

Practical guide: Gather competitor intelligence

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What competitor intelligence is

Competitor intelligence is organised knowledge of the businesses your customers compare you with: what they claim, what they charge, where they show up, and how they treat an enquiry. Gathered regularly, it turns pricing, positioning and campaign decisions from guesses into judgements.

Everything in this guide uses public information: websites, prices, reviews, advertising, job listings and your own experience as an enquirer. That is all you need, and it is the only kind worth having.

What it is not

It is not spying. Misrepresenting yourself to obtain private information is off limits, damages your reputation if discovered, and is unnecessary, because competitors publish more than they realise.

It is not obsession. The aim is a quarter-by-quarter picture that informs your decisions. A business that watches competitors weekly ends up copying them, and a copy is always one step behind.



What competitor intelligence gives you

Michael Porter's Competitive Strategy (1980) made the case formally: a business earns its returns from how it positions itself against rivals, and it cannot position against rivals it has not studied. Four practical versions of that argument.

Pricing with evidence

Most small businesses set prices from cost and nerve. Knowing what the market actually charges, and for what, lets you price from position: premium with proof, or matched with better terms. It also tells you when a price rise will hold.

The unclaimed space

Your proposition has to be something customers value that no competitor credibly claims. You cannot know what is unclaimed without a written record of what everyone claims. The claims list you build in this guide is the raw material for the proposition guide in this series.

Threats show up early

A competitor's job advertisements, new service pages and advertising spend reveal their next move months before it reaches your customers. A quarterly review catches these signals while there is still time to respond.

It disciplines your own claims

Reading five competitor websites in one sitting is humbling: most say the same things in the same words. Seeing the sameness from the customer's side is the strongest argument for sharpening your own position.



What to collect, and where it lives

Track five competitors: your three closest rivals, one you aspire to be compared with, and one substitute, the different way a customer could solve the same problem. More than five and the file stops being read.

Their claims, verbatim

Copy the exact claims from each competitor's home page, service pages and social profiles, word for word, with the date. Paraphrasing hides the sameness that makes this list useful.

Their prices and terms

Published prices, quoted prices where you can gather them legitimately, payment terms, guarantees and what is included. Where prices are hidden, record that too, because hidden pricing is itself a position.

Their activity

What they advertise and where, using the free advertising libraries the platforms publish. What they post, how often, and what gets engagement. Who they are hiring, from their careers page and job boards, because hiring reveals strategy earlier than marketing does.



Five numbers to track every quarter

The file earns its keep through a short scorecard, updated four times a year, you against each competitor. Five numbers is enough.

Reviews carry double weight in the UAE and the UK alike, because they are the one public measure customers read directly. Watch the reply behaviour as well as the score: a competitor who answers every review is competing on attentiveness, whatever their website says.

Keep the ethics simple

Use what is public, enquire under your own name, and never ask a customer or employee to break a confidence. If you would be comfortable explaining how you learned something, you are on the right side of the line.

The quarterly scorecard

Price position	Your price against the market range, like for like
Review score and volume	Google and the platforms your sector uses
Branded search interest	Your name against theirs, Google Trends
Visible advertising	Active adverts, from the platform ad libraries
Claimed proposition	What changed on their home page this quarter

The file earns its keep through the one decision you take each quarter because of it.



Actions to build your competitor file

01

Choose the five competitors

Ask your last ten customers who else they considered; their answers outrank your assumptions. Three close rivals, one aspirational, one substitute.

Write down why each is on the list, and review the list once a year.

02

Build the claims table

One afternoon: copy every claim from each competitor's website, verbatim and dated, into one document.

Mark the claims that appear more than once across the five. That is the sameness your own proposition must avoid.

03

Record prices and terms

Gather published prices, inclusions, guarantees and payment terms, like for like against your own offer.

Place yourself in the range and write one sentence on why you sit there. If you cannot write the sentence, that is a pricing decision waiting to be made.

04

Experience their enquiry process

Enquire as yourself where practical, or simply time and read what a real enquirer sees: forms, response speed, follow-up, tone.

Response time to a new enquiry is the easiest advantage to take in most markets, because most businesses are slow.

Actions to build your competitor file

05

Set up the free alerts

A Google Alert on each competitor's name, their pages followed on LinkedIn, and a quarterly look at the Meta and Google advertising libraries, which show every active advert a business is running.

Fifteen minutes of setup, and the file largely maintains itself between reviews.

06

Watch the hiring

Check each competitor's careers page and job listings quarterly. A first salesperson, a new market role or a string of technical hires each tells you what is coming.

Note headcount direction too, where the profile platforms show it.

07

Score the quarter

Update the five-number scorecard from page 5, in the same review meeting where you look at your own marketing numbers.

Thirty minutes. Anything surprising gets one line of note on what it might mean.

08

Take one decision per quarter

End every review by answering one question: what will we do differently because of what we now know? Adjust a price, sharpen a claim, speed up the enquiry response, or deliberately do nothing, recorded as a decision.

Intelligence that never changes a decision is a hobby.

A worked example

A made-up kitchen fitting company in Bristol, nine staff, competing with two local rivals and a national chain. The names and figures are invented; the decisions are the kind this file produces.

What the file showed

The claims table found all four businesses claiming quality, craftsmanship and attention to detail, word for word in two cases. Only the national chain published prices. The two local rivals took three and five days to answer a test enquiry; the national answered in an hour with an automated booking link.

The advertising library showed one local rival running its first paid social campaign, on finance offers. Its job listings sought a second showroom manager.

The reading

The rival was preparing a second showroom and competing on finance. The national was winning the first response but losing on flexibility, its reviews complained of rigid packages. Nobody owned speed or transparency locally.

The decisions, one per quarter

Q1: a same-day response promise, published on the home page, with the enquiry process rebuilt to keep it.

Q2: prices published as ranges with worked examples, the only local business to do so.

Q3: a finance option added before the rival's showroom opened, removing the point of difference it was building.

Q4: price held despite a rival discounting, because the scorecard showed review score and enquiry volume both rising.

The point

Nothing here required software or a consultant. One afternoon of collection, fifteen minutes of alerts, and four decisions in a year that each came straight from the file.



The one-page competitor file

Print this page or copy the headings into a document. One file, five competitors, updated quarterly.

THE FIVE: THREE RIVALS, ONE ASPIRATIONAL, ONE SUBSTITUTE, AND WHY EACH

CLAIMS THAT REPEAT ACROSS THE MARKET

PRICE POSITION: THE RANGE, AND WHERE WE SIT AND WHY

QUARTERLY SCORECARD: PRICE POSITION · REVIEWS · BRANDED SEARCH · ADVERTISING · PROPOSITION CHANGES

ALERTS AND SOURCES SET UP

THIS QUARTER'S ONE DECISION

Mistakes to avoid and sources to read

Six mistakes I see most often

- ☐ Tracking ten competitors thinly rather than five properly.

- ☐ Copying the leader into a position that is already taken.

- ☐ Checking weekly, reacting to noise, and drifting off your own plan.

- ☐ Collecting without deciding, so the file becomes a hobby.

- ☐ Ignoring substitutes, the different way to solve the same problem.

- ☐ Gathering anything you would be uncomfortable explaining.

Sources

Michael Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors*, Free Press, 1980. The platform advertising libraries, all free: Meta Ad Library, Google Ads Transparency Center, LinkedIn ad tab on any company page. Google Trends and Google Alerts, both free.

Related reading

On ataylorcmo.com: Conducting a competitive analysis in the UAE, under Insights. Related guides in this series: Define your unique selling proposition, and Build a marketing plan, at ataylorcmo.com/guides.



Conclusion

A working competitor file costs one afternoon to build, fifteen minutes to automate, and thirty minutes a quarter to keep. Few things in marketing return more for less.

Pick five competitors, record what is public, score five numbers a quarter, and take one decision each time. That is the whole discipline.

Next step

If you would like a second pair of eyes on your competitor file, or a fuller competitor and market landscape analysis, I offer a 30 minute discovery call at no charge.

Book at ataylorcmo.com, or write to adam@ataylorcmo.com.



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MSc, FCIM, CDMP. A marketing leader with more than 20 years of international experience driving growth, market expansion and competitive positioning across luxury retail, real estate, free zones, automotive and mega-events.

I work as a fractional chief marketing officer for owners, executives and boards in the UAE, the UK and internationally. My career includes Group Head of Marketing at Emaar, Director of Events and Entertainment at Expo 2020 Dubai, and marketing leadership of a UAE free zone, with more than 5,000 events and activations delivered for premium brands.

Credentials

MSc Marketing. Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing. Certified Digital Marketing Professional.

Experience

More than 20 years across the UAE, the wider Middle East, the UK and global markets.

Specialisms

Marketing strategy, brand positioning, UAE market entry, growth and marketing return on investment, events and experiential, and board governance.

Brands and organisations

Emaar · Expo 2020 Dubai · The Dubai Mall · IFZA · Al Tayer Motors · Ferrari · Gucci · Harvey Nichols · Bloomingdale's · Dolce and Gabbana

Contact

If you have a question about this guide, or want a second opinion on your competitor file, write or call. I reply within one working day.



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