

Site Optimization Best Practices

Introduction

The optimization of online media and website content is becoming increasingly common in marketing. From its roots in mathematics to its evolution in manufacturing and computer science, optimization is moving deeper into the online media and site development spaces as a strategy to boost efficiencies and increase conversion. Optimization is about making marketing perform its best and engineering a means to achieve a defined goal, but there can be tradeoffs and the results can be counter-intuitive.

This article focuses on the best practices for website optimization from a marketing perspective. The approaches and tactics outlined will not only help you navigate a potentially complex process, but help you collaborate with your technical teams.

7 best practices:

1. Use A Portfolio Approach
2. Focus On Audiences
3. Keep It Honest; Keep A Control
4. Define Success
5. Learning Should Be Used To Affect Change
6. Real Estate Matters: Optimize Where Change Can Be Affected
7. Look Beyond Direct Conversions: Count Crossover In Evaluating Success

Use a Portfolio Approach

Digital assets and audience segments should be treated as a portfolio where risk, yield, and offers can be managed. This is an important sea-change in perspective: conventional thinking is that there is one creative concept with its complimentary offer targeted to a specific audience. When leveraging optimization, multiple creative concepts and offers are run simultaneously to multiple audiences resulting in a more relevant dialogue with each segment and higher conversion rates.

Differentiating assets to get clear read of results is critical-path to success. A common reason why elements such as graphic design, messaging, or offer, are not differentiated enough for a portfolio approach is the concern that too much variety will cause the creative to be off-brand and confuse users. This is simply not true. A portfolio of differentiated assets can be created and be completely on-brand and comply with style and/or messaging guidelines. The challenge is to have the courage to have multiple concepts in-market at the same time.

Focus on Audiences

It's easy to loose focus on who you're marketing to. It's people, remember? Optimizing for audience profiles, behavior, and trends is the only way to ensure consistent and growing lift in conversions. Optimizing based on traffic (clicks, page views, etc.) often results in increased performance, but it limits insights into why lift is accruing and more importantly misses the most important point – the people.

When focusing on audience segments, results can be counter intuitive. It has been the case with some projects that successful audience segments do not fit the corporate culture's view of who a good customer

is. Moreover, creative concepts that are not in-favor by the marketing team may outperform the favorites in some or even most segments. This is all OK and should be anticipated and learned from.

Optimizing to audiences also provides deep insights that can be leveraged to inform many other parts of the marketing supply chain including product development, message and creative development, and offer development.

Keep it Honest; Keep a Control

Transparency is crucial to success and it is important to monitor and communicate the success of optimization. A control group, sometimes called Business-as-Usual (BAU), is important because it is a constant benchmark for your optimizations program's performance. An honest metric of lift over control is the best way to prove your program's worth.

Define Success

Defining success at the beginning of a program is a bit cliché, but it is advice oft not taken. It's critical that measures are established during the planning phases of your optimization program, that benchmarks are established, and that those measures are maintained consistently throughout the program. The increased level of transparency in how the optimization program is measured and judged will give the program an increased level of credibility to executive sponsors.

Defining success and measuring consistently will also allow you to course correct your experiment quickly as you'll be able to diagnose shortcomings sooner than if the metrics are consistently being changed to spin a story and show artificial lift. The discipline may be difficult and the transparency a bit too revealing, but the effort will be rewarded with a more successful program.

Give the Learnings Legs

A great deal of intelligence will result from your optimization project and should be proudly presented to other members of your marketing organization. Learnings from audiences including demographic profiles and behavioral trends can be shared with market researchers and compared with results from quantitative and qualitative studies, they can be shared with brand stewards and Agency partners to help guide new creative development, shared with media teams to help guide targeting, and with product development to inform strategy.

Real Estate Matters: Optimize Where Change Can Be Affected

If optimization is done well, it should achieve results no matter where the placement, but in order to achieve maximum ROI, choose a section of real-estate that is above the fold and as large as possible. Also, when choosing which page to optimize, the home page is almost always the best choice. Another good choice is a product or section home page.

Look Beyond Direct Conversions: Count Crossover in Evaluating Success

The most direct way to evaluate performance is the lift realized from direct conversions. Because the optimization program focuses on audiences and developing a relevant dialogue with individual users, the increased level of engagement can lead to users unexpectedly converting to products and/or services you're not optimizing for. This called crossover and should be watched closely. It is not a direct measure of success, but is additive to your business case on how effective optimization is.

As said before, the optimization process can be challenging in the sense that optimization can disrupt cultural beliefs in what is effective and how campaigns should be managed and measured. Moreover, the level of transparency and accountability offered by optimization can prove intimidating. A clear communications plan that stresses the value proposition of optimization, consistency and transparency of



measurement, and a steadfast attitude will all pay for itself with increasingly more effective online marketing.

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