# How to "borrow" from your competitors and outperform them

This playbook will show you how t1o perform distribution research to unlock super helpful insights about the ways in which your competitors distribute their product. Think traffic sources, positioning, community vibe, tone of voice, content strategy etc. In short, distribution research is the tool in your expert marketer tool-box that will help you better understand the competitive landscape.

Our advice? Be curious and adventurous, you really can learn a lot from your competitors. Be aware, distribution research will not serve silver bullets on a silver platter. But it will give you better growth ideas and help you better prioritise them. And that is actually a silver bullet in itself.

How distribution research works

With this playbook, you will be researching and comparing yourself to 3-5 competitors you admire and want to beat.
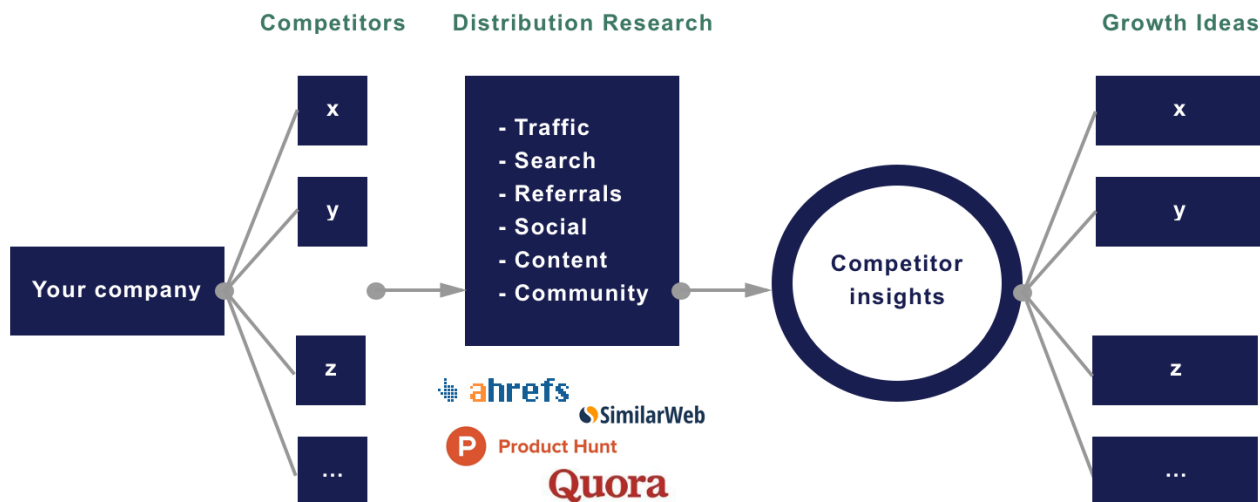
Distribution research overview

It will involve collecting a huge amount of data. To help you keep an overview, we have created a <u>template, where you can gather all your data</u> for each traffic source. Exploring different traffic sources will give you better ideas for growth activities instead of basing your ideas on another "mind-blowing" growth hacking article.

> *"Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe." - Abraham Lincoln*

Once you have all these new ideas, the next job is prioritising which to do first using an activity matrix. More on that later, plus hacks for how to get started executing these activities with <u>Founders Growth Machine</u>. Let's get started!

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Getting an overview of the competitive landscape

The first thing you need to do is to get an overview of your competitors' website traffic. You can do this by researching which traffic sources drive the most traffic to their website. Alongside that, create the same traffic overview for your own website to compare.

Why

- The goal here is to get insights about what your competitors are doing and more importantly what they are not doing. *It's not necessarily about copying your competitors and doing the same thing as they are. It's about not jumping straight into the red ocean.*

- If all your competitors get a huge amount of traffic from search, it doesn't necessarily mean that you should double down on search. *Instead, maybe you should look at the keywords they use, and assess whether there is an untapped potential in keywords they aren't targeting. More on that later.*

- It should inspire you to try new things when distributing your product. *You shouldn't avoid 100% what your competitors are doing, you should just do it better in order to outperform them.*

How

There are various tools that can give you insights about your competitors' traffic sources. We use SimilarWeb's free version. It's pretty simple to use.
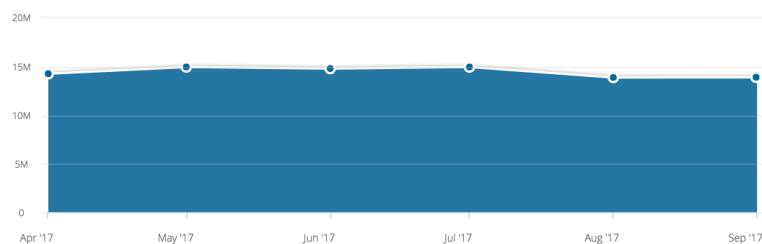
Gathering data

- Just type in the domain of the competitor you want insights about
- You will get an overview of total visits to the website and the total amount of visits divided between each traffic source This means you can see how much of the total traffic comes from direct, social, search etc.
- NB! The free version of SimilarWeb only allows you to see data from the previous month.

Traffic Overview ⓘ

Estimated Data Verify Your Website

Total Visits ⓘ   Embed Graph

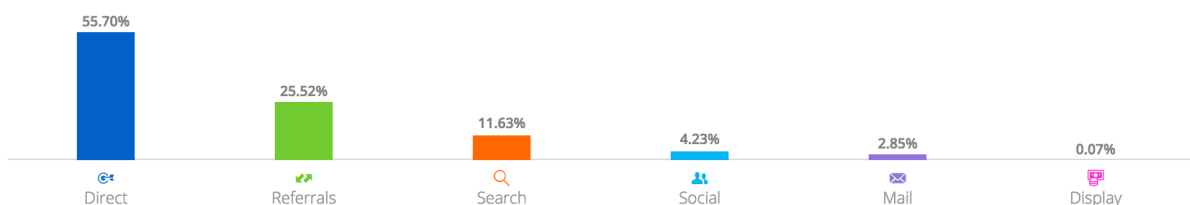🖥 📱 On desktop & mobile web, in the last 6 months

```
20M

15M

10M

5M

0
   Apr '17    May '17    Jun '17    Jul '17    Aug '17    Sep '17
```

Engagement

Total Visits	**13.91M** ⌃0.15%
⏱ Avg. Visit Duration	00:01:26
📰 Pages per Visit	2.01
⇗ Bounce Rate	83.76%

Traffic overview, SimilarWeb

Traffic Sources ⓘ   Embed Graph

🖥 On desktop

```
55.70%


        25.52%

                11.63%
                        4.23%     2.85%     0.07%
Direct  Referrals  Search  Social   Mail    Display
```

Using the template

- Look at the amount of traffic generated by each traffic source in percentages and <u>add it to the template</u>.
- To make it easy, you can just add the number of total visits and each traffic source in percentages to the template for each competitor. It will automatically calculate the traffic in actual numbers.

Company	Monthly Visits	Direct Traffic		Search traffic				Referring traffic		Social traffic		
The collective	55,100	30.43%	16,767		45.23%	24,922		14.76%	8,133		7.55%	4160
https://www.thecollective.co.uk/				Organic	80.55%	20,074				Facebook	79.19%	3294
UK				Paid	19.45%	4,847				Reddit	16.67%	693
										Twitter	4.14%	172
Common	248,710	16.45%	40,913		11.39%	28,328		8.82%	21,936		63.30%	157433
https://www.common.com/				Organic	100.00%	28,328				Facebook	98.92%	155733
US				Paid	0.00%	0				Twitter	0.56%	882
										Youtube	0.45%	708
										Pinterest	0.07%	109
WeLive	22,110	43.29%	9,571		47.31%	10,460		7.76%	1,716		1.64%	363
https://www.welive.com/				Organic	100.00%	10,460				Facebook	100.00%	363
US				Paid	0.00%	0						

Founders' template for gathering all data

Expected outcome

Bigger picture: This traffic overview will help you get an overall idea of how much traffic your competitors get from different traffic sources compared to you. *For example, all <u>LifeX's</u> (a co-living space in Copenhagen) competitors get a lot of traffic from social platforms. By looking at their social media platforms, we can try to figure out what they post to drive that amount of traffic.*

Detailed insights: In SimilarWeb, you can also explore each traffic source more in depth. *For example, under 'social traffic', you can see the top five social platforms driving the most traffic to your competitors' websites. Under 'search' you can see the search traffic divided into organic and paid search, etc.*

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Identify patterns: Once you're done with this step you will have a bunch of numbers for each competitor. It's a good idea to always start out by highlighting the top three traffic sources, to see if there is a pattern. *For example, if they all get most of their traffic from Facebook, you should explore why by researching how active they are, what kind of content they post, etc.*

Less guesswork about your product: In general it's also important to research the traffic sources that drive traffic to your own website. *For example, when we did the organic keyword research for* <u>Founders</u>*, we realised that we needed to step up regarding SEO. We didn't rank for any relevant keywords.* When doing the distribution research, you will not only learn about your competitors, you will also learn something about your own business.

5 deep dives into traffic sources

When you have the traffic source overview ready, it's time to explore every single corner of the competitive landscape and find all the good stuff: new growth ideas!

The next few sections will walk you through each step of how to research the traffic sources in depth to find new growth ideas without falling straight into the red ocean. We'll show you why and how to get closer to the blue ocean by researching each of the following key traffic sources:

- Search
- Referrals
- Social media platforms
- Content
- Community

#1 Search

By looking at the traffic overview in the template, we already know how much search traffic comes from organic and paid. The purpose of this deep dive is to explore competitors' organic and paid keywords (ppc).

Why

- Get insights into which keywords people searched for when visiting your competitors' website.
- Find out which keywords work well for them by looking at the amount of traffic specific keywords drive to their website, their ranking position for these specific keywords etc.

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- Get new growth ideas. For example, finding keywords that competitors' are not ranking for or to find relevant keywords with low competition that makes it easier for you to compete for.

How

Time to put some money behind it. SimilarWeb provides you with the overview of total search traffic divided into both organic and paid. But to get data about all the organic and paid keywords, you need a paid account.

- You can use SimilarWeb's free version, but you are only able to see top five keywords, which is the case with most of the free accounts like Semrush and SpyFu.
- The top five keywords are not that interesting, since they, in most cases, are company related keywords like company name, pricing etc. Just look at this example from Hotjar:

Keyword		Volume [i]	KD [i]	CPC [i]	Traffic ↓ [i]	Position [i]		URL [i]
hotjar	④	12,000	3	3.00	5,980	1		🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▾
hot jar	③	1,100	4	6.00	656	1		🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▾
hotjar	④	12,000	3	3.00	110	1	🔗	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ini
hotjar	④	12,000	3	3.00	110	1	🔗	🔒 careers.hotjar.com/
hotjar	④	12,000	3	3.00	110	1	🔗	🔒 www.hotjar.com/to
hotjar	④	12,000	3	3.00	110	1	🔗	🔒 docs.hotjar.com/v1
hotjatt.com	◼	200	2	3.50	72	1 ↑22		🔒 insights.hotjar.com
regular	④	25,000	31	1.70	66	20 ↑6		🔒 docs.hotjar.com/v1
hot\	◼	1,500	65	—	54	9 ↑82		🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▾
users	③	13,000	43	0.20	51	19		🔒 docs.hotjar.com/v1
hotjar pricing	②	250	0	20.00	46	1		🔒 www.hotjar.com/pr
web site heat map	③	500	66	9.00	45	4 ↓1		🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▾
what is hotjar	④	100	0	3.50	35	1	👁	🔒 docs.hotjar.com/v1

We use Ahrefs, a tool you can use for exploring almost all the traffic sources in the distribution research - and it's worth every penny. We will show you how to use it for researching both organic and paid keywords.

Organic keywords:

In Ahrefs you can see all the organic keywords that drive traffic to your competitors' website when searching for a specific domain. You will get an overview like this:

In this overview you should look at the keywords' volume, competition, traffic and position for the keywords relevant for you - remember to ignore the first company related keywords, you won't be optimising for them anyway. Ahrefs by default lists the keywords by those that drive the most traffic to your competitors' website.

Expected outcome

Get smart about what keywords to optimise for: When looking at the keywords that drive the most traffic to your competitors' website, you should pay attention to the search volume, competition, and position.

- For example, if search volume is high and competition is low for that specific keyword (competition in Ahrefs is defined as keyword difficulty (KD)), it's an obvious keyword for you to optimise for.

- Why? Because it will be easier to get a higher ranking position in the organic search results - especially if your competitors' ranking position is on the first page in the search results (position 1-10).

Geo-targeting: Distributing your product for a specific market? You can also filter by countries to see which keywords competitors rank for or if they even rank for keywords in that country. *For example, LifeX's competitors in the Danish market don't rank for relevant keywords in Denmark. This is an obvious opportunity for LifeX to optimise for these keywords as there is no competition as such.*

Work out if your competitors know what they're doing: Overall, looking at organic keywords can somewhat give you an idea of whether your competitors have a clear SEO strategy or not. *For example, if the total amount of organic search traffic is high, they might have a good idea about how to SEO-optimise their website.*

- You can also get an indication of their SEO strategy by looking at the organic keywords driving the most traffic to their website. Does it seem like they know which keywords to rank for or are the top ranking keywords complete random?
- It's also a good idea to check if they have their blog on page or off page. If it's off page, they probably don't have a clear SEO strategy, because they wouldn't miss out on a great bunch of organic traffic from their blog, if they know how SEO works.
- If you sense that they don't have a SEO strategy, you can get a good head start by starting to optimise your website for SEO.

Paid keywords

When looking at paid keywords (ppc), you are pretty much looking at the same metrics as for the organic keywords to find relevant and potential keywords to pay for. The only difference is that you also will be looking at the cost per click (cpc). In Ahrefs, you get this overview for paid keywords:

Paid Keywords [i]

Volume ▼ | KD ▼ | CPC ▼ | Words ▼ | Search in results 🔍

🇺🇸 690   🇮🇳 208   🇬🇧 105   🇦🇺 57 | More ▼   689 results

Keyword	Ads [i]	Block [i]	Volume [i]	KD [i]	CPC [i]	Traffic ↓ [i]	Results [i]	URL
hotjar	Ad	≡	12,000	3	3.00	28.1%	7,050,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
usertesting	Ad	≡	31,000	13	1.10	26.9%	1,390,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
crazyegg	Ad	≡	3,200	19	2.50	4.5%	493,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
heap analytics	Ad	≡	2,500	4	1.90	3.3%	482,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
vwo	Ad	≡	19,000	19	6.00	2.2%	9,650,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
website analyzer	Ad	≡	1,800	91	8.00	1.9%	25,800,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
usertesting.com	Ad	≡	1,800	5	1.70	1.6%	1,390,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
hot jar	Ad	≡	1,100	4	6.00	1.1%	9,820,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
trymyui	Ad	≡	2,900	0	1.00	1.0%	132,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
luckyorange	Ad	≡	900	6	1.70	0.9%	218,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
hotjar pricing	Ad	≡	250	0	20.00	0.9%	145,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
web stats	Ad	≡	500	96	6.00	0.6%	261,000,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
heatmap	Ad	≡	4,200	67	9.00	0.5%	5,650,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
website useability	Ad	≡	350	25	11.00	0.5%	42,700,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
session recording	Ad	≡	400	4	6.00	0.5%	275,000,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
web usabilty	Ad	≡	400	45	11.00	0.5%	170,000,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
hotjar.com	Ad	≡	300	4	—	0.5%	7,530,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
web analytics free	Ad	≡	350	94	11.00	0.4%	27,000,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
siteanalytics	Ad	≡	450	10	9.00	0.4%	9,310,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼
free web analytics	Ad	≡	150	94	10.00	0.4%	37,800,000	🔒 www.hotjar.com/ ▼

Expected outcome

To compete or not to compete: You'll find out which keywords drive most paid traffic to competitors' website and how much traffic they exactly drive.

- You can also see how much they pay per click. If cpc is low, it could be an easy choice for you to bid higher for these specific keywords, because it will be easier for you to compete for. Also, remember to look at competition, position etc. to see whether it's easy or difficult to compete for these keywords.

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See how competitors are positioning themselves: Another really cool thing in Ahrefs, is that you can see your competitors' ads. In that way you get great insights about how they are positioning themselves, which paid keywords and ad copy are generating traffic, what kind of CTAs they use etc.

- You can use this as inspiration for not only ad copy but also for how to position yourself on your website.
- As with the case of organic keywords, you can also check if your competitors are running ads in the same country you are targeting. If not, you should take advantage of the situation and start running ads.

Get a headstart in paid search: Not all competitors' have paid search traffic. If paid search traffic is 0%, it probably means that they are not running ads. You can double check in Ahrefs under "PPC keywords". Even though your competitors' are not running ads, it's still relevant to look at paid keywords. The purpose is to find out why they are not running ads.

- You can do this by checking some of the most relevant keywords for you to rank for (you can find inspiration from your list of organic keywords).
- Is cpc too expensive? Is the search volume too low or non existent? Is the competition too high? All these factors could be a reason why your competitors are not running ads. If you see great potential for running ads (low cpc, low competition, etc.), you should start doing it before your competitors get the same idea.
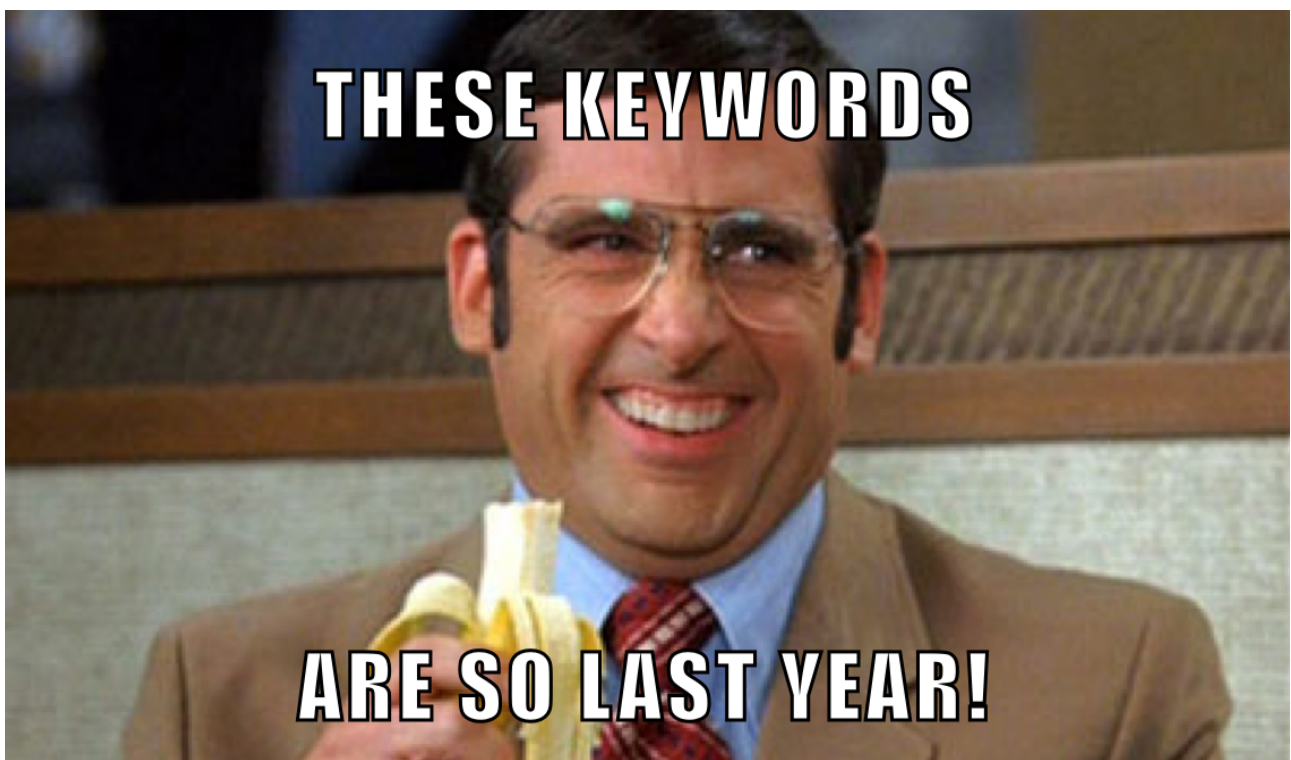
In general: The list of competitors' organic and paid keywords can give you inspiration for keywords to double down on:

- Keywords you didn't think were relevant
- Keywords to start ranking for, if competition and cpc is low
- Keywords to steal from competitors and compete for a higher position
- Keywords your competitors should, but don't rank for

If you discover a great growth opportunity when looking at organic and paid keywords, you will, of course, have to do a more in depth keyword analysis. I recommend this great guide by Ahrefs on how to do keyword research.

#2 Referrals

| Traffic | Search | **Referrals** | Social | Content | Community |

Why

- Exploring competitors' referring traffic sources, provides you with insights about which domains, pages and content drive the most traffic to your competitors' website.
- This will give you insights about who's mentioning your competitors, what type of content they get mentioned in etc.
- Remember to research your own referring traffic sources, you might find some good articles about your product that you can use for sharing on your social media platforms. It's also a good opportunity to build relationships by reaching out and say thanks.

How

Ahrefs is also a great tool for understanding your competitors' referring traffic. It provides you with a complete list of all your competitors' referring domains and content. You can also use SimilarWeb's and BuzzSumo's free accounts, but the data you will get is very limited, as you are only able to see the top five domains and top five pieces of content.

Referring domains

- With <u>Ahrefs</u> you get a complete overview of all your competitors' referring domains and backlinks from the specific page that is linking to your competitors' website. All the backlinks enable you to see the pages that ever linked to their website.
- You can also see the anchor links to get insights about how they are referred to in an article etc.

Anchor and backlinks, Ahrefs

- In Ahrefs it's super easy to navigate and search for specific domains if you, for example, want to know if TechCrunch is referring to competitors' website.
- You can also filter by the number of backlinks to see which domains link most to your competitors' website. Just remember to check the quality, because a huge amount of backlinks doesn't necessarily equal good quality. To check that, you can look at Ahrefs Domain Rating (DR).
- *NB! When looking at referring domains, be aware of domains like Eventbrite, Medium, bit.ly, goo.gl etc. It's often competitors linking to their own website via their account on external sites or by using URL shorteners like bit.ly and goo.gl etc.*

Referring content

- You can also get a list with the top referring content to your competitors' website. This gives you insights into the content they are mentioned in, like what type of content they are mentioned in, the number of content pieces they are mentioned in, how many times the content got shared on social media etc.

- Looking at referring content you will get direct insight about what type of content they got mentioned in. Is it PR material or a blog post with top 10 best tools? By looking at the anchor link, you can quickly spot what the referring content is about and get an idea how they were mentioned, for example, if it's positive or negative.
- Remember to check at the referring domain in Ahrefs to see if it's important or just a "spammy" site.

Top Referring Content [i]

| Search in results | 🔍 | | | | | | | | |

| Live [i] | Recent [i] | Historical links [i] | 42 referring pages | | | | | | | | 🗎 Export |

UR [i]	DR [i]	Referring page and backlink	🐦	f	in	📌	Total [i]	SP ↓ [i]	First Seen [i]
41	73	**Real Time Messaging API | Slack** 🔒 api.slack.com/rtm ▾ Scaling Slack Events in Node	42	19	55	0	116	19	20 Aug '17
14	60	**Sizing up the startup studio model: A look at eFounders, a company that builds companies - Tech.eu** tech.eu/features/4280/startup-studio-europe-efounders/ ▾ To name a few in Europe, there's Denmark's Founders A/S, The Netherlands-based StarterSquad and The Eleven and	187	15	41	0	246	15	21 Apr '17
28	39	**Pillar - Digital product design and development studio based in Berlin** 🔒 pillarstudio.com/ ▾ Founders	12	73	69	4	158	12	13 Jul '17
22	67	**Drawing Attention Through Color in Web Design - Designmodo** 🔒 designmodo.com/color-attention-design/ ▾ • Additionally, we have an example of Founders. By the time you make it halfway down the • Additionally, we have an example of Founders. By the time you make it halfway down the	0	148	64	9	221	9	28 Apr '17
8	49	**An inside look at startup studio – FOUNDERS** oresundstartups.com/an-inside-look-at-scandinavias-largest-startup-studio-founders/ ▾ you. In Copenhagen this dream could become your reality with Founders who opened its doors in 2012.	15	8	45	0	68	8	4 May '17
12	56	**Ny dansk opbevaringsservice er Dropbox for dine fysiske ting - Trendsonline.dk** trendsonline.dk/2014/05/02/ny-dansk-opbevaringsservice-er-dropbox-for-dine-fysiske-ting/ ▾ er ud over at være medstifter i GoBox også partner i Founders, som helt enkelt er en virksomhed, som laver virksomheder,	2	171	2	0	175	2	23 May '17
11	56	**Minbildinbil.dk er klar med den første danske P2P biludlejningstjeneste - Trendsonline.dk** trendsonline.dk/2013/08/07/minbildinbil-dk-er-klar-med-den-forste-danske-p2p-biludlejningstjeneste/ ▾ dedikerede iværksættere – og virksomheden er en del af inkubatoren Founders.as.	3	2	1	0	6	1	7 May '17
10	56	**Son of a Tailor gør op med masseproducerede T-shirts - Trendsonline.dk** trendsonline.dk/2015/11/17/son-of-a-tailor-gor-op-med-masseproducerede-t-shirts/ ▾ Tailor sikret sig en millioninvestering og en treårig supportaftale fra Founders A/S, der ikke er en traditionel investor, men et 'startupstudio',	0	26	144	0	170	0	7 May '17
8	33	**Wolf** donebywolf.com/ ▾ [empty anchor]	82	28	0	0	110	0	18 Feb '17
10	56	**Tag iværksætterspringet: Founders A/S gør landingen blød - Trendsonline.dk** trendsonline.dk/2016/02/19/founders-om-at-tiltraekke-kvalificeret-arbejdskraft-til-startups/ ▾ når opslag fra startup virksomheder toner frem. Og det vil Founders, der kalder sig selv en 'virksomhedsfabrik', lave om på. Ifølge	0	31	16	0	47	0	10 May '17
10	56	**Founders henter Gobox medstifter fra Rocket Internet i Bangkok - Trendsonline.dk** trendsonline.dk/2015/11/04/founders-henter-co-founder-til-gobox-fra-rocket-internet-i-bangkok/ ▾ • Founders er en virksomhed, hvis mission er at skabe vindende og • Founders er en virksomhed, hvis mission er at skabe vindende og	0	3	38	0	41	0	3 May '17

Top referring content, Ahrefs

Expected Outcome

These insights about your competitors' referring domains and content can give you ideas for new ways to distribute your product as well as getting more referring traffic by:

- **Finding potential business partners:** If someone wrote a top 10 guide about tools to use, you can reach out to tell them about your product. Maybe they have never heard about it.

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- **Finding relevant influencers** to write about your product (e.g. advertorials).
- **Finding relevant people or companies to follow on social media:** This is a great way for you to create awareness by e.g. tagging them when sharing content on social media. *For example, if someone wrote a guide about top 10 tools, you can share it and write about your product in the post. You can also comment on blog posts or find social media posts to make people aware of your product and explain why you're better than your competitors.*
- **Starting a dialogue by commenting on blog posts:** You have direct access to all the content via the backlinks in Ahrefs. This is an easy way for you to find blog posts to comment on or share.
- **Getting ideas for content** to write. We'll explore that more under the "content" deep dive.

#3 Social Media platforms

Why

Today most companies are on social media. Researching your competitors' presence and how they distribute their product on social platforms will help you identify their social media strategy.

How

There are not that many free tools out there to research social media platforms and the free versions only give you limited access. If you can recommend a great tool, we would love to know (janni@founders.as). We prefer to do it manually because you have to visit their social media page anyway to see the specific types of content they posts etc.

To get an idea about competitors' social media strategy, you can look at metrics like:

- **Frequency** and/or time of posting. When was the last time they posted something? What is the time span between each post? Are they even using their platform? Etc.
- **Volume** (number of daily/weekly posts)
- **Type** of post (events, blog posts, etc.)
- **Number** of followers
- **Engagement** (likes, shares, comments)

Unsurprisingly, the best way to keep yourself updated on your competitors' social media accounts is to follow them. *For example, on Facebook you can also add the function "see first", so you will see posts from your competitors at the top of your news feed when they post something new. In that way, you can easily keep track of what they are doing.*

Expected outcome

Decode your competitors' social media strategy: If there is a social platform where they post less, you can consider being more active there - if it's relevant, of course.

- This doesn't mean you should use other channels less, just because your competitors use them very actively.

Inspiration for content: By looking at their posts and the engagement, you'll get an Idea of what followers engage with.

- Is there something your competitors don't post about? Something you can do differently or even better? *For example, do they post things that give value to followers? Should you post more images? Etc.*

Positioning insights: Another thing to explore is whether they are using ads on Facebook or not in order to see how the positioning themselves. But it's a bit more difficult to find out. You can use AdEspresso or find out by liking their page and visiting their website via their Facebook page. If they are running ads, you will most likely be exposed to their ads on Facebook shortly after (if they use a Facebook pixel).

#4 Content

Traffic	Search	Referrals	Social	**Content**	Community

Why

- Exploring competitors' content will give you insights about their best performing content, what kind of topics they write about etc. (NB! Not referring content).
- Get good ideas for new content to write, but also what not to waste time on.
- Insights about their content strategy: what do they write about, how often do they write, when do they post etc.

- Get an idea of engagement with their content by looking at how many times it gets shared and where it gets shared.
- By visiting their blog, you can also see how often to they post on their blog to get an idea about whether they have a clear content strategy or not - but this is more manual work.

How

The key purpose of this deep dive is to generate new content ideas by looking at what performs best for your competitors. You can do this in three different ways.
- Looking at competitors' content
- Finding most popular content based on specific topics in Ahrefs
- Looking at questions asked in e.g. Quora or Reddit

Expected outcome

Find top content on your competitors' websites (e.g. their blog) using Ahrefs.
- If they don't have a blog on their website, you can search for it on medium.com and see their top content on medium instead.
- In the Ahrefs' content tab, it shows you the top content by default, but you can also filter content by social sharing and publish date.
- You can also see the total number of content pieces. If it's high, your competitor is probably doubling down on content marketing.

Top Content [i]

`Search in results` 🔍

65 results

#	Page	RD	[🐦]	[f]	[in]	[P]	Total [i]	SP↓ [i]	Published	
1	The Essential Guide to Growing Your Early-Stage SaaS Startup 🔒 www.hotjar.com/grow-your-saas-startup/ ▼ Hotjar Ltd	26	161	1.3K	603	4	2K	161	31 Aug '17	Details ▼
2	Hotjar Features - Connect All The Dots With One Powerful Solution. 🔒 www.hotjar.com/tour ▼ Hotjar Ltd	82	8	14K	5.8K	103	20K	103	5 Apr '16	Details ▼
3	Incoming Feedback by Hotjar 🔒 www.hotjar.com/incoming-feedback ▼ Hotjar Ltd	1.4K	11	17K	93	5	17K	93	16 Aug '17	Details ▼
4	Your Hottest Opportunities for Growth – Site Optimization with Hotjar 🔒 www.hotjar.com/action-plan ▼ Hotjar Ltd	65	34	147	101	90	372	90	4 Feb '15	Details ▼
5	The Passion Fallacy (or, Why You Need More Than "Passion" to be Successful) 🔒 www.hotjar.com/blog/the-passion-fallacy ▼ David Darmanin	25	53	215	219	2	499	53	22 Sep '16	Details ▼
6	Hotjar - 8 Heatmap Tests That Reveal Visitor Behavior. 🔒 www.hotjar.com/heatmaps ▼ Hotjar Ltd	80	31	125	40	11	219	40	17 Oct '14	Details ▼

Top content, Ahrefs

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See all the backlinks, referring and anchors for each content piece. You can use this for seeing what your competitors link to. You can also see the number of social sharings, which can give an indication of what type of content is most shareable.

Popular content ideas: Another way of getting ideas for content to write is by using Ahrefs' content explorer. Simply enter a relevant topic, for example, customer support tools, and you will get a list with the most popular content within this topic. For each content piece, you get info about backlinks, referring domains, anchor and a list of all the organic keywords. This you can also use for inspiration for SEO optimisation or AdWords.

Inspiration: The third, and maybe most interesting way to find inspiration for content topics is by using Quora. Search for specific topics and find the related questions and answers. By looking at what people ask questions about, you can write a blog post that focuses on answering these questions. If it's relevant to your product, of course!

#5 Community

Traffic	Search	Referrals	Social	Content	Community

Why

A final way to get a better understanding of your competitors is by researching your industry's community. It's not specifically traffic-related and it's also done more manually, as there is no specific tool to use for this. The purpose is to get insights about how people speak about your competitors, how they perceive their product etc. You can use this to differentiate yourself and improve your positioning.

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How

Researching the community can be done in many ways, but we start off by looking at the following:

- **Product Hunt** (PH Launch)
- **Review sites** (Trustpilot, Facebook etc.)
- **Question/answer sites** (Quora, Reddit etc.)
- **Groups** (LinkedIn, Facebook, Slack etc.)

Expected outcome

Understand competitors' positioning: Product Hunt launches reveal a lot about how companies position themselves and what people think of their product.

- This gives you an opportunity to optimise your product, to frame your content in a different way or just eliminate teething troubles.
- *For example, when we looked at Samestate's smaller competitors' Product Hunt launches, we saw that a lot of the questions PH users asked were related to how the products were different to Fullstory. We used that information to make sure we explicitly described how Samestate was different from Fullstory in our PH launch and on our landing page*

How people talk about your rivals: Facebook reviews provide insights about how people are talking about your competitors, what they like/dislike about them if they are complaining or recommend them etc.

- You can use this info to optimise copy on your website etc.
- *When we did the distribution research for the co-living space LifeX, we looked at Facebook reviews and learned that all the positive feedback was related to social events, like the opportunity to find new friends etc. This made it clear that this was something we should focus on even more on their website.*

Stay on top of industry trends: Another part of the community research is to explore what people are talking about within your industry by doing some research on Quora, Facebook groups etc.

- *For example with the co-living space, LifeX, we found a Facebook group, where one asked if they were missing co-living spaces on their list. Copenhagen wasn't on the list, so the community research is a good way to find growth opportunities like that.*
- If you don't do the research, you won't know. It's not only about finding people searching for information in various groups. It's also a good idea to find relevant groups etc., where you can tell others about your product and ask for honest feedback etc.

10+ new growth ideas, now what?

By now you should have a pretty good understanding of how your competitors distribute their product. You have probably also generated a bunch of good ideas for new growth activities to run - but where to start?

- To get an overview and - most important of all - to make it easier to prioritise which growth activity to start with, you simply add all your ideas to the <u>activity matrix in the template</u>. *The matrix is based on Brian Balfour's <u>5 steps to choose acquisition channel</u>, where each activity is scored by metrics like input time, output time, target audience etc.*
- We have added an extra metric: "relevance". *For example, is it relevant and/or realistic for you to run these activities right now based on your current situation? If you don't have a budget for running Facebook ads or paying for advertorials, it shouldn't be prioritised.*

- Once you have scored all your activities and decided which one you want to run, you can use the Founders Growth machine to create and execute a marketing experiment. This will ensure a structured approach to better understand what works and what doesn't. This article about how to find silver bullets by Simon Sylvest, head of growth at Founders, gives you all the reasons you need to start using the Growth Machine.

Okay, let's wrap this up!

Distribution research is one more tool to add to your expert marketing tool-box. It will not only give you a great understanding of how your competitors distribute their product, it will also help you identify untapped growth opportunities and show you how to execute them.

NB. This is the first version of our distribution research playbook and all kind of feedback is more than welcome! Just send them in my direction: Janni@founders.as

Enjoy!

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