PRIMEDIA

PRIMEDIA: Living Large on the Web with Multivariate Testing

Challenge:
Increase online lead conversion across Consumer Source Inc.'s (a PRIMEDIA company) four consumer sites without impacting IT.

Solution:
SiteSpect's multivariate testing helped the company quickly and accurately identify ways to improve the online experience for its website visitors, increasing lead conversion to ultimately drive more quality leads to its advertisers.

Five sites to optimize.
Through its leading websites, including ApartmentGuide.com, Rentals.com, RentalHouses.com, and NewHomeGuide.com, PRIMEDIA simplifies consumer searches for apartments, rental properties, and new homes and drives quality leads that result in occupancy for property managers, landlords, and real estate professionals.

Consumer Source Inc. came to SiteSpect in 2008 with several key objectives: improve lead generation, increase conversion rates, and balance any site improvements with ancillary revenue from third-party advertising. As a secondary goal, the company sought to optimize advertising sales in one of its business-to-business sites, Shop.Rentals.com.

A solution that both Marketing and IT can appreciate.
Without a testing tool in place, Consumer Source initially sought to optimize its sites through formal usability testing, intuition, and old-fashioned trial and error. But this approach resulted in some site modifications that failed to improve KPIs, and made it difficult to determine the cause and effect of any single "improvement." So Paul Terry, Consumer Source's Web Optimization Analyst, found out about SiteSpect through the recommendation of a trusted partner. He was intrigued by SiteSpect's hosted Software-as-a-Service model (SaaS) and its resulting non-intrusive deployment and operation.

"As part of the IT group that was initially skeptical, I have been quite impressed with SiteSpect," Terry said. "We benefit from the isolated nature of the implementation and its non-intrusiveness with the sites being tested."

SiteSpect enables web marketers to non-intrusively test content variations to determine which are most effective at persuading visitors to take action. The SiteSpect approach is unique in that no changes are made to the actual website that is being tested. Unlike the alternatives, SiteSpect does not require any changes to the HTML or programming code that drives a website. This approach enables a Product Design team to test their ideas through SiteSpect, eliminating most IT involvement before, during, and after running tests— allowing clients like Consumer Source to focus on achieving their website optimization goals and saving them precious time and resources.

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Testing for dynamic content, targeting for dynamic audiences.

"I also was attracted to SiteSpect's ability to use regular expressions in test definitions," Terry added. Regular expressions provide a concise and flexible means for matching strings of text, such as words and content patterns, making it particularly useful for multivariate testing with dynamic content. "In addition, we appreciate SiteSpect's analytical approach to reporting, including built-in segmentation."

SiteSpect features advanced segmentation functionality that enables users to identify and analyze subset of visitors who exhibit similar behavioral and demographic attributes. This gives web marketers and analysts the power to discover how variations in content impact different market segments, and it facilitates the process of targeting subsequent campaigns towards specific high-value segments.

Essentially, online marketers can use SiteSpect to build custom segments on-the-fly and at no additional cost. Segments may be defined through any combination of criteria, including unique visitor and session-level data, such as behavior, demographics, conversion values, time parts, and more.

For example, marketers and analysts can easily learn how different promotional offers perform for visitors who were referred from paid search versus organic search versus direct entry. Or, how first-time visitors respond to certain content changes relative to repeat visitors. SiteSpect also enables marketers to create rich behavioral segments, such as visitors who abandoned shopping carts or who completed purchases of specific amounts or frequency.

Quickly ramping up to continuous optimization.

Before selecting SiteSpect, Terry says that his company's IT Department was not convinced that effective testing could be low-risk and require little or no IT involvement. But with SiteSpect in place, and reality proving it could be done, everybody quickly got on board, and even PRIMEDIA's CEO (Consumer Source's parent company) got excited and helped drive adoption. It only took two weeks from initial sign-off until the company ran its very first test.

"Before testing with SiteSpect, product direction often did not improve KPI performance," Terry recalls. "The multivariate testing and behavioral targeting which we've done with SiteSpect has helped us continually improve our sites' performance."

Agile process for MVT.

Multivariate testing is now an integral part of Consumer Source's product development and the combination of multivariate testing with SiteSpect and the company's agile development methodology has proven especially effective.

In particular, Terry notes that even small changes can make a big difference. "We learned that users would rather SEND their information to us, rather than SUBMIT it to the computer. Also, if you put the most important content right in front of users, more will see it. Although that sounds kind of obvious, what began as theories led to conclusions. Now, having the data to back up our intuitions has helped us make decisions and given us the momentum to follow through with making site adjustments."

Terry offers some key questions for other web marketers seeking to take their site optimization to the next level. He asks: "Does your testing and targeting solution have near zero impact on your site and your IT team? Can you test everything and anything you'd like? Does it allow you to fully explore your best ideas? Have you received answers to questions you didn't ask?"

And lastly: "What do SiteSpect's impressive list of customers know that you don't?"

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