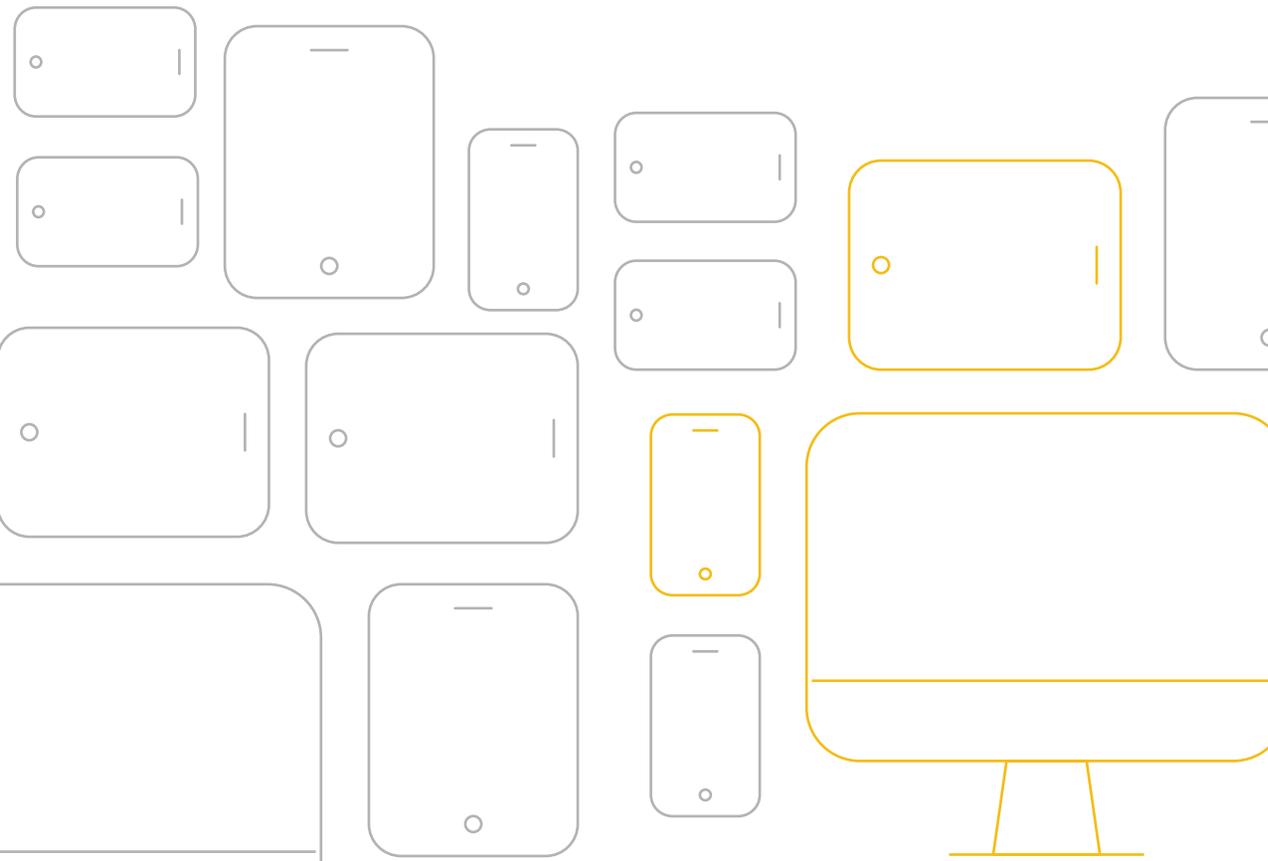




THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO CONVERSION RATE OPTIMIZATION (CRO)



What Exactly is CRO?

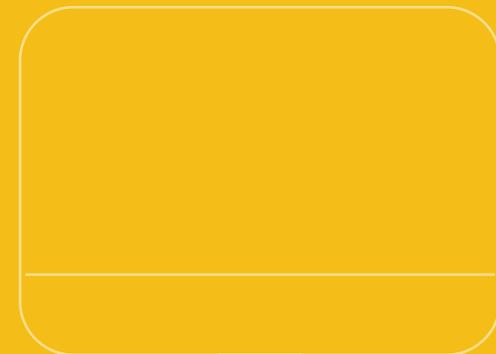
It all started with the creation of the Internet.

Since the earliest days of the Internet, the World Wide Web has expanded like no other acceleration we've seen. It's grown from humble beginnings to now a network of millions of websites. These websites have brought us joy, knowledge, and help with many aspects of modern living, and it seems like we can't live properly now without them.

These websites though, like everything else in our world, are not built solely for service value. Meeting clients' and customers' needs is a big part of why a company builds a website. However, as a core function, a business creates a website to offer something in exchange for sales and income. Websites are really self-serving. Aside from entertainment value, great design, and valuable resources for consumers, websites primarily exist to bring their owners "conversions."

Conversions refer to anything the website delivers its business based on goals that are considered during website construction. They're the actual meaning behind the site, as compared to feelings of joy and gratitude when a user comes across a website's inspiring photos or useful life hacks. Conversions are getting subscribers, building an extensive sign-up list, completing purchases, and even click-throughs that generate income.

Every site on the Internet has a conversion rate, which is essentially the rate that total website visitors take a company's desired action and convert to a subscriber, email list lead, buyer, or the like.

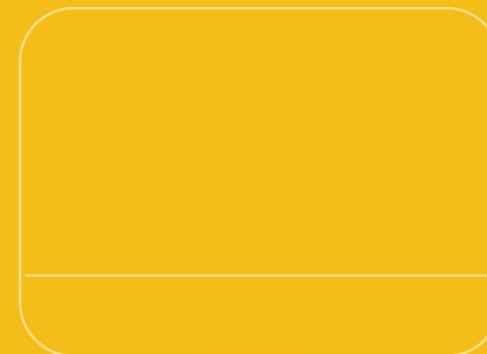


What Exactly is CRO?

CRO, or conversion rate optimization, is a process that companies can use to improve various parts of a website's design – including content, user experience, and performance – so that the conversion rate is boosted. That is the end goal for a website owner and it validates the website's first and foremost purpose.

Conversion rate optimization is a completely different take on marketing than traditional methods, both online and offline forms. Traditional marketing strategies have the goal of turning eyes toward a company's offering in lead form. However, the acquired leads may not all be interested in the company's product or service. Also, leads could turn away from the offer altogether upon seeing the product or service.

With CRO, a marketer works with a website's existing traffic to improve conversion rate – usually by tweaking the website based on analytics and data. The changes made to a site improve a company's ability to capitalize on factors that make leads stay and make those wanted conversions. CRO is more focused on converting traffic that's already there than looking for new visitors to come to a website.





Why Should I Be Using CRO?

Why optimize your website for conversions? CRO can significantly boost a company's overall conversions, which helps its website compete and stay relevant. Since each website is built with a specific purpose, CRO is an excellent way to help individual sites achieve desired success and maximize potential based on unique strengths and positioning.

Generally, as stated earlier, there are 2 ways that a company can increase conversions on its website. They can:

- 1. Increase traffic**
- 2. Increase conversion rates**

To better understand these 2 goals, it may be easier to think about them in terms of numbers.

Say you spent \$1000 on Adwords to bring 1000 visitors to your site. Imagine this spend resulted in a Cost Per Click (CPC) of \$1. If 10% of your website's visitors sign up for your offering, the total amount of signups is 100. But, what if you wanted to increase that number? Most business owners do. You might look for ways to increase your signups by a large margin, so let's examine some options that you may consider.



and



Using the 2 methods of increasing conversions that we mentioned, you might:

Scenario 1

Decide to increase inbound traffic to your website by increasing spend.

What could this look like in an actual scenario?

Total site visitors required: 1300
Rate of sign up: 10% (assumed)
Total number of signups: 130
Extra Adwords cost: \$300

This looks like forcing conversions to me.

Scenario 2

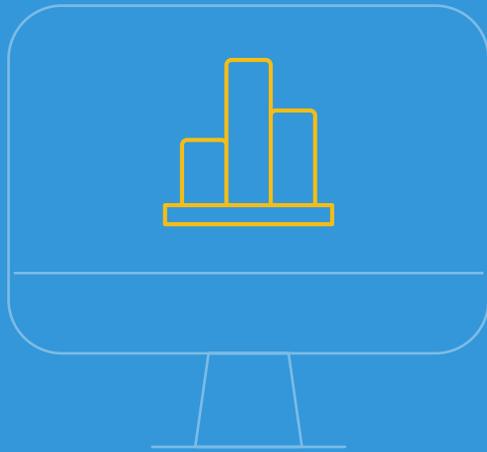
Decide to tackle website conversion rate.

What does this scenario look like with a real-life example?

Total site visitors: 1000
Rate of sign up: 12% to 13% (assumed)
Total number of signups: 120 to 130
Extra Adwords cost: \$0

This scenario increases conversion rate by an extra 2% to 3%.





Does it make sense now?

Comparing these 2 simple scenarios is all it should take to realize that CRO is a sound strategy for conversion. But, there are many other reasons to use CRO that we could talk about.

First, though, let's review the basics of optimization.

Imagine you have a brilliant strategy in place for content creation and optimization. Your website ranks high in organic search listings for your category and you get free, and high-quality, traffic from your content channels. You may think your website is doing exceptionally well.

It sure seems like it would be.

After all, given the success you can clearly see, your site is as welcoming to visitors as you are to their traffic, and everyone is happy.

But, that doesn't mean you're done.

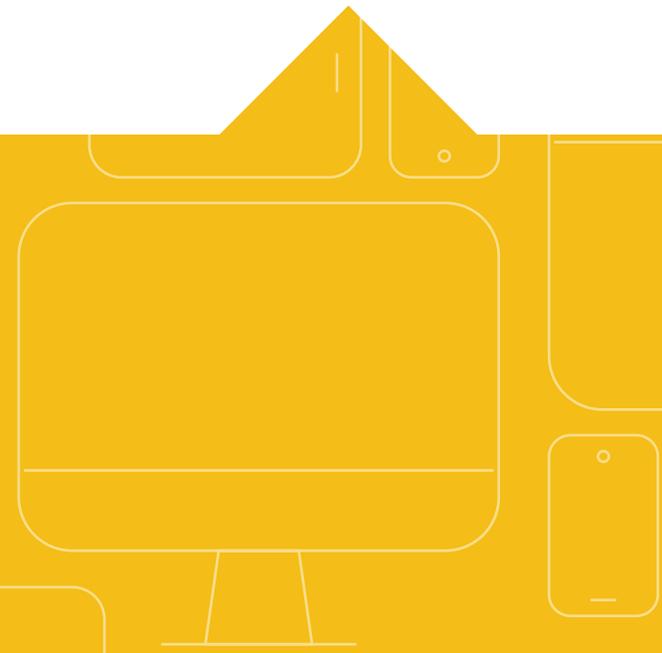
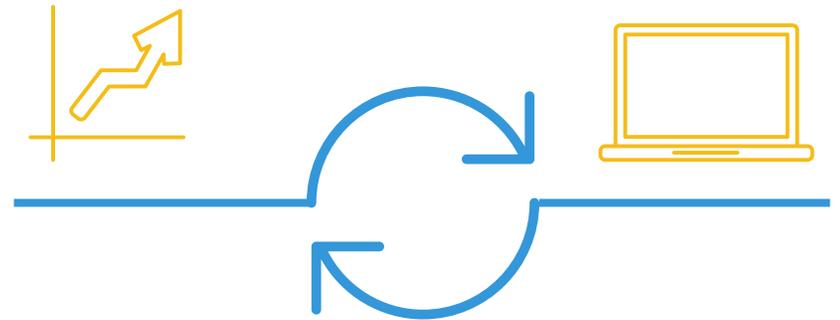
Good content strategy is an absolute basic and a must, so if you're excelling at it, good for you. But, content at its core is merely a jumping off point for conversion, and it's a tool you need to fully leverage. Since you already have potential customers on your website, reading your enjoyable content, all you need to do next is to provide them with an easy and seamless user experience that naturally points them to your conversion gateway.

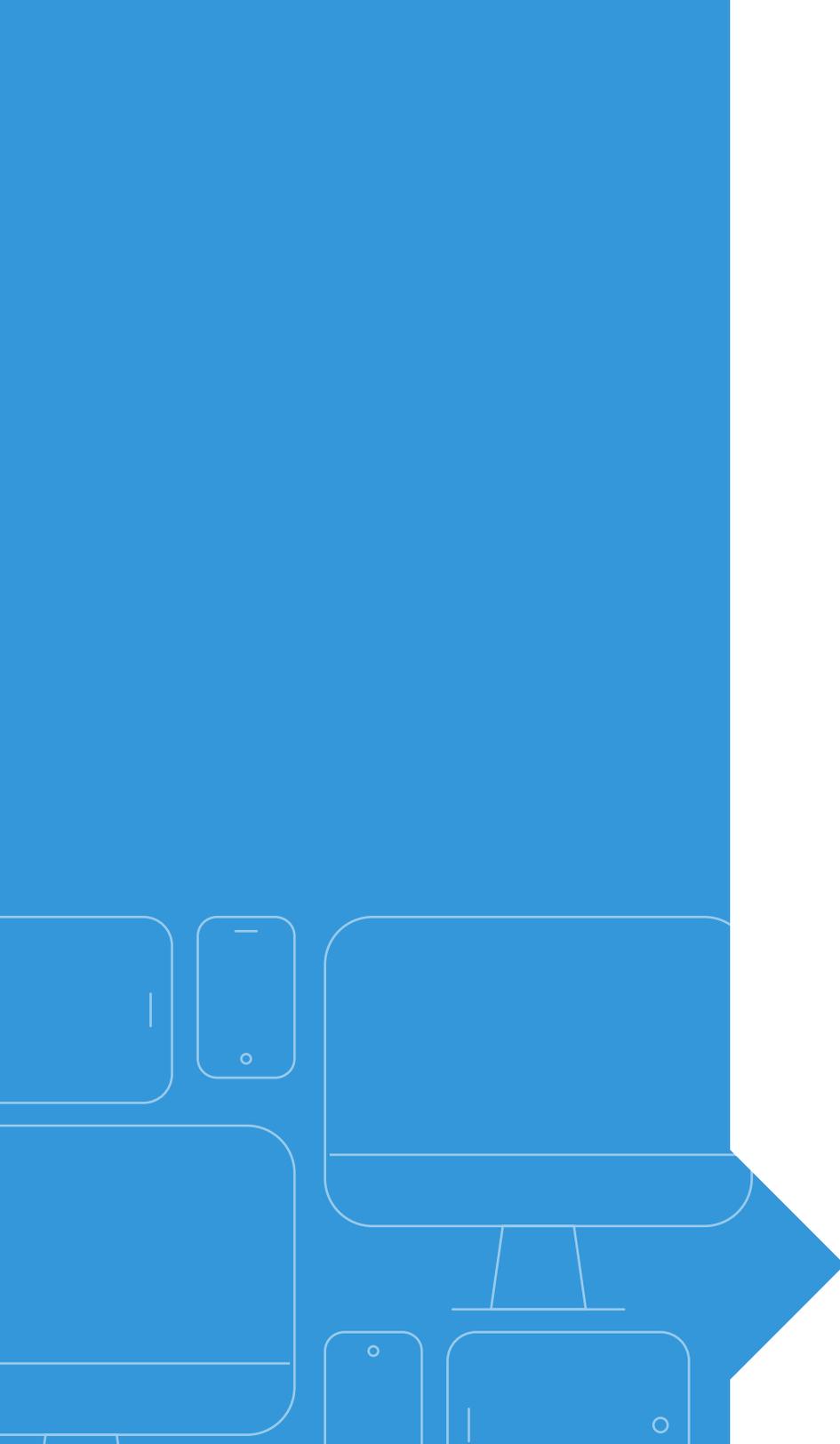
How CRO Works: The Basics

To talk about the basics, we need to discuss how to build an optimization process that's completely fool proof. And, we need to ideate on how to create one that's easy to implement.

This section will start from the beginning.

Every person or company that owns a website wants the site to have a continually improving conversion rate. Now, conversion rate optimization is a cyclical process, meaning CRO doesn't have a fixed ending. Rather, it goes on for as long as the website owner wants it to – which ideally is for as long as the business is marketing, or as long as the business is in business.





Over time, it's been said that the starting point of a journey is where you currently stand. This makes sense, logically. If we consider our current point of time with regard to our website, we would first need to analyze our present statistics and performance. Then, we know where we stand and where we should go next. We understand what needs improvement.

This evaluation stop is critical when it comes to determining the direction our CRO process needs to take. There are several tools you can use to view your site's performance data.

We'll discuss these tools more in just a bit, along with the data that they can provide for you.

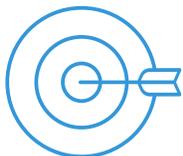
Now, however, let's look at a quick overview of the steps a website owner can take.

Step 1: Analyze Your Website's Current Performance

The first step to take toward increased conversions is obvious. A website owner must evaluate performance data. The valuable results you get from different tools need to be analyzed, so that you can extract insights from them. Insights include real data points that offer a thorough understanding of what's happening on a website. These important insights are prerequisites for tests that will be run on the website's pages. Without obtaining insights, any tests run won't give you a crystal clear indication of where and how to proceed.

You will obtain insights in varying sizes and shapes. Insights might be visitor clicks, page views, visitor scroll data, or something similar. These are examples of insights you might use, however, they are not comprehensive.

Different tools allow you to collect a wide range of insights. We'll talk more about that later.



Step 2: Construct Hypotheses to See What Can Be Better

This is a fun step!

After insights are analyzed, it's brainstorming time! Yes, this step does involve some thinking, but it's going to arm you with a great deal of useful information.

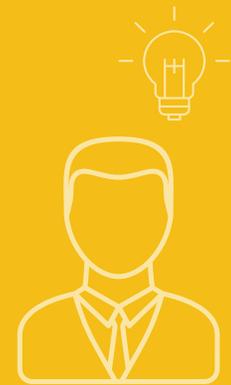
What you need to do next, is process the insights that you've gathered. You'll analyze them and come up with meaningful strategies that will improve your site's performance. You'll look at your insights in terms of what you should do about your individual website elements, including your content, design, and ease of use, among other things. The goal is to look for factors that can boost conversions.

As you work through this step, you are going to want to refer to actual insights you've gathered, not mere hunches you have about your website. You can't operate off of your opinions and kick the real data to the curb. It's imperative you put ego aside and look at what's really happening and what truthfully needs to improve.

For instance, maybe your insights indicate low visitor clicks on your sign-up button. This factual data could back up feelings you've had that your button needed an overhaul. But, it's important that you look at the real data instead of simply going with a feeling. Based on insights, you might re-design your sign-up button or make other changes to your website, like adding an extra CTA or altering copy length.

The insights are there for you to use, so embrace them and do something now to put your website (and potential conversions) on the right path!

Use your insights to construct a hypothesis and form a legitimate strategy for implementation.



Step 3: Time for Hypotheses Testing

CRO tools allow you to implement the changes you have learned need to happen for your website. You can use tools to test changes and make sure your site runs smoothly after they're put in place. Any changes you've made need to get you the results you desire, or they must be scrapped in favor of others. But, it's essential you remember that changes to your website should not inconvenience your visitors.

You can let your test or tests run for as long as you need, so that you can be sure you have interpretable results to work off of.

Step 4: Review Results

After you've taken enough time running your test or tests, you need to review the results.

Make sure your results are unbiased as you go into the review period. When we say this, we mean you should look at conclusive results and not any that are open to interpretation.

You're looking for results that clearly indicate a winning variation, one that has outperformed the others in a way that's in your face and easy to see.

The next step is to implement winning variations and then grab the conversions you have been missing.

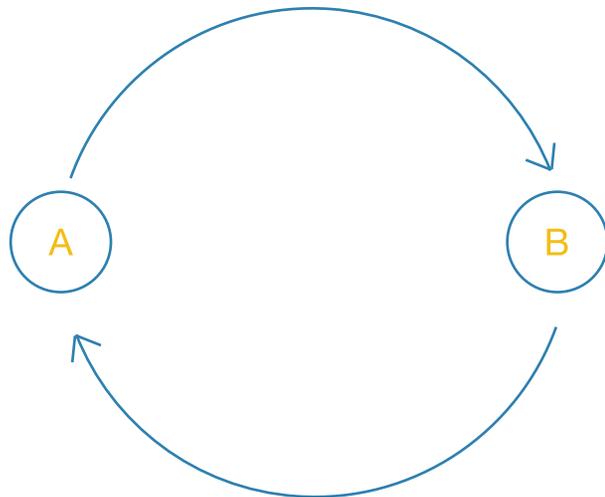
So, you might be breathing a sigh of relief that we've come to the last step. Don't relax just yet. Remember we mentioned earlier that the conversion process was cyclical? Sure you do. This means that...



Step 5: The End Brings Us Back to the Beginning

Hopefully, it's self explanatory that a cycle means you never stop. What seems like an end, just brings you back to the beginning. Maybe it's a beginning in a slightly different form, but it's still a beginning.

This CRO basics crash course ideally gives you an idea of what to expect from the whole optimization process. So now, let's dive in further.





In Deep with the CRO Process

Step 1: Analyze Your Website's Current Performance

The first step you take in any process is the most important. It determines where you'll end up, and how much work you'll have to do to actually get where you want to go.

Analyzing your website's current conversion performance is more than just comparing metrics and evaluating if they look positive. That doesn't offer much value, except perhaps, giving you a quick moment of celebration. It doesn't give you a clear plan of action either. When you analyze your website's conversion performance, you must completely understand each visitor's behavior and account for every one. If you know the types of people who visit your website, their priorities and preferences, then you've got the beginnings of an understandable road map.

There are several kinds of tools you can use to get the right data that you need in Step 1. To keep things simple, let's talk in terms of 2 groups of tools:

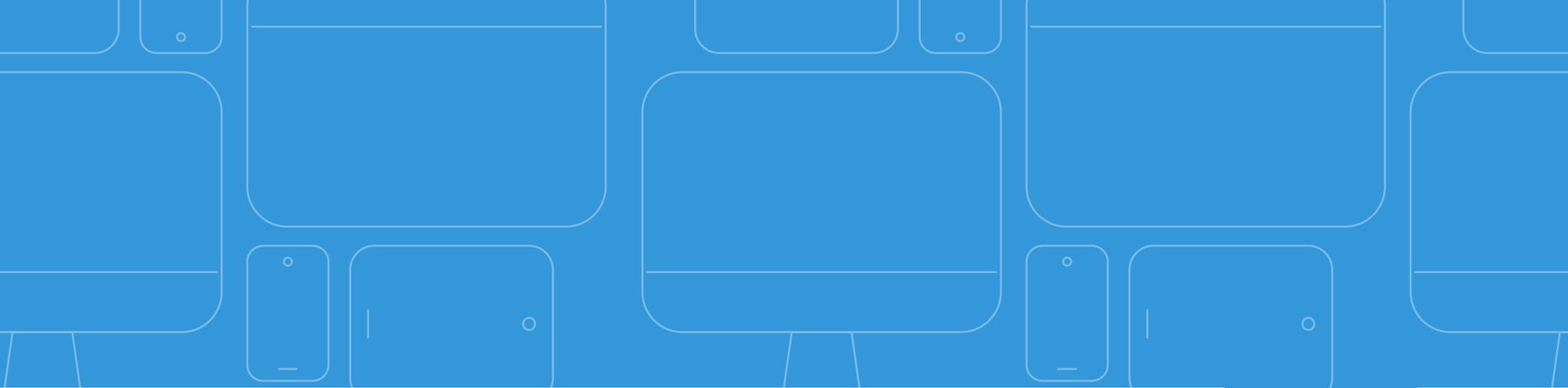
- Group 1 – Tools that let you identify weak-performing pages
- Group 2 – Tools that let you identify red flags on one or more of your pages

Group 1: Tools that Let You Identify Weak-Performing Pages

It's extremely important to identify weak-performing pages on your website. Weak pages are roadblocks to conversion, and tweaking any weak pages can have a profound effect on your conversion rate. Changing up weak-performing pages may actually have the most significant effect on your conversion rate. Sounds like you need to get identifying right away, doesn't it?

Tools for Website Analytics

Tools for website analytics give you valuable information on the general health and performance of your website.



Types of data collected: Analytics tools provide you with a complete set of data for different pages of your site. They offer metrics ranging from basic data, to extremely detailed data, on the demographics of your website's visitors. From these tools, you can also learn about visitor behavior on pages and acquisition channels.

Note: Important metrics to note when using data tools include number of sessions, average session duration, bounce rate, average time on page, and percentage of exit.

Tools for Funnel Analysis

Tools for funnel analysis are essential for identifying weak-performing pages. Each visitor who comes to your website follows a particular path – which is their conversion path – before they actually convert (if they do). These individual paths are comprised of the pages visitors land on and head toward before conversion. Funnel analysis tools let you understand how your visitors navigate through your site and its different pages. They allow you to see conversion patterns, including drop-off rates on specific pages, so that you can hone in on the weak pages and the paths that lead to and from them.

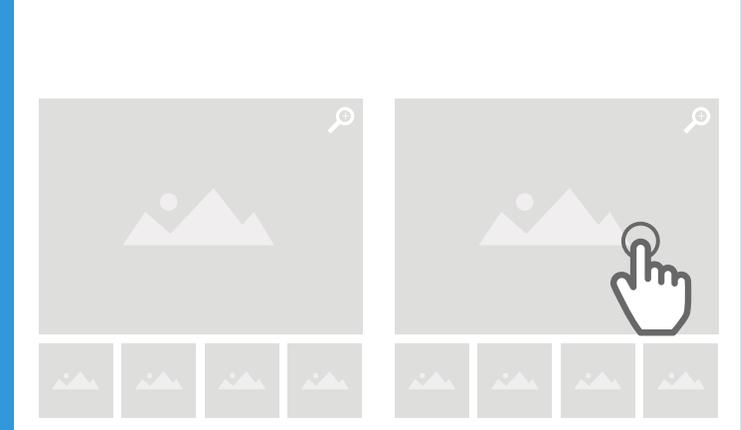
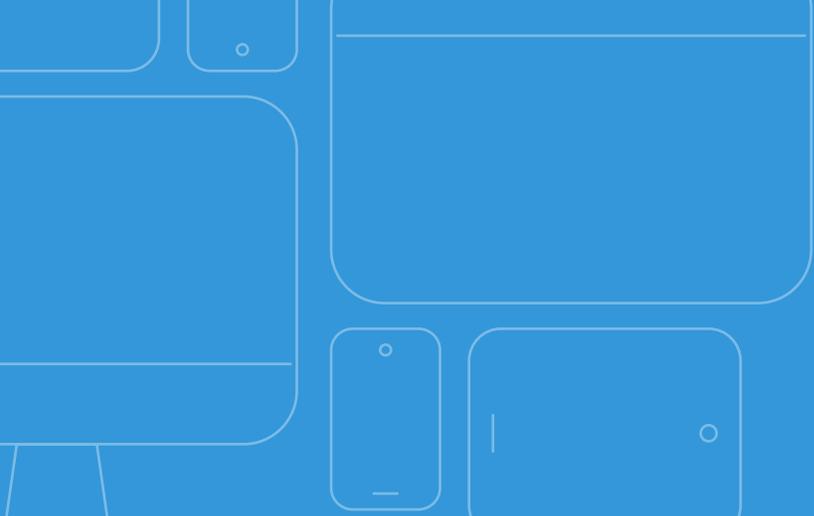
Type of data collected: The data you'll get from funnel analysis tools is primarily focused on the drop-off rate for each of your pages. Drop-off rate is the primary metric having to do with conversion performance of each page, and it indicates whether a page is weak or not.

Note: Important metrics to note when using funnel analysis tools include number of sessions, number of conversions, conversion rate, and drop-off rate.

Group 2: Tools that Let You Identify Red Flags on One or More of Your Pages

If identifying weak-performing pages is the first step in your evaluation process, the next step is identifying red flags on weak pages. Weak points on your pages are the reasons why your site visitors leave those particular pages.

When website owners don't evaluate red flags, any further tests that are run are essentially useless. The chances of tests increasing conversion rate, when red flags have never been identified, is zero.



Heatmaps

Heatmaps give you visual representations of the visitor clicks for individual pages of your website. When you represent visitor clicks with graphics, you can see more clearly how your visitors are interacting with your website. You can also gain a better understanding of where any drop-off points may be on your pages.

Type of Data Collected: Data from heatmaps usually consists of easily-digestible visual representations of clicks, shown as colored dots, for each click on a particular page. Brighter regions on pages indicate higher click densities.

Note: Important metrics to note when using heatmaps include number of clicks on every element, and percentage of clicks every element receives, as it pertains to the entire number of clicks for a page.

Recording Sessions

Recording sessions and heatmaps overlap a bit. Recording sessions are, at their most basic, videos of actions your website

visitors take. When you use recording sessions, you can see important customer behaviors including confusion points or hesitations. These insights are captured with ease for your evaluation, but the flipside to using them is that it can take a great deal of time going through all of your videos, and it's very time consuming to consolidate them into insights that are meaningful.

Type of Data Collected: Data collected from recording sessions is in the form of visual recordings. They show the actions each visitor takes, for viewing and analyzing.

Note: Important metrics to note with recording sessions include average user time spent in a session, and number of pages visited in a session. It can also be valuable to get demographic information from this tool, which comes by way of browser used, country of origin, etc.



Polls

Polls are another way of identifying red flags on your web pages, especially polls that include subjective questions. You can answer questions like, “Are my site’s visitors able to find what they came for?” and “Why are my site’s visitors leaving?” using polls. But, it’s important to take the time needed to correctly frame a poll question, or else you’ll end up with useless results. Poll questions should be easy to answer and open ended. They should also be self explanatory.

Type of data collected: Data from polls comes in the form of percentages of site visitors choosing each answer option you’ve provided, and it includes the feedback site visitors give you (which will be text).

Note: Important metrics to note include your website visitors’ reactions to the questions you ask.

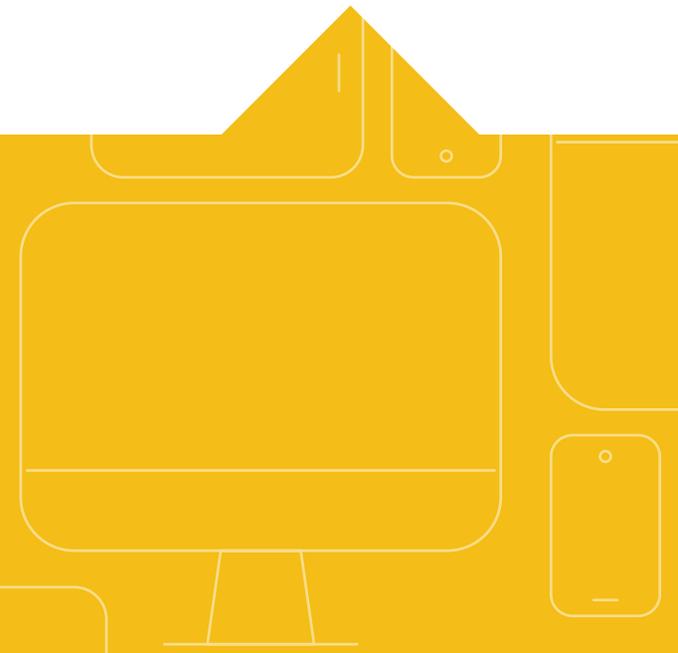
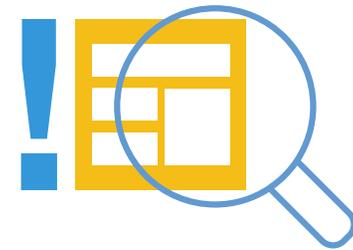
Step 2: Evaluate Data and Make Hypotheses Based on Insights

Let's evaluate some sample data that could be provided to us using each of the tools we mentioned above. Then, let's talk about how we can get useful insights from this data. The insights obtained can be used to set up various tests that will eventually let us increase conversion rates.

Group 1: Identifying Weak Pages

Tools for Web Analytics

As we've mentioned, tools for web analytics provide us with data that shows the overall performance of our web pages. Consider this example:



Insights discovered: In the example above, it's obvious that the website's homepage is the page with the highest bounce rate, so it naturally becomes the weakest page in the set of pages. Another point to be understood when examining bounce rate in terms of our example is that the website shows a rate of 67%, which is above average and should be for sure noted.

Tips: The exit rate in this example represents the percentage of website visitors that exit a particular page. It includes drop-offs (exits from the website) as well as instances where visitors moved on to other pages on the site. Given this, you should not consider exit rate a determining factor when you select weak pages. Also, some pages – especially landing pages – have high bounce rates in comparison to website averages. Consider all factors available to you before you mark pages as weak.

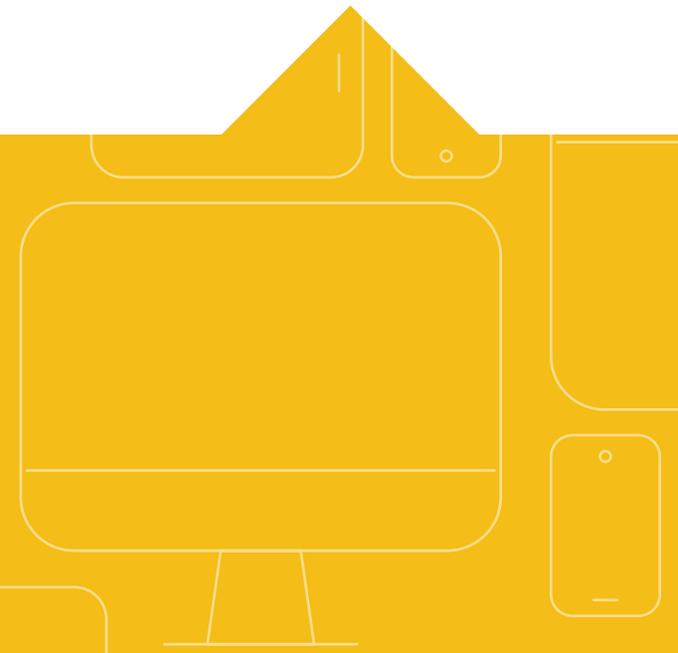
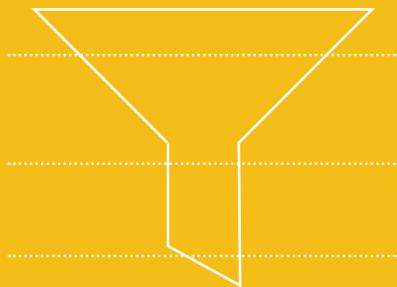
Funnel Analysis

Funnel analysis gives you your drop-off rate, which will be similar to your bounce rate provided by your tools for web analytics. Your drop-off rate focuses much more on action than your bounce rate.

“What?” you might ask. “How exactly is drop-off rate different from bounce rate?”

It's as simple as this. Bounce rate is defined as the percentage of your website visitors leaving your site after only visiting one page. In contrast, drop-off rate is defined as the percentage of your website visitors who leave a particular website page.

Drop-off rates help you predict weak pages more readily than bounce rates do. Consider this typical funnel analysis:





Insights discovered: The drop-off rate shown in this graphic tells us that more than 70% of the website's visitors drop off the site from the home page. It indicates a definitive block to conversion that needs to be overcome immediately.

Tips: Usually, you have several funnel analyses running at the same time. Because of this, you need to check every report before choosing to mark any page as weak. If a page performs well in one funnel, it may not do well in another. Keep this in mind and make sure you compare overall performance before you make major decisions.

Generally, it's simple to analyze website performance reports to identify weak pages. It becomes more challenging when you need to identify weak points on the pages you've determined are weak.

The next section will deal more with that.

70%



Group 2: Identifying Red Flags on a Page

Heatmaps

Using heatmaps, you can identify red flags on your pages. Indicators that show you where your visitors' focus lie include click density and lack on click density.



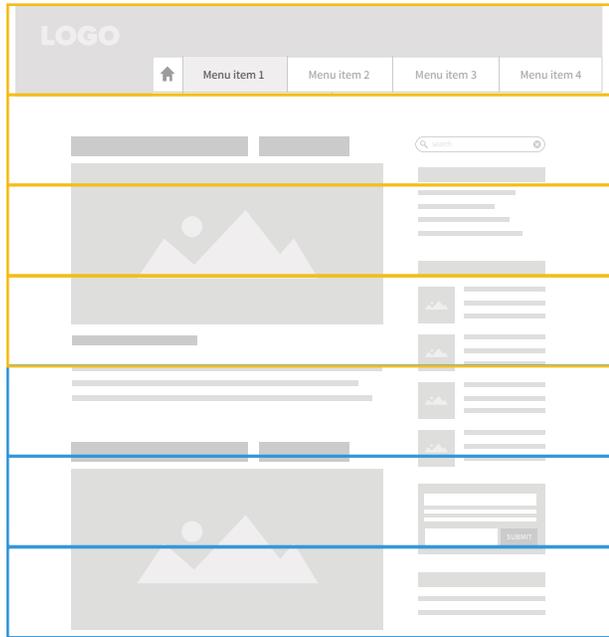
Insights discovered: The graphic above shows an example of what you'll see when analyzing a classic heatmap report. Heat density globules represent visitor clicks. Take notice of the clicks on **XXX and XXX**. These are not links, but the visitors clicking on these banners expected to be lead to pages with **XXX and XXX**. This is a classic case of banners with missing links.

Along with these insights, there are other bits of valuable information that can be learned from heatmaps. Some of them include:

- CTA Engagement – Heatmap reports make it easy to know if the clicks on important CTA buttons are increasing or not. If you have low visitor engagement from your CTA buttons, this is definitely a red flag that should be corrected right away. If you don't, it will have a huge impact on your conversion rate.
- High-Value and Low-Value Content – You may not want to hear this, but not all content is good content. Pages that have several types of content on them will typically receive more clicks on certain areas. This means that the website owner should expand on the type of content in these areas (high-value content), and of course get rid of types of content that don't receive many clicks (low-value content).
- Engagement by Device – More visitors than ever visit websites on their mobile devices, so it's crucial you have your site optimized for mobile. You can use heatmaps to see if your engagement on mobile devices is lower than engagement on desktop computers.

Scrollmaps

Scrollmaps make it easy to see where your website visitors spend time and what parts of your site they ignore. This is important for you to analyze, because it helps you understand where to place content and CTAs.



Insights discovered: The typical website fold shows the typical boundary of a viewer's screen, across a range of devices. Activity above or below the scroll is an important metric. As a rule, your most important content and CTAs should be positioned above the fold so visitors from any device can see them. In the graphic above, the steep decline from

roughly **XXX to XXX** proves that **XXX** visitors weren't impressed with the images and content. They quickly exited the page. To prevent future conversion leaks, the owner of this website needs to fix the critical errors immediately.

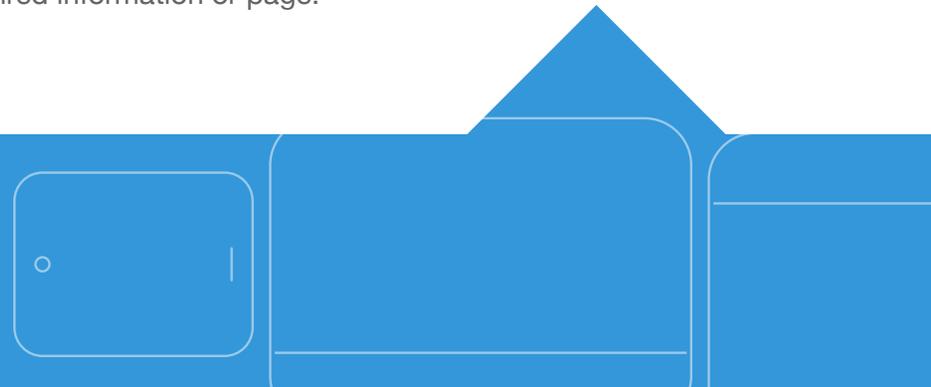
Recording Sessions

Recording sessions are important tools for marketers because they offer an understanding of visitor behavior. This is a heavy topic, too heavy for this paper, but it's one that website owners and marketers must explore thoroughly.

Insights discovered: Recordings provide valuable information on the user experience on all pages of a website. Marketers can see mouse movements, and track a visitor's flow across a page or across a range of pages. There are specific issues that can be identified easily through recording sessions, most importantly hesitation points.

Hesitation points can be observed by watching recordings. Typically, we see users filling out forms rapidly, but sometimes, for instance, we see a pause when it comes to entering a phone number. The user is deciding whether or not it seems like a good idea to relinquish this information and proceed with the form. You should correct any hesitation points if you want conversions.

Recording sessions offer insight into website confusion points. If you see repeated clicks on CTAs and links, actions that appear to be totally random, this might indicate points of confusion. Your user is likely looking for something and is not able to find it quickly, so the random clicking starts in an effort to locate the desired information or page.





Step 3: A/B Testing

What is A/B testing? It's a form of testing that allows for weighing variants on a page against each other.

To use A/B testing, you will begin by setting goals. Some goals you might set include:

- Increasing engagement (click rate)
- Increasing time spent on page
- Increasing subscribers/ sign ups/ leads (conversion)
- Reducing drop-off rate

When you set your goals, consider the points below to help you come up with parameters that will assist you in evaluating whether or not your tests are successful:

- Short term goals - It's wise to set multiple short-term goals at first, and then weave these goals into your long-term goals. As an example, a long-term goal of increasing conversion rate by 200% can start with a short-term goal of increasing conversion rate initially by 25%.
- Objective and numerical goals - It's easier to understand a "25% increase in conversion rate" than a "good" increase in conversion rate. Stay away from abstract goals that don't have concrete benchmarks.

- Realistic goals - Make sure your goals are realistic and take care that they're in line with the current performance statistics for your website. Even though you may want to get a perfect 100% conversion rate, it's not going to happen regardless of your optimization strategies – for you or for anyone.

After you've set your goals for your A/B test, you will need to come up with a hypothesis that has the potential to impact your website performance based on your goals. Come up with at least 4 hypotheses for your experiment.

Tip: Your hypothesis will differ depending on the goals you choose. Note that whatever hypothesis you select, should be based on insights acquired from your performance reports, while maintaining a constant as related to other parameters. If you test parameters beyond your insights, you might even see a decrease in your website's performance.

Here's an example

You see that your CTA button on your landing page is being ignored, which is leading to dropped conversions. Your A/B test would need to go along with a hypothesis that's something like this:

significance levels 90%

1. Change color of CTA button
2. Change position of CTA
3. Include a CTA that's more impactful (maybe a "Try Now" or "Get Started")

If you were to change the heading of the page, instead of just testing different CTA versions, your website's performance could be effected negatively.

After you're set your goals and come up with some hypotheses, your next step of building your A/B test follows immediately. There are many A/B testing tools you can use to create your experiment.

Before you build your A/B test, keep the following in mind:

- Test just one variable at a time - It's important to keep other variables constant
- Allow enough time - Don't hurry through tests or you'll get biased results. Run a test for a whole week, so that you can normalize data fluctuations that week.
- Make sure significance levels are above 90% -To have a clear winning variable, don't lower significance levels. Some marketers do this because they have a hasty desire to get results quickly, but you shouldn't because you don't want errors.

Tips: The significance level that's in place for your experiment determines reliability of your A/B test. As an example, if you have a significance level of 95%, you can be 95% certain that your winning variation came about by means other than mistake. Industry best practices dictate maintaining a significance level of 95% for A/B tests. Also, we suggest you allocate traffic to your original page and your variations. For example, if you have 2 variations of the original page, you would want to allocate 33% traffic to each of the 3 pages.

Sometimes, like in the case of a landing page, you might not want to impact your current conversions. So, you would just ensure that 70% of traffic is allocated to the original page, and then most of your conversions would not be effected.

Finally, it's time to check results and then implement your decisions. During A/B testing progression, you'll see the performance of each variation. When you get a winning variation, the A/B test is complete. The next step is to check results and put a hold on the experiment.

You will have a clear winner. Then, you simply need to adopt the winner as the variant you choose to go with.



Final Thoughts

This was a long journey, wasn't it? Our discussion is over and it really wasn't so hard to comprehend, right?

You should have a better understanding of CRO and how you can make it work for you. It's important, however, to make sure you keep a few important points in mind before you jump right into the process.

- Don't rely on opinions. Rely on data.
- Make CRO an essential part of your complete inbound marketing strategy
- You should never stop CRO if you want to improve continuously
- It's possible to get more conversions without increasing traffic
- Ensure you only test one variable at a time.

CRO will be a process you're engaged in for the life of your business. Take your first steps with confidence and enjoy the process!



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