THE ABCS OF SPLIT TESTING TO OPTIMIZE YOUR LANDING PAGES

A/B Testing vs. Multivariate Testing

Sam Flegal

Testing. Everyone loves talking about it, yet almost nobody follows through. Why is that? My experience has brought me to two conclusions:

1. People realize that they don't actually know how to test properly. They know the buzzwords and catchphrases, but when it comes time to execute, they're lost.
2. Testing is a procrastinator's dream come true. You can dismiss testing your marketing collateral for years without ever being the wiser while your business continues to run as expected. It's the ultimate "I'll do this later" fallacy.

Unfortunately, there are two sides to the "ignorance is bliss" coin.

On one side you have peace of mind believing that what you don't know can't hurt you. You're not actively testing your marketing, yet your business is running smoothly. On the other side a nagging thought slowly eats away at you: What if business could be better? What if you could improve a landing page's conversion rate from 1% to just 2%? That means doubling your results — opt-ins and sales — on just one page. That's a huge opportunity for your business.

The good news: There's a solution to this problem that doesn't take a lot of time, energy or knowledge. It's called split testing.

Essentially, split testing takes your page traffic and automatically splits it evenly across multiple versions of one page to measure performance side-by-side. There are two primary ways to split test your landing pages: A/B testing and multivariate testing. Each has different benefits and purposes, but both give you valuable insight into the performance of your pages — all while allowing you to increase conversions in real-time by improving the quality of the final product.

A/B Testing

With A/B testing, you test just one element on one page at one time. For instance, you could test page performance based on the color of a button: red or blue.

The Benefits Of A/B Testing

If you currently don't do any testing, then A/B testing is a great way to start because the setup is simpler. It's far less confusing to test one thing at a time, and results are black and white because you only have two data sets to compare. Plus, if your page doesn't get a lot of traffic, A/B testing will allow you to get more visits to your tests faster since there are only two versions to divide between. Keep in mind, many marketers will run A/B/C/D tests which, in a sense, is the same thing as an A/B test but with more variables. It is advised to run simple A/B tests for affordable and concise results. Just know that each new variation you add decreases the speed at which you can make an educated decision about the results of the test since it will take longer to get a high quantity of visitors to each variation.

Multivariate Testing

With multivariate testing, you can test more than one element at a time, including all possible combinations of those elements. If you wanted to test two different images and two different headlines, you will end up with four different versions to account for the multiple variations of those elements.

The Benefits Of Multivariate Testing

A/B testing can limit your ability to find the right combination of page elements that work. Let's say you performed a test with a red vs. blue submit button and found that the blue button worked best. Now you want to try testing different form field labels, so you try two versions, both with the winning blue button.

What if the new form field labels + red button combo was the winning formula? You'll never know unless you use multivariate testing. Also, if your page gets a decent amount of traffic, it can be beneficial to conduct multiple tests to eliminate several page elements responsible for poor page performance all at once.
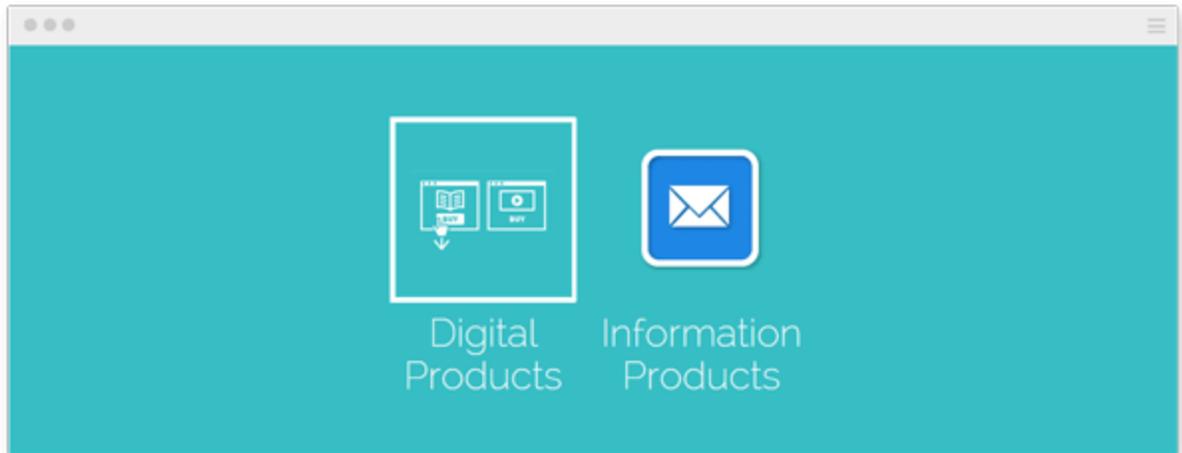
Fair Testing

Understanding the difference in testing styles is only part of the battle; you should also make sure you properly set the stage for a test that has usable results. That entails using fair testing, which means:

- Making sure every combination of elements is tested
- Running all tests at the exact same time
- Waiting until your page gets enough traffic to reach statistical confidence

By simply choosing to perform either A/B or multivariate testing, you're already taking care of item number one — a big step in the right direction, but you'll also need to make sure that you're hitting the other three criteria above.

For example: Let's say you tested a blue button on audience A and a red button on audience B. Say your results showed 50% more conversions with the blue button. How would you know if it was the button color or the audience that affected the outcome?
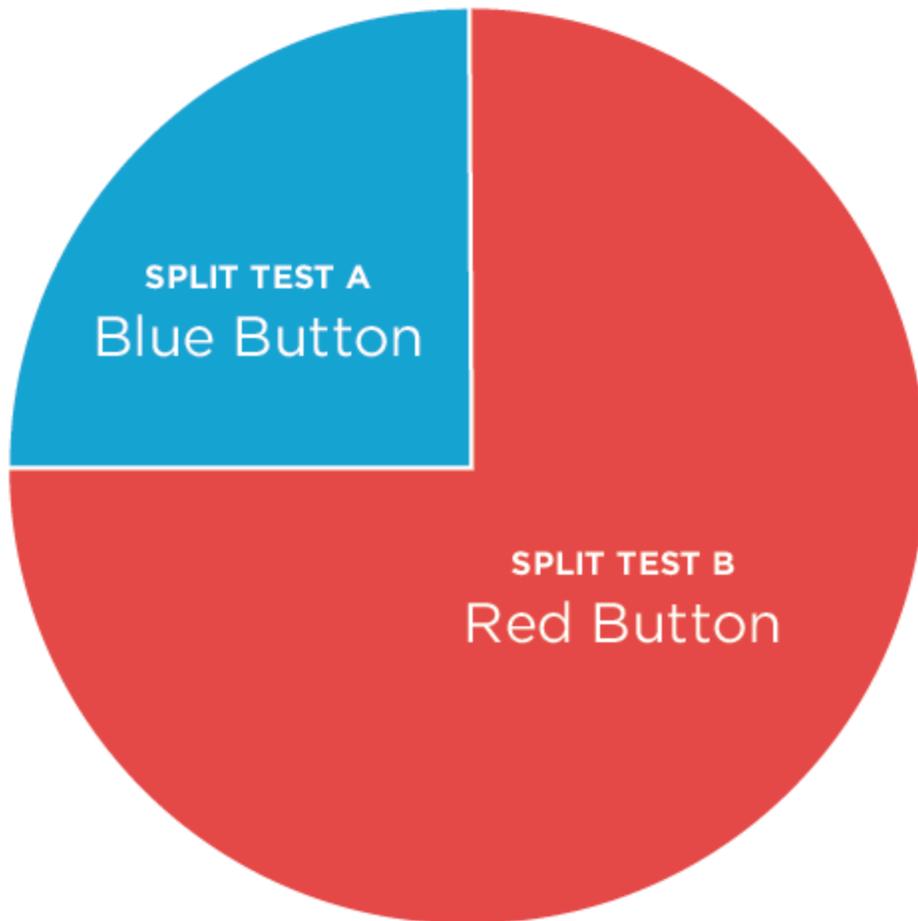
You don't.

You can run the blue vs. red button test on only one audience, but on outlier days (days where opt-ins or views are either very large or very small compared to average days), you can't come to any firm conclusions. Audience A may get the red button on Monday, and they hate Mondays so they click or opt in less. There's no way to be sure!

Furthermore, what if you only got 50 views on each version of this test? The chances that your results are a fluke are significantly higher than if you had gotten 10,000 visits to each, right? This is called statistical confidence or statistical significance meaning if we were to repeat our test, what level of confidence would we have to get the same results? If version A of our test

above got 10 visits and one conversion (10% conversion rate) and version B of our test got 11 visits and two conversions (18.18% conversion rate), how sure can we really be that the results are going to remain consistent after turning off version A?

If you're curious, the answer is that we can be 70.72% sure, which isn't really good enough.

Here are a few free calculators that can help:

- http://getdatadriven.com/ab-significance-test
- http://www.cardinalpath.com/resources/tools/ppc-ad-testing-tool/#results
- http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm

What To Test First

The natural next question is: What do you test first? The short answer: everything. You should test everything — not all at once, of course, because that wouldn't be a fair test. Since "everything" isn't a helpful answer, here are some great elements to start testing on your pages:

1. Messaging

Writing a sentence one way and one way only is a mistake. You never know what combination of words is going to make the light bulb go off in the minds of your leads.

2. Images

Different styles or types of photography and graphics might resonate differently with your target audience.

3. Colors

Big red sales buttons are proven to work, but do they work for YOUR audience? There's no way to know unless you test.

4. Layout

Positioning your page elements correctly is a big deal. If your page requires any scrolling, you'll want to be very particular about what you put at the top of your page.

5. Navigation

Consider this: Having a link to your blog on your landing page is cool and all, but is it taking attention away from your offer?