,500
att mail	■ Constant Contact	74,000
twitter analytics	■ Constant Contact	60,500
cox.net webmail	■ Constant Contact	49,500
survey	■ Constant Contact	49,500

Data by SEMrush | Google/US   View All

Backlinks

Another indicator of your content's success is backlinks. **Inbound links are highly coveted both as traffic drivers and a way to boost organic search rankings.**

Under Rival IQ's SEO Detailed Metrics dashboard, you can see how many backlinks you and your competitors have overall and a week by week analysis via Moz and SEMrush.

For more details, you can either find specific links or search and sort your competitor's entire site with the **Open Site Explorer tool by Moz** or **Ahrefs**. To search and organize backlinks to your competitor's full domain, enter their domain into Open Site Explorer or Ahrefs and set your target to "domain."
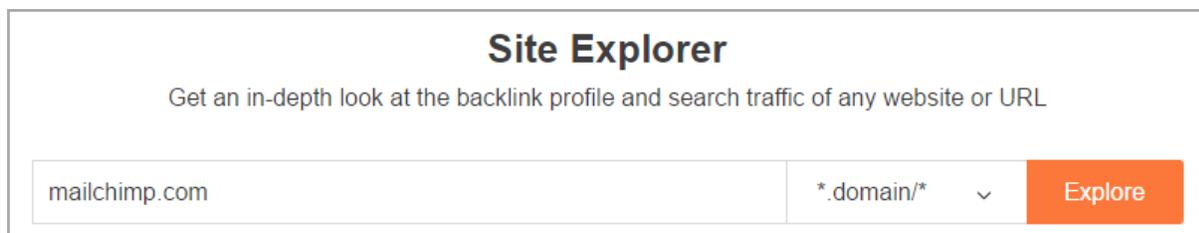
Export the results for your desired time frame and insert a pivot table using the resulting data. Set your row as "Target URL" and your value as "Count of Target URLs." The result will be a table that shows you which of your competitiors' web pages have performed the best.

From this pivot table, it's clear that MailChimp's homepage gets the bulk of their backlinks. This is true for nearly every page on the internet. However, you can see that their blog post about remote usability testing on mobile devices is one of the most linked to pages over the past month.

STEP 5: Apply What Works, Cut What Doesn't

By now, you have a solid understanding of **your competitors, the kind of content they're producing, and how well it's performing** . Next comes the fun part: incorporating your results into your own marketing strategy.

First, examine low performing content for your brand across your competitive landscape. If it isn't working for you or your competitors, even with variations, you'll see more benefit from cutting that type of content.

Next, take the content that isn't performing well for your brand, but does perform well for other brands. **You know that this type of content can lead to results** since it has for your competitors. Spend some time figuring out what they're doing that you might be missing.

Finally, gather the top examples of content that your competitors are creating and promoting with positive results but are missing in your marketing strategy. Work to incorporate similar content and promotion tactics into your own marketing efforts.

Conclusion

After following the above steps, you will be well informed about the kind of content your competition is creating, and whether of not it is hitting the mark with your target audience.

With that knowledge, ask yourself:

- What kind of content (articles, video, etc.) gets the most links and social shares with your target audience?

- Does your target audience prefer more on the nose content that relates directly to the products/service you offer or do they prefer something else?

- How (and how often) does your target audience consume and share this content?

Using this information you can create your own content that outperforms everyone across your competitive landscape.

About Rival IQ

Rival IQ delivers digital marketing analytics with a competitive and comparative context. Our goal is to equip you with a toolkit so you can uncover new opportunities, identify trends, and track results across all major social channels and the web. The insights in our reports help you set tangible benchmarks, make data-driven marketing decisions, improve results, and better understand competitors.

Interested in how Rival IQ can help you make informed marketing decisions?

With Rival IQ, you can,

Understand Your Social Landscape

Track results across all social profiles, including engagement, influencers, social bios, and sentiment—for you and your competitors.

Gain Competitive Insight

Conduct competitive analysis in minutes. Monitor your industry, create benchmarks, and evaluate competitor activity in time to respond before the market shifts direction.

Simplify Access to Data

Find comprehensive analytics for all major social channels and the web, both for your company and your competitors--all from one source.

Get hands-on with Rival IQ via our free trial at WWW.RIVALIQ.COM.