



# Keeping Up With the Joneses

A three-step game plan to conduct an e-mail audit

Every company has marketing activities it performs exceptionally. For example, one marketer may have superior e-mail creative, while another may have mastered the use of triggered messaging. While we all strive for excellence, it's a fact that we can't shine in every area. It's a good idea to turn your focus outward and analyze your competition. You just might learn something.

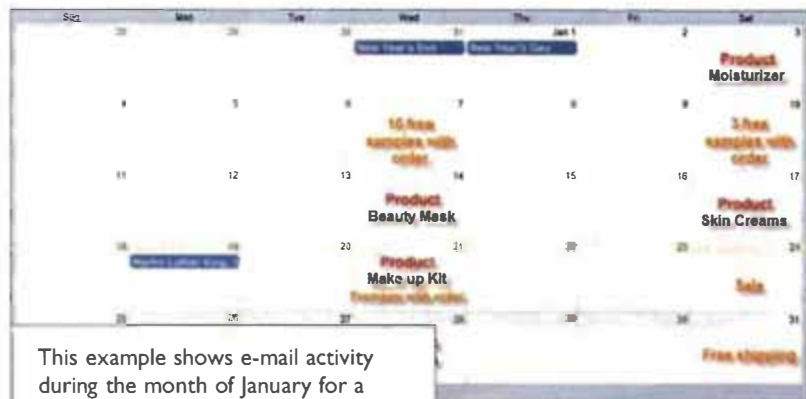
Many of you monitor competitor e-mails. But you should have a rigorous and structured approach to competitive analysis.

## 1. Look at Sign-up and Registration

This step is relatively easy. Enroll in your competitors' e-mail programs, and take notes and screen captures along the way. Build a spreadsheet, and map out their respective approaches.

- **Prominence and visibility of e-mail sign-up.** Where is e-mail sign-up promoted on their homepages? Do they romance the calls to action with brief benefits statements? Are e-mail programs also promoted on interior pages of the Web sites? Do they immediately capture e-mail addresses?

- **The online sign-up process.** Do they use registration pages? Do they restate the benefits of opting in? Do they provide links to view sample e-mails? Once registration is complete, do they bring people to a confirmation page? What messaging elements are on this page?



This example shows e-mail activity during the month of January for a marketer of beauty supplies. Sitewide offers appear in orange, and e-mails about products appear in red with the particular product line in blue.

## 2. Map Out Your Competitors' Calendars

This step is more painstaking, but if you do it right, you'll have a better picture of your competitors' marketing strategies. The elements you choose to track are more arbitrary depending on your marketing focus. We'll base this example on marketers who send promotional e-mails. Collect e-mails for at least a two-month time frame to do your analysis.

- **Permission and choice.** Do your competitors offer options during sign-up for different types of e-mail communications? Do they require double opt-in, or do they employ less stringent standards? Do they include a statement about how the information will be used internally by other departments or divisions?

- **Data and profile capture.** What fields are mandatory? Do they collect interest preferences? How much data do competitors collect?

- **Welcome e-mail.** Do they send welcome e-mails, and how quickly do they arrive? Are they simple thank-yous for signing up? Do they embed promotional offers?

Once you've finished this step in the review, determine whether there are any elements you'd like to incorporate into your sign-up process.

- **Frequency.** How many e-mails did they send? Are there particular days of the week they regularly use? Can you determine whether any e-mails are off-cycle for a special reason?

- **Events and holidays.** There are many Web resources that allow marketers to plan promotional calendars to take advantage of selling opportunities. Holidays certainly provide the chance to develop a themed approach building up to the date. How soon before the

(continued on page 22)

(continued from page 21)

holiday do your competitors begin their promotions? How many e-mails do they send around the holiday theme?

- **Mix of products and offers.** Can you discern a cadence to their communications? How often do they promote general sales and discounts that apply to all products available on their sites? How often do they feature specific products? When they do promote products, how many do they feature?

- **Design.** Do they employ a mix of communication formats such as postcards, longer-form newsletters and text-only? Do they take advantage of the preview pane, and what elements do they include? Do they include navigational department links to take readers directly to their sites? How many products are featured?

- **Personalization.** Do your competitors use simple personalization in e-mails, and if so, how often? Do they personalize the subject line, the snippet in the preview pane or the salutation?

- **Segmentation.** Can you determine whether they use segmentation techniques based on location, gender or interests?

- **Subject lines.** Is there anything you can learn from looking at the subject lines they employ?

Once you've completed this step, you're likely to have uncovered some insights into their overall approaches. Find elements you believe they do exceptionally well, and plan to incorporate them into your program.

### 3. Gain Intelligence From Online Services

Start with some of the free services that can provide you with a picture of competitors' Web traffic and visitor profiles. You have a better sense of your own true metrics, but this is a chance to view Web sources that use the same methodology to look at your site and others. Here are just a few favorites:

- **General site traffic analysis**—To see various traffic analysis, average

number of pages viewed, time spent on the site and, in some cases, a demographic profile of site visitors, go to the following: <http://siteanalytics.compete.com>; <http://www.quantcast.com>; <http://www.alexa.com>

- **Search engine pay-per-click analysis**—Get search engine marketing pay-per-click competitive intelligence at <http://www.spyfu.com>.

### Conclusion

Do a competitive analysis annually. Remember, the goal is to solidify what you do right compared to your competition. We can all learn from our competition—and if you take a structured approach to competitive analysis in the e-mail arena, you just might find pockets of opportunity for your company. ■

Regina Brady is president of Reggie Brady Marketing Solutions, a direct and e-mail marketing consultancy. She can be reached at (203) 838-8138 or [reggie@reggiebrady.com](mailto:reggie@reggiebrady.com).

Register by July 24  
& save \$200

Save an additional 15%  
Use code SJ15TM

Go behind  
the search box.

The Ultimate Search Engine Marketing & Optimization Event

From mobile search to link-building to online video,  
Search Engine Strategies San Jose will help you understand how search works,  
how it's changing, and how you can use it to your company's advantage.

[SearchEngineStrategies.com/sanjose](http://SearchEngineStrategies.com/sanjose)

conference & expo  
**SJS**  
San Jose

Aug. 10-14

Where  
Content &  
Community  
Connect.