A Marketer's View of Testing: The Power of Optimization

Always Be Testing?

> *"Let's talk about something important…Only one thing counts in this life: Get them to sign on the line which is dotted…A, B, C. Always be closing…They're sitting out there waiting to buy; are you going to take it?"*

—Alec Baldwin as Blake, *Glengarry Glen Ross*

Alec Baldwin came down harshly on his sales force in a film scene that still has the power to make people squirm. The Close. It's the Holy Grail of commerce. Except these days, the online arm of your business is a major nonhuman player in your sales force.

Whether you are pursuing sales, securing leads, or encouraging subscriptions, your website is out there interacting with your potential customers, trying to persuade them to take action. It's the connective tissue that binds all aspects of your marketing. In theory you can fire it, but you can't intimidate or shame it into better performance.

What you can do is test it.

A System for Closing

The book *Waiting for Your Cat to Bark?* (Thomas Nelson, 2006) discussed the state of modern marketing practice as well as the push/pull between selling and buying, and it explained a systematic method—Persuasion Architecture—that helps you improve the persuasiveness of all your marketing activities.

Persuasion Architecture includes a series of phases that allow you to create a persuasive online structure by addressing the individual needs of your audience. It offers a profoundly customer-centric way to achieve your business goals. The planning phases include performing uncovery, developing personas, wireframing, creating persuasive scenarios, storyboarding, and prototyping.

The final and ongoing phase of Persuasion Architecture involves testing, measuring, and optimizing. You'll never really know if you have the most efficient technological salesperson working for you unless you examine all the elements that make up that person's persuasive abilities.

Testing, Measuring, Optimizing

W. Edwards Deming said, "You create the system your visitor must navigate. People don't cause defects, systems do." Systems can be tested, measured, and optimized. You need to know whether the assumptions that went into creating your site meet the needs and expectations of your audience. More important, you need to know how to optimize your system so you can market more effectively.

When we say "testing, measuring, and optimizing," you may think we're repeating ourselves (redundantly!). But these are three distinct activities.

When you *test*, you compare elements on your site or in your campaigns to see which variation best persuades your visitors to complete the action you want them to take. That action might be making a purchase, generating a lead, signing up for a newsletter, or even clicking through to the next step in your selling process (or their buying process). Testing involves setting up an experiment in either an A/B (split) format or in any of the varieties of multivariate formats. Google Website Optimizer is a free testing platform that makes it a snap to perform these tests and review your results.

When you *measure*, you monitor what visitors do as they navigate your site. Using a web analytics program (Google Analytics is a free, straightforward program that logs visitor behavior), you can determine key performance indicators such as site traffic, over-all conversion rate, page rejections, length of time spent on a page, and so forth. These analytics—*measurements*—help you evaluate where you have problems, which in turn helps you prioritize your testing.

When you *optimize*, you put your test results in place to improve your conversion rate. But optimizing is more than simply slotting in your "winners." Optimizing is the piece that brings you full circle. Learning is a valuable by-product of your testing efforts. As you test, you reinforce and refine the plans you developed to create your site or campaign. You grow more familiar with the nature and needs of your audience, which makes it possible for you to create more meaningful options to test so you continue improving. In optimization, we inject human insight back into the testing and optimizing process to lead it in more efficient directions.

Many marketers are starting to employ testing to evaluate the creative in their banner advertisements and pay-per-click campaigns. This is merely the tip of the iceberg. Testing provides the evidence that should guide every marketing solution; it ensures qualified traffic arrives on your site so you can begin and conclude your dialogue. For marketers, testing is at the heart of improving conversion, measuring is at the heart of holding these conversion improvements to an increasing standard, and optimization is at the heart of persuasion.

In this book, however, we look beyond testing's advertising role. We want to help you understand how to test and evaluate all the persuasive elements on your site so you can create the best closing system possible. Over the years, we have identified more than 1,100

factors that affect conversion and improve the customer's experience—these are elements that affect your ability to close. To show you what you should be testing, we will share many of these factors with you in Part II, "What You Should Test."

Overstock.com Case Study: Small Change, Big Difference

We cannot overemphasize the importance and sheer power of many of these site design elements. Sometimes an element that seems innocuous to you makes all the difference to your visitors. Testing these elements comes with such a low opportunity cost compared to the opportunity cost you lose by doing nothing. Here's an example.

Patrick Byrne, CEO of Overstock.com, asked us to evaluate Overstock.com's category landing page for DVD and VHS movies (Figure 1.1). The page wasn't converting the way Byrne hoped. The number of site visitors who abandoned this page was high.

Figure 1.1
Overstock.com movie page

Below a promotional banner with a related search (Figure 1.2), Overstock.com offered excellent categorization schemes to help site visitors quickly find what they were looking for; there were lists for Coming Soon, Top 10, New Releases, Featured Picks, and Our Buyer Suggestions.

We quickly found the problem on the Overstock.com page through a process we call Persuasion Architecture. This process is based on three simple questions that we'll walk you through a bit later in the book.

In spite of the helpful categories lower on the movies page, the top element—a prominent search call to action—seemed to suggest the titles were kid-oriented and that using search would find only kid-related results.

Overstock.com may have understood what it meant by this element, but clearly its site visitors did not.

We called Byrne back, and he replaced the "Kid's Titles" image with one that suggested the search was inclusive of all titles (Figure 1.3). Byrne saw an immediate 33 percent reduction in the page's abandonment rate, which translated directly to a 5 percent increase in top-line sales. For a company such as Overstock.com, this was a $2,040,000 monthly opportunity gain! Just imagine how much testing and optimization you could do with more than $2 million extra a month!

The Best Practices Issue

No vehicle without a driver may exceed 60 miles per hour. No one is allowed to ride a bicycle in a swimming pool. A person may not walk around on Sundays with an ice cream cone in his/her pocket. Slippers are not to be worn after 10 p.m. These are just a few of the hundreds of silly laws some U.S. states have on the books. It's hard to know exactly why or how laws like these came to be. They must've made sense to somebody at some time.

The Internet is no exception. It has its share of silly, though unwritten, rules that many marketers seem eager to follow. Rules make the job easier, and if you follow the rules but still don't see improvement, well, then the problem isn't with you. Or so people would like to think.

In our industry, marketers call these rules *best practices*. And there's plenty of documentation out there, more myth than fact, telling you generic best practices apply to you. They don't. If solid rules or even best practices do exist—and given the organic nature of the medium, we'd hesitate to guarantee this—they occur within a well-established company that has taken the time to understand its audience and shape its selling process to its customers' buying process. They apply only within that business. They won't necessarily

work for any other business, be it a competing business or one with a completely different topology. We've seen these situations happen too many times to believe otherwise.

Every business has a different optimal strategy. Testing is the only way to discover which tactics work best for you.

Still, you needn't ignore these unwritten rules of e-commerce. Consider them a starting point when you plan, test, measure, and optimize. Consider them "best guidelines." But never think of them as inviolable sacred cows.

Your Goal Is Persuasion

Every website element has a persuasion role to fill: It must move your visitors further into your conversion process—closing in on the close. Even a lowly add-to-cart button can undermine this forward momentum. But you won't know whether that button is a culprit unless you test. Your goal is to create a system that meets the needs of your customers. And when you better serve your customers, you better serve your business. Testing allows you to hear what they have to say.

Scientific Advertising

Almost everyone buys into the theoretical value of testing. Few would argue with Claude Hopkins, author of *Scientific Advertising* (1923), when he wrote, "Almost any question can be answered cheaply, quickly and finally, by a test campaign. And that's the way to answer them—not by arguments around a table. Go to the court of last resort—buyers of your products."

Hopkins believed the only purpose of advertising was to sell something—it should be measurable and justify the results. He tested headlines, offers, and supporting content by tracking key-coded coupons and then analyzed the data so he could continually improve results and maximize the cost-effectiveness of his clients' advertising spending.

Dated though *Scientific Advertising* may be, the ideas are well suited to today's marketing environment. When Hopkins's advertising career catapulted him to fame and fortune, the Internet was far from being a glimmer in anyone's eye. But it's an undeniable player— and a powerful tool—in how you conduct business. We work in a medium where testing is incredibly easy and can yield dramatic results. "Cheaply," "quickly," and "finally" do apply!

You Can Test Cheaply

Cheap—as long as it isn't a by-product of shoddy—is one of your bottom line's best friends. And there's nothing quite so cheap as free, which is why Website Optimizer's platform should definitely become one of *your* best friends.

But there's more at stake here than just the cost of a software solution. You can invest a serious chunk of change in the design and implementation of your website. Generally, when it takes longer to do something, costs go up. The question becomes, how much time and money do you want to invest in guesswork? Over and over we've seen that sweating the small stuff in a vacuum of information comes with a heavy price tag.

Of course, inaction is far worse. Almost any form of testing is cheap when you compare it to the lost opportunity cost of doing nothing.

It's easy and inexpensive to make changes to your website. You don't have to film multiple takes to get your TV spot just right. You don't have to reprint an entire catalog edition to remove a mistake. You just run a test. You don't even have to run your test across your site using all your traffic. In many cases, simply setting up a pay-per-click ad campaign to drive traffic to a landing page is all you need.

You Can Test Quickly

Website Optimizer makes setting up and running tests a breeze. And the sheer speed at which you can generate responses online makes "quick" a far more significant qualifier than it was in Hopkins's day.

But "quick" isn't only about how long it takes to set up and run a test. "Quick" also applies to the time you need to invest to develop confidence that your data is representative and meaningful. Testing online, you needn't be constrained to temporal concerns such as a fixed buying season (say, Christmas) or the length of the buying decision process (say, how long it takes to decide on purchasing a car or a house compared to a candy bar or a pack of gum). In other words, you don't need to wait through a longer period of time if you can achieve a high degree of probability in less time.

When you can test quickly in a manner that gives you confidence in the data, you will, of course, be accomplishing your goals more cheaply—"quickly" is often an enforcer of "cheaply." In our experience, it rarely works the other way round.

You Can Achieve a Final Verdict

You test so you can be as certain as possible that the tactics you employ are helping rather than hurting your online efforts. Over time, testing reassures you that you've found better solutions, which helps you evaluate what you can do in the future.

When it comes to how your audiences interact with your site, no answer is ever completely final. The more evidence you acquire through multiple tests and multiple campaigns of testing, the greater the body of knowledge you will build to guide your decisions in the future. Furthermore, it gives you a verdict you can present to your naysayers—to dispute you, they'll need to gather their own evidence. Testing replaces conjecture and opinion with a form of proof.

Amazon.com Overview: How Final Is Final?

Few companies go about testing, measuring, and optimizing the way Amazon.com does. Jeff Bezos and his crew believe nothing is ever final and there are no sacred cows (our position exactly!).

Not many people could tell you which pieces of Amazon's current website are different from the site they saw only three months ago, but it's a certainty the site you looked at three months ago is not the same site you see today. This is largely because Bezos implements changes in ways most of us don't even notice. It's a clever strategy; consumers often react badly to change, even when the changes help them accomplish their tasks more efficiently.

Compare Amazon.com's original site at its official launch in 1995, when it mostly sold books (Figure 1.4), to its formidable presence today (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.4

Amazon.com's original home page in 1995

It doesn't even look like the same company. And don't hold your breath; this, too, will change!

Amazon.com didn't create its current site just through major overhauls and redesigns. Marketers persistently tested small pieces of the big picture over and over again. A simple example of an area Amazon.com subjects to ongoing testing is the "ready-to-buy" or "add-to-cart" area. Let's take a look at how it evolved.

Amazon.com's home page as of February 2008
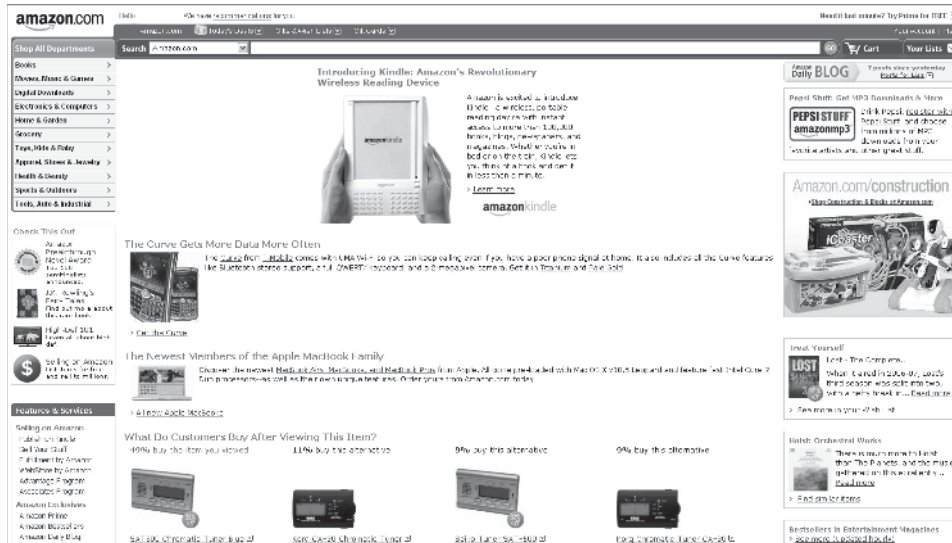
Early Days

This is what an early version of Amazon's ready-to-buy area looked like:

At the time, this add-to-cart button was unusual. It was an irregular shape that combined a rectangle "add" button with a circle cart graphic. The entire call-to-action area contained several point-of-action assurances: "You can always remove it later" and "Shopping with us is safe." And "Guaranteed" is linked to their guarantee policy.

When Amazon.com created this call-to-action area—in the early days of e-commerce—many customers feared the earth might implode if they hit the wrong button. Back then, most businesses didn't let customers edit their shopping carts. Customers were leery about entering private information and credit card numbers.

At the time, Amazon.com needed to find a way to help people feel comfortable about buying online.
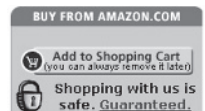
The Birth of 1-Click and Wish Lists

Next, Amazon.com created its powerful 1-Click option and unveiled a new ready-to-buy area. The wording at the top of the area changed from "Buy from Amazon.com" to the more persuasive "Ready to Buy?":

Amazon.com kept the same add-to-cart button and added the 1-Click option below it. The new objective was to make sure everyone saw the bordered, stand-alone "Ready to Buy?" area with the two ways to buy. The height of the layout grew to 262 pixels.

The button point-of-action reassurances remained, but Amazon.com removed its safety and guarantee text. The 1-Click area included shipping and gift-wrap options, plus a way to edit your 1-Click settings.

Below the 1-Click area, Amazon.com also added its new Wish List feature. Notice the relative sizes of all these elements? Those will change.

Streamlining
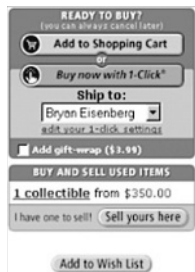
Amazon.com's next version of its ready-to-buy area removed almost all the point-of-action assurances and reduced the size of elements within the ready-to-buy area. (We snagged this version while Amazon.com was running an A/B test.)

Amazon.com decided to test removing the assurances on the buttons. It created a single assurance—"you can always cancel later"—right below the "Ready to Buy?" header. The buttons were now condensed; this cluster of calls to action took up less space. The little notches above and below the word "or" added a nice touch.

When Amazon.com made these changes, many of our clients suddenly decided they too should remove point-of-action assurances from their add-to-cart buttons. We told them this change would hurt their conversion rates. It did.

Yet Amazon.com kept the new buttons, which begs the question, why would Amazon.com switch to buttons that don't convert as well?

The answer? Conversion isn't the only metric that matters. If you look closely, you'll notice Amazon.com made the "Ready to Buy?" area half the size of the previous version. Why? Because it was in the process of changing its business model. Very quietly, it launched its Marketplace to resell used goods. If Amazon.com didn't have to stock and ship everything, it could boost profits. Its objective now was to increase profits by showing used books higher up on the page.

There is a moral here: What works for one business doesn't necessarily work for another. Don't mimic what other businesses do if you aren't fully aware of the business issues involved.

Amazon.com 2.0

The next phase of changes showcased a major redesign of the ready-to-buy area.

The iconic add-to-cart button got a face-lift. It was the same shape and used the same colors, but now it had a 3-D effect. The "Ready to Buy?" text was removed, and to use the 1-Click option, the customer had to log in (after the user logged in, the 1-Click button appeared in this area).

The blue portion of this area included a strong promotion for Amazon.com's new A9 search engine. The Marketplace got more screen real estate, and the color of the nonbuy call-to-action buttons had been changed so they didn't draw attention away from the add-to-cart button.

Amazon.com added a wedding-registry option and removed all point-of-action copy.

Amazon.com Today

Amazon.com is no longer promoting its A9 search engine, the Marketplace area has been simplified, and there are now more secondary actions ("Add to Shopping List," "Add to Baby Registry," and "Tell a Friend"):

The current version adds a quantity pull-down menu, so you don't have to wait until checkout to change it.

The objective is to increase average order value by keeping customers engaged in the buying process. This should also lower shopping-cart abandonment by reducing the number of steps in the checkout process.

Big money, small change. Changing your call-to-action buttons doesn't guarantee higher returns on investment from your website, but it is an easy and popular test. Unwilling to accept there is ever a final, perfect version, Amazon.com continues to optimize this area (formerly known as "Ready to Buy?"), making changes based on business cycles and market circumstances.

Amazon.com has spent many years testing this area, but it has also tested countless other variables. It has tested the size and viewing options of product images, it has tested images on the left vs. the right side, and it has tested where to put product reviews. You name it, Amazon.com has tested it. And will keep testing it.

The Court of Only Resort

We call it playing by the Golden Rule: "He who has the gold rules." Online, your site visitors have the gold. You need to play the game their way.

From a more empathetic point of view, there is also that moral Golden Rule. You've probably heard it: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." However, this rule makes us the yardsticks against which we measure the needs of others. That's a little presumptuous, don't you think?

Not everyone wants the same things you want or wants to be treated the way you want to be treated. Yet lots of businesses still set up processes in ways they understand and in ways they find appealing. You can imagine the extent to which you limit your ability to convert when you focus only on what you want rather than what your customer wants.

We'd all do well to think about the Golden Rule differently: "Do unto others as they would like done unto them."
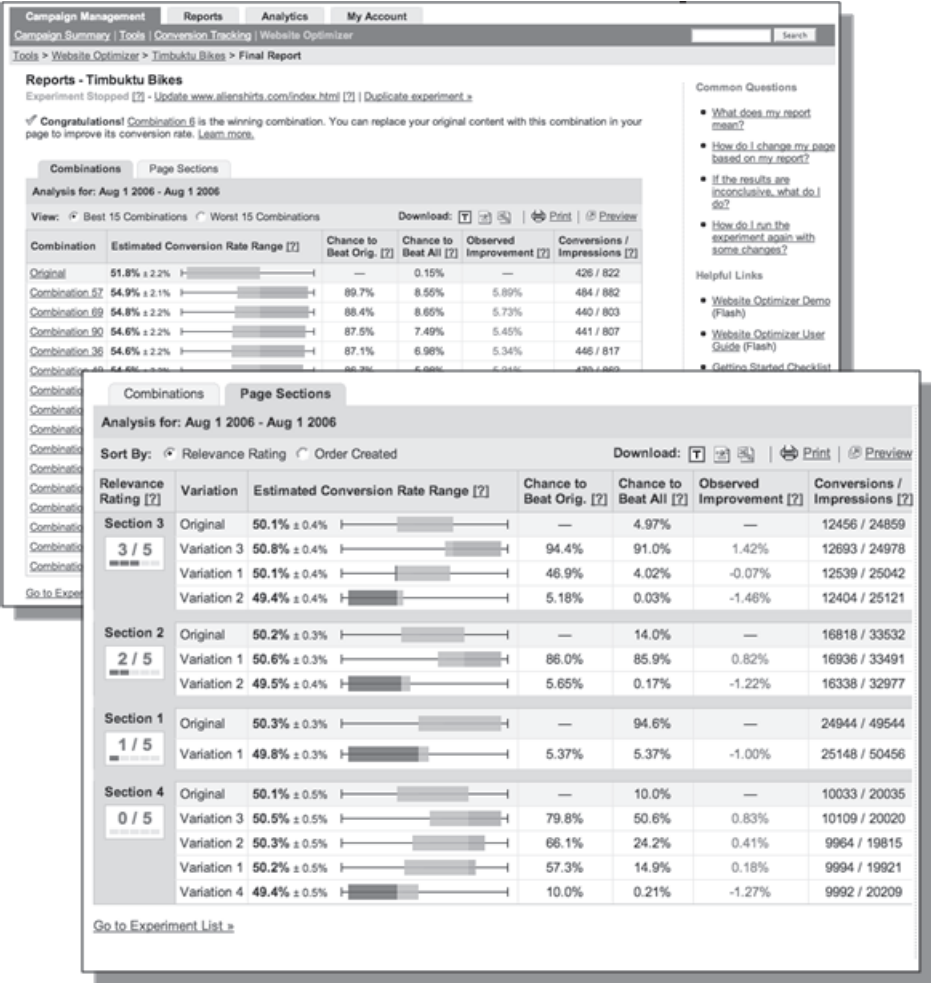
Online, marketers may design their equivalent of cars, but consumers do all the steering. You can apply your knowledge about your business, about your audience, about what you think will work, and about what seems to constitute "best practice" in the industry, but you will never know whether you got it right until you start test-driving with your customers.

Let your visitors design your site for you. You'll simply never build a site that's as good as the one your visitors would build for themselves. Even people with no sense of aesthetics are brilliant designers.

Through testing, you empower customers to collectively decide what works best for them. When you offer your site traffic variations of your conversion elements, they will "tell" you their reactions. Testing gives them a voice and lets you hear what they are saying.

With Website Optimizer, you don't have to guess what works and doesn't work for your site visitors. Report results quickly show you the thumbs-up and the thumbs-down (Figure 1.6).

Figure 1.6

Website Optimizer reports

Campaign Management	Reports	Analytics	My Account

Campaign Summary | Tools | Conversion Tracking | Website Optimizer

Tools > Website Optimizer > Timbuktu Bikes > Final Report

Reports - Timbuktu Bikes

Experiment Stopped [?] - Update www.alienshirts.com/index.html [?] | Duplicate experiment »

✓ **Congratulations!** Combination 6 is the winning combination. You can replace your original content with this combination in your page to improve its conversion rate. Learn more.

Combinations	Page Sections

Analysis for: Aug 1 2006 - Aug 1 2006

View: ⦿ Best 15 Combinations ○ Worst 15 Combinations   Download: T 🖹 🖺 | 🖶 Print | 🔍 Preview

Combination	Estimated Conversion Rate Range [?]	Chance to Beat Orig. [?]	Chance to Beat All [?]	Observed Improvement [?]	Conversions / Impressions [?]
Original	51.8% ± 2.2%	—	0.15%	—	426 / 822
Combination 57	54.9% ± 2.1%	89.7%	8.56%	5.89%	484 / 882
Combination 69	54.8% ± 2.2%	88.4%	8.65%	5.73%	440 / 803
Combination 90	54.6% ± 2.2%	87.5%	7.49%	5.45%	441 / 807
Combination 36	54.6% ± 2.2%	87.1%	6.98%	5.34%	446 / 817

Common Questions

- What does my report mean?
- How do I change my page based on my report?
- If the results are inconclusive, what do I do?
- How do I run the experiment again with some changes?

Helpful Links

- Website Optimizer Demo (Flash)
- Website Optimizer User Guide (Flash)
- Getting Started Checklist

Go to Experiment List »

Combinations	Page Sections

Analysis for: Aug 1 2006 - Aug 1 2006

Sort By: ⦿ Relevance Rating ○ Order Created   Download: T 🖹 🖺 | 🖶 Print | 🔍 Preview

Relevance Rating [?]	Variation	Estimated Conversion Rate Range [?]	Chance to Beat Orig. [?]	Chance to Beat All [?]	Observed Improvement [?]	Conversions / Impressions [?]
Section 3	Original	50.1% ± 0.4%	—	4.97%	—	12456 / 24859
3 / 5	Variation 3	50.8% ± 0.4%	94.4%	91.0%	1.42%	12693 / 24978
	Variation 1	50.1% ± 0.4%	46.9%	4.02%	-0.07%	12539 / 25042
	Variation 2	49.4% ± 0.4%	5.18%	0.03%	-1.46%	12404 / 25121
Section 2	Original	50.2% ± 0.3%	—	14.0%	—	16818 / 33532
2 / 5	Variation 1	50.6% ± 0.3%	86.0%	85.9%	0.82%	16936 / 33491
	Variation 2	49.5% ± 0.4%	5.65%	0.17%	-1.22%	16338 / 32977
Section 1	Original	50.3% ± 0.3%	—	94.6%	—	24944 / 49544
1 / 5	Variation 1	49.8% ± 0.3%	5.37%	5.37%	-1.00%	25148 / 50456
Section 4	Original	50.1% ± 0.5%	—	10.0%	—	10033 / 20035
0 / 5	Variation 3	50.5% ± 0.5%	79.8%	50.6%	0.83%	10109 / 20020
	Variation 2	50.3% ± 0.5%	66.1%	24.2%	0.41%	9964 / 19815
	Variation 1	50.2% ± 0.5%	57.3%	14.9%	0.18%	9994 / 19921
	Variation 4	49.4% ± 0.5%	10.0%	0.21%	-1.27%	9992 / 20209

Go to Experiment List »

Claude Hopkins considered consumers the court of last resort. We believe consumers are the first and only meaningful court of resort—when it comes to your success, your customers are the ones you must satisfy.

Developing an Always Be Testing Culture

It verges on insanity to look at the success of a company such as Amazon.com and still hold out hope that avoiding testing will produce the results that are well within your grasp. Yet a majority of companies out there do not test. They haven't incorporated a culture of testing; they haven't even appointed an individual within their organization as the Testing and Analytics dude or dudette. They seem content to coast on their marginally above-average (or even industry-average) conversion rates.

We continually scratch our heads at this. With the quality resources available today, such as the robust and free Website Optimizer, that make testing a breeze, *why* would businesses turn up their noses at improved site performance and increased return on investment? How much profit is too much?

Intuit's Stinky

When it comes to companies that embrace a culture of testing, we have to take our hats off to Intuit. You see, Intuit has this small, cute, squishy toy skunk— the Stinky. It's an award, but it isn't given to the testing winners who achieve positive returns on investment through their testing successes. Testing *losers* earn the right to display the Stinky with pride.

Thomas Edison once quipped, "Results! Why, man, I have gotten a lot of results. I know several thousand things that won't work." When you test, you always learn something: You learn from what went right; you learn from what went wrong. Usually you learn more from the failures, but whatever the outcome, you've got a lesson. What you choose to do with it defines your TCR— your Testing Culture Rating.

COURTESY OF DYLAN LEWIS

The Always Be Testing culture at Intuit recasts every negative as a positive. Intuit groks testing. Intuit has an extremely high TCR.

We acknowledge there are often impediments to developing a culture of testing, but these are not insurmountable. As you'll see in multiple examples throughout this book, Amazon.com is by no means the only company to make a commitment to testing. It is by no means the only company that could sing the praises of testing's value. And it has obviously dealt successfully with the obstacles that discourage many companies from leaping wholeheartedly on the bandwagon.

Difficulty with HiPPOs

Oddly enough, marketers often have difficulties persuading higher-ups that their marketing solutions have merit. This is particularly true in companies where testing has never played any role in decision-making. In his blog, *Occam's Razor*, Avinash Kaushik describes how the highest-paid person's opinion (the HiPPO) quashes ideas because those ideas buck the traditional way of doing things. Kaushik finds this blatantly stupid

but says there are two ways to earn the right to be heard: Present customer evidence and competitor evidence. He offers this idea in his "Lack Management Support or Buy-In? Embarrass Them!" blog entry:

> *"[Testing] is the biggest no-brainer, and the killer of most stupid ideas. It is the best way to take yourself out of the game: 'It is not my opinion that dancing monkeys, or grey text on black background, don't work. Here are data from our latest test.'*
>
> *"It is hard to say no to an Executive Idea. But it is easy to say: 'Excellent idea, Mr. Executive. Why don't we split traffic and send 50% of the home page traffic to your idea and get customer feedback on a no-calls-to-action, only-video home page?'*
>
> *"Testing is great because you can get the most important person's opinion: The Customer's.*
>
> *"After a few times of being proven wrong even the biggest HiPPO will back off and give you all the support you need.*
>
> *"And now you have no excuse to avoid testing."*

—Avinash Kaushik, *Occam's Razor*, March 7, 2008

It may actually be easier to win over the HiPPO than to deal with the often less-obvious and more insidious problem within companies.

Suits and Geeks and Sandboxes

It doesn't help that many businesses suffer from Suits vs. Geeks Syndrome. (Being geeks and suits ourselves, we use the terms affectionately.) We've seen it far too many times: The online business becomes a field of battle where right-brained marketers face off against left-brained technology folks. Both have the same business objectives, but they speak very different languages. It always works to your advantage to get everyone playing nicely in the same sandbox.

Ask your favorite suit if he or she embraces the geek worldview, and you'll probably hear, "I'm so not a techno-geek! Really. I can't write one line of code. An HTML tag is a new game children play, right? I get way bored with too many details; I'm a Big Picture guy. You know, I don't even own a pocket protector. But clearly, my marketing colleagues and I need to start communicating with the techno-geeks or we won't be able to do our jobs effectively."

Geeks have an equally difficult time embracing the suit worldview. Your favorite geek will tell you, "Life is about order, analysis…precision and logical processes. Process, process, process. I just hate it when one of those opaque initiatives from MarCom lands on my desk. Suits wave their hands and create forests, but you can't have a forest without trees. I deal in trees."

It's the simplified, but classic, right-brain/left-brain issue.

The left brain is considered analytic in approach, while the right is described as holistic or global. A successive processor (left brain) prefers to learn in a step-by-step sequential format, beginning with details leading to a conceptual understanding of a skill. A simultaneous processor (right brain) prefers to learn beginning with the general concept and then going on to specifics.

Rebecca Lieb, vice president and editor-in-chief of the ClickZ Network for seven years, characterizes the problem for businesses:

> *"Technology is no longer at the service of marketing; it defines marketing. This places marketers on an unprecedented learning curve, requiring them to become conversant (and then some) with skills and tasks for which they are temperamentally ill-suited. On the other side of the fence, the tech folks are dealing with co-workers who cannot express their needs in the language of the realm. Programmers don't want creative briefs, value propositions, or mission statements. They need minutely detailed specs."*

—Rebecca Lieb, *"Left- Versus Right-Brained Marketing," The ClickZ Network*, January 18, 2002

Marketers need to understand how to present information that will help the tech staff accomplish the business goals:

- Be sensitive to the methodical nature of what you are trying to accomplish. Techies get upset when they think you are wasting their time or yanking their chains.

- Provide information in writing, not verbally. If you need to brainstorm, give them time in advance to think about what they want to say.

- Give techies the things they love: They love facts, statistics, bullet points, project-management charts, and all that stuff.

- Explain your goals as part of a process, and they'll get it faster.

- Agree on what words mean and use them carefully. Terminology is important to techies.

- Get your techies involved only after you've figured out what to do and why to do it. Then they can figure out the part they do best: how to do it. If you involve techies too early in your marketing plans, they tend to sidetrack you with the "hows."

- Trust them to handle the "hows." You'll sidetrack them if you don't get out of their way and let them get things done.

Tech folks need to understand that marketing drives visitors to your company, and sales converts them into customers. Marketing discovers the gold mine, whereas sales actually digs out the gold. Technology is a support function that helps discover and helps dig.

A distinct process is involved when people take action. This can be summarized by the acronym AIDAS. The Attention of the person is tickled, their Interest is piqued, a Desire

is stimulated in their mind, and then an Action is taken—and afterward the person evaluates their Satisfaction with the process. The key here is understanding that the first three steps are emotional ones (attention, interest, desire) that are only then confirmed by the logical left brain (action). The final step (satisfaction) is a reconfirmation by this hybrid emotional-logical interaction.

When buyers buy, they basically go through a linear process:

1. Problem recognition.
2. Information search.
3. Evaluation of alternatives.
4. Purchase decision.
5. Purchase completion.
6. Was the problem solved?

Sellers, however, follow a different process:

1. Prospect for needs/desires.
2. Establish rapport.
3. Qualify the needs/desires.
4. Present to the qualified needs/desires.
5. Close on satisfying the needs/desires.

Techies must be sensitive to what is going on in people's heads and to understanding the processes that go on in the marketing and sales world. This knowledge delivers a tremendous clarity of purpose geeks can use to apply technology to support these functions. The key to converting visitors into buyers is to win their hearts. Their minds will surely follow.

The critical area for a détente between suits and geeks lies in your commitment to testing, measuring, and optimizing. When marketers understand the nature of how different forms of testing affect their ability to make decisions, they are better able to explain to the tech department what sort of data they need to collect and why they need it. When techies understand why some data is far more beneficial than other data, they are better able to implement meaningful experiments to generate the useful data.

"More than simply adopting the idea that testing is good, developing a culture of testing **'means thinking as deeply about the design of experiments as it does their performance.'"**

—John Quarto-vonTivadar, *"Testing Add-To-Cart Buttons: Stuck in the Middle with You," GrokDotCom*, January 25, 2008

Intelligent testing removes opinion, guesswork, and faulty assumption from the marketing equation. It gives you truly meaningful results upon which you can act. And now,

with Website Optimizer, you don't really need to secure permission to test, and you definitely don't need to justify a budget expenditure.

At the end of the day, it's not a contest between factions, be they marketers vs. executives or marketers vs. techies; everyone is participating in a joint effort to meet the business goals. One of our biggest hopes for this book is that it offers you solutions to resolving these tensions and misconceptions.

Why We Endorse (and Use) Website Optimizer

We've worked together for more than 10 years, and we've heard every excuse for not testing. Almost every one boils down to one concern: cost. But who can argue with free? Especially when free includes powerful, fast, and easy. For the first time ever, we have available to us a free platform that excels at managing the A/B and multivariate tests we use to test and optimize site performance.

Website Optimizer, which handles the testing side of your system for closing, is part of the Google suite of services. Googles' suite of products also includes Google Analytics software—an incredibly robust, free analytics package—that allows you to measure visitor behavior on your site.

Why would you choose Google as your testing platform? Besides the fact it's free?

- It's extremely easy to use. You can set up your tests (provided your creative is ready) in 5–15 minutes.
- It does not impact your search engine optimization. Content is delivered through JavaScript tags.
- It is backed and actively supported by Google with quarterly feature updates.
- It demonstrably increases conversion. Lifts of 25 percent are not uncommon, and if you apply the testing frameworks we discuss in Chapters 8 and 9 of this book, you can see even more dramatic results.
- It provides access to discussion groups, tutorials, web seminars, and Google Authorized Consultants. Like us.
- It allows you to perform both A/B and multivariate testing.
- It works with all your traffic, no matter how that traffic makes it to your site.
- Your testing and analytics information is secure, and you can keep it completely private.

You'll have to create an account with Google if you do not already have one, but you don't have to pay one thin dime to use either Website Optimizer or Google Analytics.

Why would Google make its testing platform free? It's a model similar to iTunes and Acrobat Reader: Google knows if you improve your conversion rates, you're more likely to invest in advertising campaigns, and it offers an integrated, for-a-fee solution for advertising. We call this a win-win.

We believe Website Optimizer is an amazing tool that can benefit your online marketing practice and improve your conversion rates. We'd say this even if we weren't Google Authorized Consultants! We'll run you through your first test. Then you can take all the information we present in this book and apply it to your site using Website Optimizer.

Did we mention it's free? No more excuses!

What Makes This Book the "Complete" Guide?

In this book, we will walk you through setting up a test on Website Optimizer. We will help you understand exactly what the reports tell you about the test you've run.

Google is always updating its testing program as refinements, new functionalities, and document updates are added quarterly. You will find a comprehensive list of links to Website Optimizer's knowledge base and user groups in Appendix A based on the information we have now. It's impossible to create a definitive "complete" guide when what you are writing about is constantly evolving.

The important thing to keep in mind is that Website Optimizer is a tool. It provides an interface for you to set up your tests. It crunches the numbers for you. It gives you results that compare how the things you tested performed.

It cannot do your thinking for you. It cannot plan your tests. It cannot produce the creative. It cannot interpret your results beyond demonstrating numerical significance and confidence. These tasks are up to you. If you want the tests you run on Website Optimizer to be meaningful and to provide the intelligence you need to make well-informed marketing decisions, then this is the book you need. This book provides a "framework of thinking" that marketers need to incorporate if they want to use their results productively.

You are looking for results that are going to make a difference. Website Optimizer is an excellent tool. We explain this tool and then give you everything you need to know to make it work optimally for you.