The Guide To
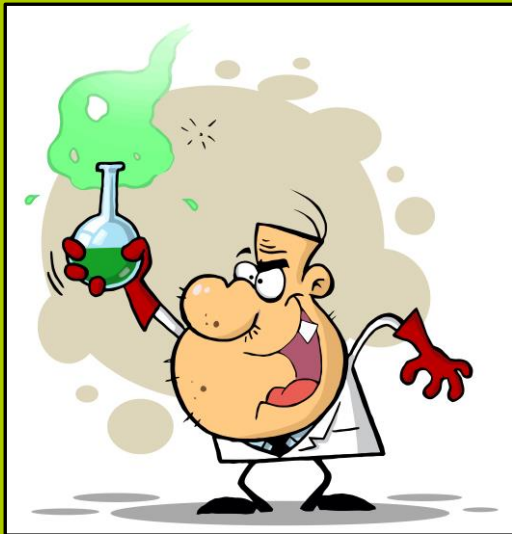# Building High Conversion Websites

Using Adaptive Web Design to Increase E-Commerce Sales & Lead Generation

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LABORATORY

Building High Conversion Websites
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CHAPTER 1:
RETHINKING WEB DESIGN

" *We must take the guesswork out of websites and digital campaigns*. "

Whether you are a digital marketing manager, e-commerce director or part of the executive team, you probably feel your website could do better. If your website isn't delivering sales growth, then you business isn't growing and you digital strategy is focusing on the wrong thing.

Companies that use their websites to grow the business know that improvements can be made, it's just not always clear how. This is a big issue faced by many business owners, sales executives and marketing departments. But why does this seem to be so common from one business to the next?

If you've ever done a direct mail campaign, you know when you send out a thousand or so pamphlets, that the number of people actually responding is going to be very low. You don't really know why most people didn't instantly pick up their phones and call you. Sure you can make a guess, redo the pamphlet and try again, but it's still guesswork.

We have learned how to take the guesswork out of online sales and lead generation. We'll show you the top tactics and processes we use to drive and build high conversion websites.

An End to Guessing?

Unfortunately, companies treat their websites the same way as mass mailed brochures. Their effectiveness at communication and delivering leads is terrible. Companies publish brand new websites and watch to see how many people visit, how many people buy and how many just bounce away. But because every visitor is unique, marketing managers can only guess why these behaviors occur.

After a year or two of this poor performance, an executive starts to think the site looks ugly and wonders who approved it in the first place. So companies start the process of rebuilding again, hoping for the best. Leaders need to understand what this guesswork is costing them and **change their web strategy to one that consistently drives growth rates** in sales and lead generation.

Problems with Rebuilding

Most companies rebuild their website every two years. The resources required to go through that process can be both financially and emotionally straining for any company and marketing team. Because websites are at the center of almost every marketing campaign and customer interaction, getting it right is critical. Rebuilding a website is tough work.

Too Much Gut Instinct

Most decisions about web design (how it looks and interacts) are more emotional than based on fact. Designs are largely driven by what people "think" it should look like, not necessarily what works best for the customer. These opinions can come from designers, the marketing team and executives. If bad decisions are made, they may be difficult to undo later on without modifying big pieces of the entire site. Additionally, because so many opinions are usually present when making a decision, reaching a consensus without someone feeling like their opinions were discounted is difficult.

What you end up with is a website that is "OK". Odds are it will be prettier and easier to use than the previous version, but there is no guarantee of success or significant impact on the business without actually rolling it out.

CHAPTER 2:

NEVER REBUILD YOUR WEBSITE AGAIN

Rise of Engagement Testing

The idea of customer testing has been around a long time. We've all seen the TV commercials pitting Pepsi against Coca-Cola. The idea is a simple one, but getting large enough numbers to be significantly accurate is really hard and expensive. Just look at the presidential polling that goes on during election season, the inaccuracies are significant.

Around 2006, with the release of Google's Website Optimizer (now Google Content Experiments), website testing became much more available to the general web audience. Typically, website testing is performed with A/B and Multivariate testing.

A/B testing is very straightforward. You test one design element against another to see which one works better. It could be a graphic, a button, text or any element that can be put on a page. Then, as visitors interact and achieve the desired goal, eventually you will have a winner. Depending on the amount of traffic coming to the website, this could take a long time or just a couple of days.

"Testing the user experience can improve lead generation an average of 70% over typical processes."

Multivariate testing is a little more complex, but is still basically the same concept as A/B. In Multivariate, you have a number of different elements being tested on a page at the same time. Multivariate testing looks at which combination of all the testing elements will have the greatest impact on the desired goal.

These tests significantly help companies accurately qualify appropriate changes to a website without just guessing at what works best. But both of these tests can take awhile to be statistically accurate, depending on traffic volume. Also, many new testers think they are smarter than their visitors and declare winners too early, thus defeating the purpose of running the tests in the first place and possibly causing worse results by stopping tests too early.

Understanding Customer Behavior

At the same time these testing tools became available, a number of other great tools started to arise, such as click-based heatmaps, onsite visitor surveys, live chat and form analytics. Using them all together to improve lead generation is classified as conversion rate optimization (CRO). Conversion rate optimization is a practice focused on changing or adding site elements to increase the number of site conversions and the quality of those conversions.

With these tools, combined with web analytics, no marketing team should ever be at a loss to understand customer behavior and what influences their online behaviors. In this age of the socially empowered user, corporate newsjacking and rampant changes in technology where even the smallest voices can have an impact on your brand, having a static website and adding just new content is no longer enough.

Our websites and campaigns need to be able to react in real-time to our customers. Shouldn't our websites know how to respond to visitors that come from a campaign being run on Facebook/Twitter and display the best conversion points aligned to that visitor? Without a website that can adapt to our customer's behaviors, that cannot be achieved.

“ *In this age of the socially empowered user and newsjacking, having a static website is no longer enough.* **”**

CHAPTER 3:
WHAT IS ADAPTIVE WEB DESIGN?

"Websites are at the core of almost all marketing activity and must be able to constantly adapt to changing conditions."

The world is constantly changing online and off. A person's ability to be successful in any area of life is inherent in our ability to adapt to changes in the environment. The same is true for businesses. Many industries that didn't embrace the web soon enough saw a major loss in their market share.

Bookstores, newspapers and the old school mobile industry are all examples of industries that are struggling to stay alive because they were too slow to adapt to their new environments. Once these executive teams realized what was happening, their business models and technology were so entrenched, failure was inevitable. Without the ability to quickly adapt, business opportunities are lost.

Websites have been the core of almost all marketing activity and must be able to constantly adapt to changing conditions. It is not merely another project for the IT teams to fit into the schedule, but a real-time business engine.

With the changing online landscape being driven by social and mobile interactions, understanding the online channel, where people conduct their daily lives, is critical to impacting the total customer buying journey.

Defining Adaptive Web Design

Adaptive web design is the practice of constantly improving the online experience through an understanding of visitor engagement, to create increasing value for the business.

Moving from a rigid website to an adaptive one requires a change in how we approach publishing, marketing and web development. Rather than a series of creative projects and campaigns, adaptive web design is focused on constant change, based on measurable improvements and not guesswork. Adaptive web design moves marketing and web teams from a scheduled rollout strategy to a real-time validation of ideas.

> **"***Adaptive web design means **knowing what really works** and not just trusting the **opinion** of experts.***"**

The New Dynamic Duo of Business

For the Web Team, it means testing the impact of every change, not just design. No longer are Web Teams merely a service organization, but a strategic unit that can have a significant positive impact on the health of the organization.

For the Marketing Team, it means many ideas can move from being part of the next rollout, to something that can be implemented in real-time. It means being able to react to marketing opportunities the day they happen, not several days later. It means knowing what works and not simply guessing or having to just trust the opinions of an expert.

CHAPTER 4:

WHERE DO YOU START WITH ADAPTIVE WEB DESIGN?

Step 1:
Understanding Your Customers

At the heart of adaptive design is a focus on gaining an understanding of your target visitors and keeping that information fresh. Your website is the perfect place for gaining a lot of those insights discreetly and directly. Additionally, we all know it's far easier and less expensive to retain customers than to get new ones. Therefore, gaining an understanding of our customers helps us gain a better understanding of all our possible customers.

For B2B, customers don't want to change to another provider because it's a headache for them to do so. Giving your customers a voice to send their thoughts on your product or service will enable them to feel like their opinion matters, especially if the communication is two way. Of course you can't respond to everyone, but it's the possibility that is important. It enables you to begin asking customers more important questions about anything that helps, including questions about the website and why an action was taken or not taken while they are still on the site. This tactic can reveal a number of possible surprises about your customer base, especially for those companies that have limited personal face time with their customer base.

Step 2:
Start Measuring Everything

While you are gaining an understanding of your visitor's needs and giving your customers a voice, there is a wealth of information available to you through indirect analytics. Indirect ways of determining visitor behaviors can be gleaned from web analytics, heatmap analysis, form analysis, testing and click analysis. In other words, we have a whole bunch of tools that can really generate a great data and really dig into what drives visitor behavior. There are some core things you have to look at in order to understand what needs changing and what you are missing.

Campaigns. For campaigns, take a good look at the conversion rates, bounce rate and exit rates of your landing pages. If these numbers are high, your ad campaign message is either conflicting with the landing page message, or your site offers your visitors little value.

Landing Pages. Your campaign landing pages should be one of the greatest conversion points on the site and therefore should always be monitored and changed to optimize their performance. The standard items you should look to constantly test on any landing page include the primary message, form fields, page layout, relevance to the campaign message, length of text and conversion button.

Just Keep Measuring

Forms. If you are in a B2B space or ecommerce, form analysis is critical to success. Let's face it, people don't like filling out forms. Everyone knows that they can spam a form to get whatever asset it is they want. The primary reason any of us give correct information is if we are truly interested in possibly doing business with the company down the road, or there is some incentive beyond getting a sales call.

Find out at what point people stop filling out forms and ask yourself if it is a critical piece of information to collect. In some rare cases, it may be beneficial to actually collect *more* information to help move only the most interested visitors into the sales funnel and nurturing streams.
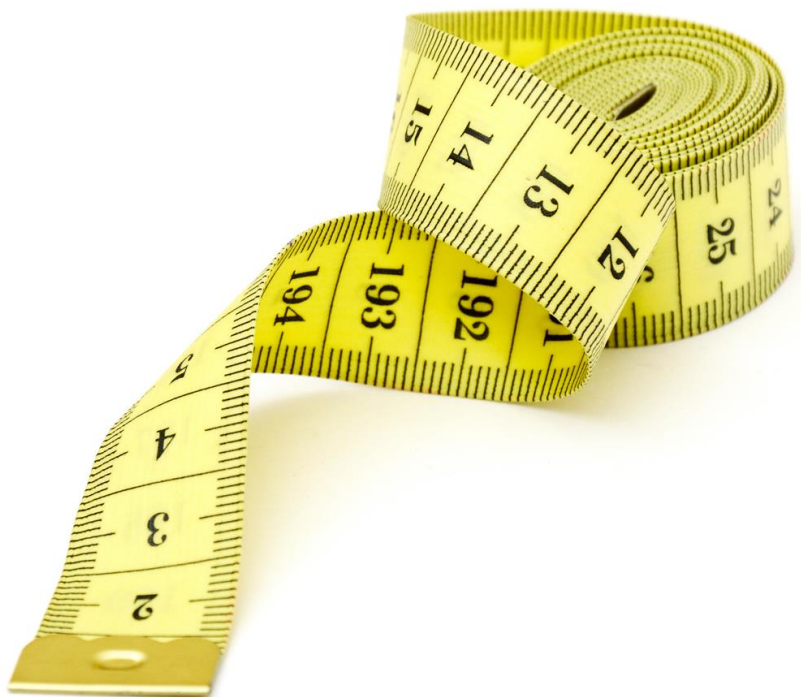
Step 3:
Funnel Toward the Goal

Take a hard look at the content you do have. Is it mostly fluffy marketing material or is it educational (provide value) in nature? Either way, it should point the way to your conversion forms or desired action. There are a couple of things to look at to determine if your content is guiding people through the sales funnel.

First, take a look at your existing content. **Are people taking the time to read the material or are they quickly leaving the page or exiting the website?** If they aren't taking the action you hoped for such as clicking on a link to read more content, adding an item to their cart or filling out a form, then something is wrong with the page. It could be the content itself or the desired action isn't obvious or compelling enough. Think about possibly changing the main title, conversion button and improving the readability of the page. It's also possible that however someone got to the page that it wasn't what they were expecting. Take a look at the referral sources before someone got to the page to determine if people are being given the wrong impression.

Second, think about what content is either missing or needs to be changed that gets people a step closer to converting. By focusing on your content and making regular changes and additions, measure whether that addition moves visitors closer to converting and its impact on attracting visitors.

By optimizing their experience and answering people's needs with just enough information, visitors are much more likely to convert. Too much content, especially rich content can overwhelm and distract a visitor. You have to find the right balance and the only way to do that is by regularly testing different scenarios.

"*By optimizing their experience and answering people's needs with just enough information, visitors are much more likely to convert.*"

Step 4:
Changes to the Web Team

Adaptive web design will have an impact on the Web Team. The web team needs to become a strategic part of the marketing team to really succeed. Their goal should be to **enable marketing** to add and test changes (text, design, graphics) at any time without heavy-handed oversight or rollout plans.

The Web Team should have responsibility for the content management system, analytics systems, lead flow, data enhancement prior to the CRM, UI/UX design, content distribution, databases feeding the website, personalization engines and testing platforms. These systems need to move out of IT and be the responsibility of the Web Team.

Rather than being constantly tasked with projects, allow the web team to continually analyze the systems in place and upgrade as desired to newer and more agile platforms. This will allow the web team to respond to requests over time much faster than they are typically able to do when technology limits their creative ability.

Ending the Project Assembly Line

Most web development teams work on multiple projects at the same time while posting content and keeping web servers running smoothly. Because of the wide range of requests that regularly come in, most web teams are accustomed to working on big projects while maintaining the website and performing daily update tasks. The problem with this is that many web teams, especially in larger organizations, have become more service oriented and less strategic.

Web teams are the closest organization to what is going on online and can have an enormous impact on the bottom line. In order to keep up with technology changes and the ability to adapt to the needs of the organization, web teams need to be free to change and upgrade on a continual basis. Only upgrading technology when there is a need limits the ability of the website to meet the needs when marketing has a new great idea but needs to purchase something new to meet the demand.

Step 5:
Start a Testing Team

A key component to adopting agile web design is to create a web testing team. This isn't a quality assurance team but the team responsible for constantly reviewing the performance of both the website and it's content. This team ensures that tests are being accurately run and that the results are quickly implemented. The marketing team doesn't care about every aspect of the website, but visitors don't just go to landing pages and forms. The testing team is responsible for **ensuring the website is constantly improving** so that visitors have the optimum experience and greatest chance at converting.

This should be at least a 1 or 2 person team for most websites and have access to all the tools necessary to impact the success of the website. Additionally, this team should have enough creative freedom to test ideas and challenge historical, outdated creative ideas within the company.

Step 6:
Assume You Know Nothing

One of the things that may be difficult for both the marketing team and the web team in adaptive design is that you have to abandon what you think you know. Of course we all "know" what the best practices typically are when it comes to web design. They are called best practices for a reason. But **best practices are generalizations**. They don't work for every business which is why it is important to be cautious about the expert opinions and start adapting our websites to meet the customer needs.

Whether selling widgets, providing services or just educating an audience, all websites should guide visitors to take some type of action. Without listening to our customers and understanding their needs, we don't have a starting point. When we do make changes, visitors "vote" with their interaction, with their data and ultimately, with their pocketbooks.

CONCLUSION AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Start with Low Hanging Fruit

Changing to an adaptive design makes sense on paper, but actually committing to it takes time and a change in business process. It means how executives think about the web must change, and that isn't the easiest thing to do. Marketing teams will fully embrace this change because it gives them greater flexibility and the ability to change in almost real-time. Web teams also will like the change because it enables them to become a more important part of the business and use up to date technologies and techniques.

In order to prove to a reluctant executive team to understand the impact this can have on the business, **start by regularly optimizing conversion forms**. Once you start seeing improvements in the number of conversions, it becomes much easier to take a plan to the executive team to invest in this change for real improvement in the website and online campaigns.

A key point to remember in Adaptive Web Design is to **never stop testing**. Whether it is the technology, graphics, content, landing pages, user interface or our own assumptions, testing everything is critical to online success.

Take Your First Steps

Find out how you can start taking those first steps toward Adaptive Web Design that can impact your lead generation and conversion rates. Get an evaluation of your current website to determine if there are areas that you can start testing now.

Finding Us

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