Multivariable Testing

↗ enhance your websites results

The Other Web Agency
www.ox2.be

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Marketeers are more and more compelled to justify their decisions and expenses as management requires from them measurable results about their investments. This imperative need for measurable return on marketing investment is certainly as important, if not more, for your Internet strategy in general and the efficiency of your website(s) in particular.

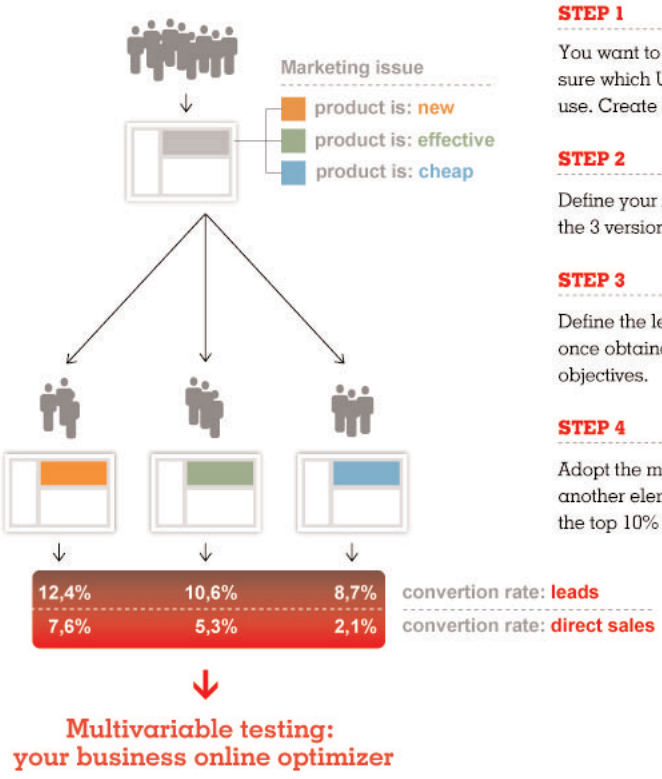
The good news is that Internet marketing is the most measurable form of marketing as every interaction can be reported upon.

A series of instruments exists out there that will allow you to define your website's efficiency. In our trade, they often go by the name of Web Analytics applications.These applications allow you to analyze the behavior of your (unique) visitors and to check whether your website actually complies with your objectives.

Nonetheless, these tools often reveal to their users whether their website and online communication have been efficient only after analysis.

It would be a lot more judicious to define prior to analysis if your interventions will produce the required returns by testing different scenarios within a real environment, with your real visitors. That's exactly what Multivariable Testing is all about.

This white paper will explain what Multivariable Testing is all about but also - and mainly - how this technique can help you define and refine your decisions related to your online strategy.



STEP 1

You want to advertise a new product. You aren't sure which USP (Unique Selling Proposition) to use. Create 3 versions of your homepage.

STEP 2

Define your A/B test. OniSystem randomly presents the 3 versions to your visitors.

STEP 3

Define the level of relevance you want (95%) & once obtained, analyze the results against your objectives.

STEP 4

Adopt the most relevant home page and test another element. Youíre on your way to be part of the top 10% of efficient websites.

1. Making decisions based upon scientific proof

In practice, making strategic decisions regarding structure, the components or the look of a website are often made on an intuitive basis or because someone has decided how things would be done.

These remain often subjective arguments that will not allow you to convince management about the foundations of your decisions.

Multivariable Testing is a technique that will allow you to make decisions based on facts. It offers you the possibility to test out various versions of your website's components, whether these are forms, banners or elements related to content, in front of a carefully segmented group of users. The visitor is confronted with one of these versions and is not aware of the fact that multiple versions exist. The method in practice links each version to a measurement system in order to report individually on his/her behavior.

By testing the different scenarios and by measuring the impact of each version on real visitors, you will able to define very specifically which approach works best for you.

A practical example:

Imagine you have a form on your website to subscribe for an alert service. You know that writing a book to explain the advantages of your services is not a good thing but beyond that, you're kind of flying blind. How should the subscription button look like? Where should you put the forms? Which call to action would be more efficient?

These questions will not be answered in a standard way, even though best practices are to be taken into account, as each website is different. With Multivariable Testing, you can simultaneously push online different versions of your form. A first group of visitors will be confronted with version A, the second group with version B and so on.

The application of MVT can be extended beyond online forms and applied to navigation menus, buttons, texts, etc. in a nut shell to any element you would want to test out in order to generate greater efficiency.

By combining the results of different Multi Variable Tests, you'll get a holistic view of the best performing scenario for your website.

Quite logical and straight forward, right? Unfortunately, in practice setting up such tests have turned out to be quite complicated as the applications managing the structure, the forms and the content of modern websites, often called Content Management Systems or CMS - do not integrate Multivariable Testing modules.

Until today! Because OniSystem 3.0, OX2's eMarketing Platform, offers an integrated Multivariable Testing module on top of its advanced content management features.

2. AB Testing versus Multivariable Testing

Different systems allow comparing live versions of website components.

> The simplest form is called A/B or Split Run Testing:
It allows you to compare 2 versions of a web element. A form, a text, a banner, etc. Each version is shown randomly to 2 distinct groups of visitors. When the amount of visitors is statistically relevant, you analyze which version has produced the best results. You can keep this version to engage into another test, till you finally find a third version that makes you feel totally comforted by the optimization you have gained.

> Going one step further or Multivariable Testing:
It allows you to combine and compare **simultaneously** different versions of more than one component of your website. You can create multiple versions of your web page, where the text and colors are different during the same test. The advantage of Multivariable Testing is that you cannot only get an overall view of the performance of your webpage but are now also able to counterbalance your decision with individual elements.

3. Multi Variable Testing and conversion

The Multivariable Testing's underlying objective - except for the mere fun of it - is to increase your website's conversion. In the eyes of the visitor, the website becomes more ergonomic while your company benefits from an increase in conversion.
Clearly a win-win situation.

In conversion, read the performance of you website in line with your business objectives or how your website reaches the objectives you want it to accomplish. These objectives can be multiple, such as:

> Sell your products or services;
> Generate selling opportunities;
> Generate subscriptions to your information boards;
> Attract people to your events;
> Increase demands for your brochures;
> Increase downloads of documents ('white papers').

Conversion can be revealed through mathematical formulas taking into account the turn-over generated by the website divided by the number of visitors.

Whether the level of conversion of your website is high or low will depend upon a multitude of factors, amongst which:

> Do content and tone increase value?
> Are you targeting the right audience?
> Is your website easy to find?
> Is your website ergonomic or easy to use?
> Does the visitor follow the path you imagined, finding rapidly and efficiently what (s)he is looking for?

Multivariable Testing holds the immense advantage of allowing you to increase conversion rates step by step by adapting many different components. Note that it is also best practice to measure different objectives, such as selling opportunities, leads or direct sales. This will allow you to spot eventual contradictions within your holistic view of your online communication.

As a result, this will allow you to increase your websites Return on Investment and make decisions based on real, measurable facts.

4. What can I analyze through Multivariable Testing ?

As such, you can submit any component of your website to Multivariable testing: navigation, forms, graphical elements, elements related to content, colors, etc.

It's good practice to focalize on components that play a crucial role in the conversion of your website.

Focus should be ideally put on:

> Call to Actions: these elements would be links, texts and buttons or even banners, that push visitors to engage into the action you have defined;
> Forms: these elements allow you to gather data about your visitors, when for example ordering a product or subscribing for a service. These forms should not scare the visitors into leaving your website and must become more efficient;
> Navigation: these elements allow the users to navigate easily through your website and find what they are looking for. If navigation is too complex, the visitor will not enjoy his surfing experience and leave.

5. 5 tips for engaging into Multivariable Testing

1/ Clearly define your website's objectives.

List your website's main objectives. This might sound trivial but don't forget to include your company's overall objectives as the web is not an island. Make the distinction between primary objectives such as the creation of immediate value (sales, leads), and more secondary objectives such as communication with your clients and partners.

2/ Limit your website's KPIs

Once your objectives have been identified, define their related KPIs or which measures will show success or failure with respect to these objectives.
Express these indicators in the form of mathematically computed parameters such as average turn-over per visitor or the number of subscriptions to information boards by visitors. These indicators will express the conversion of your website and your success in accomplishing your objectives.

3/ Define which components are most critical to conversion.

Once you have defined your objectives and their related KPIs, you can analyze which elements help you best in accomplishing those objectives: navigation, commercial texts, forms, banners, call to action elements, etc. Start by improving the impact of these elements. Don't waste time on comparing components of your website that have no impact what so ever on your primary objectives. Establish a list of priorities.

4/ Work stepwise.

Avoid the pitfall of setting up too complicated tests with too many variables.
Proceed stepwise and analyze the impact of each intervention individually. Proceed by elimination or "Darwinism": abandon each version of a web component which scores lower in favor of the higher score.
Too complex test situation holds the danger of creating false images of what is actually going on by for example annihilating the use of another component. Don't forget nonetheless to view the results in line with multiple objectives such as number of generated leads and direct sales.

5/ Define how much data is needed for relevancy.

For your analysis to scientifically proved, you need enough data or relevancy. Best practice is thus to test out on high traffic pages. The results rendered will be comparable and will allow you to make decisions based upon relevant data. Take also into account the time and traffic needed for you to obtain relevancy, discarding any hazardous based decisions.
OniSystem 3.0's MVT standard module includes a relevancy function which will allow defining whether you have gathered enough data for relevancy. Usually statisticians recommend a 95% confidence interval. OniSystem will warn you automatically through email when this threshold has been met.

6. In conclusion

Multivariable Testing allows you to test different versions of a web page or component put in front of distinct groups of visitors.
You enjoy the freedom of varying the format, the content or the position of these elements on your web page.

By measuring the behavior of these different groups of visitors, you define which version produces the best results.

This way you work on a scientific basis, allowing you to justify the modifications brought to your website and to increase your conversion rates.

OX2 has incorporated a Multivariable Testing module to its standard version of release 3.0 of OniSystem, a web content management system (CMS) or eMarketing Platform. This module allows content owners to increase rapidly and in all independence the performance of their online channel.

OniSystem allows this by making Multivariable Testing an inherent component that allows comparing certain elements of content such as forms, images, blocs of text, etc.

For more information about OniSystem 3.0, visit us at http://www.onisystem.eu/

About OX2

founded on 2003, OX2 is an interactive agency based in Brussels. Belgian leader on Web Analytics, OX2 also offers an expertise on conception, design and online marketing & strategy . To do so, OX2 counts on a team of around 20 people and 2 CMS (Content Management System) solutions : OniSystem (a marketing platform, targeted to marketeers) and OniPortal (targeted to media groups and Its).

OX2 aims to provide companies with the means, skills and technological tools to interact with their prospects. Some of the companies that are also using our systems are: Belgacom, ACV-CSC, RTL, InBev, Panos, Stanley Europe, Bridgestone Europe, Vers l'Avenir (Groupe VUM) and AMP.

OX2 is member of IAB and WebTrends Premier Partner and ATC (Authorized training center). OX2 is also the only European member of WebTrends Insight Network (WIN).

Further information is available on www.ox2.be, www.webanalytics.be and www.onisystem.eu

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