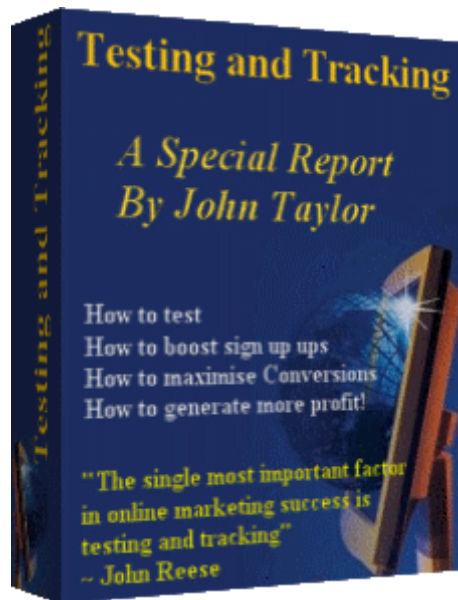


Testing and Tracking - Special Report



Mistakes are the portals of discovery.
~ James Joyce (1882 - 1941)

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Learn Over Twenty ways To Improve Your Conversion Rate And Multiply Your Profits

By John Taylor

Introduction

Internet marketing success can only be about one thing - results. Quite frankly, nothing else matters. Your primary objective is to get what is often described as “your most wanted response.” Your most wanted response might be to click a specific link, to accept your terms and conditions, to subscribe to your ezine, to submit an order form, or to complete a survey.

So, if marketing success is about results, then the single most important factor in online marketing success must be testing and tracking. The only way of keeping score is to measure and the only way of measuring is to test and to track every single part of every single sales process.

It does not matter what market you are in, or how much you spend, you can test, observe your results, and learn from them. Some methods are far more statistically reliable than others. But *all* are better than just guessing. The problem is that the vast majority of online entrepreneurs and webmasters do just that. They guess, or worse still, they blindly follow everybody else’s guess in the hope that what might be working for someone else’s web site might work on theirs.

“Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake”
Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 - 1821)

The truth is that, apart from the replicated affiliate sites that clutter up the internet, every web site is, or should be, unique. Even if you are promoting someone else’s products as an affiliate or as a reseller you should be striving to stand out by offering a unique selling point. Your web site should reflect your own personality. Your testing and tracking efforts should be focused on *your* content and on *your* sales processes.

So, what are we measuring? Well, you may think that I am over simplifying matters here but I believe that there is only one real measure and that is simply the outcome of your visitors’ decision when faced with a choice. Whatever your most wanted response is – your visitor will either say YES or NO.

Every decision, or call to action, that you want a prospect to take must be tracked. The result of that tracking will be a YES or a NO. A specific number of visitors took the desired action, and the remainder did not. If you take the total number of unique YES calls to action, and you divide them by the total number of unique visitors to the web page you will know your conversion rate. For example, if 1,000 people visit a web page where you have an ezine opt-in form, and 30 people opt-in, your conversion ratio for that opt-in form is 3% (30/1000).

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Before you read any further there are three things that I must make clear.

i) When you make a comparison between two elements in your content or in your process you will make changes. Sometimes these changes will result in a drop in performance, a lower sign up or a loss in sales. That is not a failure! That simply means that you have learned what doesn't work and you can add that knowledge to your own unique experience. In testing, there is no such thing as failure – only learning.

ii) Testing is based upon comparisons; when you test please only test one thing at a time; don't change more than one element otherwise it will be impossible for you to identify which specific change influenced the difference in the results.

iii) Be patient. The expert statisticians will tell you that you need at least 25 actions for a test to be statistically valid. That means 25 new ezine subscribers, 25 sales or 25 people respond to your most wanted call to action. Anything less than that and your test results will not really be accurate enough. In fact the more results the better, you should consider 25 to be the absolute minimum and aim to get 30 to 40 or even more if you can. I realise that 25 sales may be a lot to you, but your decisions must be made using data that is meaningful.

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honourable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing.

George Bernard Shaw (1856 - 1950)

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The Split Run test

You can design your web site in such a way that half your visitors see one sales page and the other half a different one. This is what a split run test, or an A/B split test is.

In some cases you can even have a multi-way split. But the reason why these split run tests are so valuable is that the pages with the content that you wish to test are shown to your visitors alternately in the case of an A/B split, or in sequence in the case of a multi-way split. In this way you get very close to statistical perfection. Of course the greatest benefit is that, depending upon the amount of traffic, you can quickly identify which page is more effective and then evaluate another element with another split test. As you will discover later in this special report, there are a number of tools available that allow you to set up split run testing with a minimum of effort.

Creativity is allowing yourself to make mistakes. Art is knowing which ones to keep.
~ Scott Adams (1957 -), 'The Dilbert Principle'

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Web page elements

So let's examine each of the critical elements within your web page. Although these elements and techniques are relevant to any web site, I am focussing on a typical sales letter type of web page as I go through each element. Where should we start?

Here is a list of my top twenty or so web page elements to work on:

1. Headline
2. First few paragraphs
3. Follow up
4. Deadline
5. Scarcity
6. Delayed payment option
7. Price
8. Upgrade
9. Downgrade
10. Good until cancelled
11. Guarantee
12. Immediate back end sale
13. Bonus items
14. Reposition your offer
15. Alternative colours and graphics
16. Readability
17. Complementary product endorsements
18. Header graphic
19. Order page
20. Payment process
21. Navigation links
22. Everything else!

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1) Test the headline: This is probably the easiest variable to alter to make a big change in your visitor value. There are dozens of formulas you can test against one another. The key is to change the headline enough so you are testing two completely different styles, to see which appeal is strongest.

Some easy modifications are as follows:

- The benefit headline. If you are using a news or announcement headline, try one including the benefits and end results a prospect receives when they do business with you.
- The how-to headline. If your headline contains a benefit, try stating it in a how-to format, which appeals to your prospect's desire to learn how to accomplish something new.
- The discover-you-easy modification. If you are using a how-to headline, try adding the words discover, you, and easy. Thus, "How to make money immediately" would become "Discover how you can easily make money immediately."
- The alternative benefit headline. Sometimes there's more than one benefit to your product or service, and focusing on the second one is a more compelling motivator. So, How to make money immediately and save hours of valuable time.

If you haven't already got a copy then I would recommend [Headline Creator Pro](#). It's a great little tool for creating headlines and I have found that even if it generates a list of headlines that are not quite right, it can certainly spark my own creativity to produce an attention grabbing headline.

If you have a budget and you want to speed up your headline testing, then open an account with [Google Adwords](#) and create adverts with the same body copy but use the two, or more, alternative headlines. Just keep a close watch of your Adwords statistics to see which headline performs best. Make sure you set a limit on your campaign spending so that you don't run more adverts than you need to get a statistically valid response.

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2.1) Test the first few paragraphs: If you are testing a sales page and have a very low conversion rate, you might wish to try alternative text at the beginning of your sales letter. You can achieve dramatic increases in sales by changing not just the headline, also but modifying the first 200 to 300 words of your sales letter, which includes:

- The pre-headline
- The headline
- The sub-headline
- The first few paragraphs

Your goal is to pull readers in with the main benefits or a compelling story before you even make the offer. Have you considered surveying your site visitors to ask what they are looking for or why they didn't buy? Always a good idea if you have lots of traffic and a low conversion rate; and this would be an excellent place to test this new data by including it in the sub-headline or in the first few paragraphs. They have already told you what is important to them, so use that information.

The first 200 to 300 words set the scene for the sale by arousing interest and qualifying your prospects. Often, a visitor won't even read your sales piece in its entirety. They'll read the first few paragraphs, scan the rest of the page, check out the price and the PS, and then either buy your product or leave.

Obviously you are already using attention grabbing headlines. But subheads can be just as effective in bringing out key points for your readers. And they also help make any document easier to read, because they break up long blocks of text into easy-to-digest bits. Subheads are generally viewed as goodwill gestures toward your readers, since they're most often used to divide lengthy articles into logical breaks. They may indicate a change of topic or simply break up a mass of type. Placing subheads every four paragraphs or so allows readers to skim through your article or document and skip sections without losing their train of thought.

How good is your copywriting? If you are like me you will enjoy playing with words and writing; I really enjoy creating the content for my web sites, my articles and for my eBooks. However, if you would like to improve your copywriting skills, I would recommend that you get hold of a good copywriting course. Believe me, there are a lot of copywriting courses around so you need to be careful that you choose one that is focused specifically on copywriting for web pages.

The "[Step by step copywriting course](#)" by Karen Thackston is a really comprehensive package and it places great emphasis on the importance of your target audience. To be truly successful, each individual piece of copy must be carefully crafted to fit the people who will be reading it. That's why knowing your target audience like the back of your hand is absolutely vital to successful copywriting.

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2.2) Test your sales body copy: Don't just stop after testing your first few paragraphs, test the remainder of your body copy. Try different emphasis on your text with the use of bold, italic, underline or even highlighting. Try changing your testimonials, test different coloured text, try putting a picture of the person next to their testimonial, try different examples and metaphors to build up your sales story. In fact test each variable one at a time until you feel that your sales letter is optimised for conversion.

2.3 Test your graphics: You might find that one eBook cover out performs another; you may discover that a picture of you on the page increases your conversion rate. The point is that the pictures that you include within your sales letter are yet another variable and it is well worth investing some time in testing them. Another important aspect of graphics is the file size, try to reduce the size of the files to increase the speed at which your site loads and then test. There will be a point at which the quality of the graphic deteriorates to the extent that it puts people off and the only way of discovering where that point is, is by testing.

3) Test a multi-part follow up system: If you want an easy way to increase visitor value without changing your sales letter, simply add an exit pop-up and form to your Web site allowing the prospect to request additional information by submitting their email address.

Here are a couple of links to really good pop-up scripts that we strongly recommend:

OptinMavrick: Jim Reynolds has produced a unique pop-up system. You can send visitors to any affiliate page or any page for that matter and have a pop-up or a pop-under from your site appear the page to which you send the visitor in whatever size you wish. The package also includes an affiliate link cloaking script and a web page cloaking script that allows you to mask affiliate links and the explorer bar of the browser. Jim includes an amazing amount of support material and extras making this incredible value for money.

PopUpMaster Pro Version 3.0 from Steve Shaw allows you to quickly and easily install virtually any other type of popup you can think of.

- OptInOver™ Generator - makes it point-and-click easy for you to customize and install a sophisticated full-colour instant auto-optin popup on your web site that will be shown to 95% of your visitors to sign up subscribers faster than ever before
- Main PopUp Generator - this tool creates popups from basic to some highly advanced popups, including moving popups, delayed *exit* popups, order trapper popups, and countdown controls
- Rotating PopUp Generator - each time a visitor returns to your web site, they see a different popup. To install rotating popups on your web site, you just enter the details for each popup by following the simple instructions, and generate the code you need automatically.
- Auto-Optin PopUp Generator - allows you to automatically generate the code you need to add an instant auto-optin popup (those grey dialog-type popups where you just click OK to sign up) to your web site. The OptInOver™ Generator largely supersedes this type of popup, but you can still install them using this tool if you so wish.

You now have further opportunities to present your message and, of course, you should be aiming to follow up at least seven times. Don't just upload your messages to your Autoresponder; remember to test different follow up messages by using a different Autoresponder for each sequence you test!

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If you don't already have an Autoresponder, you have two options:

If you have the technical ability you should find it relatively easy to install an Autoresponder script on your own web site. This is a high specification Autoresponder script that offers amazing value for money. [Click here for further details](#)

Alternatively, you might prefer to outsource your Autoresponder needs and you should definitely check out the ProAutoResponder.com web site for more details.

I recommend the simple follow-up formula below. The key is to stay in contact and offer additional reasons to buy after the initial visit. We have seen break-even promotions start to skyrocket when we instituted a follow-up system.

- Follow up immediately after they opt-in: Thank them for requesting information and add a simple link to go back and buy. You might also consider adding a "one time only" extra bonus as an inducement.
- Follow up one day after they opt-in: Send answers to the most commonly asked questions you get from prospects. The key is to overcome objections you may not have covered completely in your sales letter and again offer them a link to buy.
- Follow up three days after they opt-in: Send 3 - 6 testimonials with another link to buy.
- Follow up seven days after they opt-in: Send another set of answers that address different objections, along with another link to buy.
- Follow up fourteen days after they opt-in: Send another 3 - 6 testimonials and a link to buy.
- Follow up twenty-one days after they opt-in: Send a case study of someone who used the product and achieved success, along with a link to buy.
- Follow up twenty eight days after they opt-in: Tell them you are curious as to why they haven't bought your product yet and invite them to fill in a short survey in exchange for a discount or a special bonus offer.

Please make sure that you include an unsubscribe link in all your Autoresponder messages to ensure that your messages are not treated as spam. It is also good practice to include a short introduction reminding them where and when they opted-in to receive your messages.

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4) Test with a deadline: The fact is people respond to deadlines because they are afraid of missing out on a deal that may expire. Deadlines work best when you provide a logical reason to act now. By providing a credible reason why, you will reinforce the effectiveness of your deadline. For example, you can warn of a price increase, offer a special bonus, or give a discount if the prospect acts before a specific date. If you use this technique then please do what you say you are going to do! If the price is due to increase in 10 days – do it. There is nothing worse than a meaningless deadline for damaging your credibility and losing the trust of your customer.

There is a brilliant piece of software available that will manage the sales offer process for you it was developed by a friend of mine; John Delavera called [Special Offer Manager](#) John's software makes testing prices and deadlines really easy! You might also like to check out another of John's products – The revolutionary viral referral script "[Turboreferer](#)"

5) Create scarcity: Have you ever noticed people have a strong desire for things they either can't get, or that are in limited supply?

There are several ways to create scarcity with your product, and boost the aggregate value of each visitor to your web site.

- **Sell a limited number of goods:** This method uses a direct scarcity tactic and seems to work the best. If a prospect thinks the offer will really disappear, and they might never get to participate, they become amazingly motivated to act now.
- **Limit the bonuses:** Another way to achieve this, without limiting your actual product sales, is to limit the bonuses to a specific number of buyers.
- **Sell only to people with specific qualifications:** If prospects have to meet a qualification or pass a test, even if it's simple, they feel like they're part of an exclusive club, and are more likely to positively respond.

Again John Delavera's [Special Offer Manager](#) is ideal for managing this whole process

6) Test a delayed payment option: Reverse the risk on the customer by offering a "try before you buy" option. Basically, you let the prospect try your product before their credit card is charged. Obviously, you get the card number and approve the sale before you deliver, but this way they are given a trial period to inspect your wares.

This technique is not recommended for physical products as you could lose a significant amount in shipping costs! It is an excellent way of boosting the buyer's confidence and offers them a risk free option to buy.

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7) Test your price: If you haven't experimented with different prices, here's a tip: Depending on your target market and back end, changing your price can make massive differences in your visitor and lifetime customer value.

How do you know if you have chosen the perfect price for your product or service? Are you leaving money on the table? Or, even worse, is your price turning away potential customers? How do you know if that new product or service that you are developing (or are planning to sell) has a reasonably-sized, interested target group? In other words, are there enough people who will pay enough money?

- If no, you'll never build a profitable income stream.
- If yes, what's the perfect price that maximizes that stream?

Is your pricing is up-to-date, reflecting current marketing conditions? I could talk about price testing for ages but the best resource available comes from Ken Evoy of [SiteBuildIt](#) who says "Pricing is the most important of the classical 4Ps of "Marketing 101" (Price, Product, Place and Promotion). And it's the only one of the four that actually is income. The other Ps generate expenses upfront, in order to generate income later." Click now to download the free "[Make Your Price Sell](#)" eBook or, if you want to go straight to the Make Your Price Sell web site, [click this link](#)

One of the most common pricing mistakes is: "Price before offer" No matter what you're selling; a price has no meaning until your prospects know what they're getting. Make sure you tell them about your product first. If your main selling point is the low price of your product, you may introduce the price early on in the same sentence.

8) Test an upgrade: This is an awesome technique. You increase the dollar amount of each order (thus, your net visitor value) by offering an added value, "gold" option, or advanced version of your product to buyers during the sales process.

Depending on the amount you charge, you can get as many as half of all sales to upgrade. You should differentiate by charging 25% and 60% more than the regular version, and you may be able to significantly increase visitor value.

The upgrade version can be mentioned in your main sales copy, on a pre-page between the sales letter and order form, or on the order form itself, as a checkbox next to the main product description.

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9) Test a downgrade: Another great trick is the downgrade. This is used when a prospect doesn't bite on your initial offer. An example is when you have an exit pop-up showing a less expensive version of your product or service to people who don't buy.

A good example would be to offer a low cost report at \$17.00 when your prospect is leaving your sales page for a \$47.00 eBook.

There are several reasons to use a downgrade:

1. You can offer a less expensive option for "do-it-yourself" and price-conscious prospects.
2. You can set up an expensive price first, and in comparison the downgrade seems like a bargain.

10) Test a "Good until cancelled" option: If you offer a renewable product such as web hosting or a membership site, you can give your prospects the opportunity to sign up for regular payments, and offer to automatically charge their card.

11) Test your guarantee: You need to offer some sort of guarantee or warranty to be competitive, but it's hard to make it unique unless you do something outrageous.

Unconditional money back guarantees are everywhere today, but here are a few things to make yours special:

- Offer a lifetime guarantee, subject to certain limitations. This is far less risky than it sounds, but only if you have a very high quality product.
- Make it a conditional double or triple money back guarantee for a specific time period. If it's a product, the prospect must document how they used it to take advantage of the guarantee.
- Offer a hybrid guarantee. Try a one-year satisfaction, three-year replacement offer. Or offer double their money back if they fill out a questionnaire, but only single if they don't.

One comment on guarantees and testing: If you have a product of poor or low quality, or you fail to deliver on your promises, a guarantee can create a "tail" of refunds and angry customers that can follow you around forever. You must ensure the quality of your product and your customer service is up to the advertised standard before you use a guarantee that could put you out of business!

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12) Test an immediate back-end: If you have the ability to cookie your prospects so you can pre-populate an order form with their contact information (minus credit card number), you can present additional offers to them after they purchase, and convert up to one third of your customers on another offer.

You can also send an e-mail right after they buy, encouraging them to order an additional product by simply clicking on a link or confirming their address. Since you already have their payment info on file, it's an easy process.

Ideally, you'll use a database driven Web site to make this seamless for the prospect and simple for you. But if you just want to test it out, try making an offer to a small segment of your list, and manually process the additional orders. It'll be a temporary administrative hassle, but you'll see whether the process works well enough to hire a programmer and create an automated system.

13) Test bonuses: Breaking up a product or package, and turning part of it into a free bonus, can increase the value of each visitor and this is a common marketing technique, and though some see it as a gimmick, you'll generally find a majority of the people responding well to it. For example if you offer web hosting you could add domain name registration as a free bonus.

Make sure the bonus is needed to achieve the ultimate end result, or is wanted badly enough so the prospect will proceed with the transaction for the bonus alone.

Please don't give away the same old hackneyed bonuses that have been around for so long that they are both out of date and available free on literally thousands of web sites! Be creative and develop your own free reports, find new and interesting products that you can obtain reseller rights for and factor their cost into your pricing structure. How about offering free membership to a membership site or, better still, offer to pay for their first three months and then collect some residual income from their fees as they continue their membership. Click [here](#) for information about an offer that you might like to include as a bonus. I have arranged a really special deal for you as a thank you for buying this book. [Business Fastlane](#) is one of the most original membership sites around today with loads of great ideas.

I believe I have discovered one of the most effective marketing products and I am setting up a test very soon. What this service does is enable you to give away an unlimited amount of two fully paid, round trip plane tickets that can be used to fly to just about anyplace in the world and have a value of up to \$1600. These are no strings attached tickets that are valid for 2 years. The tickets won't cost you or the person you give them to a dime! This service will enable your company to give away an unlimited amount of fully paid plane tickets for less than \$30 per month!! This is a much more attractive bonus offer than most web sites offer. Click [here](#) now for further information

14) Test repositioning your offer: Sometimes you can identify a responsive market but not have an appropriate product or service. What should you do? No problem, just reposition your product and re-write the copy for that specific audience! Or try to find an alternative product that meets the needs of that market.

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15) Test alternative colours and design: Most of us aren't professional designers, so we tend to play it safe when it comes to colours, using common shades and conservative corporate style of graphics.

If you understand how the mind reacts to different colours, and after you have tested the really important stuff above, you might want to experiment a little by changing your background and graphic colours. You may be surprised at the outcome!

Use only Web compliant colours that look good on all browsers. You may not be able to reach perfect consistency, but you can definitely make sure they are solid. You might also bear in mind that approximately 10% of the entire online audience has some form of disability or impairment. Simply by making sure that your web site is designed to be accessible could increase your target market by that 10%!

16) Test for readability: One of the variables often ignored by copywriters, but quite important to prospects, is making your sales piece easy to read.

Always use a consistent font throughout your letter: Don't mix and match since it looks amateurish. Good fonts for readability online are Arial, Times New Roman, and Verdana.

Make sure formatting and white space is symmetrical: It should look good on all browsers, and when printed out. Adjust cell padding so ad copy is sufficiently far from borders, which many viewers find distracting.

Use consistent formatting: If your subheads start out red and a size larger than the body copy make sure they are the same throughout the sales letter. If you indent one paragraph, indent them all.

Mistakes, obviously, show us what needs improving. Without mistakes, how would we know what we had to work on?

~ Peter McWilliams, Life 101

17) Test complimentary product endorsements: This one is easy. Just look for complimentary products you can sell on an affiliate or revenue-share basis, and run them as pop-ups, pop-unders, banners, exit offers, even to prospects through your follow up e-mail system.

This can be especially effective when you consider that the visitor is leaving your site when you present them with these offers! This might even be a way of making money from your competitors if you sign up with them as an affiliate or reseller!

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18) Test your header graphic: Test your site with a graphic header and try a test without a graphic header. A number of forums have recently been debating this one and it is difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction. So, by now you should be one step ahead of me; what should we do? Absolutely right, we should test the theory for ourselves. Simply do an A/B split test that shows one page that includes a graphic header to half of your visitors and another page without a graphic header to the other half. Simply check your stats and see which achieves better sales conversions.

19) Test your order page: Your order form is an integral part of the sales process, don't just use the same old copy, test alternative calls to action, look through the factors listed above and apply those tests to your order page in the same way as you would apply them to your sales page.

20) Test your payment process: Your thank you and download pages are just as important as every other part of your web site. Test the copy, add a surprise bonus, offer an additional product and try a pop-under that takes people to an offer of complimentary products or services.

21) Test your navigation links. I don't mean see if they work (They do work don't they?) I mean try different types of link, test text versus graphic. Try different colours in your text links, try alternative graphics. Especially test the order now button.

Now this one has always puzzled me: Why would you want someone to sign up as an affiliate before they have read your sales letter? So why do we see "Make Money" or "Affiliate" links at the top of the sales page? Quite simply I think it is absolute madness! Do you want a reason? OK. I see a "Make money" link at the top of your page, I sign up as an affiliate and then I order the product through my own link. I have just saved, on average, 40% of the retail price and if it was your sales page, you've just given me a 40% discount!

Why would anyone want to put an order now link at the top of their sales page? It is an open invitation to me to check out the price before I read your sales copy. And, what tends to be the biggest objection? Yes, you've got it, the price! So what is the point of writing all that sales copy to overcome objections when you are inviting your visitor to immediately switch on their price objection. Boy, talk about putting barriers up before you make the sale.

22) Test everything else: Test payment providers; do you know if you are losing sales because people don't like the payment provider that you are currently using? You may be surprised to discover that some people will not buy just because they see the PayPal button!

When you make a mistake, don't look back at it long. Take the reason of the thing into your mind and then look forward. Mistakes are lessons of wisdom. The past cannot be changed. The future is yet in your power.

~ Hugh White (1773 - 1840)

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Don't stop with my list, examine very single part of your web site and look for potential improvements. Put yourself in your prospects shoes and see how you react as you experience your own web site as a visitor.

Get your friends to visit your web site and ask them to give you honest and constructive feedback. Seek advice from people who are members of the same forums as you. Put an exit pop-up on your site and ask visitors who are leaving without buying to fill in a short form in exchange for an article or a bonus item. At least you have got an email address and you can follow them up with alternative products or a special deal.

Now if you are really serious about improving your online marketing success you will want to be able to utilise the best tools available and that is why I am recommending two alternatives:

First there is [Split-Test Gold](#) software from Marty Foley's ProfitInfo web site. [Split-Test Gold](#) allows you to serve web pages in rotation, therefore, making an A/B split run test relatively straightforward. But don't take my word for it; click [this link](#) to get further information.

Secondly [SplitHit™](#) is lightning-fast software (database-driven and coded in PHP) that is installed on your web server and will automatically rotate different versions of your website helping you find out which page performs better compared to another. [SplitHit™](#) will tell you *exactly* what you need to know in order to actually get people to do what you want them to do! Click [here](#) for further information.

One final point before we move on: Don't stop testing, when you think you have the perfect headline, the perfect page, the perfect sales letter or the perfect sales follow up process... start testing again!

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E-mail testing

Testing responses to your emails is just as important and just as vital to the success of your online business. If you already have a list then you will know how immediate the results can be. I regularly send out my Marketing Hero ezine to around 5,000 subscribers and within a few moments I can see how many have bounced because mail boxes were full or email addresses are no longer valid. I can also see how many people are out of the office on vacation or on a business trip, because their out of office Autoresponder tells me!

To some extent it is much easier to run a split test using email. You simply split your list into groups and send a different email to each group. You can do that every time you broadcast to your list. But please don't send a test to your list, you must send some useful content or you will soon be accused of spamming!

In the same way that there are a number of factors in a web page or a sales process that you can test, you should also identify the variables in your email.

It is especially important to test you subject line, the headline you use in the body, your first paragraph or so of text and, of course, your signature file. You might also like to test the "From" field to see if you get a better response when you use for example your own name, your business name or the name of your ezine. Try with personalisation and without personalisation. Have you thought of testing which time and day during the week generates the best response? Test every variable and then go with what works for you.

There are three critical measures to evaluate the effectiveness of your email:

- The Open rate – the number of email messages opened compared with the sent mail count
- The Click Through Rate (CTR) – the number of people who read your message and clicked one of the links
- Conversion – the number of people who responded to your call to action for your Most Wanted Response.

Unfortunately you can only measure click through rate when you send email using the HTML format. The method is very simple, you embed a small image in the HTML message and each time your message is opened the image is loaded from your server. Tracking is not particularly accurate but by interrogating you server logs you can get an indication of you Open Rate.

The best way of measuring click through rates is either to create a unique web page for each link in your email and then check your server statistics to see how many unique visitors visited the page. Alternatively you may wish to use a tracking service that will provide you with analysis for each link that you set up.

To measure your conversion rates for a specific email campaign you will need to set up a dedicated order page and again you can either use your own server statistics or use a tracking service to analyse your conversion rate.

We recommend specialist tracking services [HyperTracker](#) who offer a tracking service with the ability to track sales activity by inserting HTML, the rotation of up to 128 URLs - allowing split-run testing to find best-selling products, daily/weekly reports by email and the export of statistical data. Their advanced duplicate protection improves the accuracy of click reporting (detects multiple sales/actions or refreshes from the same person) and their alerts system warns of problems with target URLs.

Testing and Tracking - Special Report

Ad Tracking

Every business must advertise and the more effective your advertisements - the greater your profits. So how do you make your ads more effective? There are only **two** factors:

1. The content - the words you use in your headline and the body
2. The location - where you place your advert

And, as you will now know, by constant experimenting, changing, tweaking and testing you'll eventually find the best combination. It is as simple as that except for one thing. How do you carry out the testing?

As visitors flock to your website how do you know which ad has brought them there?
Are they coming from?

- a banner ad
- your signature tag
- a published article
- a newsgroup ad
- a free link posting
- an Autoresponder campaign
- a reciprocal link
- an affiliate program
- a free classified ad
- an ezine ad
- a forum posting
- an email marketing campaign

Wouldn't you like to know?

- which of these received the best response
- which ezines are the most profitable
- how a sponsored ezine ad compares to the standard one
- whether animated banners are better than static ones
- how effective your email signatures are
- If the word "free" in the headline performs better than "no cost"
- does the ad at the start of an ezine outperform the one at the end
- and so on

There's only one way to find out the answers to all these questions and to really know the effectiveness of every single ad, banner, link that you run. You **must** use an ad tracking program. Again [HyperTracker](#) is our recommended supplier of choice, their ad tracking service offers real value for money when you compare the built in features with many other online tracking services.

While one person hesitates because he feels inferior, the other is busy making mistakes and becoming superior.

~ Henry C. Link

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What is an Ad Tracker?

An Ad Tracker is a script or programme that helps you to identify where visitors to your site have come from.

For example you might place a classified advert with a link to your site in an ezine. The basic ad tracker tells you the response to that ad; that is the number of people who clicked through to your site from that ad.

How an Ad Tracker works

It's very simple to use an Ad Tracking programme. The two main operations are

1. Setting up an ad campaign
2. Viewing the campaign stats

The programme runs either as a script on your own site or through third party provider at an external web site. There are important differences between these two which are discussed later but the essential operation is the same.

You run all operations from the program's administration section.

Testing and Tracking - Special Report

Setting up an Ad Campaign

Suppose you want to run this example advertising campaign in an appropriate article, eBook or newsletter:

For high specification hosting at affordable prices

<http://www.lakeshost.com>

Obviously in its current form there is no way to tell which visitors to your site arrived as a result of seeing this advert.

Here's where utilising an ad tracker can help you to learn where your traffic is coming from.

You first decide on a special code unique to this campaign. In this case a code **ttsr** (for Testing and Tracking Special Report) would be suitable.

Or if you planned to run different campaigns over a long period then you could include the version number, or a date identifier, in your code, for example, **ttsr1** or **ttsr_jul**. The choice of code is entirely up to you.

Now you feed in to the ad tracking program at the administration section two items of information:

1. The target URL: <http://www.lakeshost.com>
2. Your tracking code: **ttsr1**

The program then provides you with a new URL - a tracking URL - and this is the one that you place in the advert.

A typical tracking URL may look like this (different ad tracking programs use different formats)

<http://www.hypertracker.com/a.cgi?a123&ttsr1>

This example shows an online service (hypertracker.com) where your account is 'a123'.

So your advert now reads:

For high specification hosting at affordable prices

<http://www.hypertracker.com/a.cgi?a123&ttsr1>

So now when someone reads that ad and clicks on the new URL they will be taken via the tracking domain to the target domain <http://www.lakeshost.com> and the ad tracking system will register that the click came from the campaign **ttsr1**, in other words this special report, version 1.

The great advantage of an ad tracker compared to other methods is

You don't have to change anything at your web site (unless you require some advanced features)

You don't have to examine your web site logs

You don't have to make copies of your web pages

You can see your results instantly

You don't even have to install a program if you are using an online service

By the way, that new URL can be shortened if you wish: this is done by using a redirect file, explained later.

Testing and Tracking - Special Report

Viewing the Campaign Stats

The ad tracking program records the date and time when your URL has been clicked. It can detect where your visitor came from (the referring URL), the browser and operating system.

This data is kept in the system so you can then pull off reports on any ad campaign over any period e.g. by month, day or even by hour.

You can visit the tracking administration section at any time and view your report, which will be immediately up to date. If someone clicked on your ad just a second ago their data will already be available in the system.

CGI Script or Online Service?

Although the operation of ad tracking programs is basically the same there is an important distinction between the two types of programme: the CGI script and the online service.

You can read the details below or skip to the summary at the end which highlights the key differences.

The two types of Tracker

CGI Script

You purchase the script or programme outright and it is installed on your site. There are certain software requirements - for example Perl, PHP or MySQL - so you will need to check with your web host that these are installed. If you choose a hosting package from Lakeshost.com you will discover that the necessary software that you need is installed by default – all you would need is your own tracking script such as [SplitHit™](#)

If you have some technical knowledge you should be able to install the script yourself otherwise the supplier will usually charge an installation fee.

Online Service

For example if you were to choose [HyperTracker](#) you would pay a rental (monthly or yearly) for an outsourced service that runs independently of your site.

Testing and Tracking - Special Report

Comparison Chart

In the chart below the plus points are highlighted in **red**.

	CGI Script	Online Service
Installation	Script needs to be installed at your site	No installation required - you can start immediately
Site Requirements	1. You must have your own site 2. There are certain software requirements, including access to the cgi-access bin. (Unlikely that free sites will qualify).	No requirements - you do not need your own site
Upgrades	If there are program upgrades the program will need to be re-installed	Program upgrades can be added transparently with no action required from you
Risk	You are not dependent on another company	You are dependent on the service company e.g. if their site goes down or the company folds
Operational Needs	Your site needs to provide the system resources (e.g. disk space for program and tracking files)	The program operates completely independently from your site - no use of your system resources required
Account Management	If you have a separate installation for each site you need to manage each one separately	All campaigns across all sites can be managed from one account
Tracking URL	Uses the domain name of your site	Uses the name of the service
Cost	1. One-time fee. 2. Installation generally extra. 3. May need to pay for installation on each separate site	1. Monthly or yearly subscription. 2. There may be additional charges for clicks or campaigns over a certain limit.

Notes

1. Risk: If you are concerned about an online service failing when you have some critical tracking URLs then you can always move them to redirect files on your own domain.

2. Account operation: If you are using a CGI script it is not essential to have a script on each separate site. Your tracking URLs on one site can point to any domain. However it may look odd if, for example, your have a number of sport sites and your tracking URLs to football.com include the name tennis.com.

3. Tracking URL: There are mixed benefits in having either your domain name or the service company name in your tracking URL, covered in later chapters. However you can always use a redirect file to convert a service company name to your own domain.

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Summary of key points

CGI Script:

You need to install at your own site
You only pay a one-time fee
You are not dependent on a third party

Online Service:

There is no installation required, you simply sign up and you are ready to go
You will have to pay a monthly fee
You will be dependent on third party

Visitor Tracking Features

Basic Visitor Stats

This is the basic information that every tracker collects when it records a clickthrough
The users IP address
The type of Browser being used
The users Operating System
The date and time of click
Referring URL – the web site from where the click was generated

Different Ad Trackers provide different levels of data, be sure to check that they provide a level of reporting that meets your needs before you buy a script or sign up to a monthly service.

Return Visitors

You certainly don't want the figure for total clicks inflated by visitors who repeatedly click back to your page in a session. So a tracker should distinguish between the 'unique' numbers of visitors as opposed to the 'total' number. Some trackers can calculate the average time between visits to help identify if your adverts are generating more than one visit per person.

Action Tracking

Whatever your most wanted response is, one of the big advancements in ad tracking technology is the ability to record a range of visitor actions.

For the Ad Tracker do this it has to know the page at which an action takes place. For example it can record that a sale is achieved when the thank-you page is visited. You obviously need to submit details of these action events when you set up your campaigns and you may need to insert some lines of HTML code in your web pages.

Using this information the tracking reports can provide vital sales figures such as

- Total Sales
- Cost-per-click (CPC)
- Cost-per-sale (CPS)
- Click-to-sale ratio (CTS)
- Return on Investment (ROI)

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Full web site tracking

Do you know the exact point in your sales process where your prospects stop paying attention? Do you know which of your pages result in sales and which pages lose sales? Are you losing sales because your order page is confusing?

These are just some of the questions that can be answered if your tracker can trace the complete path of a customer within your site.

Remote web site tracking

Would you like to know what your visitor does when he visits the affiliate site that you promote?

Maybe all your efforts in sending visitors are wasted because the affiliate program's website just doesn't sell or there are external links which distract the visitor from reaching the order page.

This vital information can be made available because, remarkably, a tracker can continue to monitor your visitor's behaviour after leaving your site.

Campaign Features

Campaign Start/End Dates

Are you planning to run many campaigns, maybe for many different products?

Keeping tight control of such promotions can be time consuming so a handy feature in a tracker is to accept start and end dates which will allow it to provide you with an overall summary of all of your current, expired, and scheduled ads; and notify you when an ad is due to start or end. Knowing when an ad is going to end can give you time to evaluate the results and renew it before it the expiry date.

Sub Campaigns

How would you like to promote a product in multiple forums or ezines and not have to create a tracking campaign each time?

You can do this with sub campaigns.

You just need to create the tracking URL once, for example

<http://www.Test-and-Track.com/cgi-bin/a/b.cgi?report>

Then for each campaign you simply invent a different suffix and attach that to the URL using the appropriate tracker format

So for example if you want to mention your product in ezine number 1 you might have an URL like this

http://www.Test-and-Track.com/cgi-bin/a/b.cgi?report_azine1

Your tracking reports will then show how many clicks have been made to that page from all the different sources.

So, as well as the ease of using an URL without having to set up another tracking campaign, you can now see at a glance the effectiveness of all these campaigns. If you had instead set up lots of individual campaigns you would then have to collate figures from many different areas of the tracking reports for comparison purposes.

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Link Checking

What happens if a tracking URL becomes invalid for whatever reason (such as an affiliate company changing their linking format)?

You may lose a potential customer.

To avoid this, your tracker should provide a default URL facility so that you can specify where you want the visitor to be transferred.

A more advanced option available is an automated check of all your links every few hours and if a dead link is found you should automatically be emailed.

There is another consideration worth mentioning at this point - Link Popularity. If you are placing links on external web sites that point to a tracking service, then they will reap the benefit of the links. Obviously using your own script will result in links being created that point to your own URL.

Redirect Files

Would you like to be able to shorten, or even hide, your tracking URL?

Example: would you prefer

<http://www.yourdomain.com/magic.htm>

instead of

<http://www.yourdomain.com/cgi-bin/a/b.cgi?report1>

You can do this with a redirect file.

Here's how: for the above case you create a file with the name magic.htm containing this code:

```
<html>
<head>
<meta http-equiv="refresh"
content="0"; url=http://www.yourdomain.com/cgibin/a/b.cgi?report1">
</head>
</html>
```

You can now use the magic.htm URL as your tracking URL and visitors who click on it will be redirected to the report1 page.

But you don't have to manually code this. Some ad trackers will create the code for you ready for it to be copied to a redirect file and uploaded to your site or even run the upload for you.

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Report Presentation

Basic reports.

At the minimum an ad tracker should report on the total number of clicks, and ideally unique visitor clicks, across a variety of date ranges, for example

Clicks to date, for the hour, the day, the week, the month and for the year.

Extra reporting features.

Other features to look out for would include:

Reports showing the campaigns which generate the most visitors and, in the case where action tracking is available, the most sales, subscribers, downloads, or other most wanted response.

An automatic mail out of reports on a periodic basis such as daily or weekly

Reports produced in graphical as well as text based output

The option to export the report as a spreadsheet or data file

Remember you can use your Ad Tracker to run split testing to measure the effectiveness of anything that you can click!

Testing and Tracking - Special Report

What to test to make your web page “Sticky”

We have looked very closely at testing and tracking and all the elements that we can test and track to improve our conversion rates. But what should we do if visitors are simply quickly scanning the page and closing the window?

Here is a checklist of 21 web page turn offs...

1. Pages too big for standard monitors
2. Pages that can't be read by all browsers
3. Use of non-standard fonts or font sizes that are too small to read
4. Too many graphics and large graphic files that slow down load times
5. Complex backgrounds or strong background colours that compete with your copy
6. Unnecessary “Flash” introductions
7. Poor navigation and broken links
8. Inconsistent design and presentation or a design that doesn't match you're theme
9. Counters and other gimmicks that distract your visitor
10. Lack of focus on your customer
11. No Unique Selling Point
12. All features and no benefits
13. Contact details that are missing or include free email addresses
14. Use of free hosting accounts
15. No guarantee or refund policy
16. Lack of secure payment gateway or SSL certificate
17. No clear attention grabbing headline
18. Long sentences and paragraphs that are difficult to read
19. Complex ordering process
20. Poor use of, or complete lack of, colour
21. Too many pop-ups or pop-unders

Testing and Tracking - Special Report

Conclusion

Some people have a natural ability to create a sales letter web page that achieves high levels of sales conversions almost instantly. The rest of us have to resort to testing and tracking to hone and to tweak each critical element of our content and each step of our sales process. Testing and tracking is an integral part of marketing. If we don't test and track we don't know what is and what isn't working. And, if we don't know it's broke we certainly can't fix it!

If you are reading this it is because you are serious about improving your chances of becoming a successful online entrepreneur. I wish you every success with your endeavours and I would like to say a big thank you for purchasing and reading this eBook.

One final quotation...

"There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are blessings given to us to learn from."
~ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

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About the author

John Taylor is a writer, a publisher and a marketing consultant. He lives in a cottage on the fringe of the English Lake District with his wife Christine and daughter Rebecca, together with four dogs and six cats. His son Mark & his partner Sarah have recently delighted John with the news that he is to become a Grandfather!

John's career has embraced a broad range of job functions across a number of industries. His early career focused on engineering and production and he later moved into general management. Although UK based, John has spent time working in North America, Europe, Africa and the Far East.

John has spent the most recent twelve years working as a consultant advising clients such as Cadbury, Coca Cola, GE Capital, Glaxo SmithKline, Lion Foods, Quest International and Sellotape. Over the past two years his work has become much more focused online and he has set up a number of internet based businesses. Here is a selection that may be of interest:

Lakeshost.com – web site design, hosting, ecommerce and online promotion

DesignByYou.com – a site dedicated to the use of web site templates.

Web-Optimisation.com – web site optimization and search engine submission

Marketing-Hero.com – a highly successful marketing ezine

Test-and-Track.com – provides advice and guidance on web metrics

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