Spy on Competitors With Free Online Tools - With Michael Cyger

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http://www.domainsherpa.com/spying-on-competitors/

Three messages before today's interview educates and motivates you.

First, if you're a domain name investor, don't you have unique legal needs that require domain name technical know-how and industry experience? That's why you need David Weslow of Wiley Rein. Go search for David Weslow on DomainSherpa, watch his interview and you can see for yourself that he can clearly explain issues, can help you with buy/sell agreements, deal with website content issues and UDRP actions, and even help you write your website terms and conditions. David Weslow is the lawyer to call for Internet legal issues. See for yourself at NewMediaIP.com.

Second, managing multiple domain name marketplace and auction site accounts is a pain. Inevitably, you forget to sign into one and lose a great domain...or worse. Now imagine using a single, simple-to-use and comprehensive control panel to manage all your accounts. That's Protrada. You can setup search filters, analyze domains, automate bidding, list domains for sale, and buy domains across all major marketplaces. Protrada also has a new semantic engine that builds Google-friendly websites with rich content and network feeds. Sign up at Protrada.com to get 20 free credits and start building and monetizing your domains today.

Finally, if you have questions about domain names, where should you go to ask them? The answer is DNForum.com. Not only is DN Forum the largest domain name forum in the world, but it's the best. You can learn about domain names and the industry, buy and sell domain names, talk about domain name news, and meet other domainers just like yourself. Register for a free DN Forum account and begin advancing your skills and knowledge today. And when you do signup, send me a friend request so we can connect.

Here's your program.

Hey everyone. My name is Michael Cyger, and I'm the Publisher of DomainSherpa.com - the website where you come to learn how to become a successful domain name entrepreneur or investor directly from the experts.

Today, we're going to teach you how to spy on your competitors using free online tools; but first, I wanted to take a moment to say thank you to you, our readers. DomainSherpa has been nominated in the TRAFFIC Conference Awards Competition for the Best Domain Blog, and I've been honored as one of the nominees for Developer of The Year and Domainer of the Year; and I want to thank all of you who took the time and nominated DomainSherpa and me for voting for us. It's much appreciated; and we're going to continue to deliver fantastic educational opportunities for you. Thank you for your votes and we'll keep up the fight.

Okay. Let's get to the program.

Many domain name investors and entrepreneurs have an idea that they would like to develop; and likely, they know of competitors that are currently in the space.

Also likely, you, as the entrepreneur, as the domain name owner, have plans to take a different path. Maybe you have a way to improve a service that just seems static. They're just not putting any money into research and development and improving the process. Or, maybe you've got some ideas on how to offer the same service, but do it with lower overhead. You know they have twenty people working on the service, and you think you can do it with a single-person business or you hire somebody overseas and you outsource it, or you get your kids, or local high school interns.

Whatever the reason, one of the things you first need to do is benchmark your competitors. And it is relatively easy to do so.

In today's tutorial, I'm going to be your guide to show you: How to Benchmark Your Competitor's Traffic, How to Benchmark Their In-Bound Links, and How to Benchmark Their Technology.

These are the three most important things, in my opinion, for doing research on the marketplace. And I'm only going to use free tools on the Internet to do these things. So, while there may be better tools out there that I use - and you can use for a price -, I'm only going to show you tools that are free today.

The traffic and links will tell you how successful your competitors or other sites are. Maybe you are thinking about buying them. Who knows? But how successful are they and how hard is going to be for you to replicate the work they've done? If you are going to buy them, that has a value. If you are going to compete with them, you need to figure out where they are so you know how much work it's going to take to catch up to them. The technology will tell you what route they have taken to develop their site and how you might be able to reproduce them more quickly and cost effectively.

We are going to take a look at three example sites. We are going to look at an industry leading domain name news site, and a favorite of mine. Andrew Allemann, who has been a Domain Sherpa. Andrew Allemann's website, www.DomainNameWire.com. Secondly, we are going to look at the leading domain name discussion forum in the world. Adam Dicker's www.DNForum.com, and one of our sponsors on DomainSherpa, of course; but we are going to take a look at what goes into DNForum. And thirdly, we are going to take a look at an experience shopping website. Also, a past guest and Sherpa on DomainSherpa, www.Wish.co.uk. So, I'm point out, this can work anywhere in the world on any type of domain name. And if you haven't watched the interviews with Andrew Allemann, of www.DomainNameWire.com, the multiple. I think I've got three times that Adam Dicker has been gracious enough to come onto DomainSherpa and share his secrets for building businesses and investing www.DNForum.com. And then, of course, Richard Kershaw and Stephen Pavlovich - Stephen, I got your name right this time - also came on. Watch their interview. Fascinating, phenomenal interview. Actually, I'm going to do four. And then, finally, a fourth website that we are going to benchmark is a site that I recently found, and potentially want to replicate, for a lead generation website for a domain name that I own now that I want to develop out. I'm not going to talk about the details. I'm one of these guys that doesn't like to over promise and under deliver. I like to not promise anything and then over deliver.

I've got a warning before we start any of the overview of this and reviewing these websites.

You should use all of this data only for magnitudes and trends. These are not exact figures. This is not actual data. In all of these cases, it is estimates of reality. Okay? And for anybody that has made the transition, you've been in websites for a long time, you remember how we used to have analytics and log files that were stores on the server; now, today, nobody has log files anymore. They are all JavaScript-based analytics. Like, Google Analytics, which you can install for free. Of course, they mine all the data, but they give you free analytics. They store all the data. They provide the reports to you. I've compared JavaScript to my log files back in, probably, 2002/2004. They were orders of magnitude off, in some cases. JavaScript doesn't record something that log files do. Log files record too much, in some cases, depending on the settings of the server. Anyways, magnitudes and trends; that is all we are looking for.

And I've got a quick story and a warning. So, even magnitudes and trends, you sometimes need to tread lightly.

I bought a website a year and a half ago that I have been working on developing for about the past month. It has been one of those. We have all have websites that we want to work on. And when I first reached out to the owner, he had a price for it. He would not give me the analytics. He had a price and it was not really worth me asking because the price was over what I was willing to pay, so that was the end of the discussion. Six months later, I realized that he was still using the same Twitter account. He was still promising things. He just couldn't deliver what he wanted to do with the service, and I knew it was frustrating for him. I reached out again after using some of the tools that I am going to show you today. I saw a downtrend. I saw traffic going down to the website that I purchased - the domain name and website that I purchased -, so I thought, "Hey, I'm going to make an offer. I'm going to make it a little bit higher. Then we're going to come to an agreement based on him showing me some statistics, which is typical when you buy a real business". You agree on a price, you go into due diligence and then, if there is some negative aspects, you may adjust the purchase price downward. It is very typical when you purchase large businesses or sell businesses. And

I figures, "Okay. I'm going to make an offer. It's going to be contingent based on looking at the data". And he agreed; so it was a little bit higher than what I wanted to pay because I wanted to get his attention. He showed me the statistics off of Google Analytics. Actually, what he did is he added me to view the statistics, so I knew he wasn't fabricating anything and the traffic was actually going up.

So, I was stuck. I had no arguments to actually get out at a lower price. Negotiate down to a lower price. And, lesson learned. It was order of magnitude correct. So, again, in some cases, the trends don't always hold.

All right. So let's get into this.

The first site that we want to take a look at is called AHRefs.com. First site we're going to take a look at is Andrew Allemann's DomainNameWire.com.

This is AHRefs.com. You can see the URL right here. AHRefs.com. I'll have a link below the video. What you do here; it's pretty simple. They have some news and things, but they have a site explorer. You are going to type in the domain name and you are going to hit the explorer links button. I've already done it once today. As you can see up here, in the right hand corner, they only allow a certain number of requests per day. So, I'm not going to see if the same request twice is going to take up my allotment.

I actually use a different service. It's a great service. Not even going to mention it because it's a pay service. So, here we go.

So I ran DomainNameWire.com. You can see the URL right here. Andrew's site. And it tells me total back links of a hundred and thirty thousand. And so, I can see that this is a well-developed site with a lot of backlinks unless it's a spammy backlink profile. So you need to actually take a look at the site and see what the site looks like; but if it looks like it is a realistic site, it's probably a good backlink profile and referring pages. So it's got a great number of links coming in. I've used my other service that I pay for that has a much-improved index and I think that it said over two hundred thousand backlinks, but you can see the order of magnitude is correct. So, that tells me where the backlinks are coming in. I can learn more about the profile. I can

see the profile over time. I can look at the number of new links that are being formed everyday. You can see Andrew had an enormous spike. He's got some new and lost backlinks at the same time. It could have just been a blip. Referring domains. You can see the anchor text that goes under those. Referring pages. So you can learn a lot about the sites that are linking into Andrew Allemann's. Everything looks good to me.

You go over to Alexa. This is for analytics of the website. So I want to find out how the website is ranked; and it is ranked very well. You can see that it is one of the top fourteen thousand - 14,231 - ranked website in the United States. And, overall, it's ranked twenty-four thousand. So that means that there are only 24,883 websites more popular than Andrew's website. And you can see the number of sites linking in - 1,731. If you compare it to the AHRefs, here is referring IPs - 2,400. Referring subnets. These are technical terms. You don't really need to understand too much. You just want to make sure that these match. Here is a couple thousand. Alexa is saying seventeen hundred. Pretty darn close.

So I can actually click "Get Details" on this website and it will give me the trend over time. I can see how much it is reaching. I can see the change percent. Everything is looking good. If I wanted to compare DomainNameWire to another website, I could do that right down here.

The next website I want to show you is Compete.com. They have a Pro Version, but they also have a Free Version.

And I'm going to type in DomainNameWire.com right here. It is going to chug away and it is going to give me a little bit different information. Whereas Alexa will tell me the daily reach - you know, right down here. Here is the daily reach. You are reaching .015% of the Internet. That doesn't mean anything to you and me. I can change it to "Time Spent on Site" to "Page Views Percent" -, Compete.com will actually put a number on it. Now, again, the numbers are not exact. None of these. And, in fact, they warn you right here. The sample size for this site is small. They work well for large sites that have a lot of data that they can collect. But you can see that, supposedly, for the month, Andrew gets about sixteen thousand unique visitors. I am pretty sure that here, in this month, December 2011, thirty-two thousand; I am

pretty sure that Andrew gets more than ten thousand visitors per month. I know that if I bring up my website at DomainSherpa, it is not accurate; but it gives you an idea and it gives you some trends.

Now, you have to understand where they get their data from. They buy data from Internet Service Providers. So, basically, any Internet Service Provider has traffic coming through them, they aggregate the data, they remove your IP address, they remove any identifying information; now they've got a ton of data on the sites that you are visiting - that are appropriate and inappropriate - and where you spend your time, and they probably know a little bit about you as well. They may have run a credit report - credit score - on you. Who knows what they know? But they know a bunch of stuff about you, they aggregate it, and they provide it to third parties that want to buy that information. And Compete.com is one of those companies. Actually, Compete.com was purchased, I believe. It looks like it's a Kantar Media Company. And so, what they do is they aggregate from the ISP and they aggregate from other sources that they collect and they try and put together a picture of what the traffic looks like.

What kind of information does not get collected? Well, ISPs that do not sell their information. Business information. So, if most of your readers are business users - say, at GE, at P&G, at Amazon.com - and they are at work browsing your website, those are behind a firewall. Your companies likely do not sell that kind of information; and so, B2B companies are not reflected well in Compete.com or Alexa information. So, that's a heads up for that.

Okay. So, now we know Andrew's website gets a good amount of traffic. They are ranked well within the US. They have a ton of backlinks coming in. And maybe it was lower and you are thinking, 'Hey, I can compete with Andrew. I know exactly the industry'. Or you might be thinking this: 'Andrew does a great job and I love Frisbee, so I want to start a website - news site -, just like what Andrew does, on Frisbees. I'm going to figure out what Andrew uses for a technology because I want to take what he has done and take the way that he does it and go do it in another place'.

The site I use to figure out that is a website called BuiltWith.com. You can see the URL right there. BuiltWith.com. Very simple and it is free. You type

in the website name. DomainNameWire.com. Hit "Lookup" and it will tell you a whole bunch of information.

Right here we have the server information. He is running an Apache Server. He is running on an Apache Server. He may be hosted there. It may be a virtual machine. It may be a hosting account. Who knows? But the website he is running runs on an Apache Server. He is using WordPress as his Content Management System. So if you are wondering whether he hand codes the web pages and he has to update it himself, or whether he is using Joomla, or who knows what, he is using WordPress. WordPress, of course, runs on PHP. He has Facebook integrated in with it; and Facebook provides Facebook Domain Insights. He uses Google Analytics to figure out where his traffic is coming from and what they are doing on the website. He also has WordPress Stats installed. He measures using Quantcast Measurement System. He uses another system called Woopra. Never heard of it before, but you can read a description of what that is. He uses jQuery in WordPress. He has got some plugins, like ShareThis and Google Plus. And he has got some aggregation facilities. And the rest of this is sort of document information. Pretty standard stuff. You will see it across pretty much every website and standard in coding.

Okay. So you may say, 'Great. Andrew is on WordPress. Now I want to know what kind of -- maybe Andrew is on a theme that I can go buy for fifty dollars. Go install at WordPress'. If you didn't watch Install Multisites on DomainSherpa in a previous interview, I'll link to that one as well. And you want to install multisites - run multiple websites -, and you want to install WordPress to do that, and you want to buy this theme.

So the way you figure out what DomainNameWire is using as their theme is you go to a website that is called WhatWPThemeIsThat.com; and WP, of course, stands for WordPress.

So, what you do is, you type in the theme right there. Click "Check Site", and it tells you everything you want to know.

Here is DomainNameWire. The Theme is Domain Name Wire. The Theme Homepage is DomainNameWire.com. DNW 2.0. So this is -- he has got Site

Graduate. So, this is not a theme that I have heard of. If I got to SiteGraduate.com, I believe it does not, yeah. It is a hosting page, or a parked page, or something. So, it looks like - I would take an educated guess that - Andrew has developed this theme either based on another theme and renamed it to his own name, or had somebody else build it for him; but it is a custom theme right now. It does not link off to another website. When we get to the next example, I am going to show you exactly what it looks like when somebody is using a theme that you can copy. Or, actually, let me show you right now.

If you go to DomainSherpa.com, I can tell you it is running off of WordPress. And if you run DomainSherpa in this website, you can see that the Theme Name is called Freshlife. You can buy it at Theme-Junkie.com. It tells you who the author is and there is the URL. And if I click on this, it will open it up and you can see that I spent sixty bucks on that theme, which I have customized, of course, to my liking. Here is the Freshlife. I can click demo. Actually, I will click buy and you can actually see how much I paid for this. Buy Now (+2 Bonus Themes) = \$39. Okay. Now I'm embarrassed. You know that DomainSherpa was only \$39 to get up and running.

All right. So let me run you through the next theme that I have.

The next theme is DNForum.com. So let's check out Adam Dicker's website. If I click Explore Links, it comes back and tells me that there is seventy-one thousand backlinks, fifty-eight thousand referring domain names; again, a very nice, healthy backlink profile. I can see that most of them are coming from .COMs. I can see that there is a nice backlink profile.

You may be wondering that same thing that I am. Why is the total backlinks decreasing over time like on Andrew's? I don't know. I look at the general website. I, like you, are fans and members of DNForum.com, and I know that it is not a spammy site and I know that it is a great site with a lot resources that people link to. And so, I am not worried about this kind of information. Again, I say look at magnitude and look at trends, but I know they are sites that are reputable, so I am not worried about this. I basically just look to understand the backlink profile.

And then, if you want, take a look through here. You can see the referring pages with anchored text. You can see the referring domains that link in and so on.

So, let's go on to the next site. We know that DomainNameWire is ranked 14,231. Let's type in DNForum.com. See how it compares to 14,000. DNForum is 5,000. Let's grab the details. It's ranked 5,900 in the world and 5,190 in the US. So, a site that has a little bit more traffic, you can see the countries that are coming in. So, some very interesting information. I'm going to copy DNForum.com. I'm going to go over to Compete.com. I'm going to paste in right here in the URL. You can paste in the search bar as well. And here is the information. You can see that the traffic, magnitude-wise, is a little bit higher than DNForum. Again, I can't trust the numbers. I am not sure if this actually increased significantly. You heard my story about my website that I bought that trends were moving in one way, but you can see the unique visitors. He has got a great number of unique visitors coming in every month.

I want to figure out what this site is built with, so I'm going to go to BuiltWith.com. Type in DNForum. On the Server Information, it is also running on Apache. Here is a specific type of server that BuiltWith was able to pull. Here is the important thing. Content Management System is called vBulletin. You may know vBulletin. You can type vBulletin into Google. You can understand that it is a free forum software that you can download for free. You can use for free. If you customize it, you are on your own with respect to upgrade and things like that. And it is great for building communities; and that is what DNForum runs. Adam purchased DNForum and he has continued to use vBulletin. It runs on PHP. He uses Google Adsense for monetizing part of the site. We know he has other advertisings on there as well. You can go take a look. He uses Facebook and Google Analytics. Some JavaScript; some widgets. Regular document information.

And if I go to WhatWPThemeIsThat, it should not come back with anything because it is not a WordPress theme. It is running vBulletin instead of WordPress, and it will tell you that right there.

All right. So let's go to the next website.

And the next website is Wish.co.uk. Great website. If you haven't gone over there and taken a look at their Zombie Encounters and watched those videos, you got to do that. It is phenomenal.

Okay. So here is a website. It is, I believe, newer than DomainNameWire and DNForum, but still a good number of backlinks coming in. About five thousand backlinks coming in. We can see how the backlinks are coming in. We can see where they are coming in from. We can see that the referring page anchor text is Zombie Shopping Mall; and that is the one you should go watch. That video. Zombie Shopping Mall. Zombie Shopping Mall Experience. And I believe that Richard and Stephen said that that was one of their highest selling experiences. And if I ever make it over to England, that is the experience that I am going to go on. That one and the sport car test drives.

So let's go over to Alexa. Take a look at Wish.co.uk. You can see, in Great Britain, right here, they are ranked 17,000. Let's get some details. You can see their traffic. They have enough traffic to show on Alexa. A lot of times you will type in a website, or if you typed in a domain name that didn't resolve, it would say "No Data" right here. So, just having a daily reach is important to show that the website actually does have some reach. And sites linking in. You can read about this reputation score.

Let's go over to Compete and take a look at them. And, again, it gives us this warning. This is a rough estimate because we don't have a lot of data on this, but you can see that, I think, they launched probably in 2011. I would have to go back and watch the original interview. You can see that they probably got a lot of press in here. And then after the sort of initial press onslaught, they have standardized on maybe order of magnitude. A few thousand visitors per month. So, they are running a business where they need to convert. They don't care if they have a hundred thousand people coming per month and they are only converting half of one percent. They just want a high conversion. That is why Stephen Pavlovich, who runs a conversion rate optimization company, is one of the principles on this company. It is his job to make sure that they are converting the highest percentage possible because that is money in their pocket. Great site. You got to go check it out.

So let's see what they are built with. They told me, on the interview, what technology they were using. Let's see if they are telling me something real or not. nginx - I'm not sure how to pronounce that. [engine x]; that's how you pronounce that - is the server that they are using. And here is their "Content Management System". It is an Ecommerce System called Magento. They mentioned this on the interview. Magento is a free Ecommerce Content Management System. You can see it right here. I think I might have actually read this on the interview. "Used by large brandes such as The North Face". And they are using it. They have customized it of course. You can see the analytics that they are using. They are using Facebook also. They are using Google Analytics.

Now, here is something really important. They understand the value of understanding user behavior on the website. They are using some great Analytics Software. They are using one called KISSmetrics, which helps measure and improve anlytics. They are using CrazyEgg, which is a visualization for what people are doing on your website. So, if you come to a webpage, you can mouse over a certain area and they give heat maps as to what people are doing on the website. And Chartbeat. It is live traffic monitoring of the website. So they can see where people are on the website; what they are doing; what they are typing; what they are clicking in real time. A host of JavaScript Libraries. If you notice something real cool that they were doing on their website, that was dynamic, that popped up, it is likely a JavaScript function. And so, you can take a look through here and you can see they have got a Colorbox. They have got script.aculo.us. A whole bunch of things. You can go and take a look at these and figure out how they put their site together. They are using Flowplayer for videos on the website. They are using a bunch of widgets here. Olark is one for customer service and chatting - instant messaging. They are using a Content Delivery Network to make sure that they serve up their content as quickly as possible to people who are interested in looking at it. CloudFront does that. Akamai does that. CloudFlare does that. Why they are using three different, I don't know. We will get them back on the site soon and we will ask them that question. And pretty typical information.

If I go over here, again, they are not using WordPress, so this website would not pull anything back. Let's see what it does though. Let's see if it comes and says that they are, yeah. "Does not appear to be using WordPress."

All right. So that is Wish.co.uk. And the last site that I want to show you is a website that I think does a pretty good job. Let me show you that website. It is called WPCandy.com; and it is a website that allows some lead generation. So let's see here. Where did I notice that? It is basically a publishing website, but they also have a Pro Section. Yeah. Here it is. So it allows people who are professionals in a particular area -- you know what it is. 37Signals runs a company - runs a website - that is specifically for designers to highlight their talents, and it is such a terrible, brandable name, in my opinion, that I can never remember what it is. So I always have to type in 37Signals Web Designers. And you see. Sortfolio is the name of it. They sort of define this user interface where you can quickly look through profiles and see beautiful pictures. Anways. WPCandy - WordPress Candy - has a Pro Section, which is a directory for WordPress Professionals. Same sort of idea. You can put in a picture. You can talk about what your focuses are. Your specialties. You can put in a range for how much it is. So I'm like, 'Oh, here is something that I think would be interesting. I am going to take this idea and I am going to modify it for another lead generation area that I have'.

So I wanted to figure out some information about WPCandy. I actually reached out to the owner, Ryan, and I asked him for some information. He is just too busy. It is a custom theme that -- well, let's get to that. So, let's run him through some paces here.

Here is WPCandy. Actually, let me remove this HTTP. It probably works either way, but I just want to make sure. Okay Total backlinks: 57,000. Referring pages: 44,000. He has an enormous following on WPCandy. The theme seems to be working. I am not sure if he is making any money with respect to the professionals section or not, but the theme that he is working is using and I know it is a great site because I go there and I read what he is doing, and I watch his podcasts and things like that.

So let's go take a look. He has got a nice rich link profile. Let's see where he is ranked. 14,000 in the US. Right around where Andrew Allemann is at

DomainNameWire.com. You can see his traffic. You can see he has got a good reputation according to Alexa. Decent amount of traffic.

Let's go on to Compete.com. Check out where he is. And it's a rough estimate, again, so it is low sample size. 20,000. So he is somewhere between probably 30,000 and maybe 100,000 unique visitors per month. Or maybe, I don't know, 10,000 and 100,000. You just don't know. He has got more traffic than most of watching this show. Let's just put it that way. Most of us aren't running successful blogs. We are trying to figure out how to build a successful blog. So, he has got a good amount of readership.

Let's go over to BuiltWith and take a look. It looks like a WordPress site, but is it a WordPress site? So here is his Server Information. He is running a Content Delivery Network. CDN, often called, on Apache. Unix. He has got some other things. He is a techie guy, so he has got a bunch of stuff listed here. But here is the important thing. He is running WordPress as his Content Management System, which, of course, runs on PHP. He is running something interesting; is AdZerk. It is an ad serving technology. You might want go over to AdZerk.com and figure out what they are. He uses Google Analytics as well as Mixpanel, which is an analytic platform for funnel and workflow optimization. Quantcast. Let's see if I notice anything else of interest here. All pretty standard stuff. So, interesting enough, he is using WordPress. Maybe I want to reach out to him and see if I can purchase the theme off.

Let's find out what theme it is first. Let's go over here. WPCandy. And I can see that the Theme Name is WPCandy. It goes directly to his homepage; not a developer homepage. He has got a customized description. This is the owner's name, right here, of the website. This is his personal e-mail address. The version number. So, clearly, he has developed this theme himself and he is using it on his website. I wish Ryan all the luck in the world.

And that is the end of the tutorial for Figuring Out Spying On Your Competitors - Spying On Other Industry Sites. And if there is anything that I didn't answer within this - you have more questions about finding out about information, traffic information, and backlink information, and what kind of technologies people are using for their websites -, ask me in the comments

below. Happy to answer as much as I can. If you were to say specifically, 'Hey, Mike, what about this reputation score on Alexa? What can you tell me about that?', I'm going to go read the help just like you. I use all of these tools like many other people in the industry for general type of information; but if you have another question, go ahead and ask. Maybe I'll surprise myself and you with an answer.

Thank you all for watching. We'll see you all next week. Bye bye.

Watch the full video at:

http://www.domainsherpa.com/spying-on-competitors/