

A Benchmark Study – Building the Case for Membership
Growth and Prosperity
Canadian Water Quality Association

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Table of Contents

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY2

 1.1 *Strategic Directions*3

 1.2 *Current Situation*4

 1.3 *Future Goals*4

 1.4 *Bridging the Chasm*4

2.0 WHAT IS BENCHMARKING?5

3.0 BENCHMARK METHODOLOGY6

 3.1 *Selection of Benchmarking Projects*6

 3.2 *Benchmarking Teams*.....7

 3.3 *Documenting Own Work Progress*7

 3.4 *Researching and Identifying “Best-In-Class” Performance*8

 3.5 *Analyzing Benchmarking Data and Identifying Enablers*11

 - *Association Membership Recruitment – Section 1.1*.....11

 - *Association Membership Retention – Section 2.1*.....13

 - *Association Image and Awareness – Section 3.1*.....15

 - *Association Products and Services Marketing Activities - Section 4.1*17

 3.6 *Implementing Benchmarking Study Recommendations*19

4.0 CWQA PLAN FOR MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT19

 4.1 *Association Best Practices*.....19

 4.2 *Objectives for Membership Recruitment*20

 4.3 *Implementation Plan for Membership Recruitment*.....23

5.0 SUMMARY24

BIBLIOGRAPHY25

APPENDIXES.....26

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Founded in 1960, the Canadian Water Quality Association (CWQA) is the unified voice for the Point-of-Entry/Point-of-Use (POE/POU) water treatment industry in Canada. Through its members across Canada, CWQA has enabled Canadians to resolve their water problems and improve the quality of water in their homes.

In recent years, CWQA has been challenged with dwindling numbers and hence has been unable to grow its membership. And despite receiving a crop of new member applications each year, attrition of the existing membership negates the Association's recruitment efforts and renders membership growth as neutral.

Early in 2002, the CWQA Board of Directors was faced with some philosophical questions. Could CWQA still play an essential role in the water treatment industry; could it expand its mandate to meet the ever-increasing needs of its members; and could it create value for its members?

As the only association in Canada representing the POE/POU industry, CWQA realized that it had a responsibility to distinguish and define itself as an indispensable entity within the realm of water treatment. The CWQA Board recognized that CWQA plays an important role as consumer advocate, industry advocate and as the conduit to enhance the standards for the industry. This, however, requires a commitment from the Board and growth in the membership.

At a Board of Directors meeting held in September 2002, it was determined that in order to remain viable, progressive and valuable to its members, the association would have to become more strategic in its thinking and not be content with the status quo. In order to succeed, CWQA would have to determine, with input from its internal and external stakeholders, the collective vision that will set the direction to enable the organization to affirm its mission and to attain its goals.

Recognizing the importance of the environmental scan, the CWQA Board "kicked off" its strategic planning process in November 2002 by engaging in a SWOT analysis, which

involved a committee of the Board. Concurrently, a members' survey, designed to determine member need and satisfaction, was developed and is to be disseminated to the membership in an online format at a future date.

A third component of CWQA's environmental scan will be the benchmark study, which will enable the Association to measure itself against similar organizations within the key areas of success pre-defined by the Board and to identify best practices in these areas.

Results of the SWOT analysis validation, member survey and the benchmark study will be presented to the Board of Directors at their May 13, 2003 meeting in Calgary.

Canadian Water Quality Association is a trade association that represents manufacturers and dealer/distributors of products that provide water quality improvement for homes, businesses, industry and institutions in these broad areas: drinking water and working water.

CWQA currently has 12 manufacturers and 103 dealer/distributors in its membership database. Approximately 290 member employees also receive the benefits of CWQA membership.

1.1 Strategic Directions:

The CWQA Board of Directors has identified the following critical issues for the Association over the next three to five years and is expected to validate these issues at their May 13, 2003 Board meeting:

- Membership growth
- Stronger financial situation
- Enhanced public profile (government, industry, consumers)
- Improved membership services

CWQA acknowledges that in order for the organization to effectively meet its objectives over the next few years, it will need to grow its membership. More membership translates into more revenue to fund future programs. In order to attract more members,

however, CWQA will need to augment its current member benefits with offerings that add value to membership and it will need to more proactively promote itself to the industry, to government and to the consumer public.

1.2 Current Situation

At the present time, the Association...

- Is not able to provide its members with good, quality programs;
- It doesn't know what its members want;
- There is no strategic plan in place;
- The Association's business practices are not linked to a strategy;
- Other than financials, there is no performance measurement in place to determine if the Association is on track or successful.

1.3 Future Goals

The desired outcomes for CWQA in the future are...

- A governance model that promotes a strong commitment to vision, mission, strategy and goals of the association;
- Governance that reflects member and industry need
- A membership that continues to grow, and contributes to the activities of the Association
- Financial security borne out of a strong membership and other sources of revenue
- A comprehensive inventory of membership services that add value and meaning to belonging to CWQA
- An enhanced "public" image resulting in more members, more consumer inquiries, and increased consultation by government;
- Results oriented activities and greater accountability to the membership

1.4 Bridging the Chasm

In order to get from "here" to "there", the CWQA Board of Directors will need to take the leap and make the commitment to take the necessary steps that will move the organization through strategic planning and strategic implementation. CWQA is prepared to adopt a shift in the way it conducts its business so that its goals may be

achieved. This may include changing policies, adjusting the budget and realigning the staff complement. CWQA also understands that the process doesn't just end, but is the beginning of a continuous improvement cycle that needs to be renewed again and again. Therefore, CWQA will engage in an evaluation of its strategy so that it may determine whether or not it has succeeded and if further improvements are required.

Canadian Water Quality Association is confident that strategic planning is not an end in itself but a necessary process that is an investment in the Association's future.

This benchmarking study will lend clarity to the strategic planning process and will enable CWQA to see what is possible for the organization by observing the best practices of other, similar organizations.

2.0 WHAT IS BENCHMARKING?

In association management, it is simply not enough to maintain the "status quo" or to rest on the laurels of past success.

The concept of continuous improvement is slowly evolving into the mantra of workers, business managers and association executives everywhere, whether they are employed by Toyota Canada or the Canadian Manufacturers Association. Continuous improvement compels managers to constantly evaluate their progress against performance indicators and benchmarking standards and to take steps concerning corrective action, abandonment or strategic re-alignment.

Benchmarking is becoming more prevalent as a useful tool for "measuring products, services and practices against competitive or similar associations" and is a way of looking outside of the association for practices that are considered "best-in class".

According to the Society of Management Accounts of Canada, benchmarking is defined as: "...a continuous evaluation of the practices of best-in class organization and adapting company processes to incorporate the best of these practices."

Benchmarking is a way to assess an organization's strength and weaknesses and to make recommendations to improve its overall performance and effectiveness.

3.0 BENCHMARKING METHODOLOGY

The Society of Management Accountants of Canada (CMA) has published an easy to follow benchmarking guidelines to assist organizations in conducting effective benchmarking studies. By using the tools and techniques described in the guideline, the benchmark team should have no difficulty implementing their study and gathering important information to influence continuous improvement.

With the objective of producing an effective benchmark study, which would meet industry standards, CWQA adapted the following CMA tools and techniques in its benchmark study:

- Selecting and Prioritizing Benchmarking Projects
- Organizing Benchmark Teams
- Documenting Own Work Progress
- Researching and Identifying “Best-in-Class” Performance
- Analyzing Benchmarking Data and Identifying Enablers
- Implementing Benchmarking Study Recommendations

3.1 Selection of Benchmarking Projects

For the purpose of its benchmark study, CWQA conducted an assessment of its current priorities and determined that it would focus in on the area of greatest concern for the association – membership recruitment and retention.

Since there are so many implications associated with recruitment and retention, it was deemed that if improvements could be made in this area, they would also filter into other segments of the association structure.

Additionally, membership and retention is an area that is most easily measured and is generally included as a performance indicator for most associations. It made the most sense to earmark membership recruitment and retention for the benchmark study.

3.2 *Benchmarking Teams*

This study did not have the luxury of having a team to perform all the roles traditionally associated with benchmarking and can best be described as an intact work group of “one”.

The CWQA Manager assumed the role of Team Leader, Facilitator, Data Collector/Analyst and Interviewer by performing the following duties:

- Project planning
- Project implementation
- Survey design
- Distribution and collection of surveys
- Analysis of survey results

Despite the below average size of the benchmarking team, it is hoped that the quality of the data and its review will be of high quality and the results will produce important information to assist in future membership recruitment and retention strategies.

3.3 *Documenting Own Work Progress*

Throughout the early phases of its strategic planning process, CWQA recognized that it is imperative for the organization to look beyond its structure for knowledge and insight into what makes an Association successful.

For the purpose of the benchmarking study, CWQA knew that it wanted to utilize a “family of measures” for gathering the knowledge and insight it desires. These measures, defined in units from one to ten, were simplistic enough for benchmark partners to follow, yet were powerful enough to provide useful and effective analysis and information.

3.4 *Researching and Identifying “Best-In-Class” Performance*

A critical next step for the benchmarking team was to validate the data repository, develop the data selection method, develop the benchmarking questionnaire/survey and identify the benchmarking partners (i.e. survey participants).

CWQA selected a numeric database and utilized a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet format for the purpose of inputting survey data. The reason this software was chosen was because of ease of use, simple formulas and a graphical charts feature.

CWQA acknowledged that it would be a challenge to conduct the study through site visits means or over the phone. The benchmarking partners identified by CWQA are dispersed geographically and the Chief Staff Officers representing these organizations have very hectic schedules.

Instead, CWQA contacted each of the proposed benchmarking partners and asked that they complete a mail survey by a due date. The incentive for their participation would be that they would receive a copy of the final benchmarking study, which may assist them in their own performance review.

Developing a questionnaire/survey tool for the benchmarking study involved segmenting the questions into the categories that were being studied including:

- Membership Recruitment
- Membership Retention
- Image and Awareness
- Products and Services

Measurement units for each of the questions ranged from one to ten (with ten representing a high score).

Benchmarking partners were also asked to complete a “Benchmark Partner Profile” although participants were advised that their organization’s data would not be identified in the study document and the information provided will be kept confidential.

Finding benchmarking partners that share similarities with CWQA was a challenge due to the fact that CWQA is tiny, even by Canadian standards.

Rather than secure partners that resembled CWQA in size, it was decided that organizations that matched CWQA in their type (i.e. trade association) and mission would make appropriate survey participants.

One exception to this rule was a professional association that does not have a mandatory membership base. It was felt that CWQA could learn from their strategies to recruit and retain members in a competitive marketplace.

In all, five benchmarking partners were selected. They are identified by name in the Appendices but for the purpose of the study are named AME200-1, AME200-2, AME200-3, AME200-4 and AME200-5. CWQA is identified as CWQA.

As you will see by the profile in Figure I, each benchmark partners is distinctively set apart from the others, but there is common ground in each of their efforts to be an effective association.

See *Figure I* on next page.

Figure 1

BENCHMARKING PARTNER PROFILE ANALYSIS

		Benchmarking Association CWQA	Partner Profile A AME200-1	Partner Profile B AME200-2	Partner Profile C AME200-3	Partner Profile D AME200-4	Partner Profile E AME200-5
Variable	Measure						
Type of Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Association Trade Association 	Trade	Trade	Trade	Trade	Professional	Trade
Geographic Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Provincial International 	National	Provincial	National	National	National	International
Demographic Business Size	Size of Industry (estimated)	2,500	15,000	450	363,295	3,500	25,000
	Number of Full Time Staff	1	10	7	5	4	27
	Number of Part Time Staff	2	7	9	12	5	2
	Number of Members	115	3,870	258	52,217	2,100	2,150
	Size of Board	15	34	19	10	7	24
Averages for All Sections		4.1	7.2	9.0	8.3	4.7	7.6
Rank		Sixth	Fourth	First	Second	Fifth	Third

Analysis from the Partner Profiles:

Number of Members as a Percentage of Estimated Industry Size (i.e. market share)

- AME200-1 – 25.8%
- AME200-2 – 57.3%
- AME200-3 – 14.4%
- AME200-4 – 60%
- AME200-5 – 8.4%
- CWQA – 4.6%

- Average Number of Staff - 9
- Average Number of Members per Full Time Staff – 1124

- Average Board Size – 18

3.5 Analyzing Benchmarking Data and Identifying Enablers

Once all of the benchmarking partners had submitted their mail surveys, the most interesting work of the study was to commence.

CWQA's goal was to identify the performance gaps between the benchmarking partners and CWQA. In order to capture all of the data that was submitted, the benchmarking team used the following tools to input and study the collected data and create a graphic representation of the results.

- Tally sheet
- Excel spreadsheet
- Matrix chart
- Histograms

The benchmarking team has categorized the survey responses according to their corresponding sections. Each of these sections provides an average score of all five of the benchmarking partners, a score for CWQA, an analysis of the scores (i.e. performance gaps) and recommendations for improvement (i.e. process enablers).

Association Membership Recruitment – Section 1.1

Overall Average Score: 6.8 CWQA: 4.1

Based on these scores, it is clear that all five benchmark partners place value on membership recruitment. While strategy for recruitment is not prominent on their list of priorities, it is apparent that they have factored membership recruitment activities into their goals and objectives, budgeting and marketing.

CWQA achieved passing grades in only two areas of this section of the study including *Recruitment Strategies* and *Recruitment Marketing* leaving room for the Association to go nowhere but “up”.

Figure II



Recommendation – Section 1.1:

CWQA must define its strategy for membership recruitment including an identification of its target audience; an enumeration of market size; an articulation of membership recruitment goals (i.e. increase membership by x% in 2003); and a marketing plan that will enable the association to achieve its goals of membership growth.

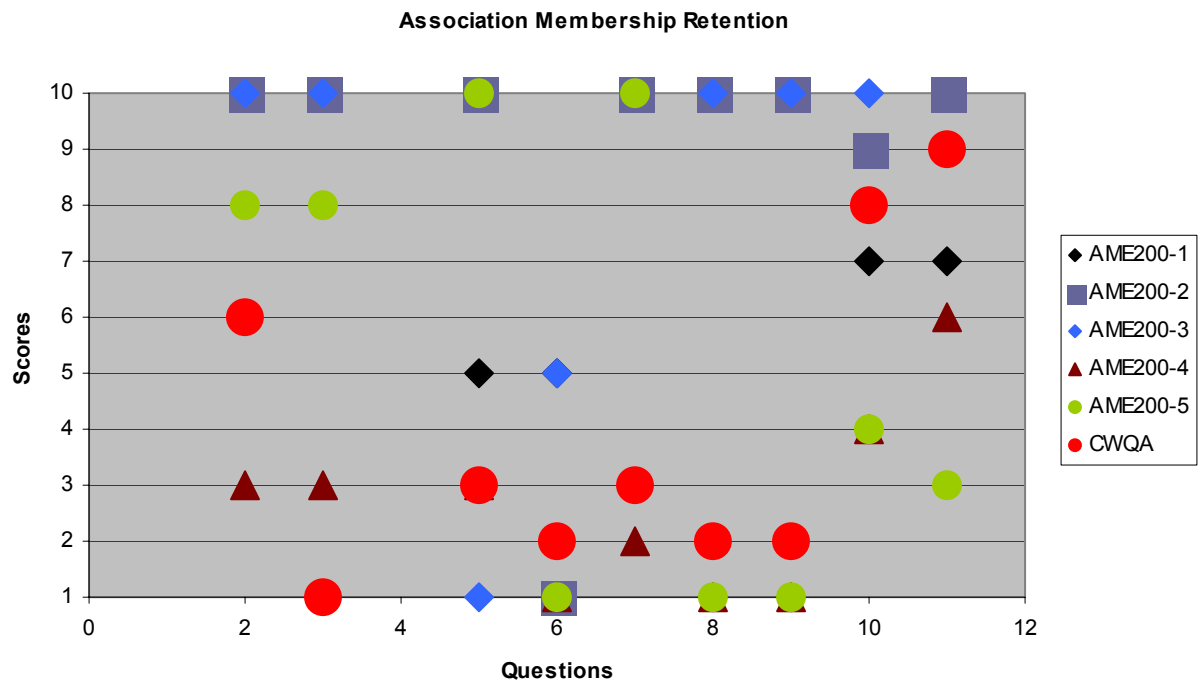
<i>Figure II-a Association Membership Recruitment Sub-section Scores:</i>	
<i>1.1.1 Membership Recruitment Plan</i> Overall Average Score: 7.6 CWQA: 1	<i>1.1.2 Market Research and Target Audience</i> Overall Average Score: 6.8 CWQA: 1
<i>1.1.3 Membership Goals and Objectives</i> Overall Average Score: 7.3 CWQA: 2.3	<i>1.1.4 Membership Recruitment Budget</i> Overall Average Score: 7.0 CWQA: 3
<i>1.1.5 Performance Measurement and Benchmarks</i> Overall Average Score: 7.1 CWQA: 1	<i>1.1.6 Recruitment Strategies</i> Overall Average Score: 5.9 CWQA: 5
<i>1.1.7 Recruitment Marketing</i> Overall Average Score: 6.7 CWQA: 6.8	

Association Membership Retention – Section 2.1

Overall Average Score: 6.4 CWQA: 4.1

Membership retention appears to get short shrift in association management as these scores demonstrate. While CWQA fares a little better in this section, it still does not receive a passing mark. Overall, the benchmark partners have a low score, which demonstrates that they do not place as much importance on membership retention as they do on membership recruitment.

Figure III



Recommendation – Section 2.1:

CWQA should continue to do what it does well in terms of membership recruitment including regular membership communications and annual “What’s in it for me” reports at membership renewal time. CWQA should also continue to make membership retention a priority in order to reduce attrition levels as well as the costs associated with losing members.

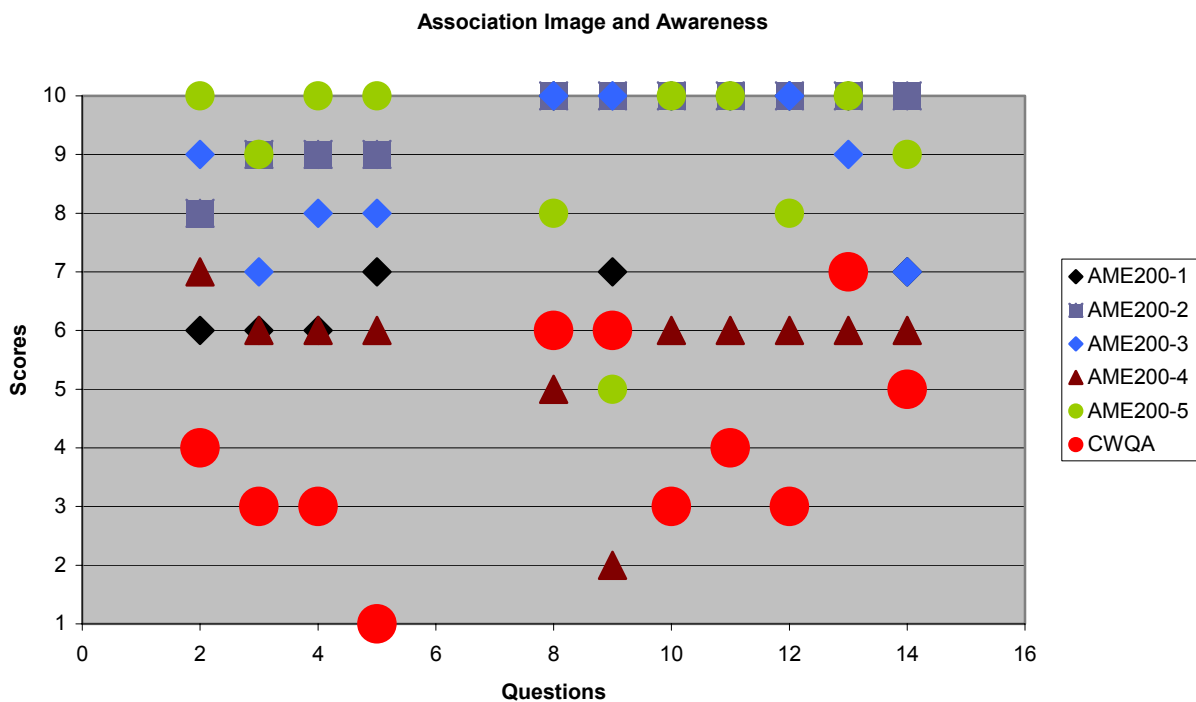
CWQA should consider developing a membership resource guide as a means of orienting and welcoming new members. CWQA is a small enough association for the chief staff officer or individual Board members to make personal contact with existing members so that the members feel engaged in their association.

Figure III-a Association Membership Retention Sub-section Scores:	
<i>2.1.1 Membership Retention as an Operational Priority</i> Overall Average Score: 8.2 CWQA: 3.5	<i>2.1.2 Membership Retention Strategies</i> Overall Average Score: 5.7 CWQA: 4.1

Association Image and Awareness – Section 3.1
Overall Average Score: 8.2 CWQA: 4.1

Compared to the other benchmark partners, CWQA has a self-esteem image, which needs considerable improvement if the Association is to grow and succeed. By grabbing on to the resources available to it through industry publications, trade shows and relationships with other organizations, CWQA can make significant improvements to its image as well as increasing awareness of the Association within the industry and to potential members. The more “imprints” that are made by the association as a result of these activities will significantly improve awareness of CWQA and potentially may draw new members.

Figure IV



Recommendation – Section 3.1:

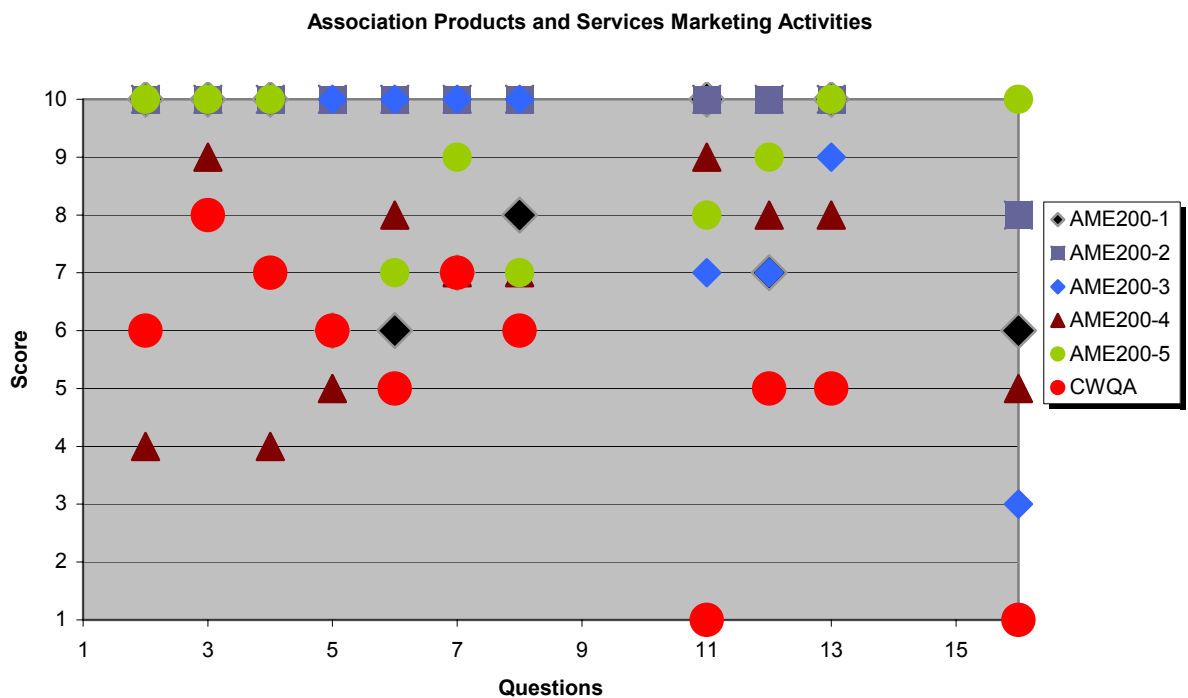
CWQA should take the lead from the benchmarking partners and develop or improve its relationships with industry publications, the media, regulators and legislators and other associations. It should also consider participation in trade shows in order to enhance its image and generate more awareness of the Association.

<i>Figure IV-a Association Industry Image and Awareness Sub-section Scores:</i>	
<i>3.1.1 Industry Awareness</i> Overall Average Score: 7.8 CWQA: 2.75	<i>3.1.2 Strategies to Improve Industry Awareness and Association Image</i> Overall Average Score: 8.5 CWQA: 4.9

Association Products and Services Marketing Activities - Section 4.1
Overall Average Score: 7.8 CWQA: 6.0

Apparently, the benchmarking partners appear to place a great deal of importance on their products and services for their respective members. The same is true for CWQA, which fares well in this section. Unfortunately, CWQA fails miserably in the Member Needs and Marketing of Products and Services sections demonstrating that the Association does not know what its members want nor does it do a very good job of promoting benefits to its members. CWQA's benchmark partners can lead by example as they score very high in these areas.

Figure V

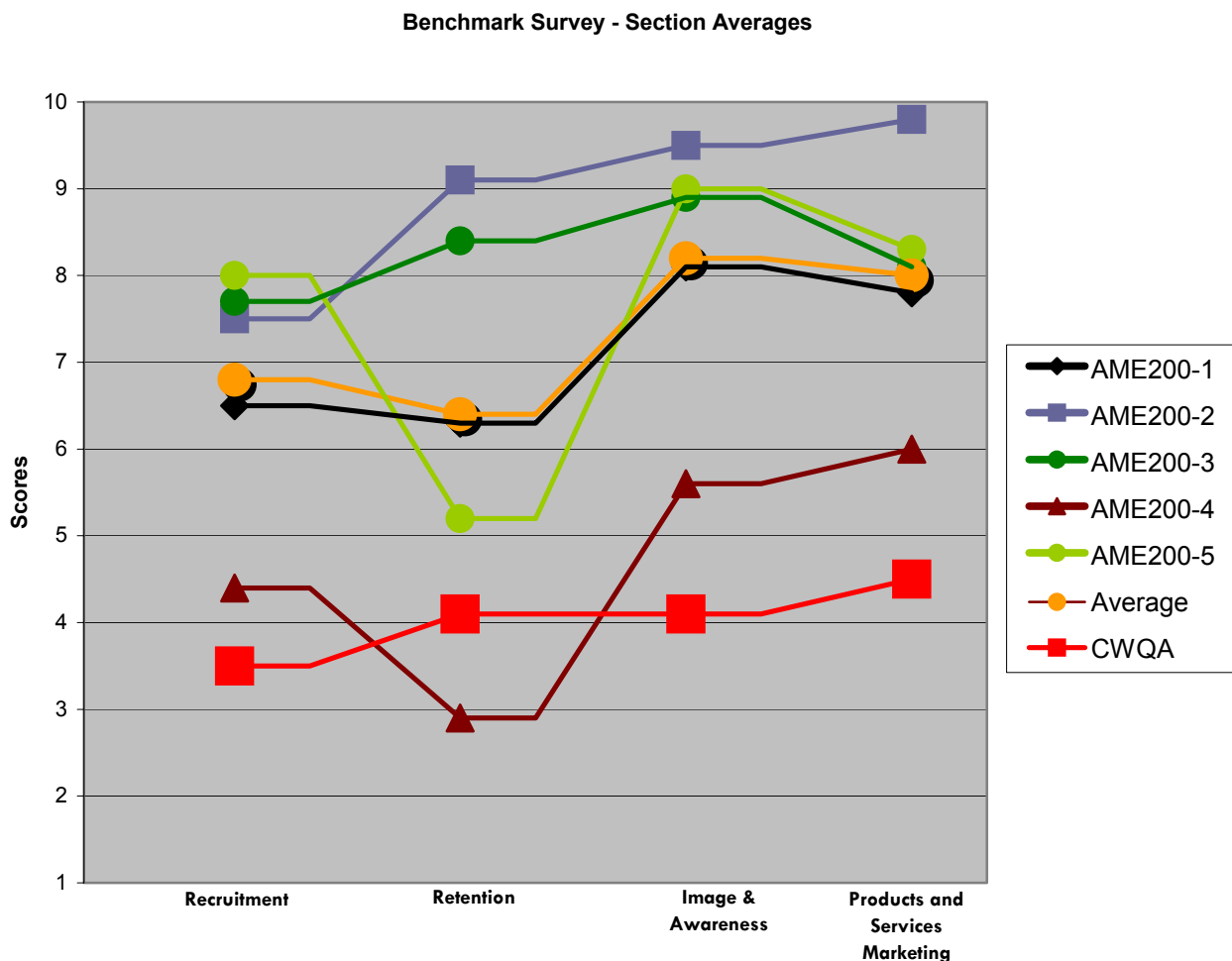


Recommendation – Section 4.1:

CWQA's membership should be provided with regular updates on CWQA products and services. Additionally, the membership should be surveyed, on an annual basis so that the Board and the staff can more effectively service them according to their needs.

<i>Figure V-a Association Products and Services Marketing Sub-section Scores:</i>	
<i>4.1.1 Products and Services</i> Overall Average Score: 8.6 CWQA: 6.4	<i>4.1.2 Member Needs</i> Overall Average Score: 9 CWQA: 3.6
<i>4.1.3 Marketing of Products and Services</i> Overall Average Score: 7.8 CWQA: 2.6	

Figure VI



As you can see by the graph above, CWQA scored consistently low in all sections of the benchmark survey and even fell well below the average of all benchmarking partners. This schematic is a graphic reminder of where the Association needs to be in order to remain viable but also a cautionary illustration of the seriousness of the current situation. This will have to change if the association wishes to remain grow and prosper.

3.5 Implementing Benchmarking Study Recommendations

The Board of Directors and staff of the Canadian Water Quality Association now play a critical role in bringing the benchmark study to the next level – implementation.

The benchmark study as a strategic planning tool will only carry weight if the Board accepts the findings, agrees to the recommendations of the benchmarking team and provides the impetus and direction to move forward so that the chasm may be bridged.

The CWQA Board of Directors has already taken ownership for the future direction of the Association by agreeing to strategic planning. The next few months will be consumed with strategic thinking, planning and implementation as well as tactical and operational plans to help the Association achieve its goals and performance measuring to ensure that objectives are being met. The benchmark study will be one of many important components in the strategic planning mechanism.

4.0 CWQA PLAN FOR MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

4.1 Association Best Practices

Canadian Water Quality Association can learn from “best practices” utilized by many associations in their successful recruitment and retention of members.

For membership recruitment, best practices may include:

- Market research: evaluating the competition and the target market;
- Established membership targets: i.e. by 2004, membership will have grown by 7.5%;
- Direct mail campaign including brochure, personal letter from Board member or key volunteer, application form and reply envelope;
- Recruitment budget
- Implementation schedule

4.2 Objectives for Membership Recruitment

CWQA OBJECTIVE: INCREASE CWQA MEMBERSHIP BY 25% (MANUFACTURER/SUPPLIERS) AND 48% (DEALER/DISTRIBUTORS)				
Current Situation	Objectives	Gaps or Barriers	Actions	Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWQA has 103 Dealer/Distributor members and 12 Manufacturer members • CWQA has a reserve of \$95,000 • 85% of CWQA’s revenue comes from dues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Manufacturer members to 15 (increase of 3 members or 25%) by January 2004 • Increase Dealer/Distributor members to 150 (increase of 47 or 48%) by 2004 • Increase the reserve to \$110,000 by 2004 • Reduce the dues revenue percentage from 85% to 75% by 2004 • Increase non-dues revenue to 25% of all revenue • Enhance current membership offerings with the addition of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Merchant credit card discounts ○ Discounts on products and services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness of CWQA within the industry • No recruitment strategy for new members • CWQA’s small size means that banks won’t offer volume discounts on merchant accounts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research other associations membership benefits (done) • Research other associations member recruitment strategies (done) • Co-op with other association’s membership benefits program (i.e. CIPH) • Implement new membership benefits • Create new membership brochure • Launch membership recruitment strategy • Target member prospects with member recruitment campaign (letter, brochure, application) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWQA Manager • CWQA President • CWQA Membership Champion (identify at May 13, 2003 Board meeting) • CWQA Board Treasurer
<p>Budget Implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership Promotion Expenses – Additional \$2,000 (over 2002) • Membership Dues Revenue – Additional \$10,000 (over 2002) 				
<p>Policy Implications:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial policies • Membership policies • Membership benefits policies 				

4.3 *Implementation Plan for Membership Recruitment*

The following is a suggested implementation plan for membership recruitment marketing.

Action:	Action Targets	Who responsible:	Date completed by:
Market research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWOT Analysis/Validation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors • Manager 	May 13, 2003
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benchmark Analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Directors 	April 1, 2003
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member Survey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager 	April 30, 2003
Establish membership targets:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 new manufacturer/suppliers (25% increase) • 47 new dealer/distributors (48% increase) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors • Manager 	January 1, 2004
Prospects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWQA prospect database 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager 	April 30, 2003
Direct mail campaign: membership kit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information brochure • Personal letter • Application form & reply envelope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager • Directors • Manager 	June 1, 2004

4.0 SUMMARY

The Canadian Water Quality Association has gone where it has never gone before as an organization. This is exciting and terrifying at the same time.

This benchmark study represents the corner stone upon which the Association will build its future beginning with the strategic planning process that is currently underway. If the Association has any hope of growing and prospering, it will need to build its foundation out of knowledge, insights, evidence and thoughtful, careful action.

Over the next few months, the CWQA Board of Directors will have an opportunity to articulate its vision; demonstrate its capacity for governance; and follow through on its hopes for the future of the water treatment industry through the implementation of a well thought out and achievable strategic plan.

CWQA is now armed with the knowledge that while it does not measure up at the present time, by taking ownership of the challenges and seizing the opportunity for change, the CWQA Board of Directors will take the organization to the outer reaches of its potential.

CWQA will grow and prosper.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Attachment:
Canadian Water Quality Association Benchmark Survey.doc

Appendix B

Attachment:
AME200-2 Benchmark Analysis.xls

Appendix C

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=36626188457>

Appendix D

Benchmark Partners:

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