A Marketers Guide to Website Optimisation

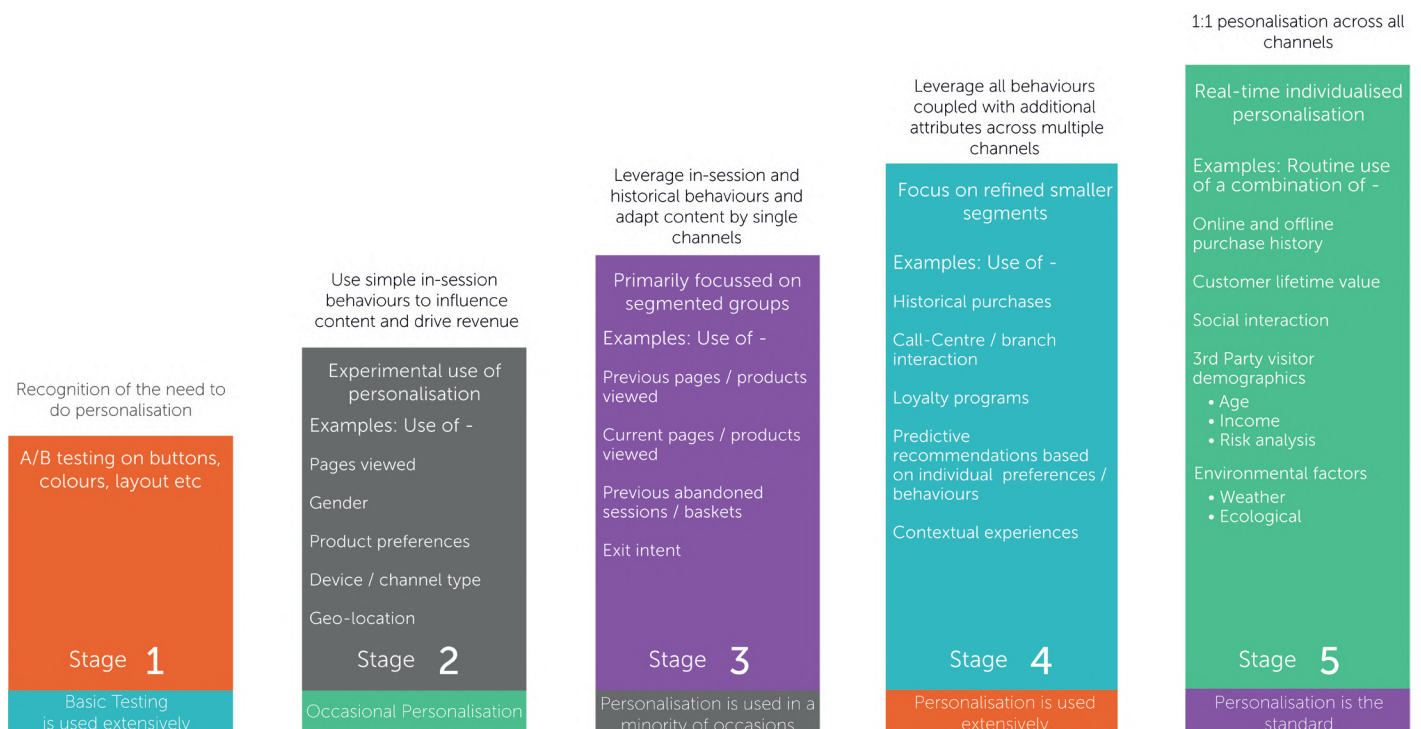Understand how to get the most from your website

Today's consumers are 'always connected, rarely engaged and often distracted', so it's not enough to just have a great looking and 'functional' website. Each interaction, across every device, must understand your visitor's individual needs and be tailored accordingly to their experience. Getting the right message to the right person at the right time has been the mantra of many. But now, context is what's key. Using your analytical and optimisation data, you can begin to understand the context of your online consumers, allowing you to connect at a more personal level to stimulate desire, build loyalty and trust in your brand and ultimately, increase conversions.

The path to optimisation maturity

The biggest challenge we hear from senior marketers is the insufficient in-house expertise they have to dedicate resources to optimisation or personalisation – and recruiting skilled talent is often not an option. Fortunately, technology advancement allows marketers of all levels of experience to start to dabble in web optimisation. However, technology alone will only go so far, understanding what to do rather than how to do it, is where many marketers struggle. Many believe that their gut feeling is the best option, but whilst this may be a starting point, thorough testing of hypotheses is the only way to maximize the potential of your site.

This model will help you understand the possibilities of web optimisation. Its 5 stages from basic button testing through to complex personalisation will guide you through the areas to enhance your visitors experience and drive conversion. If you haven't done any website optimisation then start at stage one and work slowly through each of the stages. Depending on the size of your organisation this may take you years to completely refine a deep level, cross channel personalisation strategy.

1:1 pesonalisation across all channels

Leverage all behaviours coupled with additional attributes across multiple channels

Real-time individualised personalisation

Examples: Routine use of a combination of -

Online and offline purchase history

Customer lifetime value

Social interaction

3rd Party visitor demographics
• Age
• Income
• Risk analysis

Environmental factors
• Weather
• Ecological

Leverage in-session and historical behaviours and adapt content by single channels

Focus on refined smaller segments

Examples: Use of -

Historical purchases

Call-Centre / branch interaction

Loyalty programs

Predictive recommendations based on individual preferences / behaviours

Contextual experiences

Use simple in-session behaviours to influence content and drive revenue

Primarily focussed on segmented groups

Examples: Use of -

Previous pages / products viewed

Current pages / products viewed

Previous abandoned sessions / baskets

Exit intent

Recognition of the need to do personalisation

Experimental use of personalisation

Examples: Use of -

Pages viewed

Gender

Product preferences

Device / channel type

Geo-location

A/B testing on buttons, colours, layout etc

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Basic Testing is used extensively	Occasional Personalisation	Personalisation is used in a minority of occasions	Personalisation is used extensively	Personalisation is the standard

Let's get the basics covered.

An AB or split testing solution is the foundations on which delivering an optimised experience for your visitors is built upon. Trying to do it with a free web analytics tool just won't provide the depth of information you will need to interpret what version performed the best. A self-service web based solution will deliver the fundamental testing capabilities but one that comes complete with "Marketers tools" will make your life much easier.

Terms used by optimisation consultants and agencies often sound confusing but are pretty easy to understand.

AB testing	Allows you to test two variations and see which one delivered the best results
ABn testing	Is the same as AB but offers more than 2 variations to be tested
Multivariate testing	Allows different elements (button, banners, copy etc) to be tested across different versions. Variant 1 could have just one element changed, Variant 2 could have 2 elements changed and so on. But if you have three elements that could be different across 3 variants you would end up with 27 possible outcomes. (See full factorial & fractional factorial)
Full factorial	The ability to test multiple factors and levels. A factor can be considered to be an area of change or attribute. A level can be considered a variation within a factor we wish to test. E.G. Factor 1 – Button Colour Level 1– "Red" Level 2 – "Green" Factor 2 – Button Size Level 1 – "Small" Level 2 – "Medium" Factor 3 – Hero Image Level 1 – "Sunrise Image" Level 2 - "Night time Image" Testing each potential combination individually is called a full factorial test. The above example would generate 2 x 2 x 2 different combinations and 8 experiments
Fractional factorial	Testing just the carefully chosen subset (or fraction) of the combinations required to establish performance is called a fractional factorial test. By testing just the fraction, less experiments are required. In the above example the number of experiments halves from 8 to 4. This efficiency means that meaningful results are established far more quickly
Statistical Significance	Put simply, a statistically significant result is a result that's not attributed to chance. In statistics, we are dealing with probabilities rather than certainties. With more data and observed differences we can be more confident and certain but never absolute. For this reason, statistical significance is often stated with the confidence level. e.g "We are "95% confident that experiment B is better than Experiment A"

What can you do to influence your visitor interaction?

Basket abandonment retargeting
All too often consumers use the basket as a holding place for potential purchases, but never complete the sale. There are many reasons as to why they do this; from the need to ask others, such as when booking a holiday, to wanting to check out delivery prices, to a memory aid for when they are on a different device. Unfortunately, the majority of these abandoned baskets are never completed. Traditionally email was used to stimulate a return to the basket, but often these emails were delivered outside of the moment when the potential purchase was applicable. There are many ways that you could optimise the right type of action at the appropriate time and on the relevant device to encourage a consumer to complete their purchase.

Onsite retargeting
Unlike offsite retargeting, retargeting a consumer whilst engaged on your site can deliver significant improvements to your conversion rates. Knowing when, what and how to retarget should be based on a better understanding of who the consumer is and what they have done with you both historically and within the current session. Even if a visitor has never been on your site before, you can use previously
acquired segmented experiences from other visitors to tailor-make retargeting proposals at an appropriate time.

Exit intent
By tracking a visitor's mouse movements, you can determine their normal interaction and what is likely to be exit intent. Once they click the X, then it is more challenging to re-engage with them. In defining exit intent, you can create valuable offers such as discount codes, newsletter signups or 'click & chat' engagement. There are many companies that specialise in providing exit intent but without the ability to test what works best will only deliver partial success. Remember too that the overuse of exit intent can lead visitors to abandon their session and never come back!

Urgency messaging
Stimulate desire by utilising in-line messages that show scarcity, recent purchases or the number of viewers looking at a particular product or service. By linking in external data sources, you can create an accurate and optimal experience for your visitors to encourage conversion. You need to ensure that the scarcity messaging isn't seen as scare tactics so testing the right content, positioning and visibility options are key.

Providing data for off-site retargeting
Once a visitor has left your site, it's still possible to use their on-site experience to stimulate further interaction. By extracting relevant behavioral information, you can pass suitable data on to your call centre, your app, email service provider, branch or store. This could enable more personalised and compelling content to inspire and enhance further engagement regardless of channel.

Form fill/submission
Are you expecting your visitors to provide too much information at the wrong time? Are you too intrusive in the questions you ask? By understanding how your visitors behave and by doing some baseline tests, you can help improve your forms to enable faster completion and fewer form abandonments.

Funnel optimisation
Having your consumer engage with your site only to leave part-way through is often a result of insufficient knowledge about the consumer. Using data from historical and current behaviour, you'll better understand who you're engaged with and will be empowered to provide content and trigger points to help 'nudge' them to move further along their online journey.

Search optimisation
Especially for retail sites, it's crucial to allow users to search as well as browse, hence the importance of having a powerful search bar. Whilst the efficiency of that tool is often dependent upon the internal search engine behind it, there are many ways to visually improve search bars that are worth testing.

Beyond simple optimisation

The following areas are for the more experienced and highlighted within stages 4 and 5 of the maturity model. These are more complex, require greater expertise and take longer to deliver.

Personalisation
A very hot topic for many marketers but it's wise to get to grips with the tactics above before you begin. A successful personalisation strategy must be viewed as a journey rather than a destination. Personalisation is driven by the use of underlying data, focused on clearly defined and measurable goals and the contributions of many people within your organisation. However, personalisation can be complex and difficult to get right. Having the support of an experienced optimisation consultant either in house or from your optimisation vendor who can support, align, and leverage expertise to facilitate best practice to deliver the most relevant experience for your consumers.

Visitor stitching
In order to provide a continuous and optimal customer experience, having a single digital view of your consumer is paramount. Mobile is often the first point of engagement where you should begin to drive your customer's journey. However, while it may be the starting point, the journey often finishes on another device, depending on the value and / or complexity of the purchase.
Ensuring that this cross-device continuity is established can be a challenge; but one experienced optimisation consultants can solve.

Web Optimisation is not a silver bullet, but is an important cog in the way you can manage, interpret and action engagement with your customers across multiple channels. Done well, it delivers excellent results that far outweigh the investment cost. Within our own experience at Webtrends we have helped generate many millions in additional revenue for some of the world's leading brands.

You can find out more about Webtrends Optimize here.