



# Avoid 'Me Too' Web Benchmarking

*By C. David Gammel*

Too many web site design projects start with benchmarking efforts that result in a laundry list of 'me too' features rather than focusing on how to best create value for members and the association.

'Me Too' web designs tend to not deliver a great amount of value despite sometimes significant investment. This happens because they mimic other web sites instead of carefully tailoring their site to address their own unique needs and opportunities. You can avoid this trap by starting with clear objectives for your site before you start to benchmark.

Consider what value your site should provide to your members and other constituents. How important are education, networking, research, product sales and other activities? Document your top outcomes and measures that will tell you that you have achieved them. With this clear set of objectives, you can then develop criteria for selecting effective benchmark web sites.

Your selection criteria for benchmark web sites should go well beyond "I like how it looks." You should identify sites that pursue similar goals to yours. They may belong to competitors or organizations that conduct similar activities. In all cases, they must have

comparable features or content that you actually compare against your own current or desired outcomes.

With your benchmarks selected, you should assess each and identify: what works well; what doesn't; and opportunities to create value that the others ignore. Create a simple matrix of objectives mapped against benchmarks in order to document your findings.

Analysis of your benchmark matrix should reveal clear patterns of opportunity. You should be able to differentiate among must have and nice to have features for your objectives. You should also strive to identify features or content that you can create to provide unique value that others are not doing. This intelligence will allow you to work with your technology staff and/or partners to create a web site that creates great value for your members based on solid research.

Ideally your benchmarking will do more than raise your performance to the same level of your comparison sites: it should give you the intelligence you need to surpass them. Look at what your competitors are not doing that opens opportunity for you to provide value that no one else is doing. The key to success is in creating "Only Us!" rather than "Me Too!" web sites.