

Competitor Mapping

**How to develop a competitor map to
inform your business positioning**

Disruptors Handbook #24



Introduction

Competitor mapping allows businesses to see their market landscape clearly rather than relying on assumptions. By plotting out who the competitors are, what they offer, and how they position themselves, a business gains visibility of the gaps and overlaps in the market. Without this understanding, businesses risk misjudging their strengths, overestimating their uniqueness, or missing opportunities where they could stand out. Competitor mapping replaces guesswork with structured evidence.

It also helps businesses identify both direct threats and indirect influences. Competitors are not limited to companies offering the same product or service; they also include alternatives that solve a similar customer problem in a different way. By mapping this wider field, businesses can anticipate shifts in customer preference and industry disruption. This forward-looking approach ensures that strategy is not just reactive but proactive, allowing the business to adapt before competitors gain too much ground.





Competitor mapping supports better decision-making across marketing, product development, and customer experience. By understanding how competitors position themselves, a business can refine its own messaging to differentiate more clearly. Insights from mapping may also highlight unmet customer needs, areas of innovation, or weaknesses in competitor strategies that can be exploited. In short, competitor mapping ensures businesses compete on informed strategy rather than instinct, strengthening their ability to grow and sustain advantage in a crowded marketplace.

Essentially it's important to remember that every market is different. And in order to compete, it is crucial to understand and identify:

- the market in which your business operates
- your positioning within that market
- your direct and indirect competitors

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMPETITORS

Why map competitors?

01

What's the point?

Competitor mapping is conducted at various points in the growth journey of a business:

- **New markets:** when a business is expanding into a new geographic region or launching in a different industry segment, competitor mapping helps clarify who the key players are, what market share they hold, and how they differentiate themselves.
- **New products:** competitor mapping highlights whether new products or services sit in an overcrowded space, whether they can fill an unmet need, or whether they risk being undercut by lower-cost alternatives.
- **Brand renewal:** competitor mapping can reveal whether a brand repositioning will genuinely create distinction, or if the brand risks blending into a cluster of similar players.
- **Market disruption:** competitor mapping helps businesses quickly understand how competitors are adapting to disruption, enabling identification of emerging threats and potential opportunities to shore up relevance in the new regime.



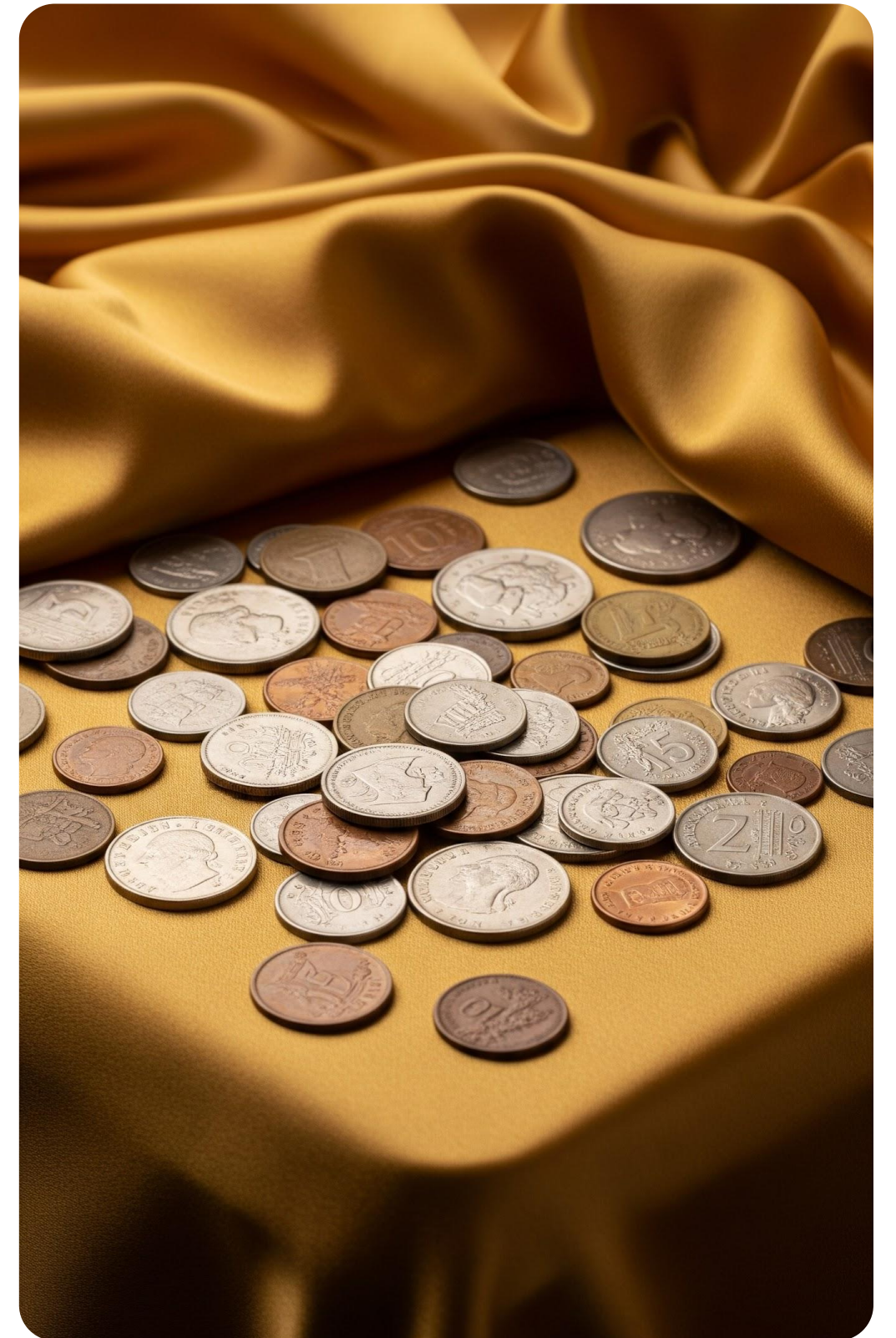
Key dimensions of a competitor map I

Price

Price is one of the most common dimensions because it directly affects customer choice and competitive positioning. Mapping competitors by pricing strategy (budget, mid-range, premium) reveals where the market is saturated and where gaps exist. It also helps businesses see whether they are competing on affordability, value-for-money, or exclusivity, and whether that matches their intended strategy.

Quality or Value

Quality, often paired with price, is another core dimension. This could relate to product durability, performance, service standards, or customer-perceived value. Plotting competitors on a quality scale shows whether a business is over- or under-delivering compared to expectations. It also highlights whether the market has clusters of “good enough” players or clear leaders in excellence.



Key dimensions of a competitor map II



Distribution and Reach

Distribution highlights how competitors get their product or service to customers. This could be online-only, retail-heavy, direct-to-consumer, or through third-party resellers. Mapping reach also matters. Are they local, national, or global? This dimension reveals whether competitors are winning by being more accessible and can guide businesses in refining their channel strategy.

Brand Positioning

Brand positioning reflects the image and associations competitors project, such as innovative, trustworthy, sustainable, or luxury. Mapping these attributes shows where competitors are crowding around similar claims and where opportunities for differentiation may lie. For example, if most brands emphasise low cost, there may be space to stand out on values such as sustainability or customer service.

Key dimensions of a competitor map III

Product or Service Features

In some industries, features or service bundles become a key dimension. For example, in software, it might be the breadth of functionality; in hospitality, it might be included amenities.

Mapping competitors on features can reveal whether your offer is underdeveloped, overly complex, or unique in ways that matter to customers.



A woman with dark hair is looking down at a smartphone she is holding in her right hand. The scene is dimly lit with a strong blue and purple color cast, suggesting a nighttime or indoor setting with artificial lighting. The woman is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, crew-neck shirt. The background is dark and out of focus, with some horizontal lines visible on the right side.

HOW TO DO IT

How do you build a competitor map?

02

1. Identify direct and indirect competitors

Begin by compiling a list of both direct competitors (those offering similar products or services to the same audience) and indirect competitors (those solving the same customer problem in a different way).

Many businesses assume they have no competitors, but this is rarely true. Look for players across your industry segment, as well as alternatives that draw attention from your target customers.

This wider lens ensures you capture the full competitive landscape rather than focusing too narrowly.



2. Define the scope and key attributes

Once competitors are identified, define which attributes you will compare them on. These might include price, quality, innovation, customer experience, marketing strategy, or brand reputation.

Keep your list targeted to the most relevant factors for your market, rather than trying to cover everything.

Establishing clear attributes ensures the mapping process is structured and highlights the areas where meaningful differentiation can occur.



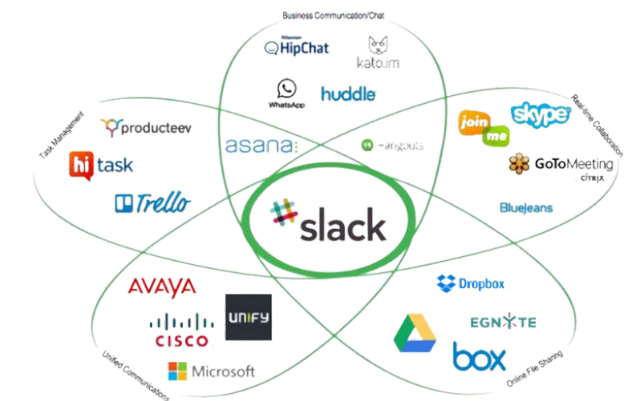
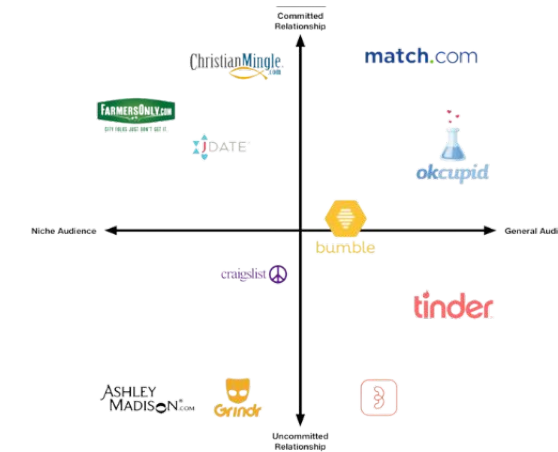
3. Choose a mapping method

Select a visual tool that best suits your purpose.

There are several methods you might consider:

- **Perceptual mapping:** plotting competitors against two attributes, such as price vs quality,
- **Petal diagram:** showing performance across multiple attributes,
- **Comparison table:** scoring competitors side by side, or
- **SWOT matrix:** highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Your choice depends on whether you want to show positioning, highlight gaps, or explore strategic opportunities.



	VersaTables.com	IDEA	HermanMiller	Office DEPOT	Steelecase	HAWORTH
Lifetime Warranty	✓		SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS
Made in the USA	✓		✓	SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS
Free Shipping	✓		SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS	SOME PRODUCTS
Green Manufacturing	✓	✓	✓	SOME	✓	✓
Customer Service	EXCELLENT ★★★★★	BAD ☆☆☆☆	GOOD ★★★★★	OKAY ★★★★☆	GOOD ★★★★★	GOOD ★★★★★
Ease of Return	EXCELLENT ★★★★★	DIFFICULT ☆☆☆☆	OKAY ★★★★★	BAD ☆☆☆☆	OKAY ★★★★★	OKAY ★★★★★
Product Recalls	NONE ✓	YES	NONE ✓	YES	YES	NONE ✓



4. Collect and plot data

Gather information through research methods such as customer surveys, interviews, industry reports, product reviews, and online analysis tools.

Ensure the data reflects customer perceptions as well as competitor claims, since how consumers view offerings often matters more than internal positioning.

Plot the competitors onto your chosen framework, making sure the data points are consistent and evidence-based. This stage translates research into a visual, digestible map.



5. Develop insights and apply to the business

Analyse the map to draw out insights. Look for clusters of competitors, empty spaces that represent market gaps, and areas where your business is closely positioned against strong players.

Ask what the map reveals about customer preferences, unmet needs, or opportunities for differentiation. These insights should then feed into your strategy, helping to refine positioning, sharpen messaging, and inform product development.

The goal is not just to produce a diagram, but to use it as a decision-making tool for growth and competitive advantage.

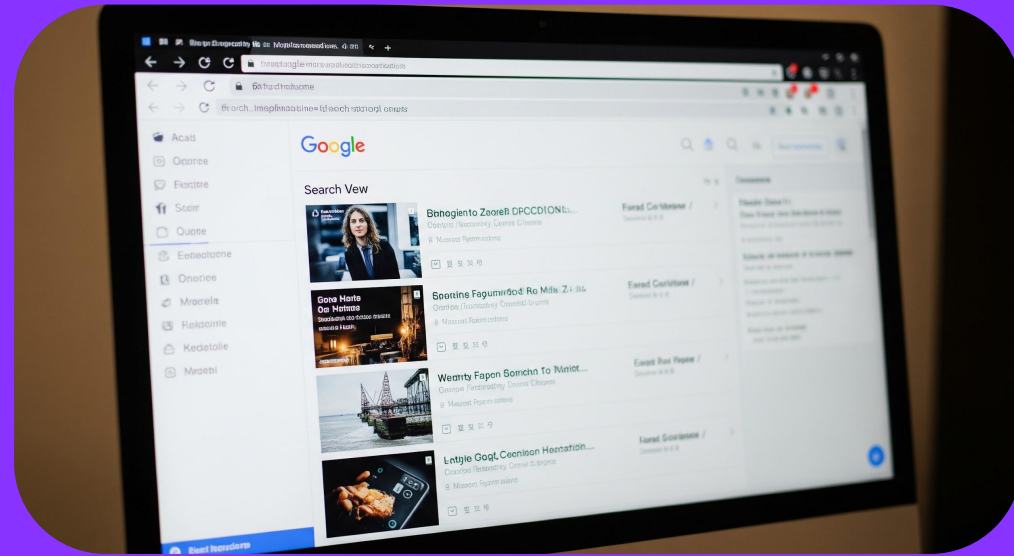


UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMPETITORS

Tips to build a competitor map

03

Go wide, then go deep



Google it!

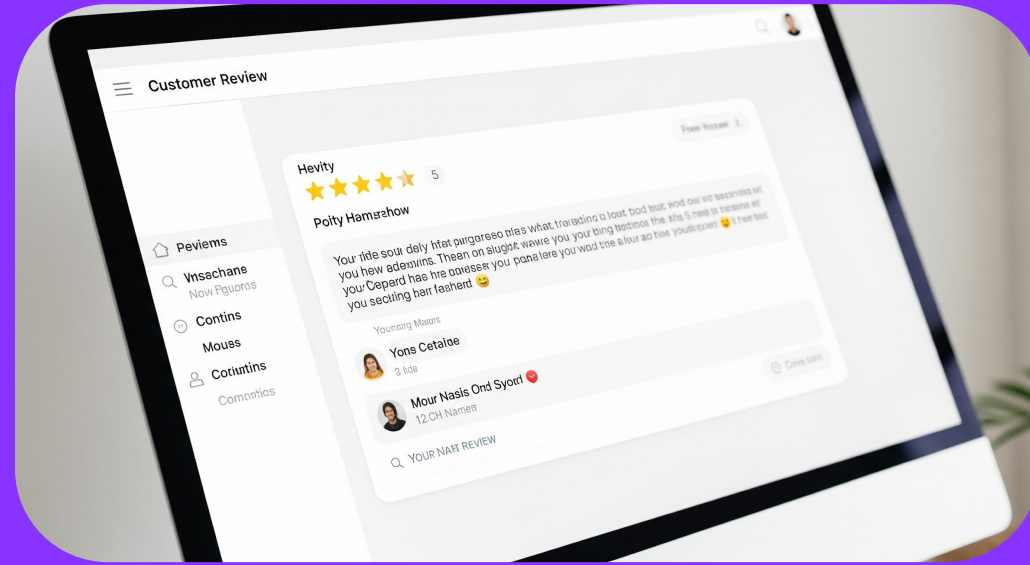
Start with broad keyword searches that broadly describe your product or industry. Then combine keywords with specific attributes customers might look for. Related search results and competitor ads can also help surface competitors you may not have considered.

When starting competitor mapping, it is better to begin with an expansive search. Include obvious direct competitors but also indirect players who might address the same customer need in a different way. Customers rarely limit themselves to a single category of options, and you risk missing key threats or opportunities if you only look narrowly.

Once you have a broad set of potential competitors, narrow the list by focusing on those most relevant to your market and strategy. Select at least 10 competitors to ensure the map reflects a realistic picture of the market landscape.

Insight: a balanced approach to competitor mapping avoids blind spots while keeping the exercise practical.

Attributes matter



Which attribute?

Reviews and customer feedback sources can reveal what customers consider important. And competitor messaging can indicate what the market values. If you're struggling to determine which attributes to measure, use these.

A competitor map is only useful if the attributes chosen for comparison reflect what customers actually care about. Too often, teams pick dimensions that matter internally, but not to their target audience. If customers care more about convenience and trust than about technical superiority, your mapping should reflect that reality.

Choose two to five core attributes that align with both customer preferences and your industry's competitive dynamics. Examples include price, quality, innovation, customer service, or brand positioning.

Aligning with customer priorities ensures the map is not just descriptive but strategically relevant.



Track competitor performance

Morningstar – snapshots and performance history

Macrotrends – performance data

Trading Economics – performance indicators at company and industry level

CBInsights (paid) – market intelligence

Use a variety of data sources

Good mapping requires good data.

Relying only on assumptions or competitor websites will give you a skewed view. Instead, mix hard data (like pricing and features) with soft data (like customer perceptions and brand reputation). Remember that perception often drives decisions just as much as reality.

Execution means tapping multiple sources: industry reports, surveys, customer interviews, product review sites, patent databases, and even professional networks.

Combining these sources strengthens credibility and avoids the bias of any single perspective.



Who is the Best?

Industry awards, analyst reports, and review sites highlight who leads on things like customer service, product innovation, or sustainability. Keynote speakers at major conferences, and case studies in industry publications also indicate excelling businesses.

Best of Breed mapping can help

Best of Breed analysis involves identifying the strongest elements across different competitors and using them as inspiration for your own strategy. Instead of focusing only on weaknesses, this approach highlights what others do exceptionally well, whether that's customer experience, product design, marketing execution, or pricing models. By "cherry-picking" these strengths, you can shape an offering that combines the best attributes in the market while still being distinctive.

Look at which competitors excel in specific areas and ask why their approach resonates with customers. Analysing these elements systematically gives you a blueprint for improvement, while also highlighting areas where differentiation is still possible. The key is not to imitate blindly, but to adapt the best ideas to align with your unique value proposition.



Subscribe!

Subscribing to newsletters from key industry groups will alert you to upcoming events and reports. Tools like Eventbrite and Meetup can surface niche or emerging events, and research bodies will share white papers that sometimes profile new players.

Conferences and professional networks

Industry conferences, trade shows, and professional associations are excellent sources for uncovering competitors that might not appear in obvious searches.

Conference agendas list keynote speakers, panel discussions, and sponsors, which often highlight emerging players or established firms moving into new spaces.

Professional network publications, such as association journals, newsletters, and reports, are equally valuable, as they often profile the activities of key players in a domain.

By integrating this type of scanning into your competitor mapping process, you ensure your perspective is not just current but anticipatory, allowing you to spot potential threats and opportunities before they hit the mainstream.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMPETITORS

04 What's next?

Competitor mapping and roadmaps

A business should also use competitor mapping to inform its long-term strategy. The map highlights not just current competitors but also potential threats and substitutes that may grow over time. This makes it a tool for anticipating industry shifts and planning ahead.

It's also particularly valuable for shaping a product roadmap, because it highlights where an offering is underdeveloped, oversaturated, or uniquely differentiated compared to the market.

Insights from mapping can guide resource allocation, such as where to increase investment, what features to prioritise, or which customer segments to target. It also serves as a communication tool internally, aligning teams on how the business stands in the market and what actions are required to strengthen its position.

Used effectively, competitor mapping becomes the foundation for both tactical adjustments and broader strategic planning.

Considering a brand renewal? Download the Disruptors Co Key [Themes and Messages handbook](#).



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