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Creating your site optimization roadmap

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Executive Overview

A new paradigm is being embraced by online marketers in an effort to increase revenue without paying additional marketing costs.

Primarily known in industry circles as “conversion optimization”, this tactic identifies, defines, and ultimately fixes aspects of the online experience that reduce sales velocity for an online business.

Both an art and a science, conducting conversion optimization is a relatively new discipline. By leveraging website analytic data, heuristic assessments, and competitive intelligence, an eCommerce business can create a roadmap for conversion rate improvement.

This brief discusses two initial steps for executing conversion optimization and provides details into how to conduct this process so your business can grow.

Defining your improvement

Beat the control. It is the fundamental rule that defines marketing and should be the premise and main focus of any metric driven website. Long embraced by marketers within the print sector, mostly catalogers, this tactic is a time-tested way to increase profitability within direct response channels.

The control is the existing metric that you are looking to improve. It can be a variety of datapoints, but for online retailers who specifically want to drive sales, conversion rate is the obvious metric we are looking to optimize.

Within an eCommerce context, conversion rate is the percentage for which a website converts visitors into buyers. Similar to print counterparts, online businesses must test messaging, calls to action, imagery, and pricing within page presentations.

A catalog's cover is so crucial to the overall success of a catalog. Frequently, these products can equal 20% or more of a total campaign. The homepage is no different for an eCommerce retailer. To engage repeat visitors to a higher degree, make frequent changes into the spotlight products on the homepage and add new promotions across seasonal categories. By testing these variables, a business will isolate revenue driving improvements, and improve the conversion metric.

Isolating changes before starting your efforts is crucial to success. Any change to your site needs to be a catalyst from data or user feedback.

A website analyst should conduct an initial review and this person must be experienced in web analytics consulting. The analytics will reveal what pages are doing well and how users are interacting. The data will detail which pages are receiving the highest traffic, how those pages are currently performing, who comes to the site and how did they interact?

Your company needs to segment data by incoming channel (search, direct, etc.) as well as conduct path analysis within primary transactional processes provided to users. Doing so will assist your organization in identifying “leaks” and will help establish which pages will be priorities to improve.

Become more aware of your surroundings

An understanding of the latest approaches to online marketing and merchandising is also essential to defining your future improvements. Deep competitive research should be completed to assess the online competitive landscape and site experience you're your competitors offer.

Are there major differences in pricing? Does the navigation and taxonomy compare in a similar fashion? How does the site search tool perform when benchmarked? What types of promotions are being offered? By understanding the alternative site taxonomies of your competition, you can learn great information on how your customers buy your product. Your company can be exposed to new attributes that may have not been identified and how your competition is integrating content within steps of the purchase process.

Turn up the “heat”

In parallel to understanding the competition, it is also important to get good data into how users interact within your user interface. Referred to as heatmaps, these visual technology tools allow analysts to see click patterns for unique marketing channels.

In the past, these types of tools were thousands of dollars and only available to large agencies and corporations. Now however, new and low cost offerings such as CrazyEgg allow these technologies to be leveraged at a fraction. Businesses have no reason to not understand user actions and create pages based on visitor data. These applications allow for heatmap export as well and are a perfect complement to an existing analytic package and testing system..

In conclusion, by conducting data reviews from your analytic system, executing competitive analysis relating to technology, pricing, and assortment, as well as implementing heatmap tools to measure data relating to click distribution, your business is empowered to isolate observations and create strategies to optimize the business. By following this model, your business will be more proactive towards your online market opportunities. Isolating and fixing the found issues will likely result in higher conversions and incremental eCommerce profits.