

Competitor Website Audit Workbook

For prospects who are comparison shopping multiple institutions and/or programs, your website is critical to making a strong first impression. In order to sustain and grow market share, leading organizations regularly benchmark their sites against competitors' to determine what content they need to add, reposition, or even subtract to stay apace with peers.

This two-part tool presents a repeatable, manageable process for completing a gap analysis of a peer group's websites:

Part I: Identifying Competitor Institutions and Programs

Part II: Conducting the Gap Analysis

Part I: Identifying Competitor Institutions and Programs

The first step in conducting an audit is to create a list of peer institutions and programs for comparison. One common mistake made in this process is focusing solely or primarily at either the institutional level (if the analysis is conducted by a marketing director or equivalent) or program-specific level (if conducted by a program coordinator or content owner). While the distinction between program-level and institutional comparison is admittedly somewhat artificial, most prospects will navigate to both types of content on your site and so both types of pages should be included in your audit.

To encourage a robust comparison, this section encourages you to brainstorm not only the institutions that come to mind when a prospect is shopping your institution broadly, but also the programs that prospects who are shopping a specific item in your portfolio are likely also considering. Part II of the tool also distinguishes between institution and program-level comparisons, because there are specific types of content each area should present (due to the differing goals a prospect in those areas are likely to have).

Scope, Frequency, and Timing

Ideally your lists will include five to ten institutions and one to three program competitors for each of your best- and worst-performing programs. We advise refreshing the lists and conducting the comparison once every six months to a year. Cycling through programs (so that you never have to conduct comparisons for more than a few at a time) can make a comprehensive program-level assessment more manageable, bearing in mind that all program pages should be as competitive as possible by peak registration time. In a similar vein, keep in mind these timing considerations:

- Two months before peak registration for an institutional level audit
- Before a program launch as part of a market research plan
- After launch of a competitor program (Review Tool 12's resources on Google Alerts to stay current on competitor news)

Institutional Competitors

Consider institutions and/or COE units catering to similar microsegments, offering programs in the same niche areas, working with local employers, and advertising in local media including radio, television, transportation, public spaces etc. Use Google to see who is coming up first with the keyword you would expect your prospective students to use. Include both for-profit and non-profit institutions.

Competitors Within My Geographical Catchment Area	
1.	Website:
2.	Website:
3.	Website:
4.	Website:

Competitors Outside My Geographical Catchment Area	
1.	Website:
2.	Website:
3.	Website:
4.	Website:

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Program-Specific Competitors

Consider program competitors that appear in an Internet search using keywords related to the program. Include programs that faculty members recommend, and programs your current students considered before committing to yours. This portion of the analysis may be best delegated to a program coordinator or the equivalent.

Competitors *Within* My Geographical Catchment Area

1.

Website:
2.

Website:
3.

Website:

Competitors *Outside* My Geographical Catchment Area

1.

Website:
2.

Website:
3.

Website:

Worksheet for Deriving Competitor Intelligence from Applications

If your institution asks applicants for a list of other institutions to which they are applying, mine this data for institutions and programs to include in your website audit. If you have not completed a similar analysis of this data already, use the worksheet below to tally frequencies and formalize any “gut feelings” you might have about competitor institutions.

Program to Which Applicant was Applying	Other Programs / Institutions to Which they Applied	Frequency
1.		
2.		
3.		

Add to Program-Specific Audit:
 Institutions that are mentioned frequently in applications for program #1 should be added to the program-specific competitor list.

Add to the Institution or COE Unit-Wide Competitor List:
 Institutions that are mentioned frequently across programs #1-3 applicant pools.

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Final List

Funnel the starter lists on the previous two pages into this final list:

COE Unit-Wide Competitors	Website URL

Program-Specific Competitor for Program:	Website URL

Part II: Conducting the Gap Analysis

Add your competitors to the Website Audit spreadsheets. This stage of the analysis will be conducted in Excel.