

Mar 31 2006

## Increasing Web sales via testing, tracking

By Dana Greenlee, Technology Columnist

You've registered your domain name, created a Web site, and generated traffic. But you just aren't making the sales.

Most of us have experienced this situation at some point in our online experience. I have a Web development client in Lakewood who sells gourmet pasta and sauces online. Last year, sales were great. This year, they took a nose dive.

I told her not to despair. People still love pasta, but we need to figure out why her Web site visitors aren't buying as much. The factors are many and the challenge is determining whether it is the pricing, shipping fees, enticement on the home page, or shopping cart experience.

There is a time-tested way to figure out ways of improving your sales process -- namely, split-run testing. If you have a Web site and you're trying to sell something online, you need to know about this testing process that can increase your bottom line.

To figure out what works on your site through your visitors' experience, you create different versions of a Web page to test its effectiveness. When users enter your site, they're shown one version or another. Once you do this enough times, you can easily see which version converted visitors into buying customers.

The benefits of split-run testing are many.

You can see at a glance what's working and what isn't. By testing different versions of your text, layout, and graphics, and tracking what converts, you can make permanent changes and see an increase in your sales with the same amount of traffic. When you improve your conversion rates, the money you spend on marketing will work harder for you as more of your site's visitors make the leap from browsers into buyers.

By testing and tracking, you find out what does and doesn't work, and modify your site accordingly. If your sales copy is ineffective, all the traffic in the world will not increase your sales activity.

What kinds of things might you want to test?

Some people might start with two different versions of their home page. Then once they finish testing the copy itself, run tests on more specific elements, such as whether to include fewer or more testimonials, modifying the headline, etc.

There are many different factors that you can test, but for the most accurate measuring results, the trick is to test only one component at a time. You'll also want to allow each test to



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run to between 500 to 1,000 unique visitors before coming to any conclusions.

Here are some things you might want to test:

- Headlines
- Different design elements of your site (fonts, colors, etc.)
- Sales letter
- Navigation structure
- Bonus offers
- Price points(high or low)
- Long copy vs. short copy
- Different advertising strategies (banners, ezine ads, pay per click copy)
- Order forms

There are many different software packages that can help you set up a split run:

Split Test Generator -- <http://www.splittestgenerator.com> -- This script is free to download. Once it's installed on your server, you simply enter two Web addresses into a form and press 'submit' to start the testing process.

Scientific Internet Marketing Assistant --

<http://www.onlinemarketingtoday.com/software/split-testing> -- This allows you to run multiple tests simultaneously, broken down into individual campaigns. You can test five different test subjects against each other at once. It's hard to believe this software is free. If you need help with installation or have some questions on the script's workings, go to their forum <http://www.marketing-strategy.org/forums> . You'll find plenty of other test users willing to answer your questions or provide assistance.

Scientific Web Marketing System -- <http://www.profitinfo.com/catalog/v4/> -- A script that runs on your server and is UNIX-based, this software works by constantly displaying different versions of the same Web page at the same URL. It comes with a 60-day money-back guarantee and sells for only \$37.97.

Testing and tracking what works and what doesn't isn't that hard -- and can save you a lot of money in the end. Without testing, you have no way of knowing what's working with your marketing efforts. Converting visitors into buyers is the name of the game online.

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