

# Deconstruct Your Competitors' Websites

Steve Matthews | May 2011

Sometimes, the winning formula is right in front of you. This is often true when marketing your firm online and building its web presence. Many lawyers would benefit from spending just a few hours reviewing the websites of their three top rivals, or of a leading practitioner from another state. Here are some quick tips on what to look for, and tools to help.

1. **Check out the website's homepage title, or "title tag."** Go to your competitor's homepage and choose "VIEW > SOURCE" from your browser's menu. Right at the top of the page code will be the words <TITLE> and </TITLE>. Everything between these snippets is the website's page title, including some of the most valuable search engine real estate on the page! Chart which keyword phrases are used and how the keywords are ordered. These likely reflect some of the firm's biggest targets. (Note: You can right-click or control-click to bring up the view source menu option.)
2. **Build a list of website properties owned by the competition.** Firms can't help themselves from linking all their websites together. But your intelligence efforts won't be worthy until you have a full list of those websites in front of you. It takes some sleuthing, but reconstructing that digital footprint will tell you which practice areas and types of work your competitor deems most valuable. If you consider your competitor web savvy, chances are it's also savvy about how it prioritizes its website development.
3. **Find out who links to your competition.** When websites link to other websites, the search engines give the recipient website more authority in that site's rankings—it's called "link popularity." So while many firms want to know who's linking to their website, it's equally valuable to know who's linking to the firm across the road. Try using a tool like Yahoo Site Explorer to help you explore those link networks.
4. **What is the competition writing about?** This isn't about blogging so much as it's about following your competitor's commentary. Watch the delivery vehicles (blogs, newsletters, external publishing) that your competition has chosen to deliver its message. Original drafting (non-spam) takes time and is a huge soft-cost expense for most law firms. Knowing which topics are worthy of your time and investment might just generate some new online opportunities.

What's your competitor doing right that you're not? Learn from your rivals, plan improvements to your own site and execute.

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