

INTELLIGENT WEBSITE BENCHMARKING

WHAT DOES IT DELIVER?

Professionally executed intelligent website benchmarking is often much the best and most inexpensive way for an organisation to identify how to improve the overall effectiveness of its website.

It is an adaptable, flexible tool designed to show how well the existing site fulfils its own stated communications objectives when measured against

- established best practice
- selected competitive and comparator sites

These measures can be used to produce a single 'snapshot in time'. If appropriate they can also be repeated over time to provide trend data.

Intelligent benchmarking can also quickly and easily identify bright new ideas already 'out there' suitable for the client.

Putting all this together, the exercise delivers a comprehensive basis for informed site improvement – often at a fraction of the cost of more conventional assessments.

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT TO OTHER BENCHMARKING OFFERINGS?

Virtually all website benchmarking offerings measure specific site features: whether or not they are actually there, and (sometimes) how well they work. However the summation of all these findings – a site's overall score – is often a poor indicator of how well the site actually fulfils its overall communications objectives.

By being tailor-made to the requirements of the client site, and by being based additionally on a broader understanding of communications practice in general, intelligent website benchmarking delivers much more useful and relevant results.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

There are several well defined steps in the process.

Establish what the client website is for

The first stage is for the benchmarking organisation to understand the true objectives of the client and its site: the nature of the business, the types of its site's visitor groupings, the kinds of messages, information and interaction intended, and the benefits the organisation expects as a result.

Establish existing views of the site from both inside and outside the organisation, as necessary (optional)

This is an optional, but desirable, way of collecting additional data which can give an added direction to the benchmarking. It consists of some meetings with selected people from a) within the client organisation, for whom the website is or

could be of the most direct use, and b) defined visitor groups to determine the kinds of information and interaction they would most like from the site.

Agree the measuring profile

This is crucial to the offering. Most benchmarking operates a one-size-fits-all approach which reviews all sites against the same measures with the same weightings, regardless of what kind of site is being assessed. Intelligent website benchmarking, by contrast, recognises not all sites are directly comparable, and varies the measuring profile to 'best fit' for the nature of the client's own site and business.

Bagnold Shorter has developed some 200 measures, under 10 principle groupings, by which any site may be thoroughly and knowledgeably assessed. Some of these measures are valid for all websites (eg navigability); others are always valid but need particular weightings according to the type of organisation involved (eg certain kinds of basic information); others may not be relevant at all (an example would be the full range IR function measures, where the organisation is not a publicly quoted company); and finally there may be a few extra measures which fall outside the usual ones but have been suggested by the interviews and meeting in stages 1 and 2.

The measures and weightings for any benchmarking exercise are developed and agreed with the client before the testing begins. All sites within the exercise are then marked against this specific measuring profile.

Agree the list of competitive and comparator sites

Typically there will be up to a dozen of each (although there can be many more, or a few less, as required). Again, the selection will be made after discussion between Bagnold Shorter and the client.

Undertake the survey work

This can take 2-3 weeks, depending on the complexity of the sites chosen. All sites are scored by members of the benchmarking panel, working independently; where there is a significant difference in scores the assessors meet to discuss their findings and resolve the difference.

Present the findings

The findings are grouped, analysed and presented in a way which shows

- How the site stands on absolute scale, as defined by the agreed measures, in relation both to itself and to the other assessed competitor and comparator sites. Broken down into the detail of each group of measures, this immediately indicates areas most needing attention and, often, the kinds of alteration required. The results can if necessary also form the basis for future exercises which would provide trend data – eg whether the client website has improved or not, and where it then stands in relation to the other sites
- Usually, lots of good, relevant ideas which have been harvested from the other sites during the assessment phase

If required, Bagnold Shorter also provides an indication of possible next steps for site redevelopment.

For further information call Stephen Bagnold on 020 8318 3912 or visit www.bagnoldshorter.co.uk