

4 Ways to Spy on Competitors to Better Plan Your Marketing



One of the great things about online marketing is how public everything is. Your competitors' marketing teams are no longer locked away behind closed doors, planning strategies in secret. You have total access to the content for their campaigns.

When they do something, you see it - along with everyone else that visits their website or follows them on social media.

And that's just ripe for new opportunities.

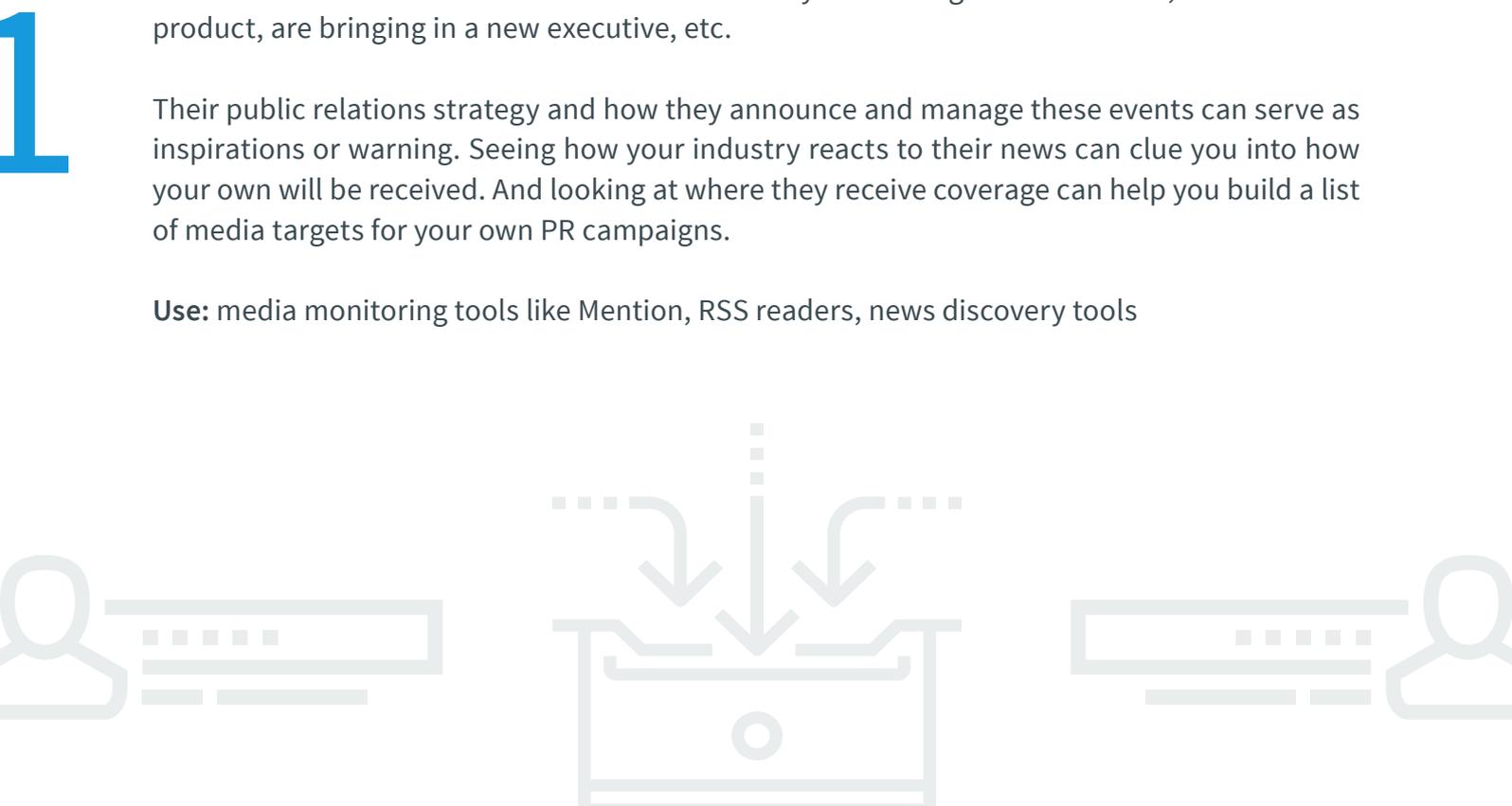
By closely following what your competitors do, you can keep a constant pulse on your industry and make sure you're staying ahead. Here's what you can do.

Monitor news & websites

The first way you'll want to track your competitors is by seeing what's posted about them in the news and on other websites. You'll know if they make a big announcement, release a new product, are bringing in a new executive, etc.

Their public relations strategy and how they announce and manage these events can serve as inspirations or warning. Seeing how your industry reacts to their news can clue you into how your own will be received. And looking at where they receive coverage can help you build a list of media targets for your own PR campaigns.

Use: media monitoring tools like Mention, RSS readers, news discovery tools



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Listen to social media conversations

Aside from the formal press, listening to casual conversations on social media is important. It clues you into the general public's thoughts, interests, and opinions.

You can look at what people are saying to your competitors via @replies or posting directly on their Facebook page. But even more helpful, you can see what other people are saying to each other about your competitors.

The insights you can get on social media are honest, authentic, and up for the taking.

Use: social listening tools like Mention, Twitter and Facebook lists, and contact discovery tools

Track search rankings

If organic search is important to your business, your competition might actually be a little wider than you thought. In addition to businesses with competing products or services, you'll need to worry about those with competing pages ranking well for keywords you're targeting.

For each of the most important keywords for your marketing strategy, track what other content is competing with your own. Watch to see how the rankings change over time, and adjust your content strategy accordingly.

You can also find out what keywords your competitors are targeting as a way to discover new ranking or content opportunities.

Use: SEO analysis tools like Moz or SEMrush



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Track paid marketing

Look at what your competitors are doing in terms of online advertising, too. Advertising is one of the more expensive digital marketing channels, so they wouldn't spend the money if it didn't work. Social advertising, PPC, display, sponsorships - if they're all opportunities.

And if your competitors are advertising, look at their strategies for idea and what you need to beat. See who they seem to be targeting, what they're offering, their keywords and landing pages, and where ads are displayed.

Use: an AdWords competitor tool like SpyFu or iSpionage

