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Brand Marketing: Check Out The Competition!

Do you know what makes your business diverse and unique? When it comes to the competition, how does your business compare? Do you know what your weaknesses and strengths are, relative to that of your competitors? And - most importantly - are you aware how your clients perceive your business, in relation to the competition?

If you do not know the answers, you may be operating under a major liability, for a number of reasons. # 1, if you don't understand what your unique strengths are you're not giving your market any compelling reason to select you over the competition. Number two, if you don't know what your competitors' weaknesses are you may be unable to take advantage of a crucial available and/or undeserved niche within your market. And # 3, if you're not aware of your own weaknesses you may be driving customers away from your door.

Brand marketing is all about creating a unique, memorable identity for your business that focuses on not just your strengths, but the strengths which make you distinct and unique within your market. You may think you are already aware what your strengths are, but in order to really get a handle on where you want to position your business you're going to need to learn how the major brands within your market are positioned, and how to position your brand in relation to them.

So how exactly do you check out the competition, directly - short of posing as an actual customer?

Websites are a great place to start, since almost every business has one these days. Your search-engine criteria might be simply the type of product and/or services you provide (i.e., "office supplies", or "web design") limited by region, area or type of market you serve ("Greater St. Louis area", "Arizona", "nationwide", "online.")

Once you have found the websites of several of your most important competitors, look closely at them. What impression do you get about this business? For example, do the images, copy and headlines convey a no-nonsense "we'll save you money" approach? Or is the emphasis is more on the company's experience and expertise? Write down a list of impressions you have about this business, based on its website. Also, pay close attention to whether your competitors are clearly targeting just one sector of the market, creating a niche you might be able to fill.

Now, take a look at your own website. Try to consider it from a third party point of view, the same way you did with your competitors. How does this business (yours) compare? Is it unique in terms of look and feel? Do the images, copy and headlines convey an emphasis unique and different from that of your competitors? Is it oriented towards a niche in the market you may be seeking to fill?

It sounds simple, but you'd be amazed how many small business owners never take the time to visit the websites of their competitors. Or, if they do, it is simply to check prices, services and payment options - without really looking at where their business stands in terms of brand identity within the market as a whole. This type of "website window-shopping" can be a gold-mine of invaluable information when it comes to positioning your business for success.

If you're interested in taking the concept further, you might think about a Do-It-Yourself version of the kind of brand comparison surveys major corporations pay market research firms to conduct. In order to be cost-effective for most small businesses, this would mean working together with marketing students from a local college or institute to make a brief survey rating your brand against that of your competitors in a few key areas - price, convenience and customer service, to name just a few - add that to overall perceptions concerning strengths and weaknesses. However this survey gets distributed and completed, what's most important is that your respondents don't know it's you conducting the research. Otherwise, results could wind up skewed.

Once you have specific information concerning your own strengths, weaknesses and unique attributes - as well as those of your competitors - you'll have the information you need to create a unique brand identity that positions your business for success.

For more information about brand marketing make sure you check out [brand marketing](#), and [The Cab System](#) This article, [Brand Marketing: Check Out The Competition!](#) is available for free reprint.

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