

COMPETITOR AUDIT WORKSHEET

The structured way to score your local competition, find the gaps that win, and spot the operators worth buying

WHO THIS IS FOR

Home service operators who want to stop guessing what the shop down the road is doing and start scoring it on paper.

WHAT YOU GET

A six-category scoring system to audit any competitor in under 90 minutes, a gap-prioritization grid that tells you which gaps are cheapest to close versus most impactful to close, the offseason weakness audit that finds the operators bleeding cash from November through March, and the seller-motivation framework for identifying acquisition targets worth approaching.

BASED ON

field research across 200+ home service operators running at scale, from single-location shops to 170+ unit franchise systems.

WHY YOU AUDIT COMPETITORS BEFORE YOU BUILD A MARKETING PLAN

Most operators write marketing plans by listing what they want to do. The better order is the other way around. You audit your competitors first. You score them honestly. Then you build a plan around the gaps where you can win.

This is not about copying competitors. It is about seeing them clearly. A competitor with 400 five-star Google reviews has a moat a new entrant cannot cross in a single season. A competitor with 25 reviews has no moat at all. The first competitor is a wall to go around. The second is open ground to take.

High review counts are evidence of brand equity that is difficult to dislodge. Fragmented markets with no operator above 5% share are the preferred entry point. Even operators with 170+ locations often hold less than 2% of their total addressable market and could get to 10% without changing a thing. The pattern is consistent: dominance is usually local, and most operators never look closely enough at their own block to see who actually owns it.

This worksheet is how you look.

STEP 1: PICK THE RIGHT COMPETITORS TO AUDIT

You are not auditing every operator in your metro. You are auditing the ones who actually take work from you.

Pull a list of five to eight competitors using these filters:

- **Two market leaders.** The names that appear first when a customer searches your trade plus your city. These set the ceiling.
- **Two direct peers.** Operators roughly your size who service your geography and your customer type.
- **Two emerging threats.** Newer brands with fast review velocity, fresh trucks, or visible ad spend. These are the ones who will be your peers next year.
- **One or two PE-backed or franchise units.** Any unit operating under a national parent or franchise umbrella. These compete differently and you score them differently.

If you cannot tell who is PE-backed or franchised, search the brand name plus the word "franchise" or check whether the website footer references a national parent.

STEP 2: THE SIX-CATEGORY SCORING SYSTEM

Score every competitor on the same six categories. Use a 1 to 5 scale. Score yourself last, so you do not anchor on your own numbers.

CATEGORY A: REVIEW COUNT AND RECENCY

Reviews drive map pack position. They drive paid ad click-through. They drive customer choice when a stranger compares three names. They compound.

Score each competitor on:

- **Google review count.** 1 = under 30. 2 = 30 to 99. 3 = 100 to 249. 4 = 250 to 499. 5 = 500+.
- **Average rating.** 1 = below 4.0. 2 = 4.0 to 4.3. 3 = 4.4 to 4.6. 4 = 4.7 to 4.8. 5 = 4.9+.
- **Review recency.** Are reviews coming in this month? Score 1 if the most recent review is over 90 days old. Score 5 if reviews arrive every week.

A competitor with 400 reviews and steady weekly recency is in a different league from a competitor with 400 reviews who hasn't earned one in six months. The first is actively building. The second is decaying.

CATEGORY B: GOOGLE BUSINESS PROFILE COMPLETENESS

A complete GBP is free and most competitors leave it half-done. Score:

- Service categories filled out: yes or no
- Service area defined accurately: yes or no
- Photos posted within the last 30 days: yes or no
- Q&A section actively answered: yes or no
- Posts published within the last 30 days: yes or no
- Owner responds to reviews within 24 to 48 hours: yes or no

Six out of six is a 5. Three out of six is a 3. Zero out of six is a 1. Most competitors land between 2 and 3.

CATEGORY C: WEBSITE CONVERSION

You are not scoring how pretty the site looks. You are scoring whether it converts a stranger into a booked job.

Check each competitor's website for:

- Phone number visible in the header on mobile
- A clear call-to-action above the fold (book, quote, call)

- An instant pricing or instant quote tool. One 170-location lawn care franchise generated \$2 million in upsell revenue in one year from a single instant pricing screen, and adding an in-field upsell button inside their CRM produced a 29% average revenue increase. Most competitors do not have any version of this.
- A page for each major service, not one catch-all page
- Reviews or testimonials embedded directly on the homepage
- Residential or commercial branding clarity. If your website looks very residential, you are going to get residential customers. A site that tries to look like both ends up converting neither.

Score 5 if the site does all six. Score 1 if it does none.

CATEGORY D: BRAND PRESENCE AND SATURATION

This is where most independent operators lose without realizing it.

Score:

- **Truck wraps.** Are the trucks painted with brand colors, logo, phone number, and clear service description? Or unmarked? Trucks are cited alongside a website, Google listing, and Google reviews as the four core brand-visibility assets that generate organic leads.
- **Uniforms.** Branded uniforms or street clothes?
- **Yard signs after job completion.** Walk a neighborhood you both serve. Whose signs are in lawns?
- **Local saturation.** Did the competitor concentrate their presence in a tight radius? The "boil the puddle" approach -- saturating a 1 to 1.5 mile radius until everyone thinks you have 10 to 15 trucks -- beats spreading presence across an unserviceable footprint every time.
- **National media or franchise lift.** Has the brand appeared on national TV, radio, or media? Some franchise systems charge franchisees 2% of fees specifically for brand development and run national media placements. In one HVAC radio test, sustained brand-radio advertising lifted Google Ads click-through from 8% to 51%. If you are auditing a competitor with that kind of lift, mark it.

CATEGORY E: PREMIUM SIGNAL

Premium signal is the by-product of operational focus. Operators who invest in new wrapped trucks, top-tier parts, and top-tier training find that top clients seek them out saying "we don't care what it costs, just do it the right way." That is premium signal.

Score:

- Trucks newer than 5 years old: yes or no
- Technicians arrive in clean branded gear: yes or no
- Visible technology in the field (tablets, in-truck point of sale, instant invoicing): yes or no
- Stated guarantees and warranties on the website: yes or no
- Pricing positioned with confidence (no "starting at \$39" lowest-price bait): yes or no

CATEGORY F: SPEED TO LEAD

This one you measure yourself. Call each competitor like a customer.

- Did they answer the phone on the first call? Only 1-in-10 service companies answer on the first call attempt. Simply answering puts a service company ahead of 90% of competitors.
- If they did not answer, how long until callback? The booking probability drops from above 70% to below 30% when a call goes unanswered, and 62% of missed calls never leave a voicemail.
- Fill out their web form. How long until phone follow-up? If a web inquiry is not called back within the first 5 minutes, conversion probability drops from above 70% to below 30%.
- Quality of the booking conversation: confident and consultative, or transactional and rushed?

This category is the most often underestimated and the cheapest to win on.

STEP 3: THE SCOREBOARD

Build a simple grid. Six categories across the top. Each competitor and yourself down the side. Score 1 to 5 per cell. Total at the bottom.

You now have an honest snapshot. Three things will jump out:

1. The category where you are weakest relative to the field
2. The category where the market leader has the biggest moat
3. The category where everyone is bad, including the leader

That third one is where you build the wedge.

STEP 4: THE GAP-PRIORITIZATION GRID

Not every gap is worth closing. Sort each gap into one of four quadrants by plotting cost-to-close (low or high) against impact-on-revenue (low or high).

High impact, low cost. Close these this quarter. Examples: setting up an automated review request after every job, updating your GBP to 6 of 6 on completeness, training your office to answer the phone live.

High impact, high cost. Plan these for the next 12 months. Examples: wrapping your fleet, rebuilding your website with an instant pricing page, adding a CRM that supports in-field upsell and automated follow-up.

Low impact, low cost. Do these only when the high-impact items are done. Examples: small social media polish, business card redesign.

Low impact, high cost. Skip these. Examples: chasing a national brand on TV ad spend when your basic GBP is incomplete.

Most operators get this backwards. They spend money on the low-impact, high-cost quadrant because it feels like progress and they ignore the high-impact, low-cost quadrant because it feels too simple. The audit is what stops that.

STEP 5: THE OFFSEASON COMPETITOR WEAKNESS AUDIT

Most competitor audits get done in your busy season, when everyone looks healthy. The audit that matters most is the one you run in your offseason.

The math across 250 home service P&Ls tells the story. Removing just one bad quarter from the annual report increased average profit by 72%. One 170-location lawn care franchise found offseason losses totaling \$700,000 per year system-wide before the operation was restructured. The term for this structural disease is "seasonitis." Diagnostic criteria: revenue drops more than 50% in any single month versus your best month, or negative cash flow in any single month of the year.

If your competitors have seasonitis and you do not, the offseason is when you take their market share for free.

What to score during your offseason audit:

- **Are their ads still running?** Most competitors go dark in Q4 or Q1. The solution: advertise when your competitors have nothing to sell. Pull up Facebook Ad Library and Google Ads transparency for each competitor. If ads stopped in October, that competitor conceded the offseason.
- **Are they hiring or laying off?** Check Indeed, ZipRecruiter, and the competitor's careers page. Operators in distress lay off in Q4. The play: hire the employees your competitors are laying off, buy the equipment they are selling because they are in debt, and advertise when no one else can afford to.
- **Are their trucks selling?** Search Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist, and local trade Facebook groups for competitor logos on used trucks. A logo on a used truck is a tell.
- **Are reviews slowing?** A competitor whose review velocity drops to zero in Q4 has lost their technician ask system and probably lost the techs along with it.
- **Are they running follow-up?** Submit a quote request to each competitor in October. Track who calls you. Then track who calls you a second time. Operators who make three follow-up phone calls on pending estimates typically increase close ratio from sub-40% to 60-65%. A competitor who quotes once and never follows up has a follow-up problem dressed as a leads problem.

The offseason audit tells you who is weak. The next step is deciding what to do about it.

STEP 6: SELLER-MOTIVATION FRAMEWORK FOR ACQUISITION TARGETS

If your audit surfaces a competitor in real distress, you have a third option beyond "compete with them" or "ignore them." You can buy them.

Every acquisition is different, and the key variable is understanding the seller's personal goals, not just the financials. Sellers almost always have a broken or distressed business, because if it were running well they would not be selling. The primary value in a home service acquisition is recurring revenue and the customer list, not equipment, vehicles, or one-time jobs.

Score each acquisition target on four motivation signals:

Burnout signals. Owner working 70+ hour weeks. No second-in-command. Owner posting frustrated content on social media. Wife or husband working in the office under stress. These are the conversations that close.

Distress signals. Truck logos on Marketplace. Layoff notices. Late vendor payments visible through industry gossip. Reviews slowing. Negative reviews unanswered.

Lifestyle signals. Owner over 60 with no succession plan. Health issues mentioned offhand. Kids who clearly do not want to take over the business.

Capital signals. Owner publicly looking for capital, asking for partners, posting about needing a line of credit.

A target with three or four motivation signals is worth approaching. A target with zero is not for sale at any price you would want to pay.

THE VALUATION REFRAME TO USE IN THE FIRST CONVERSATION

A common seller mistake is pricing the business on what it could be once cleaned up. Use this reframe:

"You want me to pay you for what I'm going to fix? I'll hire you as an employee and you can make commissions as we fix it, but my price cannot reflect what I'm going to fix."

This puts the conversation back on what the business is actually worth today, while keeping the seller engaged in the upside.

THE PROACTIVE OUTREACH SCRIPT

For acquisition targets you have studied carefully:

"I know you. I've studied you. I've studied your social media. I got a gift for you. Let me just design a picture for you that can not only give you a better life, but I want to know what you want out of life first."

The frame is about the seller's life, not the seller's P&L. Most acquisition conversations fail because the buyer leads with money. The ones that close lead with the seller's goals.

THE STRUCTURE RULE

Paying all cash for an acquisition is a bad idea. Earn-outs and bringing sellers on as employees are preferred structures. Also pay attention to the platform math: a buyer acquiring at 3x EBITDA when the buyer itself is valued at 12x creates immediate equity. Buying \$300K in earnings generates \$1.2M in enterprise value -- \$900K created from nothing. You may not be the platform yet, but understanding the math tells you when to be the seller and when to be the buyer.

If you are under \$10M in revenue, private equity will not look at you. PE buyers typically require a minimum of \$10 million in revenue before they will evaluate a home service acquisition. That is your acquisition window: the operators below the PE threshold, where you can be the consolidator instead of being consolidated.

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

This week:

- ☐ List five to eight competitors using the filter criteria
- ☐ Score every competitor on Categories A, B, and C from your desk
- ☐ Score yourself last on the same three categories
- ☐ Identify your weakest category relative to the field

This month:

- ☐ Drive a neighborhood you both serve. Score Categories D and E in person.
- ☐ Call every competitor and run the Category F test
- ☐ Build the gap-prioritization grid
- ☐ Commit to the top two high-impact, low-cost gaps

This offseason:

- ☐ Run the offseason weakness audit on every competitor
- ☐ Mark which competitors went dark on ads
- ☐ Mark which competitors stopped earning reviews
- ☐ Mark which competitors laid off or sold equipment
- ☐ Identify two to three operators with three or more seller-motivation signals
- ☐ Schedule one informal conversation per quarter with a possible acquisition target

Ongoing:

- ☐ Re-score the top three competitors every six months
 - ☐ Track changes in their review velocity month over month
 - ☐ Track changes in their ad presence month over month
 - ☐ Update the gap-prioritization grid as your own scores rise
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WHAT THIS AUDIT PRODUCES

You will know exactly who you are competing with. You will know where you are stronger than the field, where you are weaker, and which gaps are cheapest to close. You will see seasonitis in your competitors before they see it in themselves. And when one of them is ready to sell, you will already have the relationship.

The Growth Operating System magnet covers what to do inside your own walls once the audit is done. This one is about looking outside.

All tactics in this worksheet are sourced from operators who use them at scale. Benchmarks drawn from field research across 200+ home service operations. Full source index available in the BurksUP Field Intelligence Library.

• WHAT'S NEXT •

READY TO *INSTALL* THIS?

BurksUP builds the marketing systems that make home service operators findable, bookable, and referable. This guide is the playbook. We're the team that installs it.

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