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**Web Site Effectiveness Study**  
of  
Leading Sacramento Companies

May 1, 2007

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**HELPING  
OUTSTANDING  
COMPANIES  
STAND OUT<sup>SM</sup>**

# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

## Executive Summary

### Summary of Results

The following charts and graphs depict the results of a web site effectiveness study of leading Sacramento-area businesses. 181 business web sites were ranked for performance along a five-point scale, from poor to great, in eight best-practices dimensions. The average results are presented first, followed by several performance comparisons by industry, size, and customer focus:

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  2. Overall Score Breakdowns
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- **Closing Remarks**

No statistical analysis was conducted for the purposes of this study, other than the presentation of graphs based on mean responses for the groups studied. No claims are made as to the accuracy of the study, and the data included herein is solely for informational purposes. The complete list of raw results, minus specific company identifiers, can be viewed at [www.brandetc.com](http://www.brandetc.com).

### About Brand, Etc. LLC

Brand, Etc. is a full-service marketing communications firm serving Northern California organizations with a focus on brand building. Brand, Etc. helps organizations identify and refine their brand identities, develop their go-to-market strategy and sales messaging, and implement their communications projects including web sites, printed materials, advertising, presentations, and sales support.

# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

## Background & Objectives

### Background & Objectives

Brand, Etc. is committed to the advancement of Sacramento-area businesses in the areas of brand development and communications excellence. The goals of this inaugural study is to:

1. Assess the state of web site effectiveness among leading Sacramento-area companies within a range of general best-practice standards.
2. Create a benchmark for identifying trends impacting the effectiveness of web-based communications among Sacramento's business leaders.
3. Inform and educate Sacramento businesses about web site best practices and provide suggestions for improving future performance.

### Study Group Selection

This study focuses on "leading Sacramento companies." The organizations selected for inclusion are the 100 fastest-growing, top (highest-revenue) 100 privately-held, and top 20 publicly-held companies as published in the Sacramento Business Journal in 2006. Several companies appeared on multiple lists; those companies were counted once, leaving 181 total companies selected for study.

# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

## Evaluation Criteria

### 1. Overall Aesthetic/Brand Identity

Web sites were evaluated for their overall look and feel and brand identity. Sites with balanced layouts, complimentary color schemes, and attractive graphics were awarded higher scores.

### 2. Visual/Information Hierarchy & Usability

Web sites were evaluated for structure and hierarchy on both a page-layout and navigation level. Sites with consistent, easy-to-follow navigation structures were rewarded, and navigation that was hard to find, disorganized, poorly labeled, or required extra clicks received lower scores.

### 3. Copywriting: Clarity & Scanability

Web sites were evaluated by their use of text. Clearly-written copy broken into meaningful, easy-to-scan blocks was rewarded, while sites with small type, poor foreground/background contrast, and large blocks of text received lower scores.

### 4. Search Engine Visibility

Web sites were evaluated for their visibility to search engines. Sites using “keywords” and “description” META tags, keyword-laden text on the home page, “alt” tags for images, and keyword anchors ranked highest. Sites with no visible home page text, including most flash-only web sites, ranked lowest.

### 5. ADA §508 Compliance

Web sites were evaluated for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, section 508, subpart 1194.22, which specifies 16 compliance guidelines for making web sites accessible to those with sensory impairment or using assistive technology.

### 6. Differentiation and Sales Messaging

Web sites were evaluated for communications effectiveness from a sales and marketing standpoint. Sites that clearly defined their benefits, highlighted key differentiators, and were written from the perspective of the customer ranked higher in comparison to those that didn't.

### 7. Use of web as Communication Tool

Sites were evaluated for their data collection practices and site interactivity. Sites that used forms for data collection, offered secure login areas for customers and employees, and featured interactive content such as e-newsletters and training modules scored more highly than sites without such features.

### 8. Up-to-Date Content

Web sites were evaluated for their relative freshness of content. Sites with recent press releases, newsletter, update timestamps or copyright dates scored more highly than sites with older content.

## General Methodology

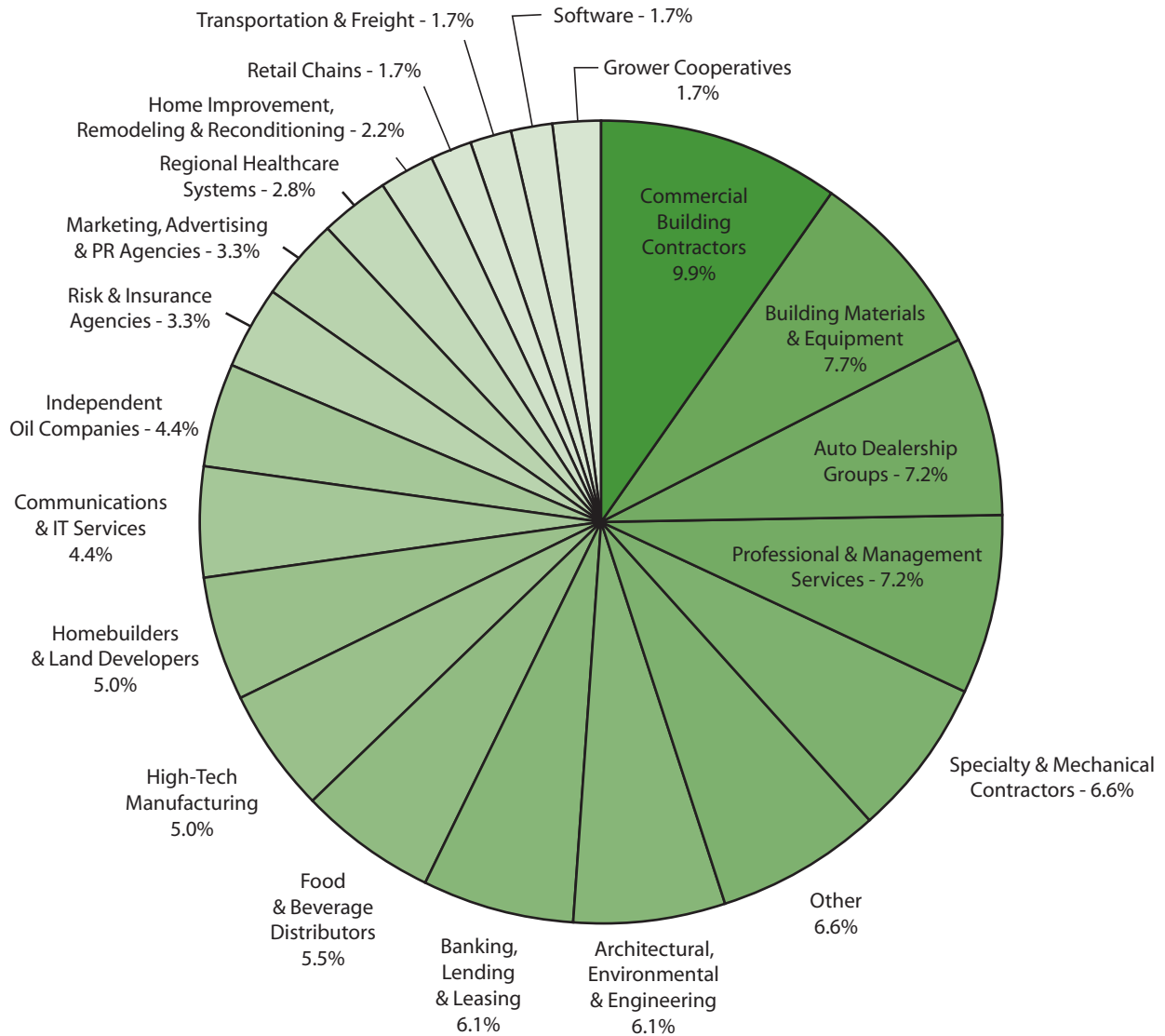
Each site was visited within the month of April, 2007, given an expert review by seasoned interface designer and marketing consultant Dan Wilson, and assigned a score from 1 to 5 in each of the areas above, according to the following effectiveness scale:

1	2	3	4	5
Poor	Fair	OK	Good	Great

In borderline cases, the higher score was assigned. Sites where insufficient data was present received a score of 3.

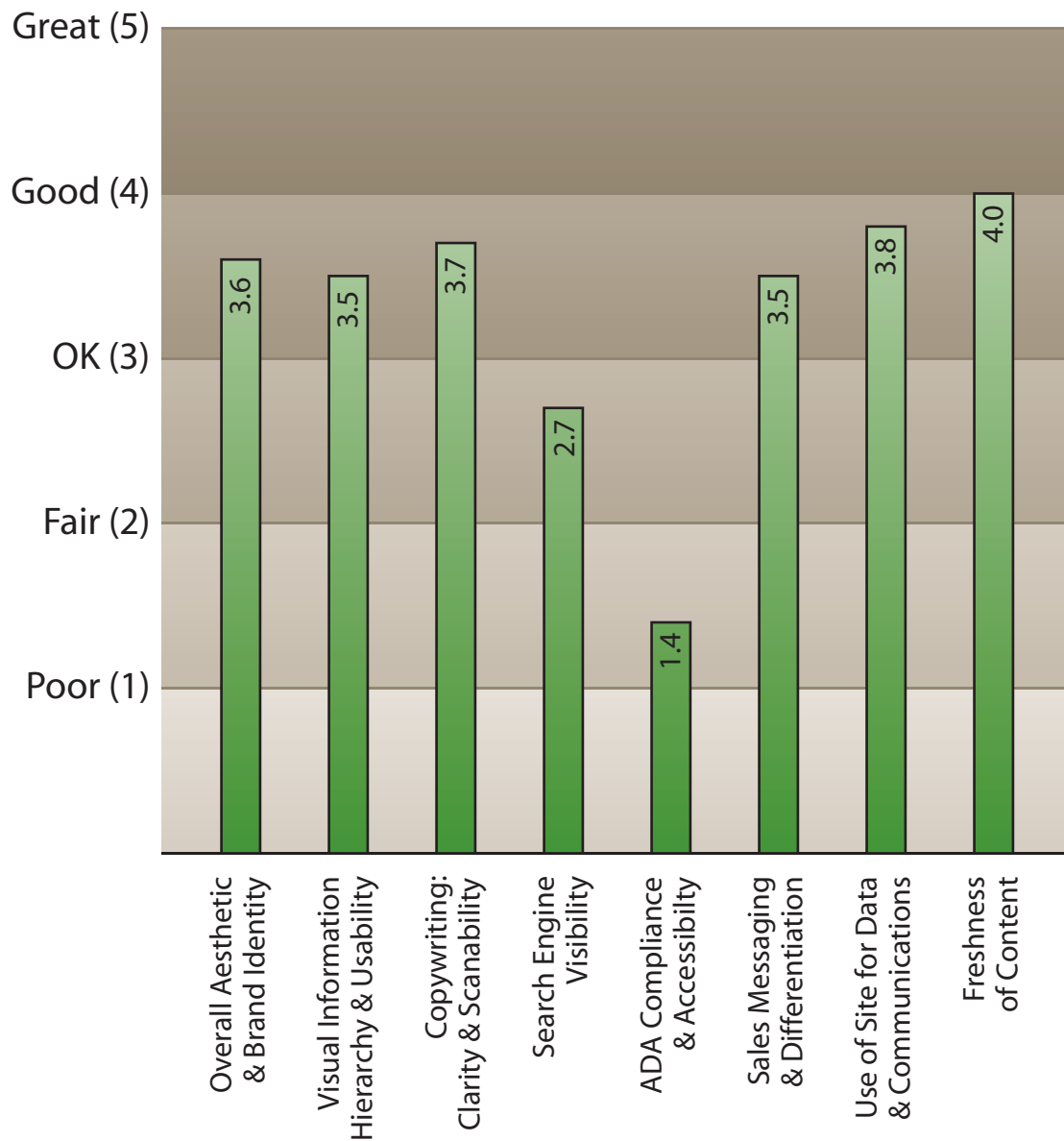
# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

## Industries Represented



The companies studied included a high proportion of construction-related industries, followed by services industries. Most business markets were local or regional, though several companies market nationwide and internationally. Notably absent for a study of California's capitol city are the many state and local government agencies that make up a large proportion of Sacramento's industry.

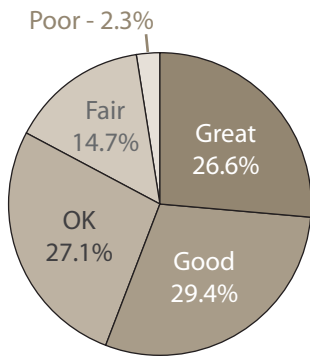
## Average Overall Scores by Ranking Criteria



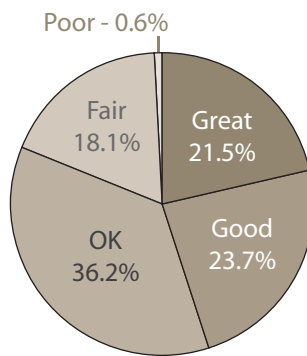
On average, the companies studied ranked within the "OK to Good" range for most criteria, with notable exceptions in the areas of Search Engine Visibility and ADA Compliance/Accessibility, where average scores were "OK to Fair" and "Fair to Poor" respectively.

# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

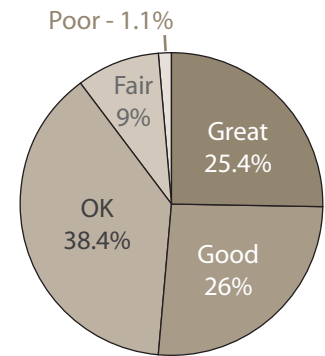
## Overall Score Breakdowns by Ranking Criteria



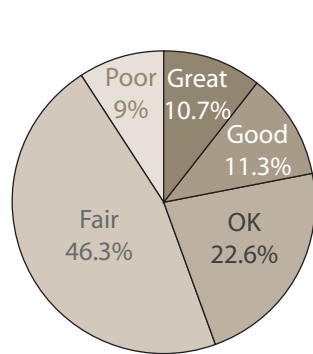
Overall Aesthetic/  
Brand Identity



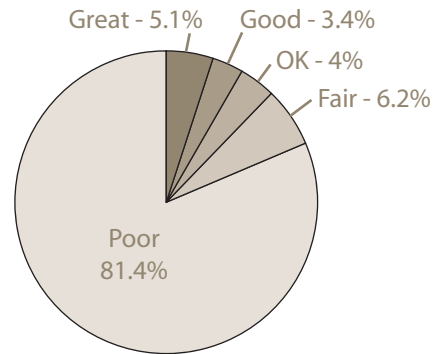
Visual Information  
Hierarchy & Usability



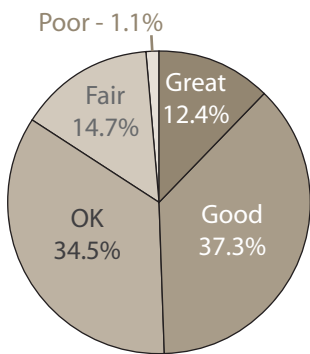
Copywriting:  
Clarity & Scanability



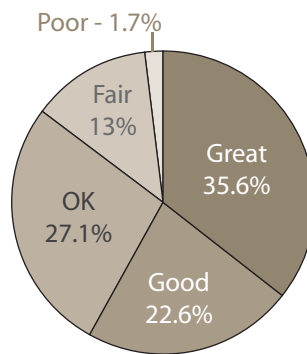
Search Engine  
Visibility



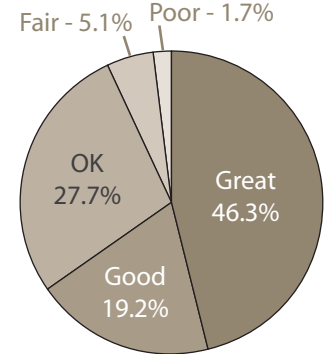
ADA Compliance/  
Accessibility



Sales Messaging  
& Differentiation



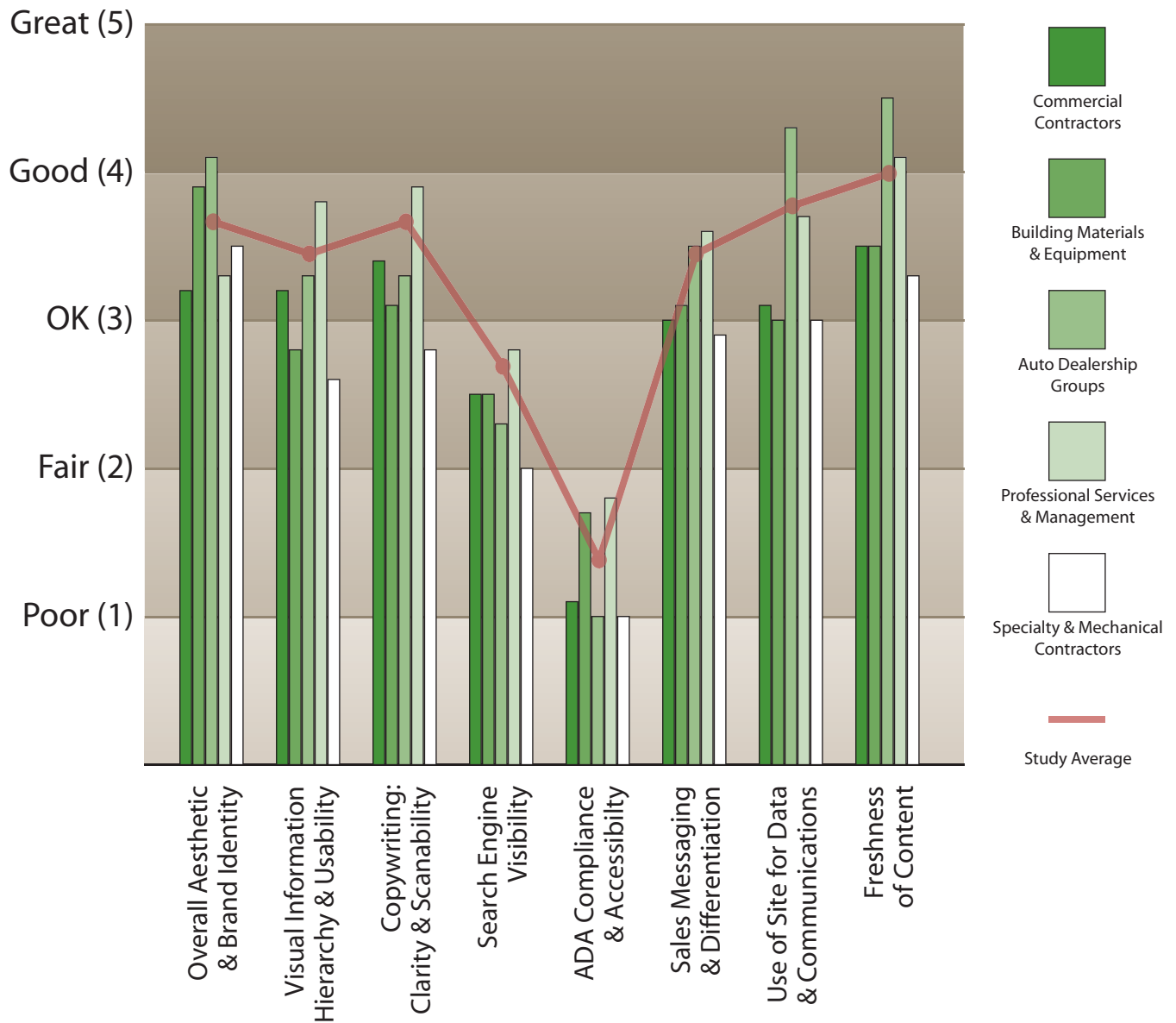
Use of Site for Data/  
Communications



Freshness  
of Content

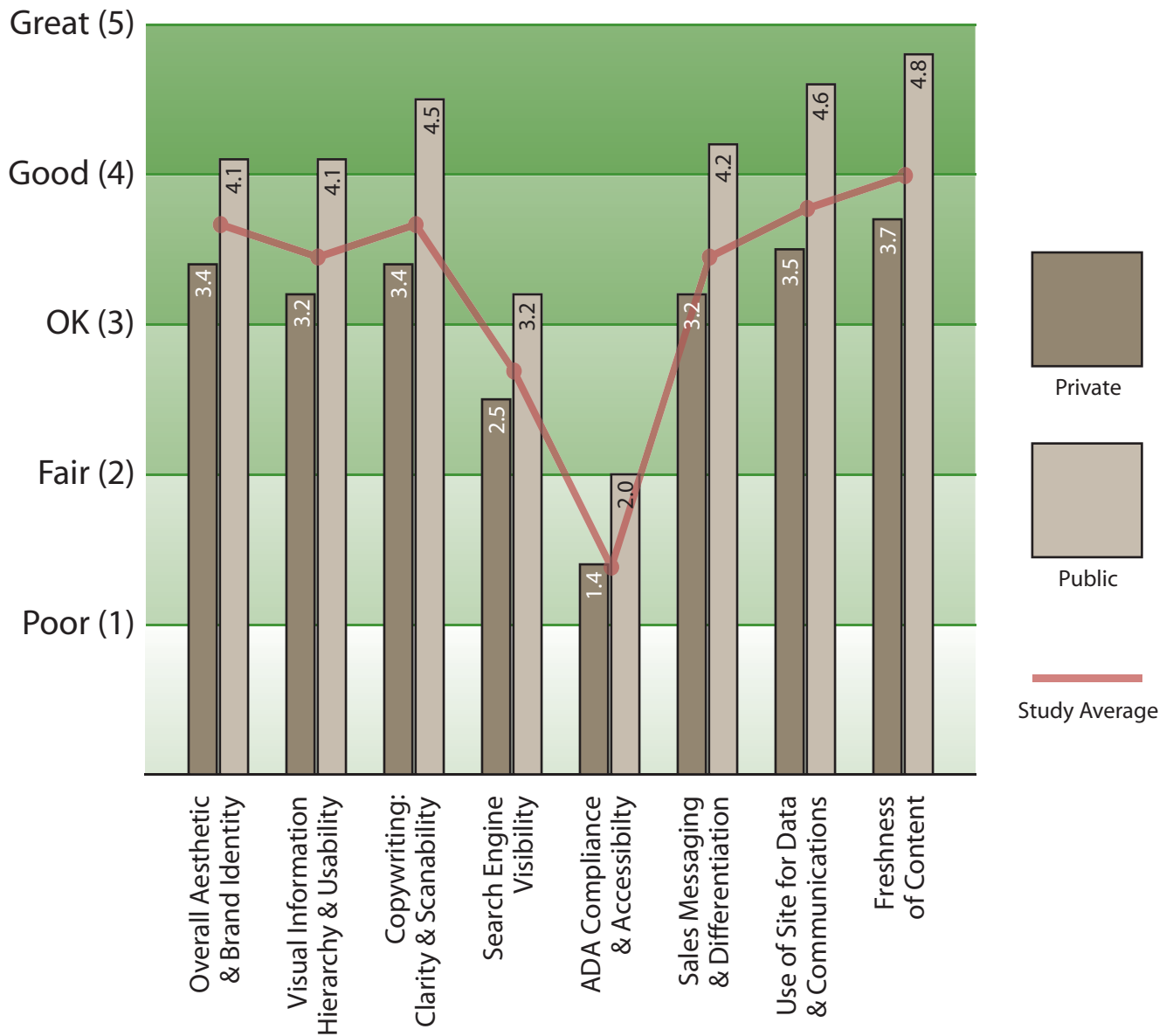
# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

## Most Competitive Industries



This chart compares the scores from the top 5 competitive industries with the study average. Professional Services & Management companies scored highest in five out of the eight categories, and above average in six. Auto Dealership Groups scored highest in the remaining three categories, and met or exceeded the average scores in four categories.

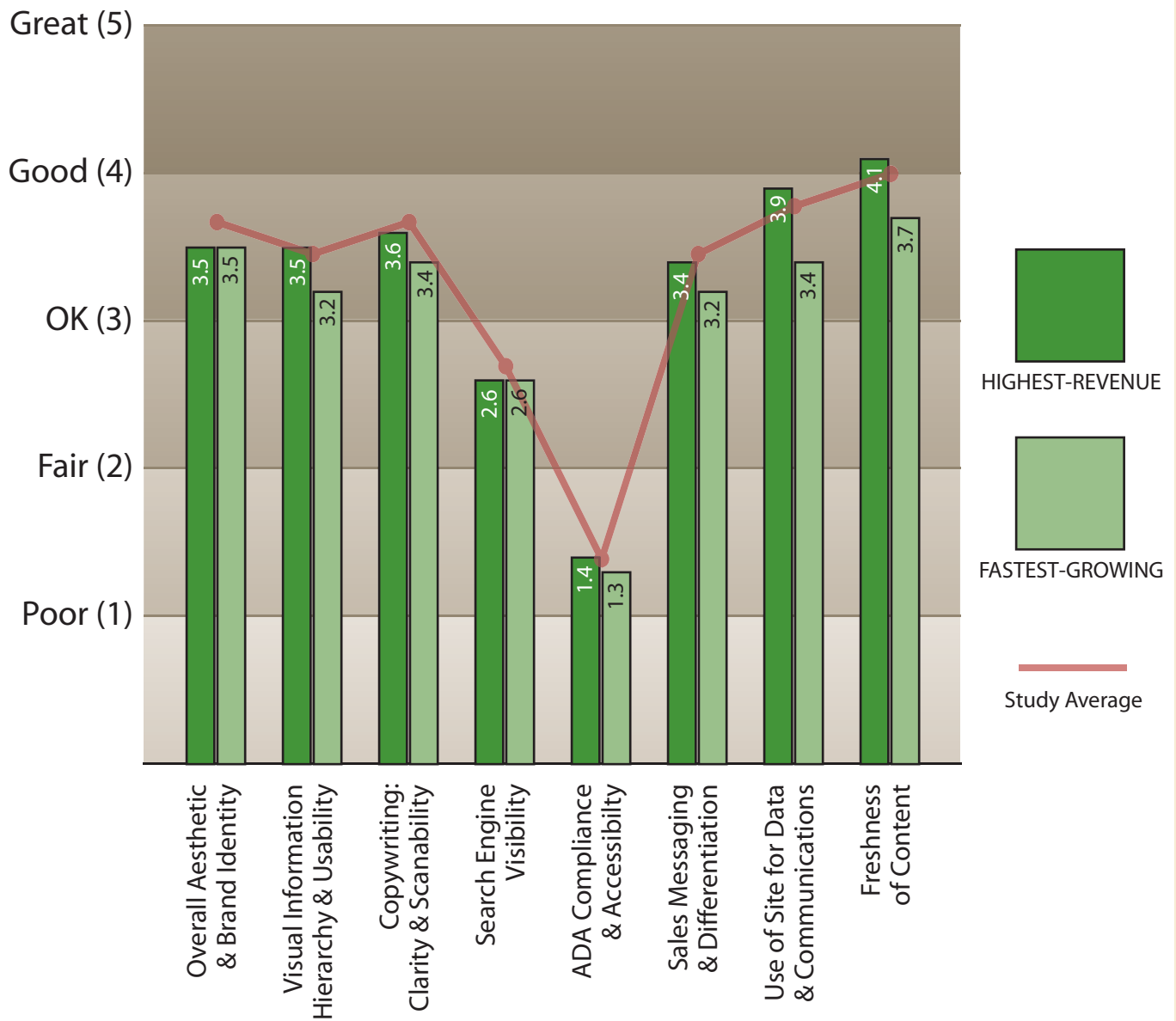
# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study Public vs. Private Companies



Public company scores averaged one full point higher in nearly every category when compared to the scores of privately-held companies. Public companies also scored higher than the overall average in every category, while privately-held companies scored at or below the overall average for each dimension.

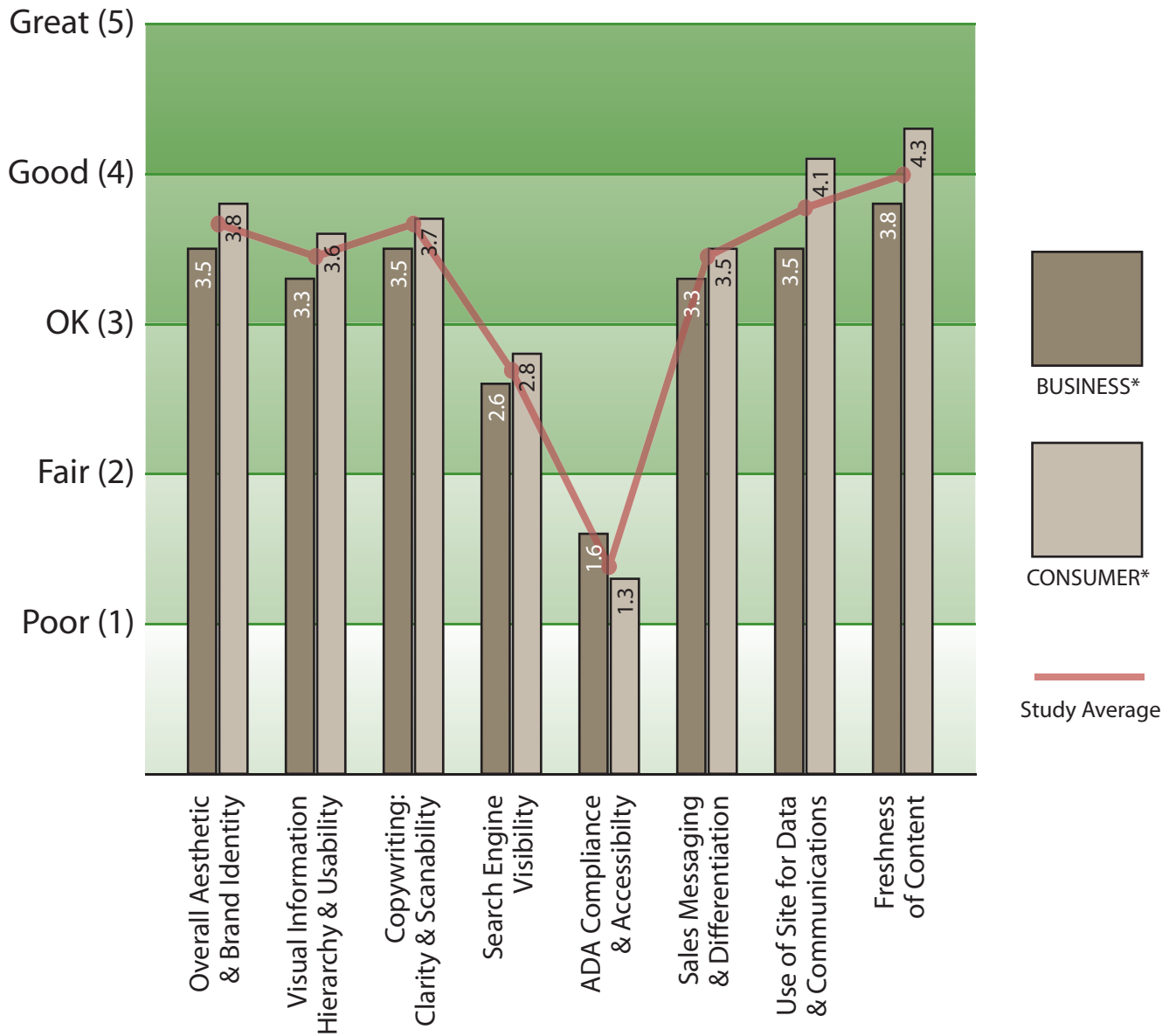
# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

## Highest-Revenue vs. Fastest-Growing



The scores for the 100 highest-revenue companies tended to be slightly higher than those of the 100 fastest-growing companies. The above chart reflects all companies within each group. 25 companies belonged to both the highest-revenue and fastest-growing groups.

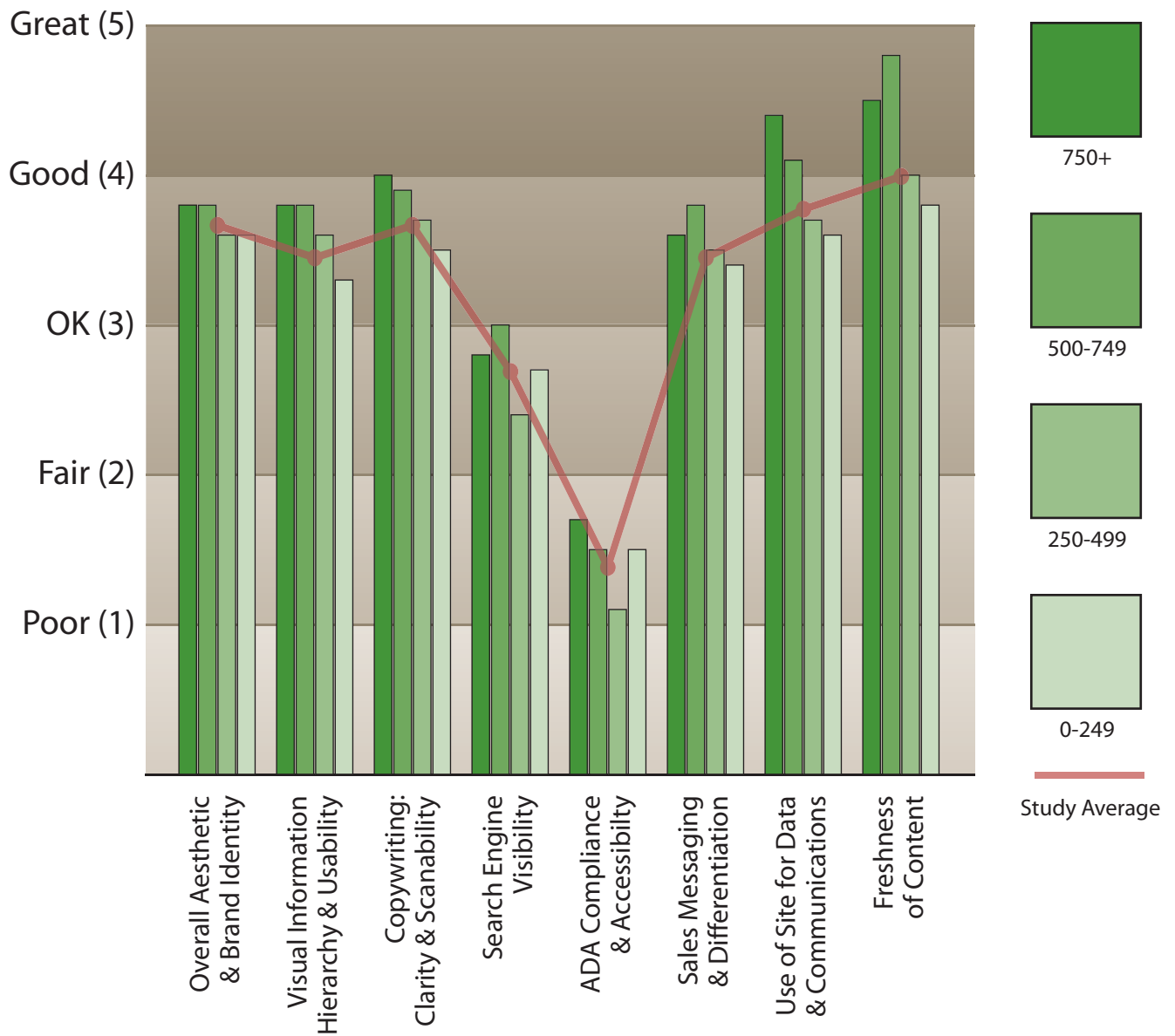
**B2B vs. B2C**



Business-to-business web sites fared slightly lower across the board than their consumer-focused counterparts, scoring an average of 0.3 points higher in every dimension but ADA compliance, where business-focused sites fared better. Companies with both business and consumer offerings were counted as belonging to both groups.

# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

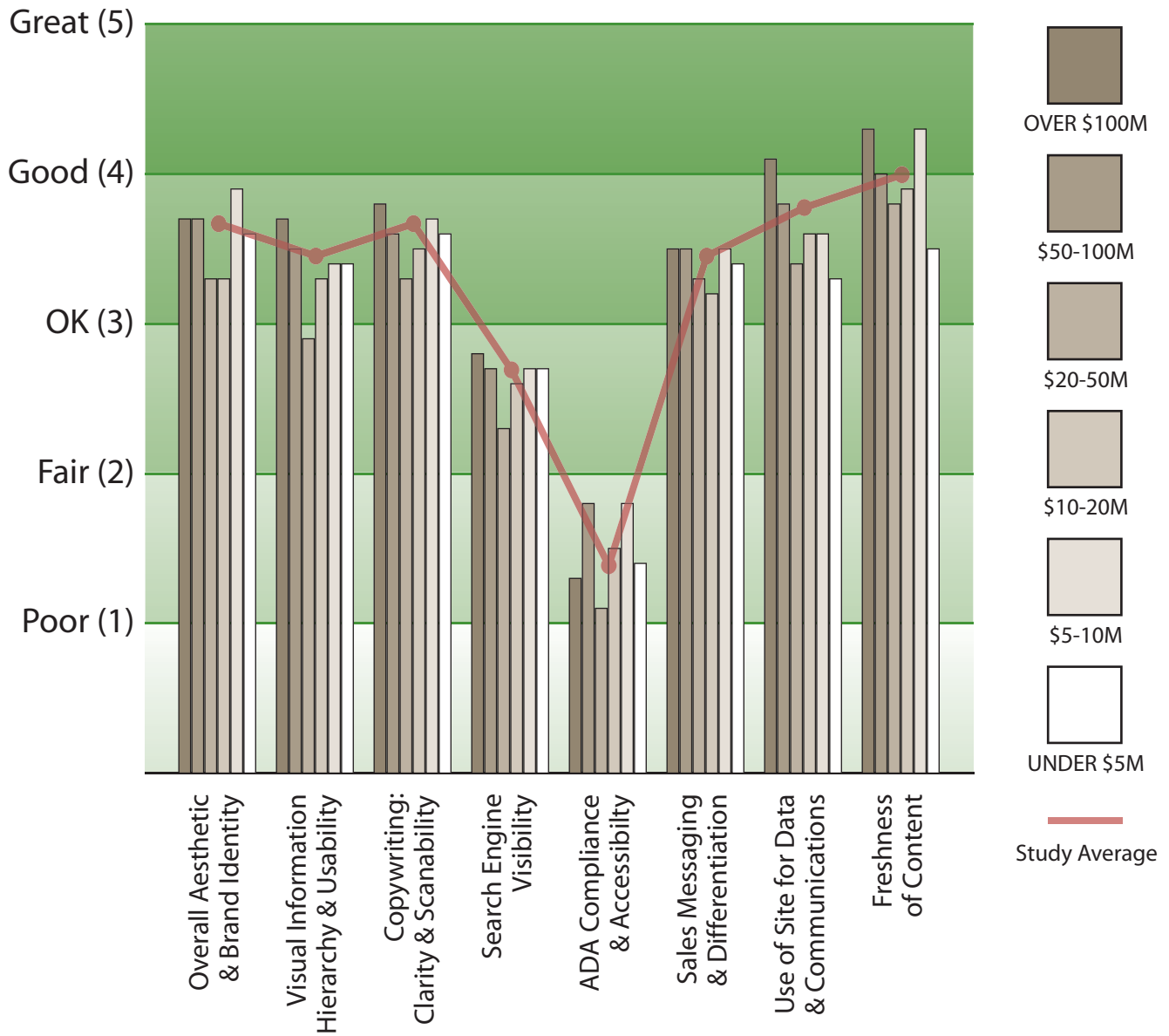
## Company Size - by Number of Employees



Web sites for companies with over 500 employees tended to score slightly above average, while smaller companies tended to score slightly below, with the most marked differences appearing in Data Collection & Communications, and Freshness of Content.

# 2007 Web Site Effectiveness Study

## Company Size - by Annual Revenue



The companies studied varied widely in terms of annual revenue, so the categories shown do not represent equal intervals. What is striking to this author in viewing the above chart is that significantly smaller companies can and do outperform larger companies that may be several times their size in several key best-practice dimensions.

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## Closing Statement

Brand, Etc. offers the following suggestions for companies wanting to increase their own web site effectiveness:

### Self-Analysis

Take a hard look at your own web site from the perspective of your audience(s): prospects, existing customers, investors, potential employees, vendors and partners. If you were one of these visitors, would the site provide you with what you need? Create a list of site requirements, prioritize it, and give this list to your development team.

### Competitive Analysis

Your competitors can not only help you assess the bar above which you must rise, but can give you insight into the best practices specific to your industry. You don't have to copy your competitors, but you do want to make sure you're at least doing all the same things right.

### General Best Practices

Creating an attractive, functional site that's easy to use, up to date and that search engines can find are goals that apply to any type of organization. Our list of 10 essential best practices (available free on our web site) is a good place to start, and applies to all industries.

### Industry-Specific Best Practices

Do others in your industry provide specialty content areas, types of information or online services? If over half of the sites you visit provide the same content, it's on its way to becoming a standard practice. Take a look at others in your industry and develop a list of best practices that you need to follow to remain competitive.

### Innovation

Best practices are great, but they're yesterday's standards that you must live up to today. To keep your competitors following you instead of the other way around, you must innovate! Today's new feature is tomorrow's competitive advantage (and, unfortunately, next year's best practice).