CHAPTER

4

Less Is More: Reduce Choices

When Subtraction Adds Value

Sometimes the winning variation of a page is one in which you haven't added anything at all but in fact *removed* elements from the page. We have seen many teams improve conversion metrics simply by adhering to the design mantra "Less is more." The products of this approach—simpler pages, shorter forms, and fewer choices—can make a very big difference.

Every Field Counts: The Clinton Bush Haiti Fund

In Chapter 2 we discussed one of the most significant tests we ran with the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund: adding an image and shifting to a two-column layout.

Another one of our hypotheses had to do with the actual donation form itself. When you're asking the user to take an action, every bit of effort counts, and so we wanted to look at the form to see if there was any way we could streamline the user's experience. We noticed that the Foundation had included fields for "phone number" and "title," hoping down the road to be able to use this information, possibly to make phone solicitations. The fact was, however, that the Foundation was stretched so thin that it wasn't actually calling anyone, so this additional information being requested of users wasn't being put to use. We hypothesized that getting rid of these two optional fields, even if it came at the cost of some potentially useful data, would be more than made up for by added donations in virtue of the simpler form (Figure 4.1).

ORIGINAL

Title:	▾
First Name:	
Last Name:	
Country:	United States
Street Address:	
City:	
State:	<Please Select> ▾
ZIP:	
Phone:	
Email:	

VARIATION

First Name:	
Last Name:	
Country:	United States
Street Address:	
City:	
State:	<Please Select> ▾
ZIP:	
Email:	

FIGURE 4.1　Original donation form versus form with optional fields removed.

The effect was instantly measurable and dramatic. Simply removing two optional fields resulted in an 11 percent improvement in dollars per pageview over the length of the test—a massive gain in donations from a small simplification.

Keep It Simple: SeeClickFix

SeeClickFix is a web tool that allows citizens to "report neighborhood issues, and see them get fixed." The tool centers on a web-based map that displays user activity. Users add comments, suggest resolutions, and add video and picture documentation. Anyone can elect to receive email alerts based on "Watch Areas" by geographical area and can filter reports by keyword.
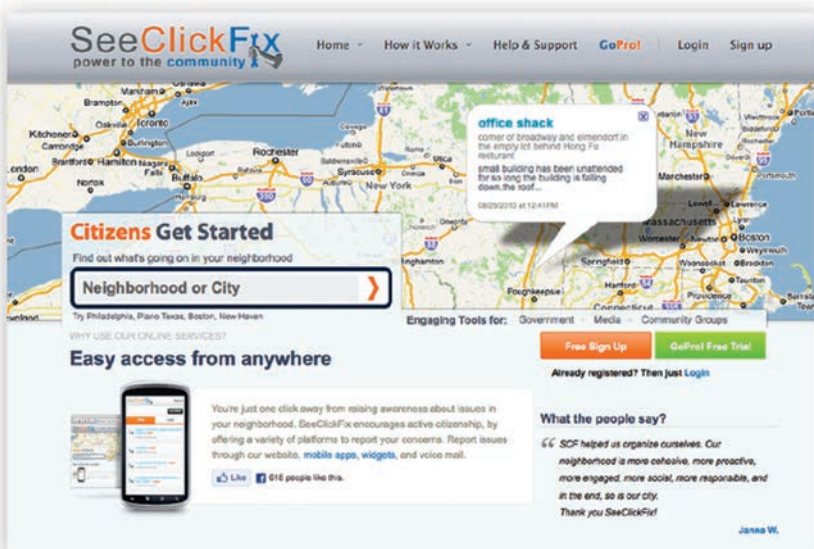
The original SeeClickFix homepage contained a simple call to action with one form and a simple design.

After a great deal of work by the team's designers and engineers, SeeClickFix had a brand-new homepage ready to launch, complete with an interactive map (Figure 4.2). The

FIGURE 4.2 Original SeeClickFix homepage versus redesigned map homepage.

team was excited about it, and used an A/B test to find out just how brilliant their new design idea was.

They were in for a surprise. SeeClickFix actually drove *8 percent more* engagement on the simple gray box form that displayed a simple call to action and a description. The proposed new homepage may have been more technologically sophisticated and visually rich, but *simplicity mattered* where it counted most: getting visitors to engage with the site.

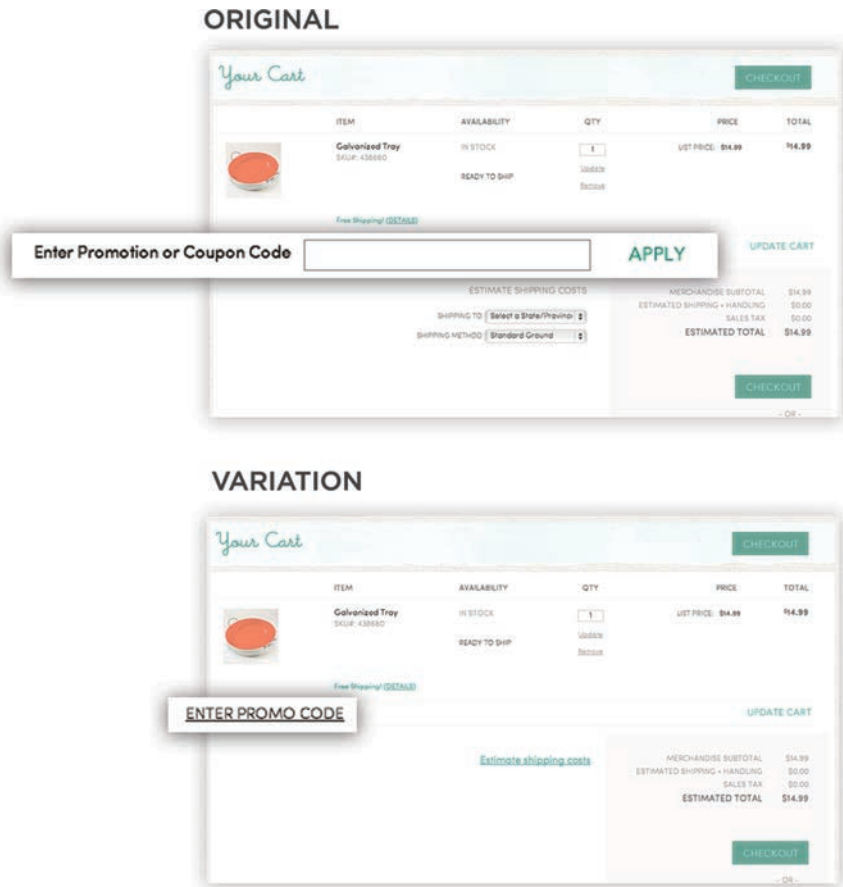## Hide Options: Cost Plus World Market

The checkout funnel is a prime place for optimization on a site, and a place where it's often true that less is more. This makes intuitive sense: nonessential steps included in the purchase process can be distracting, and it's no surprise that minimizing obstacles frequently boosts conversion. What's interesting is that removing unnecessary *options* can also reduce the overall friction of the process in a significant way.

Cost Plus World Market, a chain of specialty/import retail stores and a subsidiary of Bed Bath & Beyond, ran an experiment that tested hiding the promotion code and shipping options form fields from the last page in the checkout funnel (Figure 4.3).

By hiding these two optional fields and making them expandable links instead, Cost Plus saw a 15.6 percent increase in revenue per visitor. Conversions also went up by 5.2 percent in the variation with hidden fields.

Remove Distractions and "Outs": Avalanche Technology Group

It's important to remember that *any* clickable element on a page represents an option for your user, not just those explicitly

FIGURE 4.3   Cost Plus World Market original checkout page
versus variation.

included in the checkout process. Our next example illustrates
how valuable it can be to focus on those elements that aren't
actually part of the checkout process.

Avalanche Technology Group is the Australian distributor
for popular antivirus software AVG. When they examined their
shopping cart conversion data they suspected there was room for
improvement, and wanted to experiment with some "minor" (or
so they thought) variations that would leave the actual steps of the
checkout process untouched.

The team decided to run an experiment in which the site's header navigation links were removed from the checkout funnel, which they hypothesized would reduce visual noise and keep traffic more focused on actually checking out (Figure 4.4).
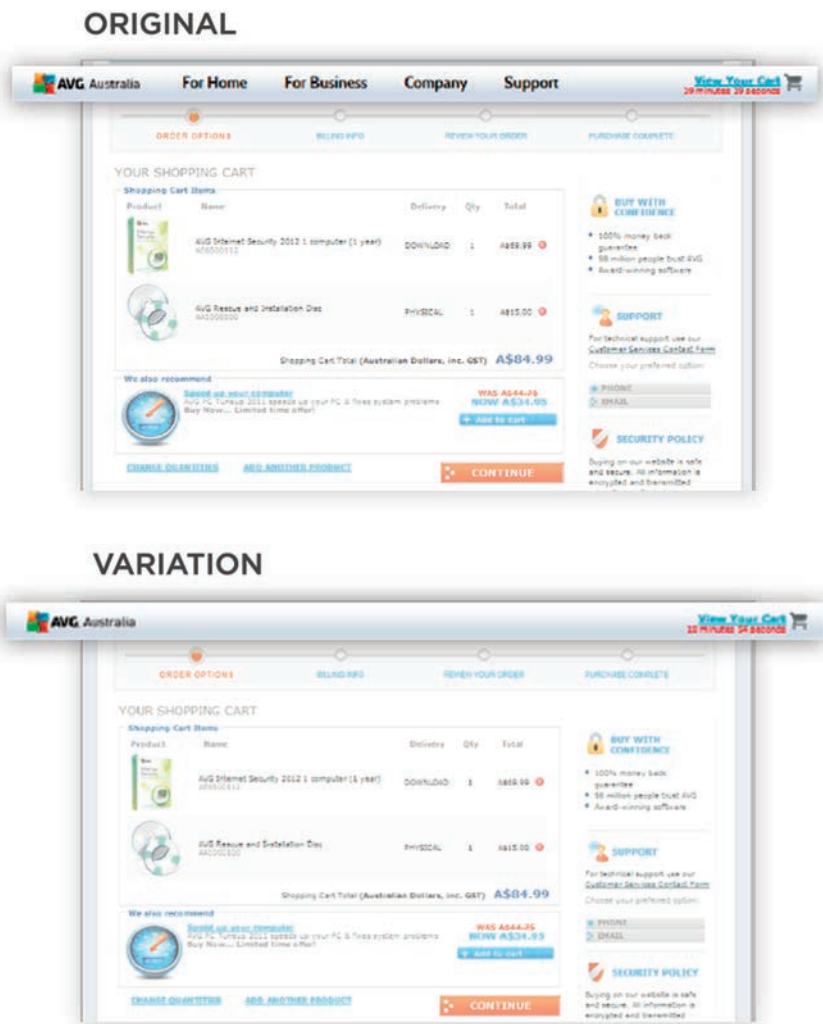

FIGURE 4.4 Original AVG checkout page versus variation.

This change alone improved conversion rates by 10 percent and led to a 16 percent increase in revenue per visitor, showing that even visually minor changes to the "auxiliary" parts of a page can have a big impact on visitor behavior.

Lower the Slope: Obama 2012

The previous examples show the potential benefits of keeping things simple by removing distractions and minimizing options. But how do you optimize when things are already as simple as they can possibly be? Or *are* they?

Every one of the 165 people on Obama's 2012 digital team understood how mission-critical A/B testing was to running the digital campaign. "We didn't have to convince anybody that A/B testing was important; it was just a no-brainer," recalls Kyle Rush, one of the lead developers on the campaign, who was responsible for much of the testing program.

The Obama 2012 team executed nearly 500 A/B tests over a 20-month period. The team experimented with everything from imagery and design to copy and usability. As a result, the optimization program collectively brought in an extra $190 million in campaign donations. One of the key tests that contributed to the $190 million pot was what came to be known as "Sequential."

The original donation process was a single page with a form and a picture of the president playing basketball. This page was already highly optimized: the image had been tested and not one superfluous form field existed—only the legally required ones remained. It looked pretty, and it was converting, but the campaign team wanted to see if they could go further. Since federal law requires specific information from campaign donors, the team couldn't just eliminate form fields at will. On the other hand, they
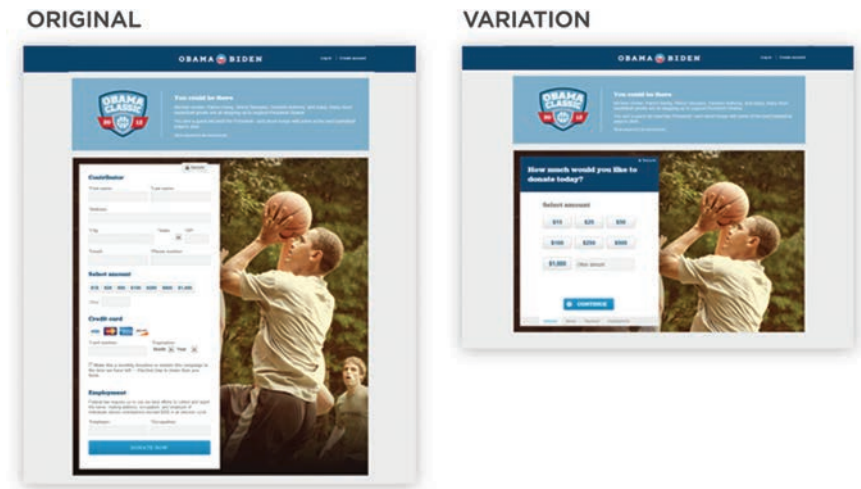
FIGURE 4.5   Original Obama 2012 campaign donation form versus variation with "Sequential" design.

Source: Kyle Rush.

knew from usability tests that the form was too long and losing potential donations. What to do? The team had an idea: make the form *appear* shorter by breaking it into pieces (Figure 4.5).

Once the form was divided into a sequence, the next logical thing to test was the *order* of the sequence. "Asking for the donation amount first more closely matches the users' state of mind," Rush explains. "Once they've made the decision to donate they're ready to enter an amount, not their personal information." Optimizations to the sequencing confirmed that donation amount should come first, then personal information, then billing, and occupation/employer last.

The optimized form yielded a 5 percent conversion increase over what had initially seemed to be the maximally optimized page. As Rush puts it: "You can get more users to the top of the mountain if you show them a gradual incline instead of a steep slope."

TL;DR

- More technologically or visually impressive pages don't necessarily lead to the user behavior you want. Experiment with **keeping it simple** and make any additional complexity earn its keep in your key success metrics.

- Every form field that users have to fill out is one more point of resistance between them and their conversion. Consider **deleting optional fields** and seeing if that lifts conversion.

- Giving visitors fewer distractions and fewer chances to leave the checkout funnel by **removing choices** can help boost conversion rates.

- Long forms have high risk for conversion failure. **Breaking up a long form** with required fields into multiple pages can increase chances for conversion.