Small-budget guide to testing ad copy, landing pages, and more

When you have a smaller digital marketing budget, you might think that testing should take a backseat to efficiency and driving conversions – but that would be short-sighted.

In order to stay competitive, continue to take up more market share, and keep up with the changing digital space it’s important to always be testing.

That said, you can test almost anything, but don’t get bogged down with your options. With a small budget, it’s important to focus on one or two tests at a time to make sure that you can reach statistical significance relatively quickly.

In this post, we’ll focus on some of the most important tests you can run:

Whitepaper

1. Ad copy testing

2. Landing page testing

3. Testing new engines and ad formats

Ad copy testing

Ad copy testing can do more than lead to more efficient ads. It can be a very effective tool for testing messaging that you can apply to other marketing efforts like your website, emails, and other digital marketing collaterals. Testing different messages can also help to understand your customer base and the ways they engage with your ads. Is there something that is getting a strong CTR but not converting down-funnel? Maybe you aren’t qualifying the user. My recommendation is to run at least two versions of your ads at all times, with particular attention paid to calls-to-action, pre-qualifiers, and value propositions.

In the image below, a bunch of hotel aggregators shows different value propositions – discounts, price comparisons, and selection:

If you’re a hotel aggregator trying to draw eyes and clicks, consider those main value props and how to stand out from the crowd. If you have a unique selling proposition, for example, exclusive access to boutique hotels, use it and see how users react.

Landing page testing

For lead gen and B2B businesses, tuning up your landing page can be hugely impactful in improving lead quality. You can test a ton of areas, but one of my favorites – simple and high-impact – is your download form. For example, it could be a “request a demo”, “download a whitepaper” type of landing page. Test the layout, the number of fields, the fields specified, error messages, and consider adding testimonials and value propositions to the lead form’s landing page to encourage users to convert. The surest rule of thumb with a landing page is to do everything you can to not confuse the user. The landing page from Blurb is a great example of a clean page with a simple value prop and CTA:

Source: Blurb

The number of fields is one of the simplest factors to address, too many fields can dissuade the user from filling out the form, but your internal team needs a certain amount of information to qualify the leads. Our recommendation is to winnow down the number of fields to only what your internal team can’t dig up on their own. If the lead volume gets to be too overwhelming for your team to do the research, consider adding fields to capture the hardest-to-find information.

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Testing new engines and ad formats

If you stand still in this industry, you'll fall behind, so make sure you're testing emerging channels and ad formats. Google, LinkedIn, Facebook, and other platforms are constantly introducing new ad formats, for example – lead gen forms, responsive search ads, and dynamic creative, all introduced in the last 12 months. Channels like Quora, Reddit, and SnapChat are clamoring for marketing attention and offer new ways to engage users.

For established platforms, test just about any beta you can get your hands on. They often provide performance gains because the competition is greatly reduced. Early adoption has its risks, but we've found those to be generally outweighed by the rewards of low initial costs and the chance to get a jump on creating best practices.

To expand your reach, it's important to test into new engines. Putting a percentage of your budget (we'd recommend 15-20% as a rule of thumb for SMBs) into a new channel can help you find more efficient and qualified leads and potentially open up a budget.

Let's start testing

You might be asking yourself, "How long do I run these tests?", "What tests do I start out with?", and "How do I measure the impact of these tests?". And those are critical questions.

There is no set length for how long to run a test. It varies

for every business. I recommend using a statistical significance calculator (a quick Google search for the term brings up dozens of options, we recommend Neil Patel's or Optimizely's) to see if you have reached statistical significance. Those tools are great free resources to let you know how much faith to put in your test results – or whether you need more volume to feel confident in your findings.

You might be tempted to make a decision before you have enough data, but I would recommend against that, especially if one or two conversions might sway the different outcome. In terms of what tests to prioritize, I would recommend you think about your business goals and objectives for the year. Maybe refining your messaging isn't as important as driving more leads or testing new channels.

If you are into lead gen or B2B business running a landing page test or testing new engines or ad formats, it's important to understand lead performance at all points of the funnel – are they marketing qualified leads? Are they turning into paying customers? Are they junk leads? Whatever your metrics, make sure to establish concrete before-and-after testing windows to compare apples to apples, and make sure no other hugely significant updates, for instance, a rebrand or price increase are muddying the data.

Good luck, and happy testing.

Lauren Crain is a Client Services Lead in 3Q Digital's SMB division, 3Q Incubate.

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