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Often when we work with new clients, we find that they have been measuring the performance of their association by using some “average” rating. The reasons we usually hear for using this type of performance metric are: (1) it is easy to calculate, (2) it is easy to explain to management and the Board, (3) it has been done that way for years and we want to continue tracking performance, and (4) it seems logical.

What some individuals forget is that an average is a measure of “central tendency”. That is, an average takes all the individual members’ performance ratings and finds some middle ground. Averages provide a smoothing effect, with high ratings offsetting low ratings.

The table below shows the performance ratings that 100 members gave to various components of their association. Members’ ratings for benefits were evenly spread across all five possible alternatives, continuing education received only extreme ratings, and the annual conference and website ratings were clustered in the middle. In spite of the stark contrast in the distribution of individual performance ratings, all four components received exactly the same average rating.

Response	Rating Value	Benefits	Continuing Education	Annual Conference	Website
Excellent	1	20	50		
Very good	2	20		10	
Good	3	20		80	100
Fair	4	20		10	
Poor	5	20	50		
Average Rating		3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0

The second table (shown on the next page) includes the top 2 scores for these four components. Notice that the top 2 scores are different for each component, ranging from a

low of 0% for the website to a high of 50% for continuing education. A “grade” column has also been added to the table. While the top 2 score is defined as the percentage of respondents who gave one of the two best possible responses, for many individuals, it is easier to think of a top 2 score as the percentage of respondents who gave a rating of A or B for that component.

Response	Rating Value	Grade	Benefits	Continuing Education	Annual Conference	Website
Excellent	1	A	20	50		
Very good	2	B	20		10	
Good	3	C	20		80	100
Fair	4	D	20		10	
Poor	5	F	20	50		
Average Rating			3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0
Top 2 Score			40%	50%	10%	0%

There are several reasons why a top 2 score is a better performance metric for associations than an average rating.

- (1) As the table above illustrates, a top 2 score is more sensitive to the extremes and shows differences where differences exist.
- (2) Top 2 scores focus the attention on the percentage of respondents who gave one of the two best possible rating responses. In order to change attitudes and behavior, members must exhibit a strong positive opinion of the component or process being measured. In the example above, half of the members have strong positive opinions about continuing education, but no one has a strong positive opinion about the website.
- (3) Calculating a top 2 score is just as easy to calculate as an average rating score, but the top 2 score provides much more useful information.

Assessing the performance of each of your association’s components using top 2 scores is a more accurate reflection of how your members feel about how well your association is delivering on its value proposition, than by using averages.

About the Author

Larry J. Seibert is the President/CEO of Association Metrics. He has an earned Ph.D. from Purdue University in Retail Management and holds an MSBA from Indiana University Northwest with a concentration in Marketing. Dr. Seibert is a member of the American Society of Association Executives and the Indiana Society of Association Executives. He can be reached at larry@associationmetrics.com or by phone at 317-840-2303.