

COLUMNS

Why you should be spying on your competitor's social ads

November 19, 2019



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Competitor analysis is essential to any business.

No matter the industry, understanding what is happening beyond your own operations is fundamental. After all, no business functions in a vacuum. And chances are that there are established players out there doing the same thing you are and trying to beat you at it.

As a spy

Social media ads have become an increasingly popular way for brands to reach their target audience.

According to Hootsuite, **53 percent of organizations** advertise on social media.

By carefully monitoring your competitor's paid social activity, you can identify what types of content engage your target audience the most.

This way, you can get to know your customers better and avoid making mistakes. If you see an ad performing poorly or attracting negative comments, you will avoid following in your competitor's footsteps.

If your competitor is ahead of you, there are plenty of opportunities to learn from them.

Likewise, if they are lagging behind, you can still evaluate their strategy and ensure you stay ahead of the curve.

Either way, these insights can help you identify the threats and opportunities that will guide your approach.

So, how do you make the best out of spying on your competitors' social media ads?

Discover social ad monitoring tools

While spying may have some negative connotations, do not fret you are not about to do anything illegal.

In the past, ad campaigns were run in the dark, with few insights into who was behind each promotion. Many marketers are still unaware that this is no longer the case.

Prompted by calls for greater transparency and the Cambridge Analytica 2016 election interference scandal, insights into your competitors' ad campaigns are easier to come by than ever.

On Facebook, you can use the [Ads Library tool](#). This feature will show you active Facebook and Instagram ads that have run in the past three months. You can search for any of your competitors to observe the hooks, offers and angles that they are trying to promote across both platforms.

For Twitter, you can visit the [Ads Transparency Center](#). Just as on Facebook, you can search for any brand to identify whether it has opted for paid promotion.

However, Twitter only shows active ads and those from the past seven days. One major bonus is that you can display the engagement numbers and spending per ad. This way, you can see which ads resonate best with their target audience, as well as which areas your competitors have focused their efforts.

Another useful hack you might want to try is following your competitor on Facebook. This means that their ads are more likely to appear directly in your feed. You can then right-click on the ad and select "Why am I seeing this ad?" This will give you better insights into who your competitor is targeting.

Likewise, you can view the comments, the community tab, and the review section on your competitor's social page. These pages contain valuable information about customer sentiment and any issues that a brand may be having.

What to look at when analyzing ads?

Once you come across a competitor's ad, there are five different aspects to analyze:

First, it is the headline. Headlines are worth **90 percent of the advertising dollar**. They are what most social users read so their quality largely affects the users' next move.

Advertising legend David Ogilvy always preached that, on average, five times as many people read the headline as the body copy.

By reviewing the headlines used by your competitor, you can identify which approach works best for each target audience. Is it a hard sell message or a question to spark curiosity? And if they A/B test, shouldn't you too?

Second, there is the copy itself. Reading the copy allows you to get a feel for the tone your competitor is using. Whether it is trying to come across as serious or playful, you can examine what personality it is promoting.

Likewise, you can see whether the competitor is using emojis or unique brand hashtags to see if those have proven successful for the company.

Third, take a look at the creative side. What exactly is your competitor using to intrigue social media users?

Most brands know that graphics or interactive elements are highly effective.

After all, a Facebook ad that contains images is said to be **75 percent to 90 percent more effective**. Therefore, it is likely you will come across images, videos, carousels or polls.

Try to understand what forms your competitors use, what style they use, and whether they focus on a specific product or portray a certain type of lifestyle.

Fourth, focus on what type of offers your competitor promotes. Is it coupons or discounts? Are they at a fixed percentage or give value through free shipping?

It is also valuable to analyze whether they target only a specific market segment. Such insights can help you realize how your business stands with promotion and see whether your strategy stacks up to your competitor's social media presence.

Fifth, pay attention to the call-to-action. When you click on the ad, where does it take you?

Understanding the landing page can give you clarity on the primary reason behind running the ad in the first place.

When you identify your competitor's main selling point, you will be better able to optimize your own ad campaigns.

Copy that

Spying on your competitor's social media should not mean replicating what your business rivals do. You do not want to be seen as a copycat.

Consumers are smart, so if a brand does something specific and they see a competitor mirroring it, your brand

image may suffer.

Instead, take the insights and observations that you have gathered to design a strategy that outdoes your competitors.

Always remain on-brand, and make sure your messaging remains consistent across all channels. This works better than trying to patchwork different things together.

IT IS ALL about being strategic.

Brands should be monitoring and pushing for innovation. This can only come through authentic strategies for growth.

Ads now are more transparent, and there is unprecedented accessibility to see what exactly is happening.

Brands should strategize around these advantages while keeping in mind that the ultimate goal is to stand out and provide a unique proposition.

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