

SEMrush vs. AHREFS: A Deep Dive Review & Comparison of Each

Transcript:

Hey, this is Shaheen from Web Upon and this is episode number 10 of Chalk Talk Thursday. Today I wanted to cover a very, very common question in the SEO industry. What is the difference between Ahrefs and SEMrush? Now, I think there's a pretty quick 30 second answer to this question. I actually use both of them pretty frequently because they are both really useful for a variety of tasks, so I'll dive into what the key differences are of both and then I'll show you a little bit of the idiosyncrasies. I think that there's probably a video for another day where I cover the more advanced features in both tool sets because they do have a lot of really awesome tool sets under the hood. There's a lot of cool stuff going on. There's also some nuances about the data, like Ahrefs just has tons and tons of data. They're not very concerned with manicuring it.

SEMrush is kind of the same as far as keyword rankings go, and that's why I love both of them, but for new users, that can be really daunting and confusing. Sometimes people get irritated because it looks like stuff's getting mistracked, but it's actually pretty nuanced and it's awesome just because you get all the information, and I'm not a fan of too much filtration because that doesn't let us really understand what's happening in the market. So with that, I'll dive in. So the main difference between these two tools is that SEMrush is actually completely geared towards keyword rankings. That's what it's really known for. That's what it excels at. And the best part,

far and away about SEMrush is when you're inside the system, you can go through and it has historical data. This is huge, right. You can look at any competitor, you can look at your site three years ago, you can look at a new domain you're thinking about buying.

You can look at the competition's blog, anything you want, you can jump into SEMrush and their warehousing all the keyword data. That's huge, right. That gives you such a competitive advantage. And I'll talk a little bit more about that in a moment. I just have Amazon pulled up right here because I love to pick on them. And I love to talk about them, et cetera, et cetera. A lot of my clients hate them, right. So I have to keep an eye on them unfortunately. But the, far and away the key use case of SEMrush is this organic ranking data. They just provide so much more keyword information than anyone else that that's really what they're known for. So if you're a small business owner and you want to track your rankings, SEMrush is the tool to go with.

If you are, I think an SEO and you're a little more advanced and you want to know about backlink data, then Ahrefs is far and away the tool to use. There is a old school study from Matt Woodward and he updated it more recently. And just anecdotally from my experience, Ahrefs has the biggest profile of backlinks of anyone out there. They're tracking the most information and if you're trying to figure out something like what's going on or why is my competition beating me in this specific area? Ahrefs is definitely the tool to use. They're going to have the most backlink data, compared to anyone else. They're going to have more than Majestic, more than Moz, even though they just updated their profile and interestingly enough more than SEMrush. So the key thing I'll say here is that everyone right now riding off of the success of HubSpot is trying to create the next tool in the SEO inbound content marketing, advertising industry that's worth \$1 billion, right.

A tool like SEMrush was not getting updated that much, three years ago, five years ago when I started using it. Now it's getting updated super frequently. They're adding all of these cool features. They're trying out stuff. It's really awesome to see. Ahrefs is the same thing. I've heard Tim Soulo complain that they had keyword data for years and they could have crushed SEMrush and they could have crushed Moz, but a CEO thought that they should have focused on backlinks, which is what they do well. Interestingly, they're running through keywords. They're looking at the same keyword data from the keyword tool planner that SEMrush is to actually get that backlink information data, but they just weren't warehousing it. And to this day, I don't think they're really warehousing it in a useful way. I'll get more into that.

But both tools are great. Both tools are basically trying to do everything, right. So whether it's SEMrush, whether it's Ahrefs, whether it's Moz, cognitiveSEO, Serpstat. I don't know if Majestic's doing keyword rankings, but they're known for their backlink data. Everyone's trying to basically get a slice of the market. Amazon buying Alexa, they're trying to move into the SEO space and everyone was trying to do everything, right. But at the end of the day, if you just need two SEO tools, SEMrush and Ahrefs are definitely the way to go. And if you could only afford one as an SEO, I'd probably go with Ahrefs just because I can finagle keyword data and I'll get into that. And I have all that backlink information, which is probably the most valuable and hardest thing to get. But if you're a business owner, SEMrush is actually the one to get.

So let's just dive in very top level here and I'll sort of go a play by play with the key feature sets here and that'll let you know exactly what's going on between the two of these things. So this is really the main dashboard as far as SEMrush goes. So what you're going to see is organic search information, which is semi accurate. I would actually say that

for a bigger site it actually tends to be more accurate. Things generally can be pretty wildly off on a smaller site. Also, things are just harder to track. Obviously Google keyword volume information is just an estimate. It's not ultra accurate all the time. So we just do what we can and the paid search information is also wildly inaccurate. Even a tool like Spyfu tends to be off pretty far. I would use that information more so than anything else just for getting information and sort of like analytics on your competition, seeing what they're doing, see what they're bidding on, all that stuff.

But paid is really hard to track honestly. And I don't think anyone's really nailed it down in the same way that a lot of SEO tools have nailed down just keyword tracking. A tool like [Akiranker 00:05:56] is really useful. You can get servers located exactly where you want and that gives you a depth of information that people really haven't achieved with AdWords tools. And then of course they have backlink data and they had display advertising data. And basically the main use case really is in this organic keyword data. They have a breakdown of mobile and countries, super awesome right. So pretty much the number one thing to do when you're looking at any keyword research and when you're working with a tool like SEMrush is you just want to hop in good domain overview, which is going to give you an overall view of a site's domain.

And then they're going to have all that data warehousing information for any given URL or domain, which is huge right. So if you click on this dropdown, you can look at amazon.com but you can also on your competitor's site, look at a specific blog post and figure out exactly what keywords they're targeting and that gives you a leverage point that you can then access and figure out what you need to do. So this is like the stock view. I think for most users of SEMrush is really this keyword ranking information appear in the right. You can click on any timelines, you can look at how things are trending. And I think the most important thing, what you

really want to keep an eye on as a business owner, right, is the top 10 keywords. This other information is useful, but it's really not as useful as just seeing like your top three because that's really going to tell you, especially in an age of mobile where there's so much competition, what's going on.

And then you can just get more granular too, right. You can look at the month, you can also look at the trailing six months, like man organic traffics might be a little weak. Who knows if the stock's gonna fall down, might be a little hot tip for you, but this is really the main view. And then you can just go in here and you can filter through. So if you want to see how a specific product is performing, let's say, I don't even know if they sell car tires, but let's find out. You can just type in a keyword and then it's going to send you back all the information here for it, which is really nice. They also just added this feature where this keyword traffic trend data is actually going to update as well, which is really, really nice compared to the way it used to be because it just didn't work that way.

So there's advanced filters in here. You can search by specific URLs again, which is really helpful because if you're spying on the competition, you're trying to figure out why they're doing well on a certain product category, or why a blog post is doing really, really well, you can just type that information into the search bar at the top and you can really see what's going on in their site. So it's huge. Tons of useful information as far as SEMrush goes on the keyword ranking side of the picture. All right, so let's hop over here to Ahrefs and let's talk about sort of their main view, right. So you're gonna hop into the tool and it's sort of the same thing. You just type in the domain into the search bar. They have these nice filters here, which is awesome.

We can literally just see the breakdown of backlinks between http and https that can be useful for site moves. Again, you can look by prefix or subdomain or even just a specific URL,

again, which is super useful if you're hunting for the competition and you're trying to figure out how to win in a specific niche, super useful information there. So for a long time, this was really what I came to Ahrefs for, right. I really, really wanted to know what was happening on this side of the picture. So I think far and away the most accurate backlink data you can see there. So they actually split their index, right. So they have a fresh index, which has 2.6 billion backlinks for them and they have a recent one with 3.9 and then they have the historical one with 19.4 billion, right.

If we hop back over here to SEMrush, they have, I believe, 4 billion backlinks. Sorry, we just gotta wait for it to load, a lot of data. All right. So in their actual log, they have 8 billion backlinks. Ahrefs has 19.4 billion. You're probably not going to pay for all that backlink data because it's just going to end up costing you an arm and a leg and it's really not worth it. But for specific verticals you're going to expect that generally speaking, especially for historical index, that Ahrefs going to have way more data than SEMrush. So going back to the Ahrefs side of the picture, they have their own sort of URL rating tool and their domain rank rating tool. Moz's domain authority DA is probably most famous as the tool that replaced the PR rating from Google back in the day.

But now given the fact that Ahrefs has just way bigger index than Moz, I would actually say that you're probably better off using this information. This Ahrefs ranks, this domain rating value when you're evaluating backlinks or site quality. That said, there's a lot of nuance here. Most of these tools are not going to do a very good job of diving in and sort of assessing the overall quality or the relevancy of the links or even the freshness. But just as a heuristic, a good little tool and tip to look at, this information can be pretty useful. And then really what Moz, sorry, what Ahrefs is quite useful for is, you can just dive down and you can look and

drill into the backlink information. We'll wait for that to load. They give you information about what's happening here.

Now one thing I'll say, this historical stuff is super inaccurate because it goes on how they've just discovered something. So if it was already out in the world, and maybe Google discovered it months ago, maybe they didn't, maybe they even haven't yet. But this is just Ahrefs tracking of the situation. It's not what Google's seeing. So this isn't super helpful as far as trend data goes. Sometimes people will freak out cause it'll jump up or it'll jump down. But when we actually dive into the backlinks themselves, it's like, oh, that was from a blog post that we did months ago or whatever it may be. [inaudible 00:11:51] cool top level data is you're just going to get like the ratio of do follow backlinks, .gov, .edu .net, .com if you're into that kind of thing.

But really useful top level data, like do follow to no follow. You're going to get, whether it's images or text, whether there's redirects going on, you're going to get the overall rating of these backlinks. And obviously in most cases we're going to expect this nice little pyramid, right where the vast majority of your backlinks, 89%, even for the likes of Amazon are going to come from low value sites. That's just the reality of the world. And the other quick thing that I always love looking at is the actual anchor text report. This can be very, very helpful. Again, especially when you're diagnosing an issue with your own clients site. They just released a feature for internal links analysis, which makes it a lot easier. I'm probably going to dive into that and in another video about advanced features for Ahrefs but super useful here. Like this, a lot of things end up happening and getting, rankings ended up getting affected by this anchor text a lot more than people realize and it's something that a lot of people don't really look at.

And if you don't have a good tool like Ahrefs, it's kind of hard to dive into that specific information because Google is

really using that to figure out, what's your brand name because you're going to expect that your brand name is going to be encoded in the link when you get mentioned for PR purposes right. You're going to expect that your products are getting named. A lot goes into the actual anchor text and Ahrefs just makes it really easy to look at. So this is their overall backlink view. This is really great because you actually get a top level rundown. You can see which of your backlinks are broken. If you open that up, you can go through your most recent links. You can go through historical, you can search by type, you can search for specific platforms, you can search for language even.

So you might wonder why you're getting so many links in Japan or what have you. And you can also search by one link per domain, which can cut down on a lot of the garbage that you're seeing. So you can just jump in there and get more information significantly, way faster, right. They do a semi decent job with the broken backlink side of the picture. Sometimes it's a little bit hit and miss. I'll be quite frank, but overall it's pretty useful because you can dive in here and you can get a lot of information. For a lot of you business owners that are wondering why Amazon is kicking our asses, I'll say, right. They have their [S1 00:14:20] amazon.com. They have all these links that are happening just because people are hosting on their site.

They have a ton of referral links. I did an article back in the day on Amazon SEO. I'll probably do another update of that one coming up here pretty quick. Like how they're getting a lot of their backlinks because for your average business owner, it's kind of unfair quite frankly just on top of their brand recognition and how they just can basically just soak up cash money from investors, deploy it and then you as an actual business owner that's trying to run an ecom store on top of maybe a nut and bolts, just average run of the mill shop with a physical location. So hard to compete with someone like

Amazon that's able to use these kinds of backlink tactics. So I'll probably make another video that dives into that stuff, but that's sort of the top level there, like you can just do so much in Ahrefs to quickly analyze a site, right.

You can look at the top domains. You can sort by the top domain ranks that are pointed at you. So you as the small business owner can basically see, or the big corporate enterprise essentially also, you can see who's linking to you. You can see the quality of the links that are coming at you. And more importantly, you can see how your competitors are getting links, right. So if there's this question of why isn't my ultimate guide ranking compared to my competitors? We designed it so well. We made it look so nice. We optimized it. Well there's maybe some backlinks situations going on. There's maybe some internal anchor text linking situations going on. There's a lot more to evaluate than just the sort of feel of does it look nice.

Does it feel like we did a good job. You can do a good job in Google and still not get rankings and that's just the reality of the system. So all that said, that's the real overview. But of course we can just dive in here right. So the actual use cases are similar. Both of these tools are trying to be all in ones there. They're trying to get all your money as far as being a tool set that you're going to want to use to keep track of your overall SEO portfolio, overall SEO presence. So SEMrush also has this backlink data. They have a backlink audit where you can jump through and create a project and they'll analyze your backlink profile to make sure it's sketchy or just to see if everything's legit. I actually prefer using URL Profiler for that.

It's my preferred tool. We'll save that for another video. But SEMrush has backlink data, same sort of set up. You can look in here and you can get the information. It's just not as big of an index. That said, I'll often, if I'm doing a deep dive, sort of audit of a client site, I'll often take the backlink

data set from SEMrush, from Ahrefs, the reported one in search console from Google. I'll actually combine that whole data set. And sometimes like each tool is going to have its own little circle of coverage and some things will get missed but you'll get an overall longer list. So I will do that when I'm trying to correlate a bunch of data, but generally speaking, I'm just mostly working in Ahrefs if I'm trying to quickly get a sense of what's going on.

And on the flip side, Ahrefs is also hosting that data. They also have this organic keyword information. I'll actually say that they're doing a very, very good job at this. They don't, they still don't have as good of a historical track record essentially that SEMrush does just cause they weren't storing that information back as far in time. So it's not necessarily as useful in my opinion right, because just the depth, the length of the information that you're getting out of a tool like SEMrush where they have numbers going back to 2011, 2012 for sites, it's really hard to match that if you're doing hardcore SEO. The other thing that I'll touch on is each of these tools are now adding in a bunch of nice features, a bunch of nice new tool sets where it's not just about this keyword ranking data.

It's also about these extras that you can use to sort of look at the information that is in front of you. So it used to be that Ahrefs is awesome because you could look at like top pages and you can see a breakdown of the backlinks going by pages. But now they have tools like content gap where you can basically compare two sites and say what's missing from each as far as what you should be writing about. They have this content explorer tool which is awesome. You can check out any sort of topic you want. So if you're trying to write something about yoga, you can use their index of both backlinks and social share data to see what the most popular piece of information that's been written about yoga in the last week or the last year, which is huge.

It's very, very helpful for content marketing. And it's a relatively new tool, right. It's something that BuzzSumo started. The other thing that I'll mention is you get stuff like this, right. So it's like a domain comparison. You can look at amazon.com and you can compare it to Target. That's super cool. There's a batch analysis upload in Ahrefs, which is really nice. There's also a link intersect, which is really nice. And again, all this feature set is actually in SEMrush as well. They're doing the same thing, just a smaller overview of information inside of it. But I would actually say that as far as secondary features where Ahrefs really shines is this actual content explorer tool because they have that backlink data, which layered on top of social share information makes it really, really easy to mine for information. One thing I'll say too is if I was marketing in a country where things were generally less competitive, right.

So something that's been a product craze in America for 10 years, but it's relatively new in say Bulgaria, I would just jump in here, right. And I could search the same topic in another country or in another country where it's more popular, I can figure out what's ranked and gotten social shares over there and then I can just start writing all that content for my Bulgarian audience, just steal like an artist or whatever it may be. Get your inspiration from another data set where there's already been more competition and you can just sort of leverage all the English content that's been written about yoga in a completely new market. So as a secondary use case, I really, really like this. Hopping over to SEMrush, as I covered, right, they have the backlink information.

They do try to make the situation where you can look at competitors. I actually like this tool a lot too because they do a good job of getting you overlap information and you can look at backlinks and you can, competition level and you can also look at the organic rankings, which is just a really, really nice visual overview for any specific site. Very

helpful I think when you're jumping into a new market to get a sense of that stuff. And just sort of see what the overlap is between domains where you may be competing. You can also set up projects inside of SEMrush and this is again, something that's similar to Ahrefs right. You can hop into Ahrefs and you can set up a site audit and they'll monitor your SEO.

You can do the same thing in SEMrush. You can do the same thing in Moz. I'll probably do another video that covers a lot of these onsite audit tools and how good they are, just because there's a lot there and they're very, very different. I of course prefer the manual approach because I'm more technical, I'm more involved. I want to get more into the nuts and bolts of the site, but these can be very, very helpful for busy people inside of companies and or for business owners to keep an an eye on things. So as far as secondary use cases on the SEMrush side, this keyword magic tool they've come out with relatively recently is actually pretty amazing. So the keyword magic tool is actually really awesome. They jump in there, they combine all their related keyword data and all their close broad match keyword data that they have inside of the SEMrush system.

And they just chunk it up for you with specific groups. So you got best, you got use, you got put, spare, inflate, right, get, buy. You get all these terms which are cost purchasing terms. You also get content terms and they basically just group everything out for you so you know what's the specific area. If you want to dive into just one little niche, like if you just want to look at car tire chains because that's what you actually sell, you can just do the same exact thing. And you can at a top level look at all of this information on the phrase match side of things, right. All right, so this is like the traditional view inside SEMrush, right, where you type in a keyword cartoon, car chain tires and you get all your phrase match related ones.

And you can also just look at completely related keywords

which are not going to necessarily include car tire chains, but it's going to be pretty, pretty close to it. But this new tool set with the keyword magic is just awesome. They just categorize the information for you in a really, really nice way. And then you as the SEO, the marketer or whatever it may be, you can just get all that data and you can start breaking it into content information, which ta-da, that's also a feature that they've recently added. So they have this SEO content template tool. I'm not a huge fan of this because I think it takes away a lot of the human thinking that is still necessary, but they can just create an SEO template for your writer.

And I think for someone that's the beginner or intermediate level, that's actually a pretty useful tool set. And Ahrefs is also trying to emulate the same functionality, right. So the real intent behind their keyword explorer tool and all this SEO keyword information that they're building in is that they can sort of start to show you a lot more of this keyword data and hopefully you will sort of buy into their overall thing, is actually a huge advantage with the Ahrefs keyword explorer tool. So they're doing the same thing here, right, where it's like, here's the questions and if you can turn the questions into articles, and there's like all this related term information as far as the keyword data goes. They're showing SERP overview information which can also be helpful right. So there's the top 10 list that you expect.

There's video SERP features, which is also another awesome information set, right. So they have all this info in the Ahrefs side of the thing which is cool, right, because there's trying to give you the data you need to write content and of course SEMrush is doing the exact same thing here. They give you this little outline there. They're literally saying in both sides, here's the SERP, here's what your competition looks like. Quite frankly it's good to know, right. Like you should be thinking about what the title tags are like for the

competitors. You should be analyzing the SERP features and saying to yourself like crap, maybe video is just easier to get into as far as rankings go than actual writing because I'm not going to be able to compete with some of these name brands that are out there that are writing things already.

And SEMrush is even going to go down to the level of your specific title tag information and your [H1 00:26:16] should have the keyword snow chains, what have you, mentioned in the text. So they're just trying to automate all that SEO work for you. The one thing that's kind of novel, I think really about their tool is they have this sort of backlink, try to get backlinks from these guys. This can be a little tricky, right, because sometimes it'll just be like get a backlink from Wikipedia or get a backlink from irs.gov or uspto. you know, and it's like, okay, well obviously I would love to get a backlink from a government organization. I would love for them to quote me, but kind of unlikely that that's just going to happen. I'm going to be able to do some back link outreach and make that occur.

Just a little, still a little rough, not something that's super believable. The last little feature that SEMrush recently added that I think is pretty impressive is the log file analyzer. This can be really nice especially with right now it sounds like Google is going to take away our data as far as crawl errors in search console goes, at least that's my understanding. So a tool this can be useful for finding areas where you're still hitting 404s. There's also a bunch of plugins on the WordPress side that are going to do the same thing. I know that was a lot. I'll probably do another video where I just dive into SEMrush and I just dive into Ahrefs and again do a little bit more of their advanced functionality because there's a lot of awesome stuff happening in both, a lot of really, really cool feature sets are getting developed in both.

I'm using both all the time, but the sort of big picture

overview for SEMrush versus Ahrefs, if you have to pick one, probably go with Ahrefs. If you're more concerned about keyword data and you don't expect to get very technical on the SEO side and you don't think you're going to need backlink data from three years ago, if you're a business owner, SEMrush is the way to go, right, because you really want to get in there and get granular. You want to be able to spy on the competition, what they're ranking for and you want to be able to spy on yourself and just know how Google is raking you all the time, how your content's doing and that's just really what the situation is.

Even though both of these tools are developing cool new stuff, SEMrush is really, really for keyword data and Ahrefs is really, really for backlink information and that's the major difference between the two. I hope that was helpful. Let me know if you have any questions. I know I covered a lot in the video but there's lots to cover in both tool sets, so I'll probably come back in and talk a lot more about a lot of the other things that are happening under the hood. Bye bye.