



UNDERCOVER STRATEGIST

CAREFUL who you tell 



HOW TO SPY ON YOUR ONLINE COMPETITORS

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(Hey, you're free to share this eBook around.)

Special thanks to Chris,
Australia's finest web freelancer (www.webfreelancer.net.au).

THANKS.

Undercover Strategist teaches people how to outgun their online competitors.

"Everyone, I mean EVERYONE, should read this stuff."

Adam Kershaw, Proprietor. Sweet & Nut Shop (www.sweetnutshop.com.au)

"This is the kind of information execs want, simple to understand, enough to make decisions."

Vicki Shambaugh, Director. (www.phrihawaii.org)

"It's hard to say how amazing it is. You just have to try it."

Teresa Moore, Office Manager. (www.contactlenz.co.nz)

"I tried lots of places like Wikipedia, but when I came to Undercover Strategist, I finally understood it all."

Leisa Weightman, Marketing Manger, Ear & Hearing Australia. (www.ear-hearing.com.au)

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1. PUT DOWN THE SHOE PHONE.

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Forget wearing a dark balaclava, trench coat or rummaging through rubbish bins. You can put away your magnifying glass and your shoe phone. You don't even need a trusty sidekick called Dr. Watson or to hire the services of Bond. (James Bond.)

You just need to Get Smart. That's all.

We live in a world where we have access to this amazing thing, called the Internet, where many computers are connected together and people can hunt for information.

Because of it, you can become your own industry super-spy, in league with the best of them. Best of all, it's super-easy to do.

It's pretty simple to go undercover of anonymity, gathering competitive intelligence from your desktop, analyzing competitor weaknesses, before deploying your own online strategies.

You do want to outgun them, right?

Read on to discover exactly how it's done.

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2. COMPETITORS ARE ANNOYING; THEY DO TEND TO EAT INTO YOUR DAY.



If you live in the Western world, you live in a world of capitalism.

Capitalism means that everyone is free, within certain rules of the game, to fairly compete against the next guy to earn more money and get more of the business, thus becoming the biggest in the market and wielding more power than your competitors. Once you get to the top, it's a very lucrative position to be in.

After all, if you're at the top, customers buy from you because you're at the top. They think you must be better than the next guy because you're at the top. Surely more people buy from you because you're the best? So they buy from you too, reinforcing your spot at the top of the ladder.

It's a sad truth that people are like sheep and they do follow the leader. The better mousetrap **doth not make a market leader.**

So if you're the market leader, you're going to be kept busy because other competitors want to take your spot and you'll need to spend your day defending your turf.

And if you're a challenger brand, you're going to be kept busy devising ways to attack the big guy because, well, your very survival might depend upon it.

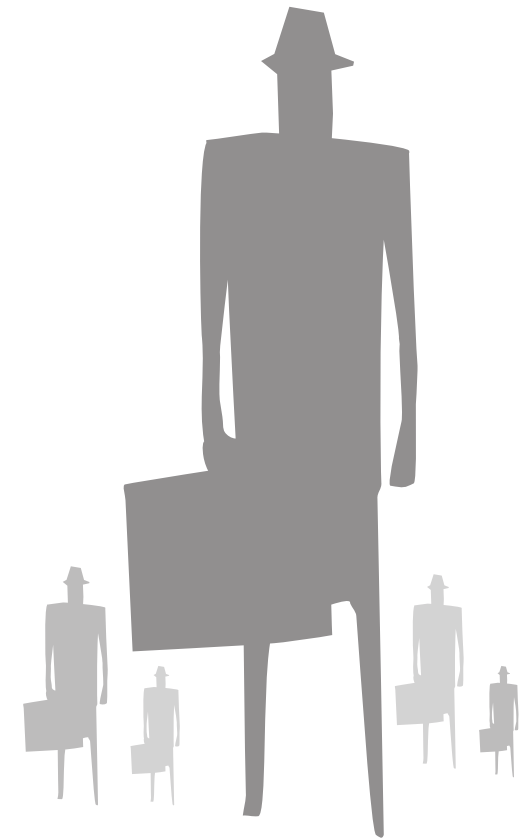
And while the fighting continues and distracts you all, profits still roll in.

Even more competitors see how much money you guys are making.

They say "Hey! I'll have a slice of that action".

This is capitalism in a nutshell.

Capitalism = Competition.



When I studied marketing, we talked about 4 P's (and if anyone is out there still talking about them, they need to retire from teaching).

In those days, you could identify a need, something missing from the market, and launch your product or service to fill that need.

How times have changed.

Back then, the marketers of my generation went berserk, launching thousands more products than it will ever be possible for anyone to need. (One saunter along a supermarket aisle will prove this point.)

The short story is that our consumers don't have needs anymore because, thanks to people like me, those needs are more than satisfied.

(Sheesh, we didn't stop there. No, sirree. We've absolutely, utterly, unapologetically OVERLOADED them with choices.)

Now that customer needs are out of the way, the most important thing left for marketers to think about is competition.

And that competition is all vying for one thing: market share - to take more and more business from the next guy.

Marketers don't have to face markets anymore; they need to face competition, with the view to outsmart them.

And how do you do that? Sun Tzu summed it up as far back as circa 722–481 BC in his treatise, The Art of War.



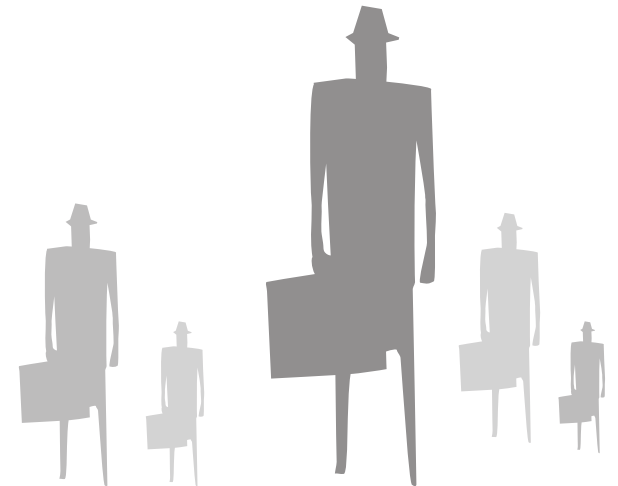
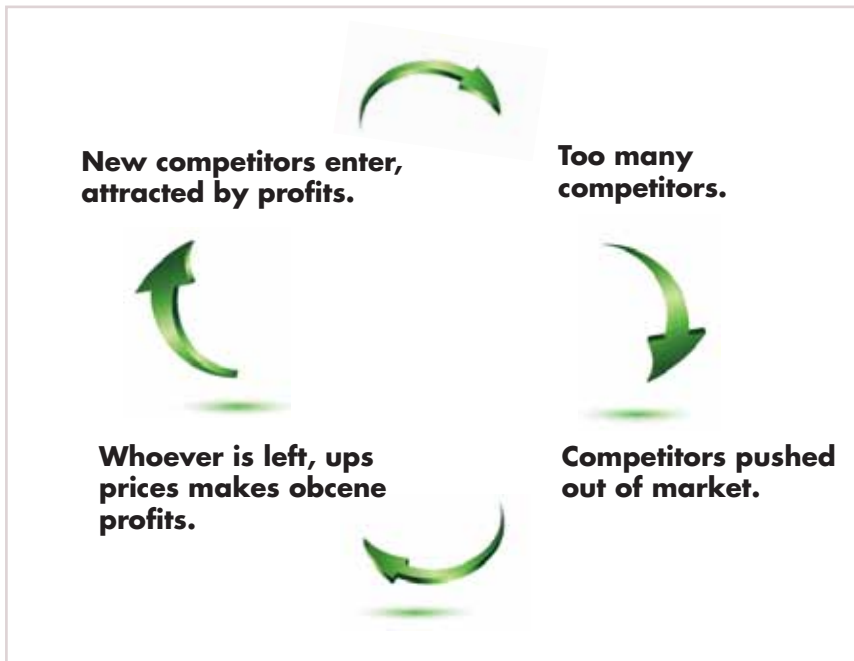
**"If you know the enemy and know yourself,
you need not fear the results of a hundred battles."**

3. THE NEW CIRCLE OF LIFE.

Competition isn't going to go away.

Sure, some might go broke because there are too many competitors, but markets have an uncanny ability to bounce back.


The new competitive circle of life, my friend, looks a lot like this:



It truly is a madhouse out there. Welcome to the party.

4. WHO ARE YOUR ONLINE COMPETITORS?

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Before you roll your eyes at such a STUPID question, I'm prepared to bet that you don't know who all your competitors are. If you did, you wouldn't need to read this eBook.

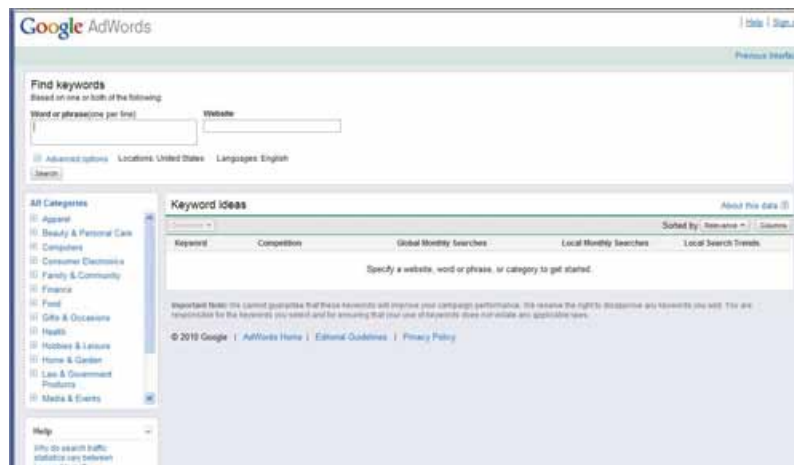
You will know some of them, I'm sure. They might be active against you in the bricks-and-mortar world. You might have seen them at trade shows. Your sales reps might have complained that they're undercutting on price. You might have seen their ads or visited their website in Google.

There are lots of ways that competitors get discovered – when they want to be.

There are also competitors that prefer to act by stealth.

They prefer to sneak up on big competitors, not to attracting much attention to themselves, so that the element of surprise on their side.

If you're not alert to them, you won't really know about them until it's too late.



Sneaky competitors are prolific online.

So the first thing to know about spying on online competitors is to find out exactly who they are.

This process starts with working out what keywords people use in search engines to find your products or services.

By far, the best tool for you to use to do this is the [Google External Keyword Tool](https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal) (<https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal>).

It can be preset to your trading market and it's free.

5. HOW TO USE THE GOOGLE EXTERNAL KEYWORD TOOL.



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Let's imagine we sell sunglasses (but you can apply the same thinking to any product.)

We enter the term "sunglasses" into the tool, preset the tool to display results from our chosen trading market (in this case, Australia) and click on "search". It takes about a minute for the results to be displayed.

Taking those keywords, sort the market into different sub-segments (niche markets).

In this example I've taken a sample of the keywords (there were a lot more) and broken the market into 4 loose groupings based upon actual search keywords. (You would need to be more specific for your own industry.)

Price	Branded Sunglasses	Sunglasses by Style	Commercial Intent*
discount sunglasses sunglasses sale discount designer sunglasses wholesale sunglasses cheap designer sunglasses cheap sunglasses	fendi sunglasses dior sunglasses armani sunglasses versace sunglasses christian dior sunglasses oakley sunglasses dg sunglasses valentino sunglasses giorgio armani sunglasses ray ban sunglasses	aviator sunglasses prescription sunglasses designer sunglasses polarized sunglasses oversized sunglasses sport sunglasses fishing sunglasses Men's sunglasses Kids sunglasses Big sunglasses Driving sunglasses Cycling sunglasses	buy sunglasses sunglasses for sale buy sunglasses online buy designer sunglasses buy aviator sunglasses buy Oakley sunglasses buy sun glasses buy ray ban sunglasses sunglasses to buy

* Commercial intent indicates keywords entered by potential buyers not browsers. These keywords are important if you're a shop.


If you're selling sunglasses, you should know who is competing in each of these niche markets to get an overall view of who is out there competing for business in your industry.

You might end up with hundreds even thousands of keywords to give you a better breakdown for the market or to better identify niche markets.

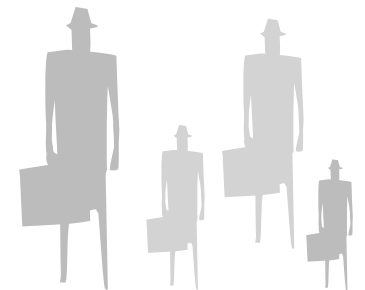
For example, Men's or Kids sunglasses are likely to be a niche on their own (not lumbered together as I have done for this example) as might sport sunglasses used for cycling or fishing.

6. HOW TO IDENTIFY COMPETITORS.

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1. Go to Google and type in each of the keywords.
2. Write down who is ranking organically and who is paying for ads.
3. Do that for the first 2 pages of Google.
4. You can repeat the exercise with Bing as well if you want to (although Google has the majority of search).
5. You now know who is competing in what niche and how successful they are.



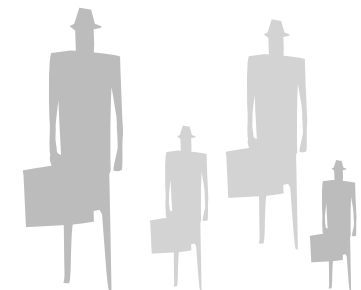
7. DETERMINE THEIR ONLINE MARKETING STRATEGY.

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Look at their websites to figure their marketing strategy:

- How they price their products.
- Special offers used to convert browsers to buyers (free shipping, coupons, up-sell, cross-sell prompts, product bundling, or extended warranty).
- Target market (men, women, kids, families, big, small, educated, non-educated).
- Range of product.
- Additional product lines (such as accessories)
- External sales strategy (look for affiliate links in global footer).



8. SEE HOW NET-SAVVY THEY ARE.

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Okay, you might be a newbie to the Internet so I'm not going to scare the bejeezus out of you just yet.

There are things that I would do which I won't tell you to do.

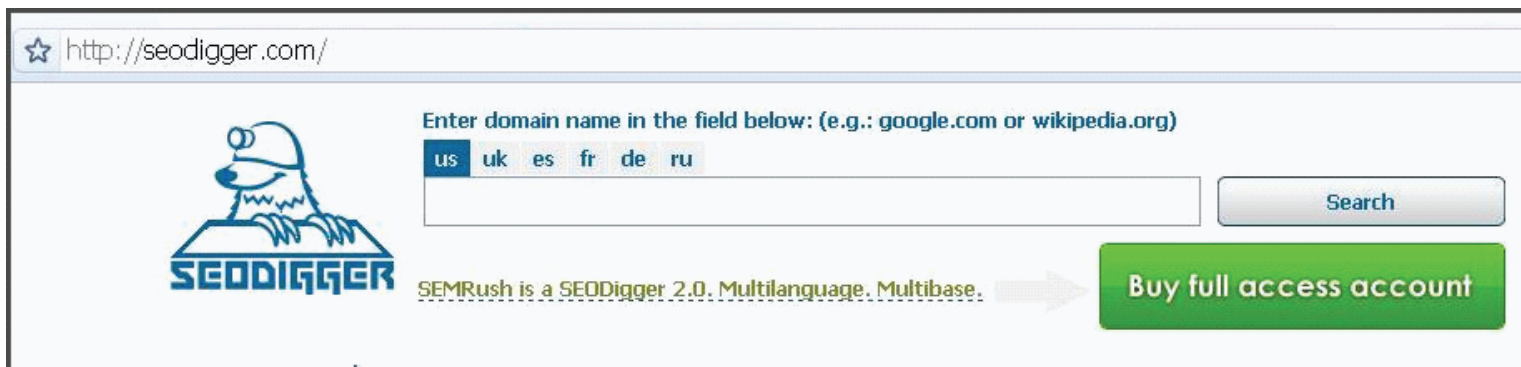
What I'll tell you to do is this.

STEP 1: SEE WHAT KEYWORDS COMPETITORS USE.

There are several ways to do this, but the easiest way for a Net newbie is to head over to [SEO Digger \(http://seodigger.com/\)](http://seodigger.com/) which has a free tool that you can use.

Just enter in the URL for your competitor and click search.

Ignore the ranking information that gets returned, though, unless you trade in the US which is the data source.



And if you're a down-under Aussie?

The good news of course is that you can see how they rank for their keywords in Australia.

Just head to this other free tool, this time at [Strongpoint \(http://www.strongpoint.com.au/Australian-SEO-Rank-Checker.aspx\)](http://www.strongpoint.com.au/Australian-SEO-Rank-Checker.aspx) for the Google Australia view of how your competitors rank.

AUSTRALIAN GOOGLE SEO RANK CHECKER

Internally we developed software to easily track where a site ranks in Google.com.au (Google Australia) for various keywords, note this is not Page Rank but where a site is listed in the SERPs (Search Engine Result Pages), we thought a simple online version might help some people, so here it is.

Enter your search keywords and website URL below to see where you rank in Google Australia:

Search Parameters

Keywords Website URL Results

STEP 2: SEE WHO LINKS TO COMPETITORS.

There are two really good reasons to find out who is linking to your competitor's website.

First, Google assigns PageRank (its proprietary quality score) on the basis of those links and,

Second, you'll get great ideas for backlinks to your own site from seeing who is linking to your competitors.

Sneaky huh?

Head to Google or Bing and search for backlink checker tools. You'll find plenty of choice. They're free.

Head overleaf for two of my favourites with a brief explanation why.

Yahoo! Site Explorer (<https://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/mysites>).

Unlike other tools, Site Explorer gives you a view of how big your competitor's website is.

So apart from knowing who is linking to them, you can also get insights into how many pages may potentially be being indexed.



Backlink Watch. (<http://www.backlinkwatch.com/>).

This tool offers up all your backlinks, plus makes PageRank information available and tells you whether or not the link has been marked "No Follow".

If the link is marked "No Follow" it means that the link isn't counted by Google towards improving your PageRank.



STEP 3: CHECKING OUT THEIR ADS.

By far, the best tool to use **for free** is TrafficTravis (<http://www.traffictravis.com/>) although, very sadly, it doesn't work with Apple computers.

TrafficTravis is downloaded as an application to your local computer in return for an email address.

It has the added advantage of allowing you to select your trading market so it's useful for businesses in Australia, New Zealand, UK, US and many other markets.



SPYFU (<http://www.spyfu.com/>) is a paid tool.

You can choose between US or UK markets. If you don't trade in those markets it has limited spying value for you.

However, if you're planning on writing a PPC campaign, SPYFU is terrific.

See what ad copy others have done that has been successful and, well, plagiarism is the finest form of flattery, isn't it?



9. MONITORING YOUR MISCHIEVOUS COMPETITORS.

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STEP 1: SET UP GOOGLE ALERTS.

Google Alerts are free and take about two minutes to set up.

Head over to www.google.com/alerts, enter your competitors name, choose "everything" and add your email address. You're done.

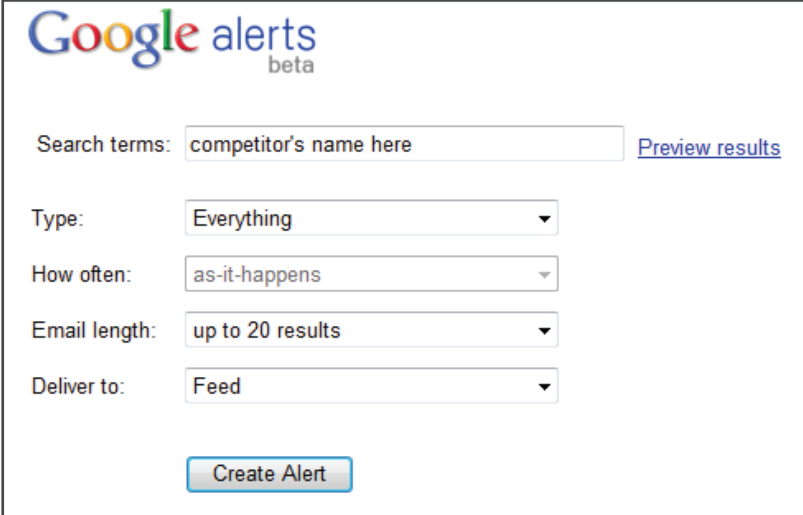
STEP 2: JOIN THEIR MAILING LIST (BUT DELETE THEM FROM YOURS).

Okay, this might seem mean, but all's fair in love and war, right?

Set yourself up with a non-identifying email address (Gmail or Hotmail is perfect) and subscribe to their mailing list.

If you can identify them on your list, well you know what to do.

The delete key was invented to rid competitors from your mailing list.



The screenshot shows the Google Alerts beta interface. At the top left is the "Google alerts beta" logo. Below it is a search form with the following fields:

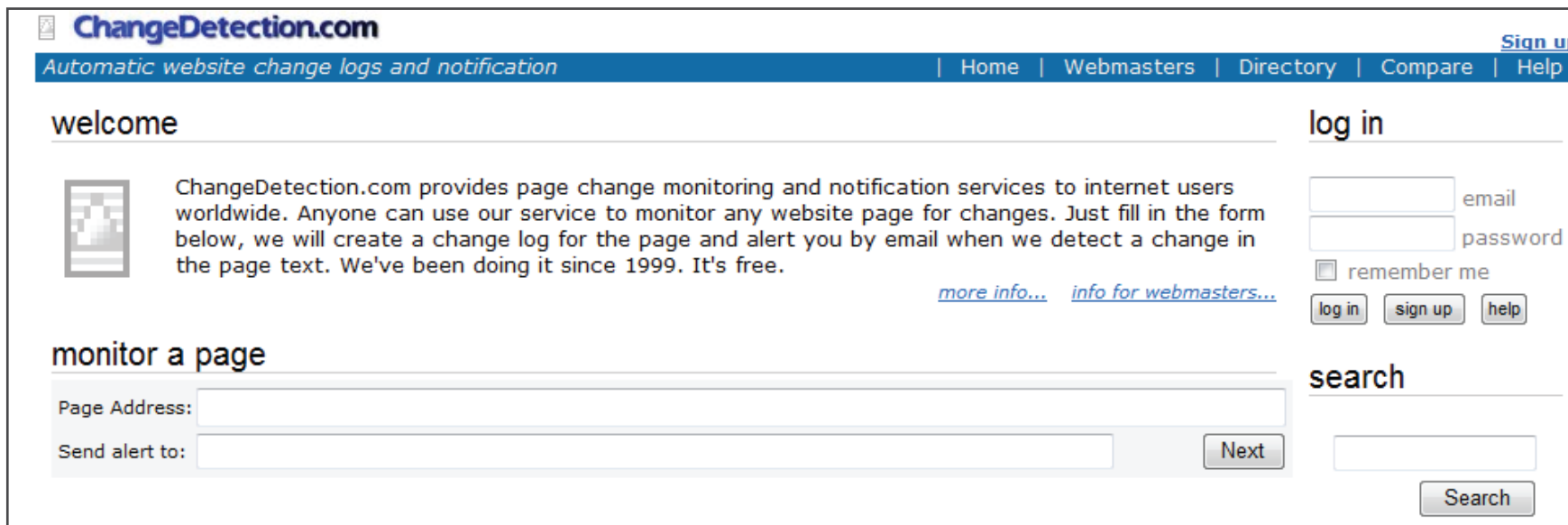
- Search terms:** A text input field containing "competitor's name here" and a blue "Preview results" link to its right.
- Type:** A dropdown menu with "Everything" selected.
- How often:** A dropdown menu with "as-it-happens" selected.
- Email length:** A dropdown menu with "up to 20 results" selected.
- Deliver to:** A dropdown menu with "Feed" selected.

At the bottom of the form is a blue "Create Alert" button.

STEP 3: MONITOR CHANGES TO THEIR WEBSITE.


This is perfectly legit, but seriously sneaky. Head over to www.changedetection.com and enter the pages of your competitor's website into the free tool.

Add your email address and Change Detection will tell you each time they make change to their page.



ChangeDetection.com [Sign up](#)
Automatic website change logs and notification | Home | Webmasters | Directory | Compare | Help

welcome

 ChangeDetection.com provides page change monitoring and notification services to internet users worldwide. Anyone can use our service to monitor any website page for changes. Just fill in the form below, we will create a change log for the page and alert you by email when we detect a change in the page text. We've been doing it since 1999. It's free.

[more info...](#) [info for webmasters...](#)

monitor a page

Page Address:
Send alert to:

log in

email
 password
 remember me

search

10. DELIVERING THE KILLER BLOW.

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Google, Yahoo! and Bing have strict rules when it comes to how your website is constructed and what you do to help make it rank. For instance, don't do these things:

- Upload your website a second time under a new domain name (that's a breach of duplicate content rules)
- Over-stuff your pages with your keywords (that's called keyword stuffing) or
- Participate in link schemes (you know those schemes where you buy 1,000 links for \$10).

This list, by the way, is NOT inclusive, so head to the following places for the latest on rules you'll need to abide by.

- Google Rules (<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=35769>).
- Yahoo! Rules (<http://help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/search/basics/basics-18.html>).
- Bing Rules (<http://www.undercoverstrategist.com/training/bing-rules.html>).

Sometimes competitors do really BAD things that search engines don't like in order to outrank you.

What happens if you catch them out? You can dob them in by completing a spam report with the relevant SE.

- Google Spam Report (<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/spamreport?hl=en&pli=1>)
- Yahoo! Spam Report (<http://help.yahoo.com/l/us/yahoo/search/abuse.html>)
- Bing Spam Report (<https://support.discoverbing.com/eform.aspx?productKey=bingcontentremoval&ct=eformts&st=1&wfxredirect=1>)

Search engines take breaches of their rules seriously and penalties for really bad infringements can be severe, including getting struck off the search engine index.

Of course, if a badly-behaved competitor that ranks on the front page is struck off, it leaves room for another website (perhaps it will be yours) to fill the gap that's left behind.

After all, all's fair in love and war.

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