

WAA at the crossroad: to win or to die

2009 witnesses a special year for the WAA. The industry is moving in a new direction if the unusual marriage of Adobe/Omniture is any indication. Competition is emerging and fierce, and associations such as DMA and EMA⁽¹⁾ are moving onto our turf without our notice. Furthermore, the WAA is struggling to acquire and retain members. Even thought leader, Eric T Peterson, let his membership expire.

Rather than blame external factors like recession, we must examine the fundamental questions "What value does the WAA provide to its members?", and "How does the WAA provide this value relative to its competitors?". We believe the biggest challenge facing the WAA today is one of survival amidst competing associations as web analytics transitions to become mainstream marketing. Thus, our analysis and insights pertain to the competitive landscape and provide recommendations to help position WAA as the **leading online marketing optimization association** in the world.

What value does the WAA provide for its members?

From its mission statement, we know **Education, Standards, Research** and **Advocacy** are the four core services the WAA seeks to provide. Two other benefits the WAA offers on its site are the **job listing** and **networking** opportunities which are essential to its members. We'll call these as "Six Values" throughout this paper.

How is WAA performing against its competitors?

As the industry moves toward multi-channel integration, the WAA can no longer see itself as the niche player in the narrowly defined "web analytics" field. Rather, WAA must find a unique position in the broad spectrum of online marketing analytics and optimization.

A Google search for **marketing association** quickly returns a list of WAA's competitors: AMA, DMA, IIMA, MMA and EMA⁽¹⁾. A quick tour of their websites reveals some of them have invaded our backyard. For example, out of 140 total events the DMA hosted in 2009, 35 of them covered online marketing topics such as search, email, mobile, social media and web analytics featuring vendors such as Coremetrics and consultants such as John Lovett. AMA and EMA also have long lists of events on similar topics.

Our research benchmarks these associations against the WAA on three dimensions: annual membership cost index vs. WAA⁽²⁾, perceived membership value on the "Six Values" based on what offered on their websites⁽³⁾ and finally, monthly global unique visitors in October from Google Ad Planner. (Graph 1)

Clearly WAA is losing competitive advantage on both ends, cost as well as value. If the WAA fails to improve its competitive position, it will lose members gradually and cease to exist as an entity eventually.

How can the WAA improve its competitive position?

The answer is obvious. The WAA must focus on delivering better value to its members!

While different types of members have different needs, for the sake of this analysis, we focus on **professional membership** only - evaluating how the WAA is meeting the needs of 3 personas within.

Starters: These people think a web analytics career is the best for them. They might have some analytical experience and now they want to learn the nuts and bolts of web analytics. They want to increase their knowledge through formal or informal training so they can eventually find a job in the industry.

From the entry keywords report in GA, we found something interesting. All the keywords related to "UBC" have a fairly low bounce rate (~25%). Pretty good! However, more generic keywords such as "web analytics course(s), class(es)" rank much higher in pageviews, and yet the bounce rate is twice as high!

Looking at the [education page](#), we see the only education option is the UBC program and WAA sells UBC so hard on that page! This shows in the Google Ad Planner data with an overwhelming affinity of over 14,000x for tech.ubc.ca, almost 50% higher than even emetrics.org with about 9,500x! While UBC is a great program, UBC alone cannot satisfy all the educational needs for these starters! The higher bounce rates for generic web analytics courses keywords indicates demand for short classes rather than desire to commit to a long and formal program. Competitors such as [eMA](#) offer ecourses for free or at a discount rate to its members.

We recommend 1) create some 1 hour sessions geared toward these starters and make them free to members, and/or 2) aggregate video/audio sessions on web analytics out on internet to make them accessible to starters.

(1) These letters stand for "[American Marketing Association](#)", "[Direct Marketing Association](#)", "[International Internet Marketing Association](#)", "[Mobile Marketing Association](#)" and "[eMarketing Association](#)" (2)The index is calculated primarily by the cost of Professional Membership. The entry level cost of Corporate Membership is used if Professional Membership is not available. (3)We rate the six values from 1 to 5 (highest) based on our survey of their websites. We then give four core services 10% weight each and two underlying services 15% weight each to calculate weighted score. This means to be "subjective".

Career Advancers: These people have been in the field, know how to get things done, and want to become analytics ninjas. They want to know about possible career paths and specific skills/experience required to progress.

Our experience as members leads us to believe this is a huge opportunity for improvement. The web data confirms this is an issue for members in general. Only about 1 in 3 visits are from returning visitors and less than 1 in 5 visits is from someone who visited a prior day. There is virtually no ongoing user engagement with the site. There are some valuable webcasts, papers, and research available on the site, but they are difficult to find. On the [Resources page](#), with the exception of the upcoming Unica webcast, only 2008 and prior resources are featured. The only way to find the archived 2009 resources is to click a left hand menu link. As a result, archived webcasts only receive 20% as many page views as the resources page!

To increase engagement with Career Advancers and help them progress their careers, we recommend the following : 1) Feature more recent webcasts, surveys,etc directly on the Resources page, 2) make available a career guide based on the job/salary research which WAA has been doing, with links to relevant training, and 3) start a mentoring network, exclusively for members.

Job Seekers: These could be either **Starters** looking for opportunities to jump start their career or **Career Advancers** who are constantly looking for their next best opportunity.

The job board is the service WAA is providing for this group of people. It is pretty popular as the job search page is the number two most viewed page. But, are those people satisfied?

We studied four websites with similar functionality including WAA, IQ workforce, webanalyticsdemystified.com, and [eMA career center](#). In Oct, there are 31 jobs in WAA job board, far more than IQ workforce and webanalyticsdemystified.com. But search for “web analytics”from the eMA career center returns 168! A closer examination reveals that eMA actually leverages the platform and technology of careerbuilder.com.

Recognizing that WAA has so many priorities and job searching is a relatively mature and commoditized service, we recommend the WAA outsources the job board to 3rd party vendors such as careerbuilder.com and focus on providing career guidance like we discussed above.

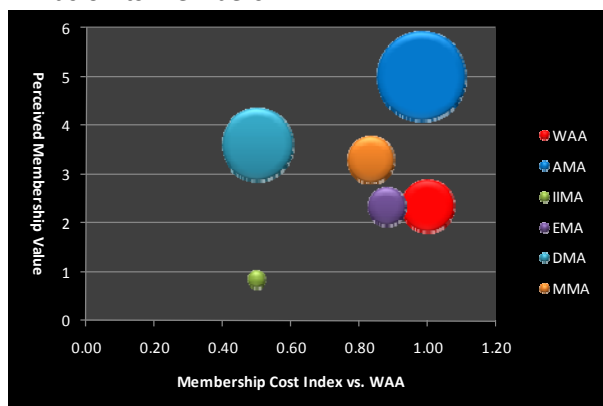
Our Final Thought

While it is critical for the WAA to deliver the tangible benefits as above, the intangible brand asset is equally important if not more so to help its members grow and prosper.

To understand WAA’s brand equity, we used Google Insights for Search as a proxy. While interest for “web analytics” continues to grow, interest for “web analytics association” is far below and remains flat. Furthermore, the industry headlines such as Adobe acquisition didn’t spur interests over WAA like web analytics. (Graph 2)

This tells us the WAA isn’t seen as “the leading authority” even in the narrowly defined “web analytics” field. We recommend the WAA increases leadership of “conversation” in the industry through marketing efforts especially social networks, making the WAA a well-known, relevant and trust worthy brand.

It is up to WAA leadership to take the challenge. We are glad to know that the board is taking the member value issue seriously by hiring a CEO, marketing manager, and certification director. Such efforts don’t go without members’ notice. The public membership renewal by Mr. Peterson is a great evidence of that. With the new leadership, passionate volunteers and the right execution to improve “Six Values”, the WAA can certainly redefine itself and win the heart and minds of its members.



(graph1)



(graph2)