

Understand design ideation

Conduct competitive audits

- Video:** Scope the competition 3 min
- Reading:** Learn more about competitive audits 10 min
- Practice Quiz:** Test your knowledge on competitive audits 2 questions
- Video:** Limits to competitive audits 1 min
- Video:** Steps to conduct a competitive audit 4 min
- Reading:** Steps to conduct a competitive audit 15 min
- Practice Quiz:** Practice Activity: Create a competitive audit for the Coffeehouse project 1 question
- Reading:** Activity Exercise: Create a competitive audit for the Coffeehouse project 10 min
- Discussion Prompt:** Create a competitive audit 10 min
- Reading:** How to present a competitive audit 15 min
- Video:** Use insights from competitive audits to iterate 1 min
- Video:** Exercise: My journey to UX 3 min

Brainstorm design ideas by sketching

Week 4 review

Course review

Steps to conduct a competitive audit

You've already learned that conducting research on competitors is the cornerstone to understanding your product, the landscape of your industry, and your users. Conducting a competitive audit is an effective way to compile all of your research into one central resource. In this reading, we'll break down each step of the competitive audit process in more detail through an example to introduce you to the process. In a later activity, you'll conduct your own competitive audit.

For the example in this reading, imagine you're conducting competitive research on fast food burger restaurants for your new client, Burger Garden. Burger Garden feels that their current website isn't attracting much business, and they want you to help the company redesign their website.

To follow along with the example in this reading, you can use this link:

To see the completed exemplar for this course item, click the link below and select "Use Template."

Link to exemplar: [competitor audit spreadsheet \(1\)](#).

OR

If you don't have a Google account, you can download the exemplar directly from the attachment below.

[Google UX Design Certificate - Competitor audit - Food trucks \(example\)](#)
XLSX File

Step 1. Outline the audit goals

As a UX designer, you know that the ideation process is most effective after you've completed an audit on your new client, Burger Garden, and their competitors. But before you move into the details of the audit, you have to define your goals. Since this project is for a website redesign, the goal of the competitive audit is to compare the user experience of each competitor's website.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------|------|--|---|---|---|---|
| Competitive audit | Goal | Compare the user experience of each competitor's website | | | | |

Using consistent language for rating competitor products can also create more uniform feedback and help you "grade" competitors. You can grade competitors on a scale of:

Needs work: The app is not usable, and users aren't getting what they need from this aspect of the app.

Okay: This aspect has some issues, but with some work, it could meet user needs.

Good: This aspect works well, but doesn't always provide users with the necessary information easily.

Outstanding: This aspect feels consistent, and it meets or exceeds the user's needs.

Step 2. List competitors

Start to build the competitor audit using the template. First, ask the company or team who they consider to be their direct and indirect competitors. As a reminder, **direct competitors** have offerings that are similar to your product and focus on the same audience. **Indirect competitors** either have a similar set of offerings but focus on a different audience, or they have a different set of offerings and focus on the same audience. Getting this information early can provide good insight into where the company really fits into their industry.

For example, Burger Garden mentioned that Beef Eaters restaurant is one of their direct competitors, so they should be included on the list. Based on your own research, you find two more direct competitors that are also burger restaurants in the same geographical area as Burger Garden, called Burger Nest and The Spotty Cow. You also come across an indirect competitor, The Vegan Cow, that has an international presence and really appealing imagery on their website. The competitor audit spreadsheet now includes the information shown below.

| Competitive audit | Goal | Compare the user experience of each competitor's website | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--|-------------------|-------|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|---|--|
| | Competitor name | Location | Product offering | Price | Website | Business size | Target audience | Unique value proposition | |
| Burger Garden (our company) | BurgerGarden.com | Norwalk City, MD | Fast food burgers | \$5 | www.burgergarden.com | Small | Local audience | Large menu with 100+ options and 24-hour service | |
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Step 3. Determine the specific competitor aspects you want to compare

Defining a list of aspects you want to compare makes it easier to compile your results for analysis later on in the process. For this example, imagine that you check out each of the competitors' websites and rate them based on the following categories:

- First impressions:** Check out the website on both desktop and mobile devices, and make note of your first impressions. Is the website responsive, meaning that it reuses across devices? Does the design complement the product? How do you feel about the website?
- Interaction:** Explore the user flow and navigation of the website. What features are available for users? Is the website accessible to all users, including those using screen readers? How inclusive is the website to non-English speakers? Will the user get confused as they click through the website pages, or is the navigation clear?
- Visual design:** Review competitor branding and their overall consistency. Does the website appear and feel the same throughout all sections and pages? Does the branding match the intended audience? Is the imagery and color palette memorable?
- Content:** Examine the written content included on the website. Does the tone of the content match the company's branding? Will users be able to find the details they're interested in?

These are the aspects to list across the top row of the competitor audit. In the example spreadsheet, these aspects are listed in rows 3 and 4. This means you would fill in information about these aspects for each of the companies you're evaluating.

Step 4. Research each company

Now that the list of competitors and features to compare is filled in, it's time to check out each of Burger Garden's competitors and start the audit. If you were conducting your own audit, you would fill out the spreadsheet row by row as you review each competitor. You can include notes in bullet point form, links, and screenshots—whatever is most helpful for your information gathering process. Let's check out each section of the example spreadsheet.

Audience

Millennials, including families, make up the biggest portion of the competitors' audiences. There's also a small crossover between millennials and Gen Z college students. This is very similar to the audience that Burger Garden is targeting. Only one competitor, The Vegan Cow, has a different audience. That's okay! The Vegan Cow wasn't included as a direct competitor because their audience isn't similar to Burger Garden's. It's still important to compare their website and overall user experience to ensure you're getting a good sense of the entire market.

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First impressions

The websites that make the best first impression are The Spotty Cow and The Vegan Cow. Both provide appealing and clear imagery and are fully responsive websites. On the other end, the websites for Beef Eaters and Burger Nest weren't very impressive. While they're easy to navigate, they both need to work on improving their brands.

For the mobile website experience, only one site had issues with responsiveness: Beef Eaters. Their website didn't adjust to the smaller screen size of a mobile phone, so the spacing was misaligned and some information was cut off.

For the sites with lower ratings, the biggest issue was the menu. Sometimes the menu wasn't accessible, and other times the menu was included as an image that was hard to read. That's definitely something to make note of for your redesign of the Burger Garden website!

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Interaction

The next part of the competitive audit focuses on the user's ability to quickly and efficiently find what they're searching for on the website. Your client, Burger Garden, needs help to create a hierarchy for their site that's easier for users to follow and interact with.

The Spotty Cow's website includes animations that slow the navigation, and The Burger Nest's site has lots of unnecessary content on the homepage, which makes it hard to find important information like their phone number and menu. On the other end of the spectrum, the websites that work well have a clear navigation style and make it obvious which elements are clickable and which aren't—a characteristic that's important to include in the redesign of Burger Garden's website. The Vegan Cow is the standout competitor in the category with useful features like a store locator and comprehensive accessibility considerations including multiple language options and compatibility with screen reader technologies.

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Visual design

A website with clear and consistent visual design is a great way to draw users into a product and company. Burger Garden's current website has pretty solid visual design overall, but there are a few areas that could be updated to better reflect their brand tone.

The Spotty Cow and The Vegan Cow communicate their brand well with distinct colors, typography, and photography. But Burger Nest and Beef Eaters both have an inconsistent visual style on their websites, and Burger Nest's site doesn't communicate their brand very well.

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Content

The tone of the content is another way to communicate a company's brand and engage users. Most of Burger Garden's competitors use an engaging and fun tone that fits their audiences. Burger Garden's tone is a little inconsistent and not as light-hearted as its competitors. This is an area for improvement when you redesign their website!

In general, the competitors' content is short and easy to follow. Burger Garden's current website descriptions come off as a bit dry and overly long, so you can point to competitors' content as an example to follow.

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Step 5. Summarize your findings in a report

After conducting research, gathering data, and analyzing your findings, summarize your work in a report. What you include in your report and how you present your findings will vary depending on the audit goals you outlined at the beginning of the process. For example, if your audit mainly focuses on comparing competitors' audiences, you might want to include a few informational graphics with numbers and figures. Or, if your audit mainly focuses on visual design, you might want to include screenshots of your competitors' websites with different areas highlighted. You'll learn how to create a report summarizing your research findings in more detail later on in the program, so don't worry too much about it right now!

Completing your audit

Conducting a competitive audit is a great way to familiarize yourself with user experience design by getting more information about a new industry, a new client, and recent industry trends. The information you learn can be used throughout the design process. If you can, it's best to take your time with the competitive audit process so you'll have a great foundation of knowledge to build your designs on moving forward. Good luck!