

## The Invisible Threat: Your Competitor's Website *Innovative competitive intelligence value*

*by Celeste Smith Bishop*

What do you think about when you contemplate your competitor's website? Nice design? Online sales? Great branding? If this is where the contemplation of your competitor's website pretty much ends, it's time for a fresh look.

Savvy competitors set high expectations for their website marketing and achieve some pretty compelling results, such as: leads, customers, sales, expanded market reach, customer churn reduction, and improved profit contribution from existing customers. And there's more – dynamic partner and vendor programs that deliver results with less time, money and agony than more traditional approaches.

What makes these savvy competitors so good? They use their website as a channel to relentlessly gain competitive advantages. Let's take a look at some of those potential competitive advantages:

### Website Competitive Advantages

- Businesses that leverage their website as growth and profit tools achieve **high ROI**. Arguably, this is an indication of their fierce competitive intent in other areas as well.
- An aggressive website can **level the playing field** for emerging competitors. For hardly more than the price of admission, new competitors can gain instant credibility, drive lead generation and build a formidable sales pipeline at your expense.
- **Stealth** favors competitive success. It's much easier to gain ground when no one is looking. Without new approaches to timely competitive intelligence discovery – your competitors might as well be invisible.
- Aggressive competitors use the **speed and flexibility** possible through their website to immediately adapt to changing market conditions and seize every competitive advantage.
- **Alienation of affection** is an old-fashioned term to describe disrupted customer loyalty. If your customers and best prospects seek information on the Internet and they find it on your competitors' site – what impact does that have on your bottom line?

### So – What Do You Do?

The first step in creating powerful website marketing is to discover *which* competitors are aggressively using their website to drive business growth. You may find some competitors mounting aggressive web-based campaigns aimed at your customers

and most attractive prospects. Or, opportunity to gain on your competitors – unimpeded.

Next, drill down further to uncover *what* your most aggressive competitors are doing. Look well beyond Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Search Engine Marketing (SEM) techniques that represent only a fraction of the ways to build targeted traffic for lead generation and sales through your website. Identify complimentary online and offline marketing initiatives as well as business activities with partners, suppliers and customers.

Finally, now that you know which competitors' website marketing might represent a threat—and what they are doing to drive traffic—find out how much any of that traffic building activity really matters to their lead generation and sales efforts! If all your competitors have succeeded in doing is driving traffic to their website that contributes nothing to their business goals – what good has it done them and at what cost? Don't be too surprised if a lot of competitors don't have it together at this last step... yet.

Aggressive competitors leverage their website like a Swiss army knife, producing value in many ways with one tool – their website channel. And each success they achieve has the potential to put your business further behind. Competitors are not invisible if you know how to apply innovative competitive intelligence tools and techniques to stay on top of this high-potential channel for lead generation, sales and more. There's solid gold in 'going to school' on your competition. Staying ahead of the game and becoming the competitor that others worry about – now that's success!

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