



Designing Websites for Multivariate Testing: Top 3 Tips to Ensure Your Success



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Top 3 Tips to Make Your Website Testable

If you are like most online marketers, you are doing everything you can to optimize your website. One of the best ways to optimize your site is through multivariate testing, which is a technique that enables your visitors to tell you what's working on your site and what isn't. In a multivariate test, variations of your site's content are presented to visitors. As visitors navigate through the site, their behavior is tracked to determine how each content variation affects marketing goals such as conversion, registration, retention, average order value, and so on.

While multivariate testing is an effective and proven technique for optimizing a site, some sites can be made easier to test than others. Technical factors such as the structure of the HTML come into play in determining how much prep work you will need to create a new multivariate test. But since testing is so valuable in terms of giving you a feedback loop into your visitors' preferences and behaviors, it's well worth considering how to make your site more readily testable. Doing so will yield a competitive advantage that makes it possible to out-test, out-learn, and out-optimize competitors.

There are a few times in your website's lifecycle that are ideal for considering how to make your site more testable. For example, building a brand-new site or redesigning your current one gives you the perfect opportunity to apply some best practices and make your site's elements easier to test. Another good time to prepare your site for multivariate testing is when you are adding major new content or functionality, where those new elements can be carefully introduced on the site so as to maximize their effectiveness without hindering existing site goals.

An interesting observation in the business of website design is the age-old struggle to balance a *great-looking* website versus a *great-working* website. Ideally, you want both, but the primary requirement should be a highly functional site that achieves your online marketing goals, instead of just a pretty website.

Here are three top tips to prepare your site for multivariate testing success, which represent the fundamentals of making content testable:

1) Use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)

CSS is a popular choice for web design consistency and standardization, and that's great news for multivariate testing. Among other things, CSS centralizes site-wide styles such as text and headline specifications (font, style, color, size), page layout, and positioning of elements. So, when you make a CSS change, you change it in one place and the style is updated everywhere on the site. This makes it much easier to test multiple variations of site elements since you don't have to wrestle with changes in multiple places, which you would have to if you weren't using cascading style sheets.

For example, a recent test for a B2B site revealed that by increasing the size of body text by 0.2 "em," the time-per-visit increased by 21% and pageviews-per-visit increased by 18%. This test was highly fruitful, and because only one line of CSS was changed, it was very easy to design and deploy.

2) Employ Text-Oriented Navigation

In the past, web designers often relied on images or Flash for navigation text elements, particularly for sites that were built before 2004-2005, since browser technology was such that CSS couldn't be relied on for precise positioning or stylization of text and labels. Unfortunately, using images or Flash for navigation has the side effect of making it difficult to test alternate text labels—for example, to test "My Preferences" vs. "My Profile" vs. "My Settings." Over the last few



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years, however, browsers have become much better at supporting most CSS standards, so there's little reason anymore to rely on images or Flash for navigation. Text links are much easier to modify and control, and thus are much easier to test and optimize.

But why bother testing navigation? Because they're the milestones by which visitors step through your site to accomplish their tasks and reach your marketing goals. The best product, price, or promotion is no good if the visitor can't grasp which link to click on to find the information they need, or to get to the next step in your site's conversion process.

As an example, SiteSpect recently redesigned its own website and took this recommendation into consideration. Using the text-oriented navigation that we decided to implement, we were able to run a series of multivariate tests to simultaneously optimize several different visitor goals.

Below is an example of how SiteSpect used all three design principles in redesigning its website to make it easier to test various elements.

The top nav is now text-oriented navigation.

The left-nav is an example of fluid design such that the stacked elements can easily change without disrupting the page layout.

The headline and body text are CSS styles.

3) Apply Fluid Design

Another important tip to keep in mind when creating or overhauling a site's design is to use fluid design wherever possible. Fluid design is a general approach where a site's elements can be added, removed, or rearranged without interrupting or breaking the presentation of the surrounding content. Besides being a good design principle that makes the site more accessible across varying screen sizes, fluid design also makes multivariate testing much easier because you can determine which layout is most effective.

The truth about layout is that different types of visitors scan content in different ways. For example, older visitors who grew up without computers may view a page's sections in a different order than younger visitors who have been "wired" since birth. Similarly, behavioral differences exist based on gender, education level, and language spoken. By making it easy to adjust page layout through the use of fluid design, you'll be able to test and optimize for the audience that is unique to your site.

For example, an online jewelry retailer wanted to determine how cross-sell items should be displayed relative to customer product reviews. Because the site had a fluid design, a multivariate test was easily constructed that optimized the arrangement of elements within the page, leading to a 16% increase in average order value.

And remember that sometimes "less is more," meaning that visitors may prefer less cluttered pages as they browse your site. Fluid design makes it possible to remove elements on your pages in order to determine the optimal amount of information that should be shown.

Summary

Overall, you'll want your website to be modular, flexible, and easily testable. These are the qualities that make a site usable for your visitors and will support thorough optimization towards reaching your marketing goals. Multivariate testing is an advanced technique that enables you to increase leads, conversions, and registrations, and SiteSpect can help. Designed for web marketers, SiteSpect makes testing and optimizing your entire site easy and cost-effective. With SiteSpect, you can test everything without changing anything:

- Only SiteSpect lets you run multivariate and A/B tests in combination with one another that can be launched in hours instead of days.
- Only SiteSpect tests dynamic elements like personalized content and internal site search results, not just static content.
- And only SiteSpect's non-intrusive approach requires no time-consuming tagging, no software integration, and no website changes of *any kind*.

About SiteSpect, Inc.

SiteSpect provides the world's only non-intrusive optimization platform, enabling web and mobile marketers to significantly improve key metrics such as conversion rate and engagement. SiteSpect's solutions include rapid A/B testing, multivariate testing, behavioral targeting and personalization, landing page optimization, mobile web optimization, and web performance optimization. With SiteSpect, marketers enjoy unmatched speed and flexibility without the need for ongoing IT involvement. SiteSpect's patent-pending technology and professional services are used by many of the world's leading online businesses, such as Wal-Mart, Staples, Mozilla, JCPenney, MTV, ASOS, Overstock.com, VEGAS.com, and Unitrin. For more information, visit www.SiteSpect.com or call 617-859-1900.

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