



semantic



Driving results

Test, don't guess

A top-level introduction to
conversion rate optimisation.

Semantic Website Wins #11

Neil Lewin – April 2020

Welcome

Semantic Website Wins is a new series of mini guides to help marketers optimise their website, learn something new, and make the most of these strange times.

Many of us are working from home or furloughed, so day-to-day work has reduced or stopped. We hope that you can use our guides to find website wins to use now, or in the future and also build your skills so that you're ready to bounce back stronger.

We'll be writing guides with advice, tips and ideas to help you optimise your website in the coming weeks. Of course, we're always happy to help with any questions and provide further support if you get stuck.

Just drop me a line I'll be back in touch:
neil@semantic.co.uk or 02380 111 545.

In the meantime, stay safe, and stay positive.

Neil

P.S. Need some extra support?

We're offering free video-call consultancy sessions for leisure & tourism, sports, theatres and professional bodies impacted by Coronavirus.

We can cover SEO, conversion rate optimisation, technical or critical analysis of your site.

Just give us a call for more details on 02380 111 545.

Test, don't guess

The previous guide made sure your sales funnels are working, now it's time to start looking at how we might go about optimising your user journey(s). This is called Conversion Rate Optimisation (CRO).

Data drives decisions at Semantic, and it's our mission to show you that it can transform your site too. This guide summarises our approach, and how you can get started.

You don't have to be a multi-billion dollar company to reap the rewards of a well thought-out CRO plan.

In this guide:

- What's CRO?
- Data gathering
- Split testing your ideas
- Analysing the results

A word of warning – it's very easy to make incorrect assumptions or bias tests one way or another, so it's always worth talking to an expert. Our goal with this guide is to shift your mindset to take CRO into account, and open your eyes to what's possible now online.

We're happy to help set up tests on any websites, whether we've built them or not. They can be fast to implement so just give us a call and we'll talk you through it..

If you're looking for further reading on CRO then check out Conversion Rate Experts, and their book [Making Websites Win](#) – a must-read for anyone involved in marketing online.

What's CRO?

Everyone has heard of SEO, and how it helps drive traffic to a site, but many companies then leave users to just get on with it.

CRO is the process of learning about what your users want, identifying their frustrations and then applying improvements to a site in a systemised measurable way.

How often are you told from the big boss that a certain update has to happen, or they want something a certain colour... CRO is a great way to counter this. Instead of relying on gut feel and luck, we can implement tests variants and compare how each version performs.



CRO...

- ... drives continual improvement, with marginal gains and testing
- ... maximises the ROI from a new or existing site
- ... removes the guesswork to give you a data-driven web strategy
- ... gives you insights to inform future marketing
- ... lets you be bold by testing new ideas and learning if they work

The most successful companies like Apple, Amazon and Disney are constantly gathering data and using this to refine their user journeys.

Remember that CRO approaches can apply to all aspects of your online journey (PPC ads, headlines, banners, taglines etc)... if you can make modest improvements to each part of a 10-step journey then the cumulative effect is much larger.

Data gathering

One of the most important parts of CRO is gathering high quality data. If you don't have the data, then it's impossible to accurately diagnose the problem.

There are two types of data that we can collect online –

- **Qualitative data**

User opinions, comments, or heatmaps all fit this category. It's essentially non-numeric data that can be used to glean insights. A good example might be an exit survey after an online purchase.

- **Quantitative data**

These are the numbers. It's the data collected in your Analytics and other tools that lets you measure specific metrics or spot trends on your site. Examples would be number of purchases, conversion rate, average order value, sales etc.

If you've not collected any qualitative data for a while, or don't have systems set up to do this regularly then buyer surveys are a good place to start. Asking 'what the one thing that nearly put you off purchasing' will often yield some nice nuggets that you may not have thought about.

- **Check your qualitative data gathering is up and running**

Think about good times to add user surveys, run heatmaps on key pages, and consider setting up user testing videos.

- **Note down findings**

We normally use a spreadsheet so that issues can be prioritised.

- **Cross-check with Analytics**

If you can, check the qualitative data to verify your assumptions. You may find this reveals gaps in your tracking to address first.

Split testing your ideas

A fundamental part of CRO is to always try to split test your ideas, also known as A/B testing. As we say though, you should *test, don't guess*.

Often assumptions will be made about updates being a 'no brainer'. This is dangerous – if updates are made without split testing, then we can't know for sure what made the impact. Of course, if one of the issues is 'the booking page is broken in Safari on iPads' that's a no brainer, but other updates tend to be more subjective.

What's a split test anyway?

It's a way to pit one or more page versions against each other in a test.

- Tests can be run on all traffic (i.e. 50/50 distribution) or on a smaller proportion, say you might only test on 10% of traffic.
- Splitting the traffic means that other market influences don't impact the results (i.e. if you tried one page one week, and another the second, then all kinds of other things would impact it (weather, offers, competitor conditions etc.)
- The versions of the page are shown 'evenly' to both sets of users
- You can test lots of versions of a page in multi-variant testing
- Typically there is an Original page and Variant pages (with various 'treatments' that are being tested)
- Tests can be set up to cover individual page element changes, design changes across a whole site or more.

This is somewhat simplified, but hopefully explains the approach clearly. There are all kinds of statistical models used behind-the-scenes to maximise the chances of getting a result.

A few split test do's and don'ts

- Don't run multiple split tests within the same user journey. It'll confuse the results as the combination that generated the 'win' will be unclear. Only run one split test on each journey at once.
- Avoid running a test across wildly different trading periods (e.g. spanning from half term to the week after)
- Do be careful on the implementation
Sometimes split testing code can mean the Variant page will load slower, so skewing the test results.
- Do remember there's no such thing as a failed test
If it's implemented properly, then you'll always learn something, even if you just learn that you did things right on the original page!

How to start planning for a split test?

This is all about starting with the end in mind. What insights are we looking to gather, and therefore what would we need to measure?

Split tests can be thought of as experiments. For an experiment to work, there needs to be a solid hypothesis, i.e. what we think is going to happen, and why (which should be backed by data).

Make sure you create a thorough hypothesis with this template:

Because we observed A _____ (quantitative data)
and had feedback B _____, (qualitative data)
we believe that doing C _____ (page treatment)
for people D _____ (user targeting)
will increase outcome E _____. (goal)

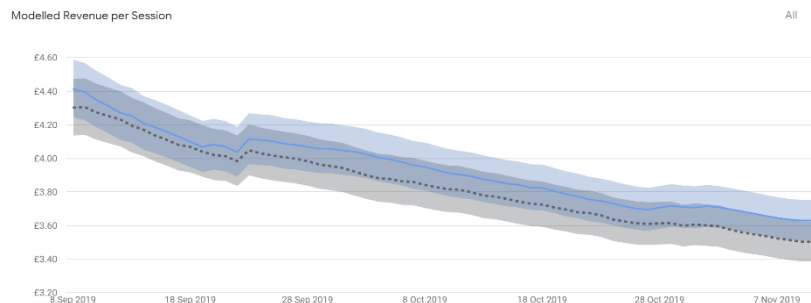
We will know this when we observe data F _____ (analytics)
and get feedback G _____. (qualitative data check)

Analysing the results

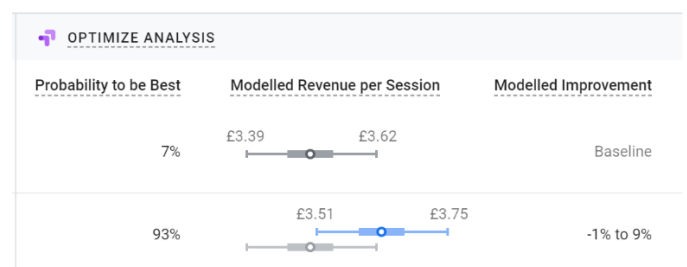
Of course, if you've written an awesome hypothesis, then validating the results to check top-line progress is fairly easy.

Here are a few pointers to think about:

- Check the results on mobiles/desktops
Sometimes what works on one will not work for the other.
- Segment the data
If you can, check how the results differ in your key user segments.
- Don't end a test early
You need to aim for a decent level of statistical significance (generally 90-95%+), otherwise you may make wrong assumptions Google Optimize recommends a minimum of 2 weeks. Equally if it runs too long, then you'll probably cross over different trading periods and make the outcomes harder to interpret.
- Watch for clear winners, v.s. lots of ups and downs
Interpreting the data can be more nuanced than you think.



If your variant was successful, then you'll get a summary screen like this in Google Optimize. In this example, the variant would beat the original 93 times out of 100.



Not enormous, but with further tests like this, you'd be able to drive more incremental improvements and maximise the ROI.

Need a hand?

There you have it, a whistle-stop tour of CRO fundamentals. Hopefully it's given you an insight of what's possible, and if nothing else, given you some tools to start testing your (or your boss') assumptions!

If you need a hand with anything then we're always happy to help. You'd be surprised how easy and quick it is to set up split tests, even on sites that we've not built from scratch. No code access required.

Give us a shout if you need a hand – we'd love to hear from you.

In the meantime, be sure to keep an eye on our blog and LinkedIn for more tips and updates.

- Email me on neil@semantic.co.uk
- Call 02380 111 545
- Book a time in my diary to chat at <https://calendly.com/neillewin/>



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