



A/B TESTING STARTER GUIDE

What is A/B Testing?

So, you're a digital marketing guru.

You've built a rabid following that loves your business, your message and your content. Your ads get lots of clicks and your website gets tons of traffic. Your competitors envy your brand and the way you effortlessly communicate with your target audience.

But there's something missing.

Although people seem to respond well to your advertising, they don't seem to be doing anything after they click. At least, not at the rate you think they should.

You don't have a lot of email sign-ups. People aren't converting on your website. Your advertising efforts aren't driving a ton of leads or sales.

What's wrong?

To be honest, there are a lot of potential answers to that question. But, fortunately, there's an easy way to figure out what's going on: A/B testing.

A/B testing is all about figuring out how to get people to act after they interact with your ads or content. Essentially, you test different versions of your pages and site to see what sort of experience really motivates people to do what you want them to do.

Now, the words "A/B testing" might give you traumatic high school science flashbacks, but trust me, this guide makes A/B testing easy—and the results are a lot more exciting than examining frog guts.

So, ready to learn how to get more value from your current advertising efforts? Let's go!

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1. How Do I A/B Test My Web Traffic?

Essentially, there are two different ways to A/B test your web traffic:

1) test your site and **2) test your landing pages.**

If you are testing your website, you need to use an A/B testing tool like Google Experiments, Visual Website Optimizer (VWO), Optimizely or OptinMonster (more details in the sidebar). These testing platforms will automatically split your visitors between the different pages in your test and report on how your audience engages with each page.

For example, Social Media Examiner uses OptinMonster to test out different versions of their forms.

On the other hand, if you are primarily using pay-per-click ads to send people to a dedicated landing page that matches the messaging of your posts, your best route is probably to use a landing page tool like Unbounce, Instapage, LanderApp or Leadpages (see next page for more info).

In addition to giving you an easy way to build dedicated landing pages, these tools also make it easy to test your pages.

Once you've decided which testing platform to use, all you have to do is come up with some testing ideas (we'll get into that in the next couple of sections), put together some variants and run your test!

Picking an A/B Testing Tool

There are several A/B testing tools to choose from, here's how the biggest players compare:

Google Experiments

- Free
- Very limited testing capabilities
- Only good for very basic tests

VWO

- Cheap!
- Constantly adding new features
- Can be harder to use

Optimizely

- More expensive, but still affordable
- Free trial package
- Lots of 3rd party integrations
- Intuitive interface

How to approach A/B testing

Sometimes, your landing page or site just isn't right for your audience. Maybe it isn't a good match for your ads, maybe your value proposition is unclear, maybe your design just doesn't gel with your traffic.

In many cases, you might not even realize that your page doesn't work for your traffic, which is why A/B testing is so important. There are actually a couple of ways to approach A/B testing:

1. Old vs. new

If you've been using the same site design for a while, try revamping your overall design. Do a little heat mapping research with a tool like Hot Jar and see if you can identify problems (people not scrolling down your page to your most important content, clicks on areas of your site that don't make sense, etc.) Then, use what you learn to come up with new ideas that address those apparent needs.

Split your traffic between the two pages and you can quickly start to identify what your target audience *really* wants.

2. New vs. new

Alternatively, you can try creating two brand designs and see which one performs better. Once you have a winner, you can split test the victor against your old design and see which is the true winner.

This can be particularly useful if your advertising efforts aren't sending a ton of traffic to your page. The bigger your change, the bigger of an effect it will likely have on your conversion rate. As a result, you won't need as much traffic to identify your winner.

Depending on your situation, either approach can be a good way to test the overall effectiveness of your current landing page design.

Picking a Landing Page Tool

Like A/B testing tools, there are several landing page platforms that you can use to run A/B tests. Here's how they break down:

Unbounce

- Lots of customization options
- Lots of integrations
- Landing page templates available
- Steeper learning curve

Instapage

- Extremely easy to learn and use
- Lots of landing page templates
- Fewer customization options
- Less integrations

LanderApp

- Cheapest option for low traffic sites
- Lots of features
- Easy to customize
- Pricing increases quickly

LeadPages

- Highly customizable, but...
- Must start from a template
- Lots of landing page templates
- Templates sorted by conversion rate

2. A/B Testing Ideas

As a rule of thumb, you should always be A/B testing something on with your web traffic. Your clicks aren't just opportunities to get conversions—they are also a great way to learn more about your audience.

You can't just test for the sake of testing, though. You need a strategy that makes sure that each test answers at least one of the following questions:

- How does this page/site element affect conversion rate?
- How do changes to this page/site element affect conversion rate?
- How does my page/site layout affect conversion rate?
- How does my copy affect conversion rate?
- How do my images affect conversion rate?
- How does my form affect conversion rate?

Answering and optimizing for each of these points takes a lot of planning and testing, but if you're new to A/B testing (or simply facing "tester's block"), creating an effective testing strategy can be quite a challenge.

With that in mind, the following are some testing ideas you can try to improve your conversion rate in each area.

Call-to-action

Getting someone to act on your site is the ultimate goal of your on-line advertising, so testing your call-to-action is a must for A/B testing. Simultaneously creating a sense of value, establishing what will happen when they convert and urging the user to take your desired action is no easy task.

Here are a few things to consider testing on your CTA:

- **Copy.** Consider changing from a more generic phrase like "Learn More" to something like "Speak With An Expert." The clearer your CTA is, the more effective it usually will be. Test it and find out!
- **Color.** The importance of button color to conversion rate has been the subject of a lot of online ridicule and debate, but the fact of the matter is that—for some companies—changing button color has produced impressive results. It might not be a guaranteed win, but that's why you run tests. At a minimum, your button color should stand out against the rest of the page.
- **Location.** Where you put your CTA may have a big impact on your conversion rate. For some pages, putting it above the fold may be important. Other pages may have traffic that wants more information before you hit them with a CTA, so it's worth A/B testing to see how a below-the-fold CTA works for your page.

- **Design.** The design of your CTA can actually affect your conversion rate. Simple changes, like rounding the corners or adding a shadow or gradient are easy to test. You also might consider adding imagery (say a picture of the product they will be buying) or some sort of trust seal to make your CTA more compelling.
- **Additional CTAs.** If you have a long landing page, it might be worth it to add a CTA or two further down in your page. Or, you could try adding a sliding sidebar CTA or a CTA to your sliding header.

This isn't Lord of the Rings, there's no "One CTA to rule them all." Test different CTAs until you get a combination of elements that really works for your audience.

Forms

If the goal of your online advertising is to get people to fill out and submit a form, then A/B testing form content and design is another absolute must.

There's a lot of debate out there about form best practices, but there really isn't any way to know what sort of form will work best for your audience. To really optimize the performance of your form, you'll want to test several variations.

Consider the following tests:

- **Shorten your forms** (also, if you have a lot of unqualified leads, you can consider lengthening your form to add qualifying fields)

- **Left justify your form labels**
- **Change from a vertical form to a horizontal form** (or vice versa)
- **Change the background of the box containing the form**
- **Increase (or decrease) the number of required fields**
- **Break your form up into multiple steps**
- **Add a security seal**
- **Try a light box form**

Along with CTA optimization, form optimization is one of the first things you should be A/B testing. You don't want them to click on your CTA only to lose interest while filling out your form!

Hero shot

A picture is worth a thousand words and—in this case—it may be worth a thousand conversions. Changing up your hero shot is a minor change that can produce major results. Traditionally, your hero shot is what grabs a user's attention once they land on your page.

Here are a few tests to consider trying:

- **Emotion of your hero shot.** Does your hero shot convey happiness? Satisfaction with your product or service? Frustration with a pain point? Try changing it up and see what happens.

- **Subject matter.** Using a stock photo of a happy person? Try a cityscape, snapshot of an actual user or your product in action, flat art or even a solid color!
- **Race/Culture.** Depending on your product or offer, certain races or cultures may identify better with certain images. For example, if you are selling menorahs, pictures of a cozy African-American family sharing a Happy Hanukkah experience may not resonate very well with your target audience.
- **Seasonal images.** Is it winter and your hero shot shows people standing outside in shorts? Consider trying a seasonally appropriate image or, if you're trying to sell how awesome a season-specific product is, consider contrasting the current season (for example, winter) with the seasonal benefits of your product (ie, happy people swimming at your resort in summer weather).
- **Product images.** Do your product images make it easy for your audience to envision themselves using it? Test different types of pictures of your product—in use, free-standing, with happy users, etc.

Your hero shot and other images are relatively easy to test and they can have a big effect on your conversion rate, so try changing things up!

Copy

Your headlines and body content are a key part of your messaging. Essentially, there are two key areas you should look into testing:

- **Headlines.** Try testing out headlines with industry buzzwords against headlines advertising an offer to see which does a better job of grabbing your audience's interest. However, if you are only changing your headline, you need to make sure that your new headline is consistent with the rest of your landing page—otherwise you'll need to adjust the rest of your page, too.
- **Body copy.** How much do you really need to say? Sometimes a shorter page works better. Other times, you really need to explain more to convince people to convert. Try A/B testing various amounts of text or discussion points to see what works best.

In addition, consider changing the layout of your content to see if that affects your conversion rate. Your audience may be interested in or need to be reassured by a specific point earlier on the page, so changing where and how your information is presented can significantly affect conversion rate.

Testing your blog

If you're like many advertisers, a lot of your content marketing efforts probably send people to articles on your company blog. Although you can run many of the same types of A/B tests on your blog as you can run on your regular site or landing pages, there are a few special tests you may want to try as well.

For example, we've run many of the following tests on Social Media Examiner or other blogs to help them get more conversions out of their blog traffic:

- **Opt-in forms.** Email signups, etc. might not be “macro-conversions” like lead form submissions or eCommerce sales, but for many businesses, opt-in forms can be a great way to migrate your web traffic into your marketing funnel. You can test a variety of things on opt-in forms like color, layout, text and even the size of the clickable elements that trigger your form.
- **Social share buttons.** Try putting your social share buttons in different locations or change up the order of the social media platforms on your buttons (Facebook | Twitter | LinkedIn vs LinkedIn | Facebook | Twitter, etc). With a little coding, you can even try changing the order of your social share buttons based on which platform someone used to reach your blog (so, if they reached your site by clicking on a link in a tweet, the Twitter share button would show first).
- **Titles.** You can test different titles or title types on articles. For example, Optimizely has a plugin that allows you to write two separate titles for a post and then test to see which title produces more conversions.
- **Content length.** If you have a few high-performing pieces of content, you can try testing out different lengths of content to see how content length affects your conversion rates. Alternatively, you can try spreading a single article over multiple pages of content and see if that drives more conversions.

- **CTAs.** There are a variety of ways to incorporate CTAs into your content. You can try in-text CTAs (“click here for our free eBook”, etc), sidebar CTAs (“get my free audit”, etc), floating CTAs that follow users down the page, popup corner CTAs, exit overlay CTAs...get the idea? You never know what kind of CTA your audience will respond best to.

Using these sorts of tests, we’ve seen blog post conversion rates increase by over 600% in as little as 3 months. So, don’t sell your blog short—test it!

3. Running a Successful A/B Test

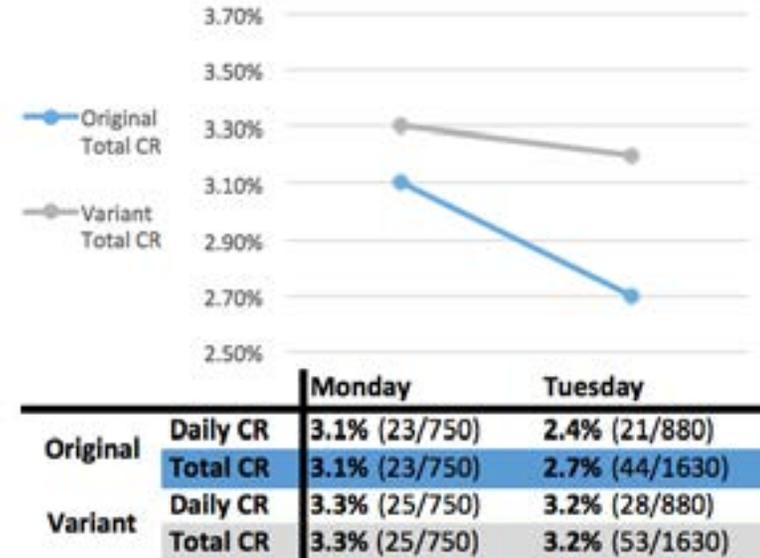
Unfortunately, even if you're in a hurry to get results, you can't just run an A/B test for 2 days and pick whichever variant gets the most conversions.

For most tests, you want a lot of conversions (300-400 per variant) before you can declare a winner.

For example, take a look at the results on the right. After 2 days of testing, the original page has a 2.7% conversion rate (CR) and the new one converts 3.2% of its traffic. That's a 20% increase in conversions with the new design!

That looks pretty good, right?

But, if you only tested for two days, how do you know that your test results weren't just a fluke?



Statistical significance

Okay, take a deep breath. The words “T-test” and “p-value” probably send chills down your spine and dredge up dark, suppressed memories of college statistics, but stick with it, this is important.

There’s actually a statistical test you can use to see how likely it is that your test results are due to chance. It’s called a “T-test” and produces something called a “p-value.”

Your “p-value” tells you what the chances are that your test results aren’t a random fluke.

So, if your p-value is .70, then there’s a 70% chance that the differences you saw in your test sample will hold true for the rest of your customers.

To be sure that they only make effective site changes, a lot of companies choose to only implement changes with a p-value of 0.95 (95% confidence) or more.

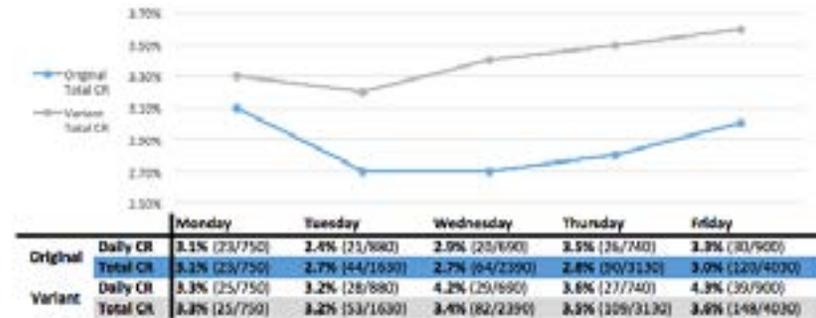
In this case, there’s only a 1 in 20 chance that the results were a coincidence.

However, in that 2-day test we were just talking about, the p-value was 0.82, so there’s a 1 in 5 chance that their apparent 20% conversion rate increase is totally bogus.

Now, in Russian Roulette, there’s a 1 in 6 chance that there’s a bullet in the chamber. Would you take worse odds than that with your business?

Without going too deep into where p-values come from (there are on-line calculators for that), let’s just say that your p-value goes up when there’s a bigger difference between groups and when there’s more data to support the difference.

Here’s what happens to your p-value if you run your test through the end of the work week instead of quitting on Tuesday:



At this point there’s enough data to get the p-value up to 0.96, so there’s only a 1 in 25 chance that the results are due to random chance.

With a p-value above 0.95, many people feel comfortable declaring their test “statistically significant” and implementing site changes.

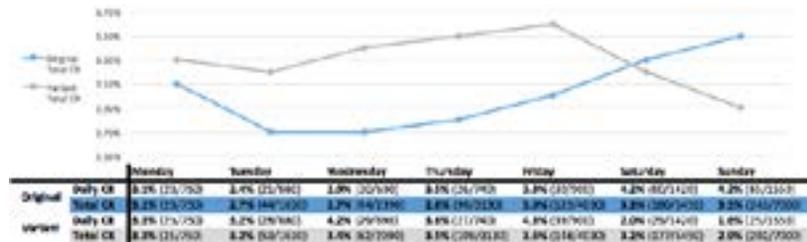
The 7-day rule

Now, I said “many people feel comfortable” declaring a ...NOT “I feel comfortable” with it. Even though the test results are statistically significant, 5 days is still isn’t long enough to declare a winner. Think about it like this: Usain Bolt doesn’t win in the first 50 meters, he wins in the last 10.

The same thing can happen with marketing.

If you run your test for a couple more days, you might discover that—although your new page resonates well with your weekday traffic—most of your advertising clicks happen on the weekend.

And, more importantly, you might find that your weekend traffic prefers your original page:



Look at that! By Sunday night, the test results have reversed themselves and we’re now 98% certain that the original page produces 21% more conversions than the variant.

Sure, if you stopped your test after 5 days, your results would have been “statistically significant”, but because you didn’t let your test run for long enough, you would have ended up picking the wrong page design.

Now do you remember why you hated statistics so much?

This is why **you typically shouldn’t end an A/B test until it has run for at least 7 days**. Sometimes, your test may need to run for even longer before you can confidently declare a winner, especially if your business sells a seasonal product or service.

But, if you’ve run your test for at least a week and your results have reached statistical significance, you can pick a winner with confidence.

A/B Testing “Rules of Thumb”

Don’t worry, you don’t have to be a stats expert to run a reliable A/B test. In general, all you have to do is stick to the following rules of thumb:

- Test for at least 7 days
- Reach 95% confidence
- 1,000+ visitors per testing arm
- 100+ conversions per testing arm

Of course, the more traffic and time you can give a test, the more reliable your results will be!

Unlocking the Potential of Your Web Traffic

Often, online advertising is focused on building an audience and getting that audience to click through to your site. However, it doesn't end there.

Once someone is on your site, you want to make sure that you are giving them the best experience possible—the kind of experience that convinces them to actually do something. To do that, though, you need to optimize your pages and site for your web traffic.

Fortunately, with A/B testing, optimizing your site doesn't have to be a painful experience. In fact, once all the extra conversions start rolling in, you just might be surprised at how fun it actually is!

Need a Hand?

Excited about the idea of A/B testing, but don't want to tackle it on your own? We can help! We'd be happy to take a look at your current advertising efforts and help you figure out the best way to start A/B testing. And best of all, we'll do it for free.

Interested? Click the button below and let us know.

To thank you for downloading this guide, we'll even build you a free landing page to A/B test.

Thanks for reading!

Help Me Test My Site!