How to plan for A/B testing

As you've already learned, an **A/B test** compares two variants of the same content, to determine which yields better results. An **A/B testing plan** helps you structure this experiment by outlining key information about the test and its success metrics. In this reading, you'll learn how to prepare an effective plan for an A/B test.

Define the problem

You can run A/B tests on almost any digital content or design element. But no matter what you choose to test—from an ad headline to the color of a button—you should first identify a specific problem or goal for your experiment. It might be that you want to improve low conversion rates or find a way to fill a new customer need. Even if the problem or goal seems large, it's best to start with small changes. Understanding how minor adjustments affect performance will give you a baseline for testing more ambitious changes.

Elements of an A/B testing plan

The details of an A/B testing plan may differ by company or testing tool, but the fundamentals of an effective plan are often the same. Below are some examples of common elements you might find in an A/B testing plan.

Hypothesis

Once you have a clear idea of what you want to achieve, it's time to create a **hypothesis**. In an A/B test, the hypothesis describes the "why," "what," and "how" of the experiment. It also makes a prediction about the outcome. A hypothesis should be backed by research or data and focus on a single issue.

At minimum, the hypothesis should describe:

- The **problem** or **insight** the test will address
- What you plan to **change** to address the problem
- The expected **impact** or **result** of the change

For example, imagine that a company wants to increase the percentage of marketing email recipients who click through to their website. After examining the data, they determine that subscribers are more likely to click elements that appear near the top of an email. Their A/B test hypothesis could be:

- *"Because we discovered that customers are more likely to click elements near the top of an email, we expect that changing the position of a link will boost our click-to-open rate by 15%."*

A strong hypothesis makes it easier to report on the test's results and to share your insights with stakeholders. But the process of creating a hypothesis is just as important. That's because it forces you to state the reason for the test in concrete terms. If you find it difficult to create a compelling hypothesis, it might mean you should gather more data before running the test.

Variants

With a hypothesis in place, your team can begin to plan the **variants**. Variants are the different versions of the content served to users during an A/B test. Variant A represents the original content, while variant B usually differs in some meaningful way. It's generally a good idea to limit the number of modifications to a single variant, however. Changing too many things at once can make it harder to interpret the test results.

For example, in the email marketing scenario, the link in variant B might be moved to the top of the message. But what if this variant also included new call to action (CTA) text and turned the link into a button? How would you measure the impact of each change individually? By limiting the changes to each variant, you're more likely to get clear and actionable results.

Note: Even a "failed" test can provide valuable data. If your B variant doesn't produce the expected improvement, that doesn't necessarily mean your hypothesis is wrong. You may need to test different variants to get the outcome you want.

Metrics

Before you begin testing, your team should decide how to measure results. While you'll likely track several metrics for each test, some will be more important than others. In the email marketing example, the primary metric is the click-to-open rate (percentage of recipients who clicked one or more links after opening an email). But the team might also track the conversion rate to find out what percentage of people who clicked that link eventually made a purchase.

Current performance and expected improvement

You'll also need to agree on a definition of success. How big of an improvement do you want or expect from the test? Is a 5% increase enough? How about 10%? The goal you set can be ambitious, but it should also be realistic according to the available data.

Other testing details

An A/B testing plan can also contain other vital details about the test. Remember that different companies may put different information in their A/B testing plans, but a basic plan might include:

- A brief **overview** of the test and its purpose
- The **channel** being tested (e.g., Google Ads, Google Optimize, etc.)
- Type of **asset** being tested (e.g., display ad, button copy, etc.)
- The **duration** of the test (start and end date)
- The number of **users per variant**
- The **confidence level** (the estimated probability that the test results would remain consistent if the test ran longer)

Key takeaways

A/B testing is a valuable tool for improving digital marketing and e-commerce performance. An A/B testing plan helps you organize your efforts and results, which can lead to more efficient improvements. With a data-driven hypothesis, carefully selected variants, and a plan to measure success, you're more likely to reach your testing goals.

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