



DYNAMIC VALUE PROPOSITION: DISTINCTIVENESS TOOLKIT

Conducting a Competitive Analysis to Assess Distinction

This toolkit includes resources to conduct a competitive analysis and to assess the distinctiveness of your school offerings based on that analysis.



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How to Use This Toolkit

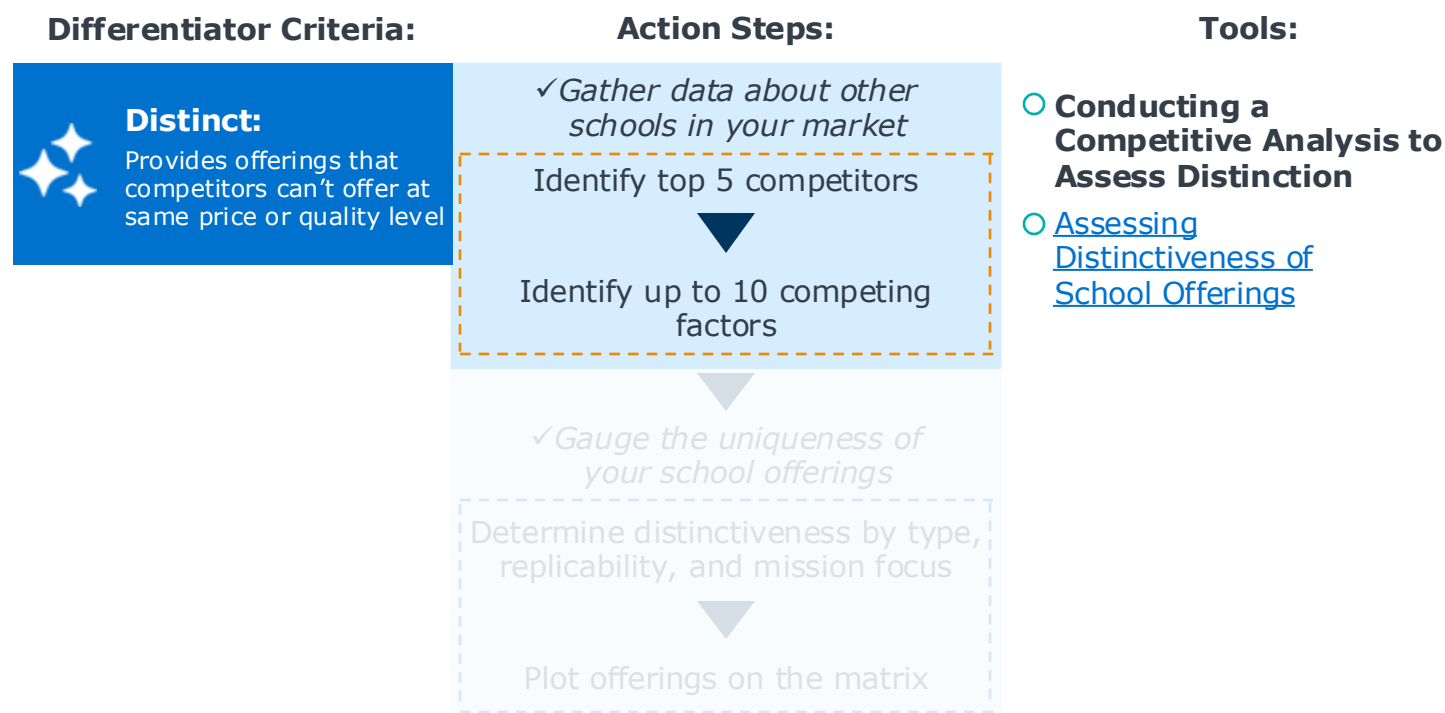
Independent schools often fall into the trap of trying to be ‘better’ instead of truly different. Simply keeping up with competitors or offering marginal improvements won’t attract more families—or set your school apart. True differentiation happens when your school’s strengths directly address family needs (relevant) and do so in ways competitors can’t easily match (distinct). That’s the differentiation sweet spot.

This toolkit is *one of two distinctiveness toolkits* that will assist schools in completing step 2 of EAB’s 3-step dynamic value proposition. This tool should be used after you create a market-tested customer profile and assess relevancy. Refer to **p. 5** of [EAB’s Value Proposition Management System Implementation Guide](#) for an overview of the 3-step process, and **p. 10** for an overview of step 2.

This toolkit begins by guiding schools to identify their top competitors and collect comparative data on key offerings they identified in step 1. Next, it provides resources, examples, and templates to help schools complete a thorough competitive analysis.

See the graphic below for a step-by-step overview and track your progress using the action plan checklist on **p. 11** of the Implementation Guide.

The Value Proposition Management System: Step 2





EAB's Dynamic Value Proposition

Guide to Competitive Analysis

Use this toolkit to identify top competitors and collect information on the distinctiveness of their school offerings to enable comparison to your school's offerings.

Analyze Distinctiveness of School Offerings

Follow the instructions below to conduct a competitive analysis to understand competitors' offerings and their distinctiveness in comparison to your school's offerings.

Instructions:

1. List *at least* the top five schools you compete with in your market on **p. 7**.
2. Gather the list of competing offerings to review from your own (up to) ten school offerings that you compiled on **p. 14** of the [Assessing Relevancy of School Offerings toolkit](#) in step 1.
3. Use the Competitive Analysis Source Guide on **p. 8** to guide you through which sources to use to research the school offerings of your top competitors; the four competitive analysis questions are also previewed on this page.
4. Answer the four competitive analysis questions for each offering, at each competitor school. Consult the Cheat Sheet on **pp. 9-10** to help you.
5. Follow the instructions on **p. 11** to complete the competitive analyses on **pp. 12-16** for *at least* five competitors in your market. This information will help you inform if and to what extent your offerings are differentiated from your competitors on **p. 7** of the Assessing Distinctiveness of School Offerings toolkit.

Identify Your Competitors

Use the following table to identify *at least* the top five schools you compete with in your market. Space is also provided for you to record why you picked each school as a top competitor.

Advice for Choosing Your School's Competitors

- Prioritize according to which schools you compete with the most for students
- Expand your competitors to include any schooling option, not just other independent schools in your market

Name of Competing School	Reason for Selecting Competitor
Competitor #1:	
Competitor #2:	
Competitor #3:	
Competitor #4:	
Competitor #5:	
Competitor #6:	
Competitor #7:	
Competitor #8:	

Competitive Analysis Source Guide

Review the following guidance about sources to gather information on your competitors' offerings. Then, start collecting information using the below competitive analysis questions, which are outlined in-depth on the competitive analysis cheat sheet on **p. 10-11**.

Sources for Competitive Analysis Information



Review Publicly Available Information



Gather Insider Intelligence



Contact Competitor Directly (optional)

Overview

Explore competitors' online presence, including websites, social media, news, etc.

Use your school community members to gather intel about your selected competitors

Identify someone who currently works at the competitor school and contact them directly

How To

- Set online alerts or follow your competitor on social media to stay up to date on news
- Determine a cadence for how often you will review publicly available data
- Identify people within your school who have connections to your competitor, particularly regarding the offerings you want to explore
- Ask them if they are willing to connect and schedule a time
- Use this option to supplement your findings, if necessary
- If no established contact, consider reaching out to staff/faculty who oversee the offering

Competitive Analysis Questions

1

Program Presence

Based on your research, does this competitor provide this school offering?

2

Distinctiveness Type

What is the type of distinctiveness of this offering- quantitative difference, different-in-kind program, or a paradigm shift?

3

Ease of Replication

How easily replicable is this school offering?

4

Connection to Mission

Does this offering tie to a distinct core value, deepening the school's overall differentiation?

Competitive Analysis Questions Cheat Sheet

Use the below guidance to answer the four Competitive Analysis questions.

Question	Guidance
<i>Based on your research, does this competitor provide this school offering?</i>	Review the competitor's website and social media. If you're having trouble finding a specific offering, it may not exist or may not be one of their selling points (even if it does exist).
<i>What is the type of distinctiveness of this offering?</i>	<div>Consider four common categories of distinctiveness to evaluate offerings:</div> <div> <div> Not Distinct <p>No noticeable differences; a vague, generic, or cookie cutter offering or description of one found. Likely the bare minimum for an independent school.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Small class sizes</i> • <i>Caring faculty</i> • <i>Rigorous academic environment</i> • <i>Student-centric wellness program</i> • <i>Strong community</i> </div> <div> Quantitative Difference or Slight Variation <p>Competing on slightly better rather than distinction. A program whose key difference is providing more of the same. Most common in most independent school value propositions.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>30 AP classes instead of 20</i> • <i>Offering Italian not Spanish</i> • <i>Avg class size 14 instead of 18</i> • <i>IB instead of AP classes</i> </div> <div> Different-in-Kind Program <p>This is the sweet spot of differentiation for most offerings. This would include an offering that few to no others offer at least in this way, making it standing out as truly unique from the peer set.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A required, multi-country study abroad program with a coordinated around the world curriculum</i> • <i>Academic tracks for pre-med and pre-law with field work in hospitals and law firms</i> </div> <div> Paradigm Shift <p><i>Most distinct but not a fit for everyone or every offering; a revolutionary and rare shift in practice.</i></p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A virtual reality pathway to get college credits without a professor</i> • <i>A school located on a partially self-sufficient ranch where all students work part-time</i> </div> </div>

Source: Bain, J., [Barriers to New Competition](#), 1956; EAB interviews and analysis.

Competitive Analysis Questions Cheat Sheet (cont.)

Question	Guidance
<p><i>How easily replicable is this school offering?</i></p>	<p>There are three key factors to consider when assessing how easily replicable a program is: the resources required, the program complexity, and its legacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resources required include capital investment, time, and energy. To help gauge the resources required to run the program, analyze the competitor's site and social media for information on the facilities, technology, and faculty required to run the program. Otherwise, use your best estimation. • The program's complexity can create a barrier to replication. Consider: Does this offering require the effort of multiple departments? Does this program build on itself, requiring student involvement across multiple grades? • A program's legacy of excellence can take decades to build, making it inherently difficult to replicate. A program with an excellent reputation recruits the best talent (staff, faculty, and students), which only further strengthens its legacy.
<p><i>Does this offering tie to a distinct core value, deepening your school's overall differentiation?</i></p>	<p>Start by locating a school's mission statement or core tenants, which is typically either on the homepage or under the "About Us" section of their website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs that relate to the school's core values may be explicitly listed here. • Otherwise, they may be highlighted in other areas of the homepage or social media posts and might be indirectly tied to the school's core value proposition.

Source: Bain, J., [Barriers to New Competition](#), 1956; EAB interviews and analysis.

Competitive Analysis Instructions

Review the instructions and example below about how to compile competitive analysis information on selected school offerings. Then, use the tables on **pp. 13-17** to compile information about your five competitors.

Instructions

1. Use *at least* your top five competitors that you identified on **p. 7** and list each on the top row of the tables on **pp. 13-17**.
2. In the 1st column of each table, list up to 10 school offerings that you know are relevant to families in *your market* to investigate if and to what extent your competitors have similar offerings. Note that the school offerings should be the same for each table.
3. In the 2nd-4th column of each table, answer the four competitive analysis questions about each offering. Use the cheat sheet on **pp. 10-11** to help you answer these questions and include links to sources when possible.

EXAMPLE: Competitor #1: Water's Edge Academy				
School Offering	Is this offering available? (Y/N)	What type of distinctiveness?	How easy is it to replicate?	Is it tied to school's core values?
<i>Program Variety</i>	Y	<i>Quant difference- They offer 15 AP courses and 10 honors courses. Students can select from different "tracks," such as STEAM.</i>	<i>Their curriculum seems to be standard for AP/Honors- it would take them considerable resources to match our offering</i>	<i>Yes- They pride themselves on having college-prep courses and include it in what appears to be a mission statement on their site.</i>
<i>Student Research</i>	Y	<i>Different program- Upper School Division Director noted the school is working to partner with university research staff to provide mentorship to juniors and seniors.</i>	<i>A university research partnership would take us considerable time and resources to implement. It would be a challenge to match.</i>	<i>No- This focus on research is a new endeavor of theirs and is mentioned several clicks from their homepage.</i>
<i>Faculty's Teaching Experience</i>	Y	<i>Different program- faculty members are hand picked from well-known higher ed institutions and are considered elite.</i>	<i>They have renowned faculty dedicated to teaching in each track. Our offering doesn't currently match that.</i>	<i>Yes- Their faculty and faculty's network are an obvious selling point for them on their social media.</i>

Data Collection Template

[illegible]

Data Collection Template

[illegible]

Data Collection Template

[illegible]

Data Collection Template

[illegible]

Data Collection Template

[illegible]



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