How To Diagnose and Overcome Competitive SEO Challenges

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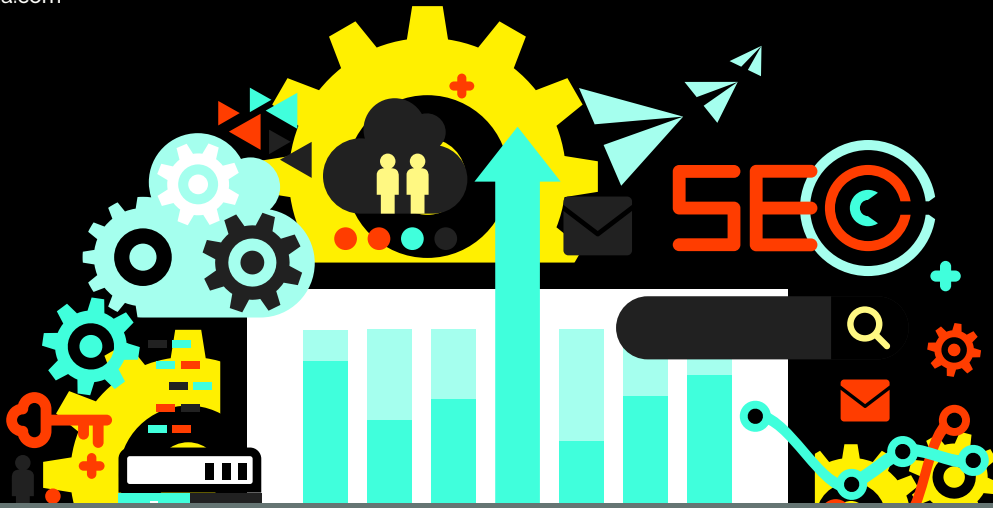
Introduction

Diagnosing a decrease or increase in organic traffic as a result of competition is very difficult. Often, your SEO competition differs from your actual marketplace competition.

Identify your SEO competition by putting a few of your non-branded keywords into Google. Which companies appear? Most likely you will see a variety of media, commercial, supplier and educational websites. These sites are all vying for the same #1 spot that you're pursuing.

If you are facing a gradual decrease of search traffic over time, due to increased competition, this is what you can do. First, spot the symptoms of a competitive SEO issue. Second, understand the causes of these pressures. Finally, create a strategy that will help you connect with your audience regardless of the fierce nature of your competition.

Symptoms of a Competitive SEO Issue

Gradual changes (over the course of months or years) in organic traffic and/or rankings are symptomatic of competitive SEO issues.

When reviewing your web analytics, look for long-term sloping trends in organic traffic. You need to change your SEO strategy to be found in Google in the future.
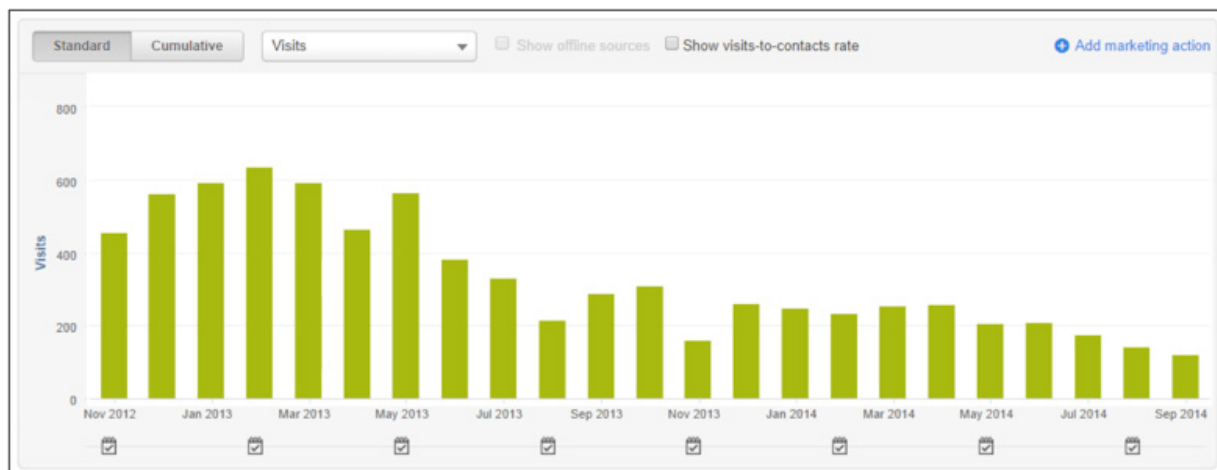

Google Web Analytics Screenshot

Causes of Competitive SEO Issues

Before diagnosing your SEO issue, let's look at the main causes of competition in SEO traffic.

Competition in SEO is no different than competition in the real market. As the demand for content increases around Topic X, presumably the supply of content related to this topic will also increase. This leads to more competition in the Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs).
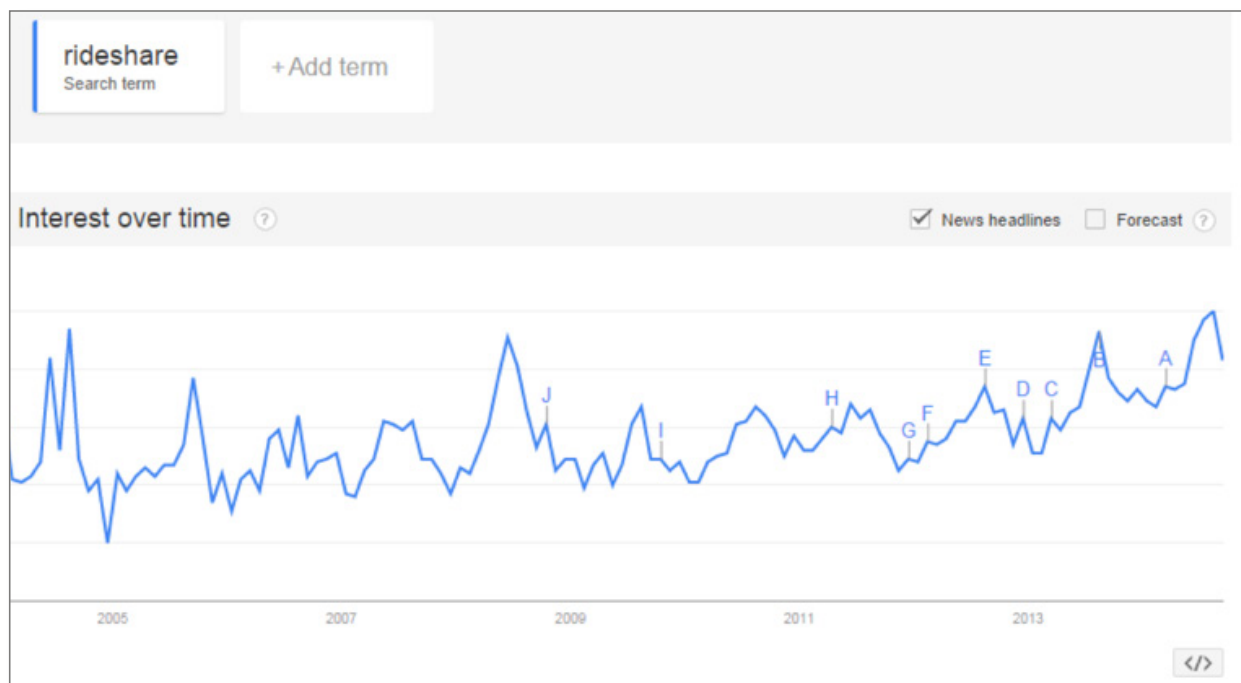
Competition in SEO is no different than competition in the real market.

One example is the current trend of "ridesharing." Via Google Trends, there is a gradual but steady increase of people searching for "ridesharing" topics. This search growth indicates the likelihood of increased SEO competition.

As you've seen in the past few years, there has been a massive shift towards Uber, Lyft, Sidecar, and other ridesharing companies. These companies are now building their brands, creating a glut of content, and earning links to their site. All of this activity leads to increased SEO competition for ridesharing sites.

These are the ultimate causes of increased competition in the market:

- Increased number of direct competitors in the market

- Increased variety of websites creating content about a topic (commercial, media, educational, etc)

- Increased number of established competitors entering a market

When thinking about your own industry, are any of these causes present? If not, other SEO issues may be causing your organic traffic change.

Solutions to Overcoming Competitive SEO Issues

If increased competition is the diagnosis for your SEO woes, this is what you can do about it:

Identify your true SEO competitors

Take your top 15-20 non-branded keyword targets. See which websites are garnering first-page Google rankings. The websites that appear most frequently in that target list of 15 to 20 keywords are your SEO competitors. On this list we can see that Zimride, Ridejoy, and ShareTheRide are top SEO competitors.

	Keywords				
Rank	Ridesharing	Carpooling	Taxi Sharing	Share a Ride	Car Sharing
1	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Real-time_ridesharing	SEOmoz.com/learn/seo/redirection	moz.com	sharetheride.com	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carsharing
2	rideshare.com	wikipedia.org/wiki/Carpool	bandwagon.io	ridejoy.com	carsharing.net
3	zimride.com	carmacarpool.com	uber.com	sharetheridenc.org	enterprisecarshare.com
4	rideshare.511.org	zimride.com	en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Share_taxi	zimride.com	zipcar.com
5	ridejoy.com	techcrunch.om/2014/12/15/carpooling-us/	welcome.cabwith.me/	lyft.com	carsharing.org
6	rideshareonline.com	1800234ride.com/carpooling	newsweek.com/tax-sharing-could-revolutionize-new-york-citys-transporation-system-267592	muni.org/departments/transit/sharearide	futureofcarsharing.com
7	techcrunch.com/tag/ride-sharing	play.google.com/store/apps/details%3Fid%3Dcom.carpooling.android.es%26hi%3Den	fortune.com/2014/09/01/share-a-taxi-with-a-stranger-idea-is-catching-in-big-cities	cattransit.com/services/share-a-ride/about-share-a-ride	citycarshare.org

Analyze their content

- Increased number of direct competitors in the market

- Increased variety of websites creating content about a topic (commercial, media, educational, etc)

- Increased number of established competitors entering a market

Backlinks

- How many linking domains do competitors have?

- What is the relevancy of the websites linking to competitors' sites?

- What is the quality of websites linking to competitor sites?

- What pages on competitors' sites are gaining the most links?

Rankings for targeted keywords

- How many first-page rankings do competitors show for a set of non-branded targeted keywords? Do some sites gain good rankings because of certain topics

Brand

- How well does this competitor stand out in the marketplace? How many websites mention this brand?

Shareability

- Social media doesn't impact your rankings directly. However, a large, engaged social following could build the buzz you need, which will generate links. How big and engaged are competitors' social audiences

- On which channels are they most active?

UX on site

- Is the site accessible on both mobile and tablet?

- Do competitors' sites load at a nominal speed?
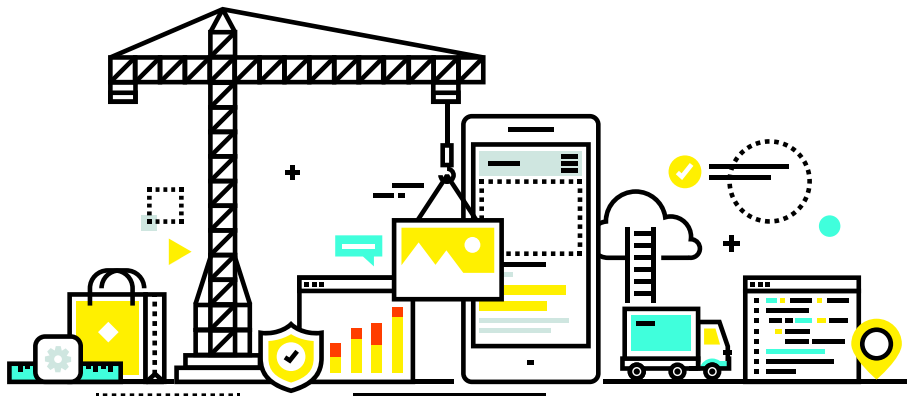
# Create a holistic marketing strategy that includes:

Content creation and outreach: You can't rely on content creation alone to produce great results. You have to spend time promoting the content on your site through many types of outreach (social, PR, email, events, and manual) to generate sustainable SEO results.

Brand building: What are you doing as an organization to build awareness? Marketing can't be responsible for all of this. The market views your brand based on your mission, history, product, marketing, and customer experience. As much as Google denies this, there is a bias in favor of bigger brands in search.

Usability: Make sure your site can be viewed on any device and that it doesn't load slowly.
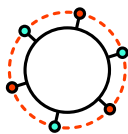
Segmentation: Organize your database by lifecycle stage and persona to make sure the communications you are sending are effective and timely.

Goal-centric initiatives: SEO shouldn't be the sole reason to make drastic changes to your marketing strategy. SEO needs to fit within your marketing initiatives and should align clearly with your overall company/marketing goals.

About Smartbug

SmartBug Media, one of a handful of HubSpot Diamond partners in the world, is the highest-rated agency in the history of the HubSpot ecosystem. We also boast the highest ROI documented from any HubSpot partner—3,558% and 14,500% ROI on a six-month and three-year campaign, respectively. At Inbound 2015, SmartBug Media became the most recognized agency, after winning or being named as a finalist in nine awards.

SmartBug Media, one of the first HubSpot partners to implement growth-driven design, was an inaugural member of the HubSpot COS Advisory Board. For more than seven years, SmartBug Media has been helping businesses to increase sales leads, close more customers, and enhance the reach of their brands. From building comprehensive online marketing programs to designing new websites, driving leads through social media or sales enablement, we're an extension of your marketing team that really delivers.

For a free inbound marketing or Web design consultation, or to learn more, visit www.smartbugmedia.com or call 949-236-6448.

About the Author

Ryan Malone, the founder and CEO of SmartBug Media, is a veteran of Deloitte & Touche, Seagate and several venture-backed technology companies. When he's not leading SmartBug and helping clients build high-octane marketing organizations, he's loving his wife and daughters and unsuccessfully learning the guitar. Go Terps!

Have a question? Curious how we can help grow your business?

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