

Conversion rate optimization strategies for any marketing budget

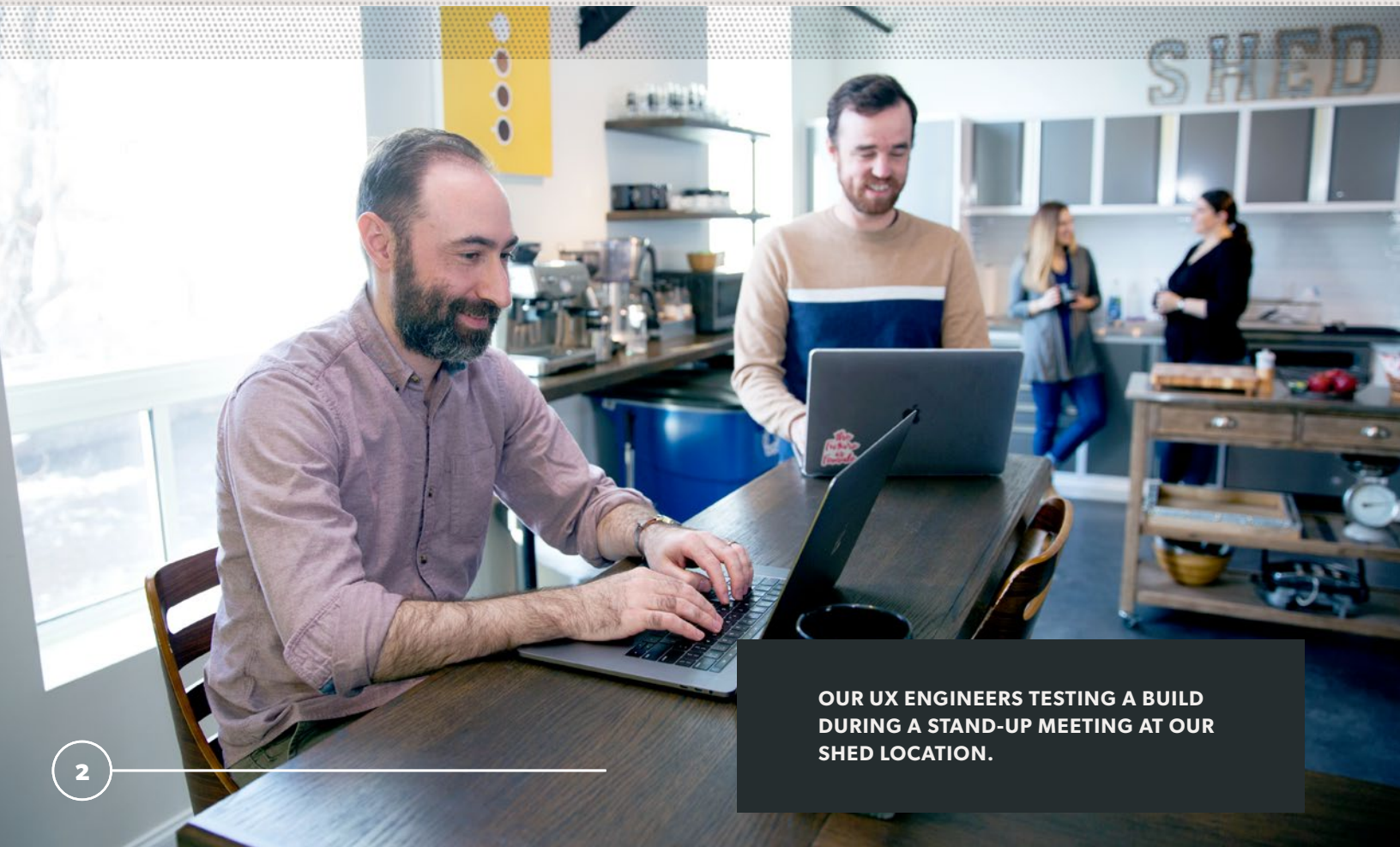
Author: Jeremy Ott





About Imarc

With over 20 years of practice in developing and supporting digital experiences, Imarc has helped implement conversion rate optimization (CRO) strategies for early-stage startups to Fortune 500 companies.



OUR UX ENGINEERS TESTING A BUILD DURING A STAND-UP MEETING AT OUR SHED LOCATION.



Introduction

If you're reading this, you're most likely involved in managing your organization's customer-facing website. For decades now, marketing teams have been experimenting with different products, messages, and branding in an attempt to generate demand and convert website visitors into paying customers. While the details of these experiments may differ by industry, the tools and techniques used to optimize website conversion rates are universally applicable. We hope the tools and techniques provided here will help you plan for and successfully implement your own CRO strategy.

WHAT WE'LL COVER

1. **What is Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO)?**
2. **Why do you need a CRO strategy?**
3. **How do you implement a CRO strategy?**
4. **CRO for small and medium-sized businesses (SMB)**
5. **CRO for enterprise**
6. **Checklist for CRO success**



What is Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO)?

The conversion rate of your website is the percentage of visitors who convert into customers. For example, if 10% of the people who visit your website complete the intended action (make a purchase, sign up for your service, etc.) that means you have a 10% conversion rate. Conversion Rate Optimization (CRO) is the act of increasing this percentage through improved messaging, design, or user experience.

A NOTE ON CRO IN A POST-GDPR WORLD

Many CRO tools rely on tracking visitor behavior and history. It can be challenging to understand what is and isn't acceptable when it comes to establishing a [GDPR compliant](#) CRO strategy. The tools highlighted in this post vary in their interpretation and rigidity, but they are all considered GDPR compliant. The content of this ebook should not be taken as legal advice.

Why do you need a CRO strategy?

If you have a website primarily to sell goods or capture leads, the benefits of a CRO strategy should be pretty obvious. Regardless of the intended action of your website, by implementing a CRO strategy, you'll likely see an increase in traffic, customers, and sales while you stay ahead of the competition.

Small changes add up when it comes to your CRO strategy. Improved page load time has proven to decrease bounce rates which positively impacts the conversion rate of that page. Layout, content, and design changes all play an equally important role in helping to increase conversion rates.

How do you implement a CRO strategy?

While people typically think of A/B testing when talking about CRO, developing a sound strategy actually runs more like a science experiment. Making educated guesses about what your visitors will engage with is part of the experimentation process. Here are the steps you should take:

1. Define the problem
2. Analyze the current state
3. Hypothesize results
4. Experiment
5. Analyze results
6. Implement changes



There is a lot of information to unpack and consider once you make the decision to get serious about CRO. We take a two-phased approach to implement CRO strategies, regardless of your budget and resources. These include:

Baseline preparation

Analysis & experimentation

BASELINE PREPARATION

Before you can start experimenting on and analyzing individual pages, you need to make sure your site's technical health is in good standing. Like building a new home, you need a foundation and some finished walls before you can start testing paint swatches. A good foundation creates a baseline for you to start experimenting, removes additional variables that could affect conversion rates, and typically leads to improvements in bounce rate, time-on-page, and more. We'll get into specific tools and tactics for setting the foundation for your CRO strategy in the sections below.

ANALYSIS & EXPERIMENTATION

Before getting creative with different content or design experiments, collect some information on how users are interacting with the current website and content. This analysis will help you identify high-traffic pages, user flows, and top converting pages. If you haven't already, now is the time to put tools in place so you know when a page's conversion rate drops.

While a lot has changed over the past few years, the correlation identified in [Pingdom's 2018 analysis](#) between page load time and bounce rate is still valid. If you haven't already done so, run your homepage and a handful of your most highly trafficked pages through Google's free [PageSpeed Insights](#) tool. This tool provides you with a score for both mobile and desktop, but one of the most important metrics they measure is First Contentful Paint (FCP). FCP is important because it measures the perceived load speed of any given page. Learn more about FCP [here](#).



Experimentation is probably the most exciting part of the CRO strategy. There are so many possible variables to take into account and experiments to run. As a result of this complexity, we won't go into specific experiments, but rather provide you with guidelines for managing your own.

This phase of optimizing your website's conversion rate is ongoing and should be re-evaluated on a regular basis.

CRO for small & medium-size business (SMB)

The primary differences between an enterprise and a startup's CRO strategy are the tools available and the time it takes to gain any valuable insights. We break the CRO for SMB strategy into the two phases we mentioned earlier: Baseline Preparation and Analysis & Experimentation.

CRO FOR SMBs: BASELINE PREPARATION

One of the challenges we encounter with smaller companies is their lack of development resources, making website health optimization difficult at times. The good news is that if you work with an agency, website health concerns should be baked into their development workflow. If you're a small marketing organization with access to a Content Management System (CMS) and no formal development support, there are actionable steps you can take to improve page load time.

For some smaller companies, images that were downloaded directly from a stock image retailer tend to be the biggest (literally) culprit when it comes to slow page load times. Here are a few tips for handling those larger images:

- Work with your graphic designer to make sure image compression and resizing is built into their workflow.
- If you're using WordPress as your CMS, consider a well-established/rated plugin like [Smush](#) to help automatically compress your images.
- Pay for an image compression tool like [Kraken.io](#) or something similar.

If you do have additional development resources and you would like to tackle third-party scripts contributing to poor performance, skip ahead to the [CRO for Enterprise: Baseline Preparation](#) section.



At the end of the day, you shouldn't let limited resources hold you back from getting started on the analysis and experimentation phase. Any improvement to image compression or third-party script loading should yield better bounce and conversion rates.

CRO FOR SMBs: ANALYSIS & EXPERIMENTATION

1. Identify high-traffic pages

If you're an SMB, you likely won't have tens of thousands of visitors hitting any given page every day. This means some of your experiments might take significantly longer to reach statistical significance. This is where the analysis of your key pages is so important. If you can **identify one or two pages to run experiments on that is your most frequently trafficked**, you're going to have an easier time reaching your experimentation goals.

2. Create a realistic experimentation plan

Go bold! If possible, **spend more time coming up with unique experiments that are drastically different from the current state**. This approach will typically yield clearer results than the traditional incremental changes often employed by Enterprise level companies. With that said, any experimentation is better than no experimentation.

Experiment on components that can be easily used throughout the site. This holds true for the Enterprise as well, but with limited resources, it will be easier to implement a reusable component across your site. In other words, don't come up with an alternative experience that could only ever apply to your experimentation page.

3. Review results and set expectations

When your shiny new button or experience yields minimal change to the conversion rate of a specific page or it never reached statistical significance, you are likely to feel some level of frustration or disappointment. "How could this have happened?" you ask. "The new experience is so much better!" you say. You will be tempted to simply go with the new button or experience because it "looks better" but don't! This is part of the process. In a 2018 industry report of 3,900 marketers, UserTesting identified a majority of respondents saw **< 40% success rate of their A/B experiments**. This isn't intended to discourage you from running A/B experiments, but rather to set expectations that a number of your tests will likely not reach statistical significance.

If you're working with limited pages that can offer a good platform for experimentation, you always want to limit the number of variables you add into the mix. Keep your control state constant until you find a variation that significantly improves the conversion rate.



Percent of companies reporting the indicated success rate of their A/B tests
(Success = statistically significant result)

Continue setting realistic experimentation goals and consider creating a calendar or running list of experiments you want to implement. Keeping an organized list of experiments will help keep you motivated to continue testing!

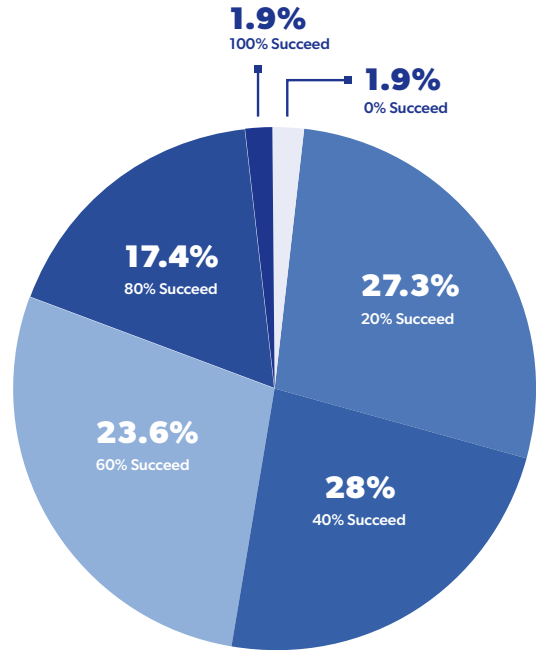
CRO FOR SMBs: TOOLS AND RESOURCES

For organizations just getting started with CRO, we recommend embracing the free suite of Google tools. Google Optimize has become increasingly powerful since Google's "Content Experiments" tool was sunsetted in August 2019.

Follow the setup guide linked [here](#) to prepare for your first Optimize experiments.

Once you've successfully integrated your Optimize account with your Google Analytics account, you will be able to start your first experiment (also referred to as an "Experience" within Optimize). Consider starting with a simple A/B test on a highly trafficked page.

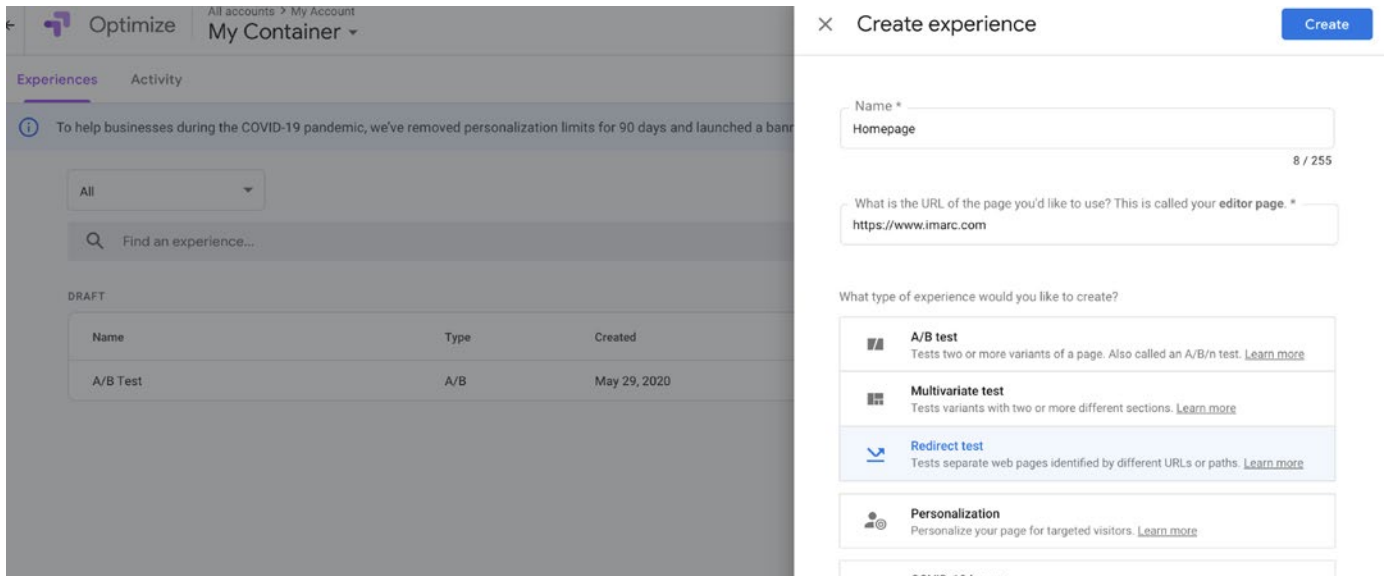
When it comes to defining statistical significance, Google and other CRO tools typically calculate and track this for you. This way, you don't need to worry about becoming a mathematician in the process. Some tools allow you to set your threshold (or p-value).



When our new ideas fail, it's usually because we were overconfident about how well [visitors] would understand and how much they would care.

JAKE KNAPP

SPRINT: HOW TO SOLVE BIG PROBLEMS AND TEST NEW IDEAS IN JUST FIVE DAYS



Google Optimize does a great job of explaining all of the above in this [article](#).

Here are a few links to some of the tools and resources we just discussed:

[Google Analytics](#): A free web analytics tool to help you track website traffic, bounce rate, time-on-page, attribution, and much more! Use this tool to identify your most highly trafficked pages and pages contributing most to your site’s overall bounce rate.

[Google PageSpeed Insights](#): A free tool to help you understand the overall health of a specific page. Select a handful of highly trafficked pages and run them through the PageSpeed Insights tool to help identify where to focus your attention.

[Google Optimize](#): A free testing toolkit to kick-start your experiments! Use this tool to set up A/B tests, split URL tests and even personalization. Easily link it to your Google Analytics account to make sure you continue to accurately represent your website traffic data and link to any existing goals.

[Web.dev](#): Google’s web development performance blog has lots of useful information. The content is geared towards a more technical audience, but there is plenty of educational content for webmasters of all abilities and experience levels.

[Hotjar](#): A great tool for getting started with heat mapping and understanding user flows.



CRO for enterprise

If you're working for an enterprise-level organization, you likely already have some form of CRO strategy in place. Depending on your team's resources and priorities, you may have an individual responsible for implementing changes, or you may have an entire team dedicated to optimization. We've broken our recommendations into the two-phased approach we mentioned earlier.

CRO FOR ENTERPRISE: BASELINE PREPARATION

With the many competing priorities of a large-scale corporate site, it's not uncommon to see sites loading scripts for SaaS services they have long since canceled. Before you get a developer involved to help with the creative loading of your third-party scripts, perform an audit of the tools getting loaded on your site. There are a number of helpful free tools to help you perform this audit:

- <https://www.wappalyzer.com/lookup>
- <https://builtwith.com/>

Google goes into [more detail](#) about the impact of third-party scripts. Many of the changes will likely require a developer to implement. With that said, the third-party script audit is made easier if your team takes advantage of [Tag Managers](#) for consolidating, loading, and managing all of your third-party scripts.

There are so many more possible site health optimization elements to consider. We don't have the time to go into all of them, so I suggest reviewing [Google's documentation](#) if you want to take a closer look.

If you have the resources, we would suggest looking into a monitoring tool to gain deeper insight into the overall health of your site on a more regular basis. Get in touch with your IT department or engineering team to understand what tools may already be available. We have seen enterprise-level companies successfully use tools like [Pingdom](#) or [Datadog](#) for monitoring uptime, user interactions, and even testing forms.

CRO FOR ENTERPRISE: ANALYSIS & EXPERIMENTATION

1. Attribution reporting and analysis

You will likely already be working with a marketing automation tool that allows you to track traditional form conversions, but what about understanding how those individuals made it to the form in the first place? This is where enterprise-level attribution tracking tools like [Neustar](#) come into play. If you don't have the resources for Neustar, simply spend a little more time working with the Google Analytics (GA) attribution reporting and your marketing automation tools. You may not necessarily get the multi-touch reporting capabilities that you're looking for, but you will be able to make educated guesses based on the GA User Flow report and total conversion in a given timeframe.

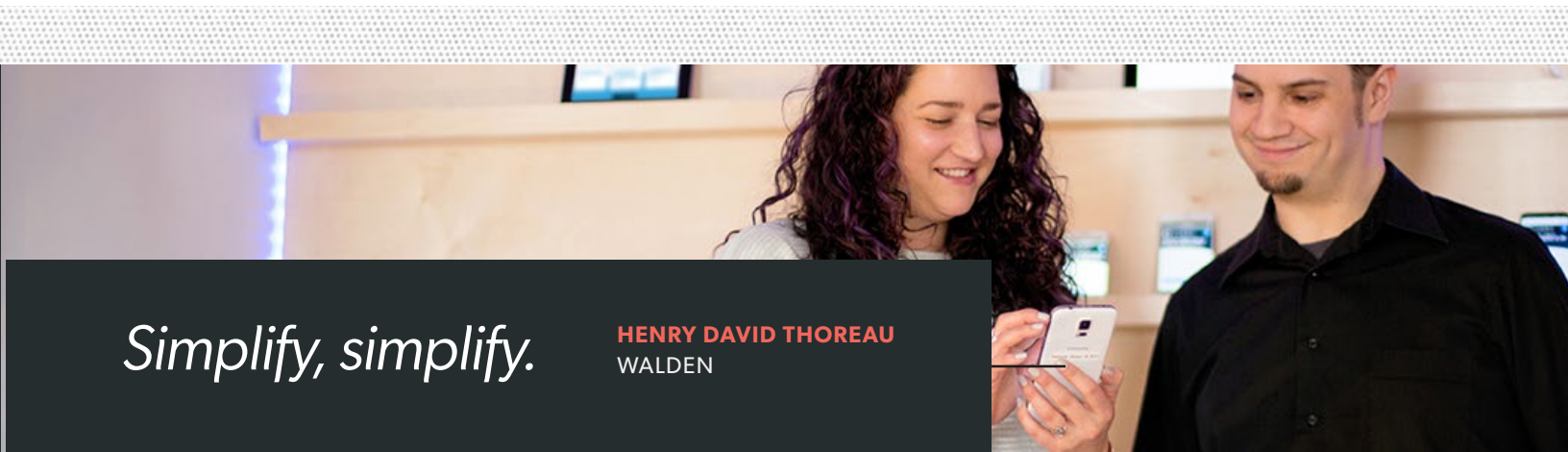


2. Alignment

With so many resources at your disposal, it's easy to get carried away with the complexity and frequency of your experimentation. Align experimentation with your marketing organization's priorities for the quarter to add some structure to your experimentation. That recommendation is a little vague, so here are a few examples of organization-wide priorities you may be able to align your process with.

MARKETING PRIORITY	Promote the Partner Marketplace and Increase Marketing Attributed Revenue Share Dollars by 30%	Increase Customer Marketing Attributed Leads	Grow Weekly Webinar Attendance
ANALYSIS AND TESTING EXAMPLE	<p>Analyze: Identify where the problem lies. Is there not enough traffic getting to the Marketplace or are there simply limited conversion opportunities on the Marketplace pages?</p> <p>Test: Add the "Marketplace" page/ website to your primary navigation.</p>	<p>Analyze: Identify current traffic levels and bounce rate of Customer Marketing related pages (customer success, case studies, trust pages, etc.)</p> <p>Test: Pick a gated case study and un-gate it. Make a landing page version of it (as opposed to a PDF) and strategically place CTAs for live demos throughout</p>	<p>Analyze: Identify the bounce rate of your Webinar landing page.</p> <p>Test: Add a checklist of items you'll be covering on the webinar.</p> <p>Consider offering a social share option to your landing page experience.</p>

As you can imagine, aligning your testing strategy could become much more manageable if you bucketed experiments into 2-3 overarching categories.



Simplify, simplify.

HENRY DAVID THOREAU
WALDEN



3. Experimentation

As a larger organization, you will likely want to come up with a more formal testing calendar or plan. Just as the content team is responsible for managing the publishing calendar, you too should be working to update and share the experimentation calendar with the larger marketing organization on a regular basis.

We put together a [Google Sheet template](#) to help you organize some of your upcoming experiments.

CRO FOR ENTERPRISE: TOOLS & RESOURCES

We thought it might be helpful to simply list which tools we've had direct experience with and how they help. The tools listed below should help any enterprise team looking to build a more structured CRO strategy expand their A/B testing, split URL testing, heat mapping, and personalization toolkit.

Pingdom: Pingdom offers website monitoring tools for companies of all sizes, but it primarily focuses on those with larger team and monitoring needs. Their services include uptime monitoring and synthetic monitoring, which is the simulation of visitors interacting with your digital experiences. This is especially helpful when trying to identify broken third-party embedded forms.

Datadog: Similar to Pingdom, they offer synthetic monitoring services in addition to cloud application performance monitoring.

Neustar: An enterprise-level multi-touch attribution tracking system to help you better understand visitor behavior on your site.

Optimizely: While their focus has shifted to larger-scale applications and not necessarily websites, the core functionality still stands. Take advantage of their complex Feature and A/B testing tools to go beyond button color changes and content updates.

Freshmarketer: A great, affordable, all-in-one platform for A/B to be consistent, heat mapping, personalization, etc.

Omniconvert: Another solid CRO tool with great documentation and blog content to help get you started.

VWO: A step up from Freshmarketer, VWO offers an all-in-one platform with solutions that seem to be purpose-built for enterprise.

**Note - we purposefully did not account for CRO tools included in CMSs like HubSpot and AEM.*



Summary & checklist

We hope you learned something new today! In summary, regardless of your resources, existing tools, or experience, optimizing your site for conversion should be a major priority. Start small and work your way up to a more structured testing plan. If you find your testing plan has gone out the window, try aligning it with your marketing team's priorities.

Below you will find a checklist of action items to set you up for success with your CRO strategy:

- Read this article! Keep it up, you're on a roll!
- Run your homepage through Google PageSpeed Insights and other site health tools.
- Identify the top five most highly trafficked pages.
- Sign up for a free trial with one of the CRO tools listed in the glossary above.
- Identify one element on a highly trafficked page to run and A/B test with.
- Document your hypothesis and experiment plan.
- Identify time to statistical significance.
- Run your experiment.
- Identify the winning variation and, if applicable, make improvements to your site.

If you didn't gain anything from this article because you're already a CRO pro, consider checking out [our career's page](#)! We're always looking for great new talent.

