

The Competitive Intelligence Audit Checklist

A one-sitting audit of the blind spots that most reliably surface in a board meeting, an investor conversation, or a partner's due diligence — market signals, audience evidence, direct and adjacent competitors, AI visibility, and the review cadence that keeps it all current. Built on the same four-pillar QUAD methodology behind ThriveFinity's Blueprint.

44%

of companies admit zero competitor visibility

68%

of deals now face direct competition

6

audit sections, ~30 minutes

Source: Crayon, *The State of Competitive Intelligence 2025*; Octopus Competitive Intelligence Agency, 2025 competitive-intelligence blind-spot analysis. Full source list on the final page.

How to use this checklist

Work through the six sections in order — each takes roughly five minutes. Tick each box as you genuinely confirm it, not as you intend to. An unticked box is not a failure; it's the exact thing this audit exists to surface before someone else finds it for you.

01 Market Signals

Is the market real, and is the timing right?

- **TAM figure traces to a named, dated source** — not a press release or a number you can no longer locate
- **Calculated bottom-up at least once** — total addressable customers × realistic annual revenue per customer
- **Source is under 18 months old** — in fast categories (AI tooling, fintech, dev infra) a 2-year-old figure can mislead
- **Timing verdict stated explicitly** — window open / closing / not yet open — and why, in one sentence
- **At least one regulatory or macro tailwind identified** — and dated — a forcing function, not a vague trend

Common failure: citing a top-down analyst figure ("the market is worth £X billion") with no visible methodology. Investors treat undated, unsourced TAM claims as the first thing to challenge — see ThriveFinity's own data on *How Investors Verify Startup Claims*.

02 Audience Evidence

Who actually buys, and where do they look?

- **Buyer archetype built from behavioural or search-demand signals** — not invented from assumption alone
- **At least one channel-fit signal checked** — e.g. search volume, community activity, or existing paid-channel benchmarks for your category
- **Willingness-to-pay checked against comparable public pricing** — at least 2–3 named competitors' live pricing pages
- **Demand distinguished as structural vs. seasonal/cyclical** — a spike is not the same evidence as sustained growth

03 Direct Competitors

The rivals everyone already tracks

- **Every named direct competitor checked on a funding database** — Crunchbase free tier is sufficient for an initial pass
- **Any competitor funded in the last 24 months explicitly acknowledged** — silence about a well-funded rival reads as ignorance or evasion, not confidence
- **Positioning gaps mapped, not just feature lists** — where has a competitor left a segment or use-case unclaimed?
- **"No direct competitors" claim removed or replaced** — if this is still your claim, it usually means an undefined category, not an open field

04 Adjacent & Substitutes

Where blind spots actually live

- **Scope widened beyond the 2–3 competitors you already track** — "competitive tunnel vision" — deep expertise on known rivals, blindness to adjacent entrants — is a documented, common failure mode even for teams that track dozens of metrics
- **Substitute solutions listed** — what would a customer use instead of buying anything at all?
- **Adjacent-category entrants checked for pivot risk** — a company one category over that could move into yours with a small pivot
- **This section re-run at least quarterly** — collected competitive data left unrevisited is close to worthless — most of it never gets acted on

Why this section exists separately: a widely cited example from enterprise competitive-intelligence practice — a financial-services CI team tracked 47 metrics across 12 known competitors and still missed their biggest rival quietly acquiring fintech startups outside the tracked list entirely. More tracking of the same competitors doesn't fix a scope problem.

05 AI Visibility

How ChatGPT & Perplexity describe your category

- **Category prompt run in ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, and Claude** — e.g. "what are the best tools for [your category]?" — logged out / new chat, to avoid personalisation bias
- **Comparison prompt run against your top named competitor** — "how does [you] compare to [competitor]?" — check for accuracy, not just presence
- **Factual prompt run** — "what does [company] do?" — flag any answer describing a pivoted-away-from product or stale pricing
- **Any wrong or missing answer traced to a gap on your own site** — vague "about us" copy gives these systems little to retrieve — specific, dated, sourced statements are more likely to be cited accurately

Across a large 2026 sample of commercial prompts, ChatGPT named a specific brand in 71.4% of answers and Perplexity in 84.2% — yet only around 14% of companies have any deliberate AI-visibility strategy. See the companion guide *How to Run an AI Visibility Check on Your Startup* for the full 20-minute walkthrough.

06 Review Cadence

The rhythm that keeps this audit current

Cadence	What it covers	Off-schedule trigger
Monthly monitoring	Funding announcements, pricing-page changes, new competitor features	A competitor is rumoured to be raising
Quarterly full review	Re-run all six sections above in full	Before any board meeting or raise

Ad-hoc deep dive	One section only, in response to a specific event	Any event material enough to shift positioning
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■ **One named owner assigned to the monthly monitoring pass** — the single highest-leverage change most early-stage teams can make — not another tool

■ **Recurring calendar block set for the monthly pass** — ~90 minutes; without a fixed slot this decays the same way one-off research does

Want this run for you — verified, cited, and signed?

ThriveFinity's Blueprint runs this exact four-pillar structure as a 48-hour engagement: four independently-verified intelligence reports (Market, Audience, Competitive, Trend incl. AI Visibility Check), synthesised into one signed Core Truth, plus a 90-Day Action Roadmap. From £499 · thrivefinity.uk/intelligence

Sources

- Crayon — *The State of Competitive Intelligence 2025*. Deal-level competition rate (68%) and CI team preparedness scoring.
- Octopus Competitive Intelligence Agency (2025) — competitive blind-spot analysis, including the 44% zero-visibility figure and the financial-services "tunnel vision" case pattern.
- Evalueserve, cited in Octopus Competitive Intelligence Agency (2025) — estimate that companies analyse roughly 12% of collected competitive data.
- Superlines — *AI Search Statistics 2026*. Named-brand citation rates across ChatGPT, Perplexity, Gemini, and Claude from an 8,400-prompt commercial-query sample; ~14% AI-visibility-strategy adoption.
- Aggarwal et al. — *GEO: Generative Engine Optimization*, ACM SIGKDD (KDD 2024), Princeton / Georgia Tech / Allen Institute for AI / IIT Delhi.