



How Do You Know If Your Site Is Optimized for Conversion?

In the early years of ecommerce, just existing on the Internet was enough. The retailer who had a functional website was light-years ahead of their brick and mortar competitors.

Back then, no one was concerned about optimizing their website for conversion. Even if they wanted to test how well elements of their site were performing, they couldn't. That's because no testing tools existed.

The world of ecommerce has grown more competitive, and the approach to conversion has become more scientific. Today, robust testing is crucial to a site's success. Online retailers must test every aspect of their websites to determine how effective the sites are at turning shoppers into buyers.

How do you know if your site is optimized for conversion?

You won't know, not until you test the site with the right tools and the proper strategy. This white paper examines the three essential questions you and every online merchant must answer to know whether a site is optimized for conversion:

- What needs to be tested?
- What is the best tool for the test?

- Is the testing strategy structured and implemented properly?

THE EVOLUTION OF CONVERSION TESTING

The earliest type of conversion testing was the time-series test. The formula was simple: compare this quarter's sales figures with last quarter's sales figures. If sales went up, then something worked. If sales went down, then something went wrong.

A handful of tools, like Google Optimizer, measured traffic for analysis in conjunction with sales figures and traffic volume. Using this early form of conversion testing, it was difficult for retailers to determine which factors influenced the performance of their sites.

Only in the last several years have more sophisticated testing tools emerged. Retailers gained the ability to change the color, design and other elements of a site, reorganize the shopping cart, and conduct simple tests on the sales impact of these changes.

Still, many retailers were stuck using basic time-series testing that compared sales across two periods in time.

Basic testing may work for smaller companies and those just entering the marketplace. Very small companies can safely conclude that a

major event, such as launching a new product line or changing a price, has a direct impact on sales from one month to another. Detailed analytics aren't necessary to draw conclusions about huge changes to a small website.

In today's fiercely competitive ecommerce environment of large retail sites and heavy traffic volume, time-series testing is incapable of supporting accurate conclusions and strategic decision-making. Reaching a conclusion takes too much time. Things change fast on the Internet, and retailers can't afford to wait a year, a quarter, or even a month to measure changes to their websites. This type of testing can't account for products with seasonal sales cycles or the huge sales boosts most retailers experience during the holidays.

Fortunately, testing tools have reached a higher level of sophistication.

Retailers can now deploy tools that, when paired with the right testing strategy, give them valuable analytics that empower them to maintain a high level of optimization for conversion.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT TESTING STRATEGY

The conversion rate of every retail site is constantly affected by changes on the Internet that are outside of the retailer's control:

- Search engines routinely modify their SEO algorithms.
- Competitors tweak their sites to provide better shopping experiences.

- The effectiveness of social media and content marketing is a moving target.
- Data breaches at large online retailers increase shoppers' fears.
- Mobile devices change the ecommerce ecosystem.

With so many uncontrollable variables, testing is a means to understand the impact of what can be controlled. What worked last month may not work this month. A recent change once considered a stroke of genius may actually drag down conversions. Retailers must continuously take the pulse of their ecommerce site so that they have the accurate and timely information they need to adapt and make strategic decisions.

What Needs to Be Tested?

The first question is, what needs to be tested? To determine your testing strategy, consider the additions or changes you made to your retail site. Perhaps your test examines:

- The impact of a free shipping offer
- A merchant reliability seal, or
- A guaranteed shopping program on conversions.

Once you understand what to test, you can choose the best retail testing methodology to get accurate analytics.

What Is the Best Methodology for the Test?

A **time-series test** introduces the test element, tracks conversion over time, and then compares conversion rates between the two time periods. It's a simple process that's easy to execute. However, this testing methodology does not produce quality analytics to support strategic decision-making.

In nearly every instance, the **A/B split test** yields far more accurate and reliable results. A/B testing randomly divides website traffic into two similarly composed groups, introduces the test element to one of the groups, then compares the performance of the test element between the two groups. This methodology is best because it effectively isolates the tested element, allowing merchants to directly attribute any positive or negative performance difference to that element.

Also consider whether a **single-page test** or a **site-wide test** is required. Single-page testing rotates elements on a specific page on a per-view basis, regardless of the previous or subsequent pages seen by the visitor. This methodology works well when you attempt to measure the impact of one element on increasing click-throughs to the next page.

Site-wide testing, on the other hand, introduces and maintains elements that are persistent throughout a potential buyer's visit to the site and measures the overall impact on conversion. When paired with A/B split testing, site-wide testing becomes a highly effective methodology that offers retailers detailed analytics about a tested element.

Is the Testing Strategy Structured and Implemented Properly?

A/B site-wide testing presents significant technical challenges. To get the best analytics, structure and implement the test with precision. Use only the tools and testing strategies specifically designed for this type of testing. Otherwise, the test will produce unreliable analytics and will waste your resources.

Critically important, ensure that the tool used is accurately calibrated to conduct a true site-wide test: each visitor must be in a group that consistently sees, or consistently does not see, the element being tested. Don't cut

corners. Avoid the common mistakes, such as using free tools that are not sophisticated enough to accurately track visitors or measure the impact of site-wide changes.

Also, the tool must be capable of tracking the lifetime impact of an element on the visitor. Because shoppers often visit multiple retail sites before making a purchase, the tool must consistently track repeat visitors. Those who start in one test group must remain in that same group throughout the duration of the test period.

Testing tools that rely on cookies to track visitors are less effective because as many as 65 percent of Internet users delete cookies and 39 percent change their browser settings to block cookies.¹ When members of a testing group are intermittently exposed to the tested element because their browsing behavior cannot be properly tracked, the reliability of the test is destroyed. The best tools use IP addresses and related data, in addition to cookies, to provide accurate analytics with greater reliability.

NORTON SHOPPING GUARANTEE OFFERS FREE SITE-WIDE A/B TESTING

Site-wide A/B testing is the most effective way to ensure that the chosen conversion optimization solutions are producing the desired ROI. Retailers who have chosen to implement the Norton Shopping Guarantee to

Because testing is a process and not a goal, every retailer can benefit from a partnership with a technology provider that understands the purchasing dynamics of online shoppers as well as the complexities involved with testing conversion optimization.

increase conversions can conduct free site-wide A/B tests. Also, Norton Shopping Guarantee offers users a 20x ROI guarantee. For every dollar that a retailer invests in Norton Shopping Guarantee, we guarantee that the merchant will realize a \$20 increase in sales.

The best way to determine if a retail website is optimized for conversion is to use the right testing tool along with the proper methodology for the job. To confirm that your website is optimized to turn shoppers into buyers, conduct ongoing robust testing of your conversion solutions.

¹ Microsoft, [Data Privacy Day 2013 Survey Results](#), 2013..

Norton Shopping Guarantee is designed to increase conversion, average order value, repeat buyers and customer satisfaction. When the Norton Shopping Guarantee benefits are displayed throughout the buying process, merchants will reduce shoppers' concerns about information security, product authenticity, timely delivery, and getting a good price.

NORTON SHOPPING GUARANTEE

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