Is Your Competition Spying on You?

Did you know that a portion of your online traffic is probably competing companies who are checking you out? It may not even cross your mind, but it's true that search engine ranking and link data, pay-per-click ads, and often pricing and positioning information is often all there for anyone to assess.

So what are they looking for? Some SEO consultants look at what keywords you are targeting by checking your keywords tag.

Others check your backlinks (links that point to your website) with a Backlink analyser such as Yahoo Site Explorer or Majestic SEO. More sophisticated software allows you to research and compare competitors' page ranking for certain keywords.

Why not return the favour and do Competitor Research yourself?

In any business, from plumbers to business consultants, you can turn this around and use Competition Analysis to see where you are placed relative to your competition.

Steps to check your competitors' keywords
If you'd like to view your main competitors' keywords, you can use a tool such as www.keywordspy.com, www.ispionage.com, or Adwords Keyword Tool. With Ispionage, in addition to the top 8 SEO competitors for a keyword set, you can also check Pay-Per-Click competitors and their budgets. For a quick view of a specific site's keywords, on your Browser, go to View: Page Source and scroll to <Meta> keywords (if blank, check Meta description).

Steps to check your incoming links (or someone else's) using Site Explorer
People often get confused about hyperlinks. The difference between internal links and incoming links (i.e. backlinks) is internal hyperlinks only go to your own web pages, while inlinks/backlinks are ones pointing back to your website.

Outgoing links to other sites from yours are not given much weight by Google in page rank analysis, however, if yours has many poor value incoming links (such as from a 'link farm') this could actually blight your search engine page results. So always ensure you judge their reputation before attempting to secure an incoming link (a PageRank score of 2 or over is a good reputation judge).

You can use Site Explorer [http://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/] or www.opensiteexplorer.org to find out which sites gave backlinks to your competition.

Press Inlinks. Under "show inlinks" (from all pages) change it from "only this URL" to "Entire Site" - this will give you a better indication of all the links pointing at your site. Remember that Google and Yahoo will show a differing number of inlinks; the backlink tools are not exact by any means. Google/Yahoo index different pages and

often miss out some of them, making their score differ.

As you scroll the listings, and click EXPLORE you may be surprised to find another list of incoming links relating to this site. Click on those links and it will go to the page where your site is mentioned. It could be a from a comment you made, another blog writer's mention, or a social account such as Meetup.com.

It's important to hyperlink your keywords, where possible, when talking about your ".com" or ".com.au", because these words are then used by search engines to judge what your site is about; they count towards your overall keyword score.

Steps to check your Page Ranking or your Competitors':

There are many ways to check your site's search engine ranking in Google. You could spend half the day sorting through Google keyword searches to find your site/others' sites (especially if you're on page 20).

Often newbies go wrong by searching for their site's placement on Google from the same computer. You see, Google is inclined to put most-clicked links further up the results; thus giving you a false idea of your page ranking. However, you can turn on Private Browsing (under Tools in Firefox or Control-Shift-P in Internet Explorer) to get more accurate results.

If using software such as Market Samurai, once you put keyword phrases into the competitor section, the tool retrieves your top competitors and your site's Page Rank, Domain Backlinks, Page Backlinks, Domain Age, all in a few seconds. Of course first you've got to know what keyword terms you should be searching for.

Many business operators consider it's worth paying for that information to be delivered to you as a report rather than wasting time Googling and guessing. As they say, information is power!

Do you use the Internet to conduct competitor research? What tools do you use?