A/B TESTING

MADE EASY

Multivariant Testing Basics for Nonprofits

JOURNITY

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Do phrases like "A/B testing", "split testing" and "conversion rate optimization" overwhelm you? Fear no more. We're breaking down the basics of A/B testing to make it easy and doable for you, starting today!

If you want to get more supporters, volunteers and donors, then it's time to get serious about increasing conversions on your site. And the best way to do that is through a simple, yet powerful tactic called "split testing" (aka A/B testing).

This crucial strategy component is often overlooked by nonprofit marketers. In fact, very few organizations we work with are accurately A/B testing (or testing at all) before they partner with us. Nevertheless, A/B testing has the power to generate significant impact and boost results for nonprofits - therefore, we include it in all of our digital strategies. It's simply that important.

There are many misconceptions about testing and the impact it can potentially have on your conversion rates. However, we've vetted the best resources to provide you with the most important information to get you started today.

While it may seem overwhelming at first, trust us when we say - it's pretty simple. The key to testing is...

- Knowing what to test,

- How to analyze the results,

- And how to make data-driven decisions to add your bottom line.

A/B Testing is *essential* to any marketing success

Let's begin.

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In This Guide

Get to know us

Journity is the latest cloud-based software solution, and the first product of its kind developed specifically with nonprofit organizations in mind. Journity revolutionizes the way you think about your website by bringing you a way to connect with your digital audience on an individualized level. In this day and age, individuals expect individualized experiences. By using our simplified dashboard, you can go beyond simple website analytics to deliver messages to your website visitors in real-time, messages that resonate with individuals, because those messages are based on their own personal interests and behaviors.

FiveQ, the company behind Journity, was founded on the principle of multiplying impact. That means at the heart of what we do is an unwavering desire to grow the missions of nonprofit organizations both across the US and worldwide through SEO user experience, creative design, brand identity, email marketing, website development, and website personalization.

Chad Williams
Five Q CEO

Find us online

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What is A/B Testing and Why Should I Care?

A/B testing can also be referred to as *split* or *multivariate* testing. The key difference is "multivariate" testing refers to more than two tests (i.e. version A, version B, version C, and so on).

These types of testing (regardless of which you choose) allow you to compare how your audience responds to different elements in your marketing copy and design. **Testing is a great way to obtain quick insights** by experimenting with different variations to see what your audience responds to best. This will, in turn, increase your conversion rates and improve overall campaign results.

Are your website visitors more likely to click on a headline with an emotional or a direct appeal? Do they prefer a popup message with an image or no image?

For example, you can test headlines, images, copy, colors and much more -- from entire website pages to a specific headline or button color on your donation page. It's likely that you already use many tools or services that have A/B testing built-in.

The insights derived from testing will help you better understand your audience to improve website performance. A/B testing is an insightful way to learn about what makes visitors "click". By capturing behavioral data, you'll serve your audience better and improve campaign results.

In the example below, two headlines are tested to see which variation performs better.

> Headline A: Simple Digital Solutions
> Headline B: Simple Interface and Flexible Design

A simple A/B test with Journity allows you to show half of your audience the first headline and the other half the second headline.

Let's assume the B variation won this test. This would tell us that our audience is more interested in specific features like a *simple interface* and *flexible design* as opposed to a more generalized copy like "digital solutions". Moving forward, we know to include features and benefits in our headline copy to achieve greater results and higher conversion rates.

Testing marketing efforts helps you be more effective at reaching your organizational goals. By optimizing your content and overall digital performance, you'll create better connections with your audience resulting in increased awareness, volunteers, and donations. No audience is alike and it's crucial you understand what best resonates with your digital audience.

Why you can (and should) be A/B testing?

The simple, straightforward answer is -- A/B testing will significantly impact your campaign results and ROI.

For example, let's assume 100 people per month visit your website and on average 10 of them convert to donors. Your goal is to double the number of donors each month. Therefore, you have two options:

1. Double the traffic to your website to convert more donors. This option can be very costly because buying traffic through paid ads will quickly eat up a large portion of your budget.

2. Use A/B testing to optimize your conversion rates (convert more donors) with the same amount of traffic.

Option 2 allows you to **convert more donors** *from the traffic you already have.* Therefore, instead of spending thousands of dollars to drive new traffic to your website, invest in optimizing the traffic already on your site. This is why A/B testing fits many nonprofit budgets -- because most of the digital platforms marketers are currently using have testing features built-in.

Additionally, testing helps you stretch the budget further by doubling your conversions. If your cost per donor is cut in half (because you're not spending advertising dollars), marketing efforts become more profitable. Then, the extra budget is free to help grow your email list and invest in other growth initiatives.


Doubling your conversion rates might sound like a monumental task, but it's fairly simple. Recently, we ran an A/B test to see which email subject line would generate a higher open rate. The graph on the left shows our results.

Variation B performed considerably better with a 30% higher open rate than version A. This campaign was sent through MailChimp and tested on a small audience segment. The winner was sent to the rest of the audience. We experienced a 30% growth in engagement and more people reading our emails simply from this one test!

Over time, running tests on multiple things like subject lines, buttons, and headlines will help you learn what makes your audience "click". You'll notice results are achievable and much easier than you imagine.
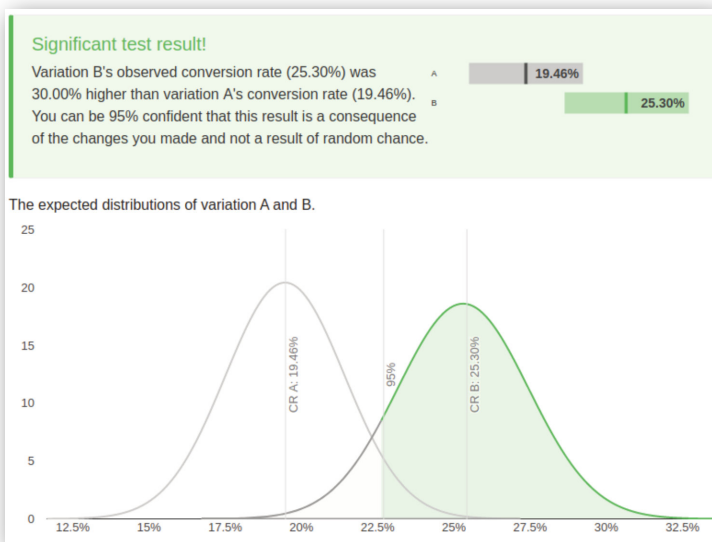
2 Ingredients for Successful A/B Testing

One of the benefits of testing is the ability to get started right away with the tech you already have in place. There are only two ingredients needed to run a successful test.

1. Traffic to your website.
2. Time to collect the data.

Statistical Significance

It's important to achieve statistical significance by gathering enough data to ensure your test results are accurate. A consistent flow of website traffic is essential for reaching statistical significance. Without people on your site, it takes a

long time to gather enough data to get accurate results. Therefore, it's important to have steady website traffic so you can reach a volume of conversions to achieve statistical significance.

Ensuring your test is valid is critical because the data needs to accurately represent audience behavior in order for you to better engage and serve your online visitors.

For example, if your sample size is too small, then the test results will not be sound and therefore, you'll be unable to declare a winner.

Use the AB Testguide calculator to forecast audience data for a valid test. Most testing platforms have these calculations built in so you don't have to waste time determining statistical significance for every test. However, if the platform you're using doesn't, but sure to check out AB Testguide first.

Representative Sample

Many professionals are pressed for time and resources in the nonprofit world. In this section, we're referring to *time* as giving the data *time* to collect so the results are representative of the whole.

Time is important because we want a representative sample. On the right, you can see data by days of the month and number of transactions. You can see almost all of the donations occurred in the last 15 days of the month and very few occurred in the first 15 days.

Time is a factor in long term conversion rate optimization rather than quick tests like the email subject line example above. If your goal is to increase donor giving long term, then you want to consider things like what time of the month people get paid, holidays, giving season, elections, current events, etc. These trends and cycles can greatly impact the results of your test.

Your business cycle might be much longer or shorter. If you run a test on the first few days of the month, the results might not be representative of the results you'd get on the last five days of the month. Therefore, pay attention to your business cycle. If it looks like the example above, consider running longer tests so your data isn't skewed by business cycle trends.

It also depends on *what* you're testing. For example, if you're testing overall website changes, you'll see in the graph on the left, Sunday's data is significantly different than the data on Tuesday and Wednesday. If you run a test on Sunday, it'll produce different results as opposed to Wednesday. Look at the data behind your business cycles and what you're testing. This information is crucial and available to you in Google Analytics. It will guide you in determining the length of time to run your tests.

Daily Traffic by Device Type
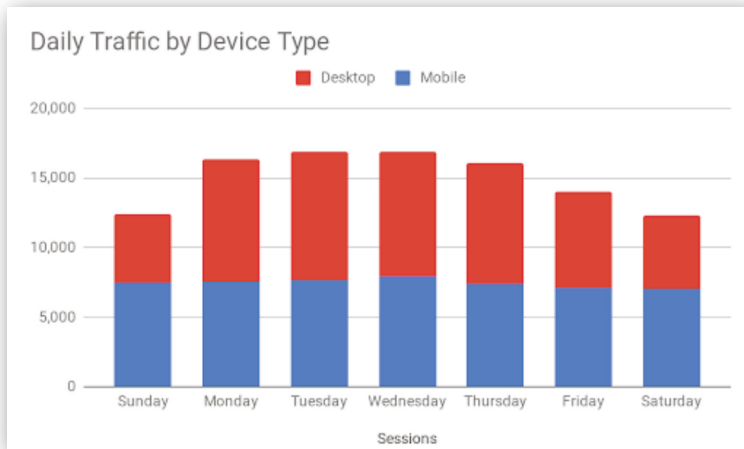
Keep in mind the two key components to running a good test are website traffic and time. Knowing what your testing and your business cycle trends will help you determine how long to run a test and how big of a sample size you need to achieve statistical significance.

Selecting the Correct Test to Run

There are four key strategies to get the results you want when it comes to testing.

1. To start, you need a **high level of visibility.** This is important because, without adequate website traffic, there wouldn't be enough people seeing your test to provide meaningful data. Nobody wants to waste time testing if the data doesn't accurately reflect true audience behavior.

    The volume of traffic on your site will determine statistical significance and a high-level of visibility will help you reach more people with your mission. Many marketers waste time testing variables on very specific pages (i.e. /coastrica2019project) with low visibility. However, if you run tests on pages with high visibility like the Home or About page, you'll see a much greater impact.

    For example, let's assume you increase the conversion rate on your homepage by 10%. This boost would ripple through your donation funnel and generate a greater impact than if you increased the conversion rate on low visibility, project-specific page.

    The goal is to **test variables that will drive the greatest impact.** Starting here will provide you with key insight to guide your more specific tests down the road.

    Key takeaway: test high visibility areas first and often.

2. Next, **design tests to align with your key performance indicators (KPIs)**. When you know what you're trying to achieve, it's easier to create tests that help you reach your goals. KPIs should drive what you test and how you test it.

For example, if you want to increase email open rates for a specific campaign, test two subject lines that align with your KPIs and see which one performs the best.

> Key takeaway: Let KPIs drive what you test.

3. **Test to overcome a weakness.** What challenges are you facing on your website? Do you need more email subscribers? Do you want to increase online donations? Before you start testing like a mad man, consider the weak spots in your digital strategy, more specifically - your website and conversion funnel. How can you improve the overall effectiveness of your website by fixing key areas?

   Let's say you run two tests on your website - (1) increase email subscribers and (2) to boost online donations. If your email subscribers conversion rate is already at 15% and you run a test, your growth will be very incremental. This is because 15% is already a high conversion rate.

   However, if you're donation conversion rate is 0.5% and you run a test to improve it, you'll see a greater impact because you have significant room to grow. As you improve performance over time through several rounds of testing, it gets harder and harder to see *big* changes so be sure to keep track of the law of diminishing returns.

> Key takeaway: focus on overcoming a weakness before improving something that is already performing well.

4. Only make **one change per test.** A general rule of thumb is to test one thing at a time. This is important because if you test several variables at the same time, you won't know what worked and what didn't.

   If we change the headline, image, and CTA in one test and experience great results, we won't know which variable prompted the growth. Was it the headline? Was it the CTA or the image? In many cases, the data gets mixed when you're testing too many things at once. For this reason, it's important to test only one variable at a time so your data doesn't become a wash.

> Key takeaway: test one thing at a time.

Tools for A/B Testing

A/B testing is relatively simple and extremely common in the digital marketing world. Many online marketing platforms have split testing tools built-in so you can easily run a test, analyze the data and put those insights into action. Because testing is crucial to your marketing success and should be an ongoing part of your digital strategy, we've provided a quick rundown of our favorite tools to help you get started today.

Email Provider

Email marketing is (and should be) a priority for any business or nonprofit in 2019. There are several great email service providers like MailChimp, Drip or Constant Contact that allow you to send direct communication to your audience. The great news is -- you're only a few clicks away from running your first A/B test. Because nearly every email service has a built-in testing feature.
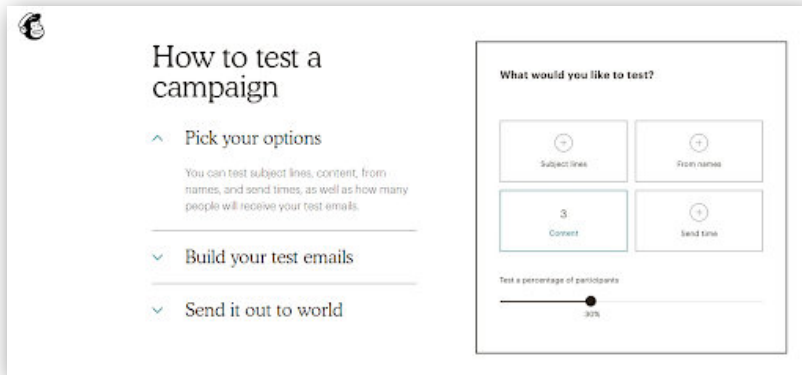
MailChimp is our preferred email service because of its user-friendly interface and prebuilt testing components like subject lines, from sender names, content, and send times. We love this feature because these are very common A/B tests, and with MailChimp's prebuilt testing feature, you don't have to worry about deciding what to test. Simply select a test that best aligns with your goals and you're ready to go!

Many email providers allow you to test a small percentage of your audience first. Once a winner is determined, it will automatically push out the test with the highest performing variation to the rest of your audience.

Like the subject line test mentioned earlier in this guide, we're able to achieve significantly more email opens from a simple test. This results in more people reading our emails, connecting with our content and ultimately deepening the relationship with our brand.

Therefore, start by looking at the email tools you already have in your marketing stack to determine which ones offer testing features.

Google Optimize

Google does it again with another platform made for nonprofit and business marketers alike. Synced with your Google Analytics, Google Optimize allows you to create A/B and multivariate tests on your website. From testing your entire homepage and navigation bar to customized messages on landing pages, you can do it all. The best part -- Google Analytics data will help you determine where to start by identifying areas of weakness on your site.

Google Optimize offers a free and paid version. For most organizations, the free version is sufficient. Therefore, if you have saved segments, conversions, and events in your Google Analytics, you can trigger A/B tests to occur at any of those events. This makes it easy to test things that directly align with your KPIs.

Journity

Unlock the power of personalized website engagement and testing with Journity. We highly recommend this service because it was built specifically for nonprofits. Our team of digital experts recognized a need for onsite messages (overlays, slide-ins, embedded content) and simple testing -- so we built it.

Journity allows you to test different elements of your marketing messages and collect audience data immediately. It's easy to set up, especially if you have a WordPress website because it comes with a WP plugin - no programmer

## How to Track and Organize Your Test

Let's face it - data can be overwhelming so we recommend keeping it simple. Our weapon of choice is Google Sheets because it allows you to add predefined results.

With Google Sheets, you can see, at a glance, what types of tests have been run and how they performed by looking at trend data. It also allows you to see how campaigns performed overtime by having all the data in one place.
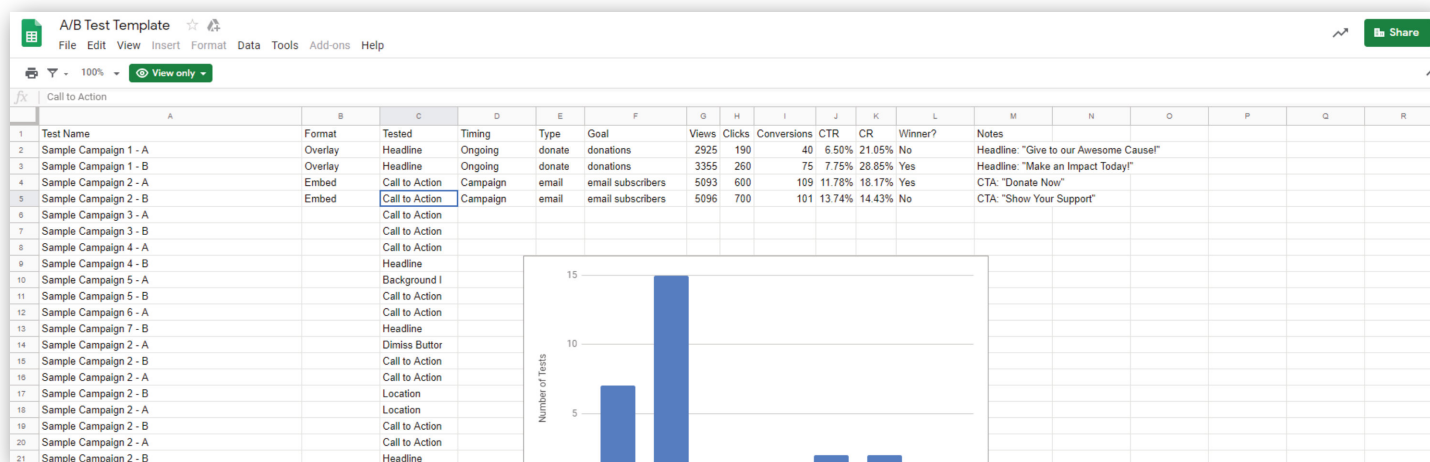
Google Sheets are easy to set up, share with your team, and make quick updates. Tracking data in this way helps you see weaknesses and determine what to test next.

On the right, you can see the person who created these tests oftentimes tested the CTA and headline rather than the location or image. Simple graphs like this one are a good visual indicator to help you determine what to test next.
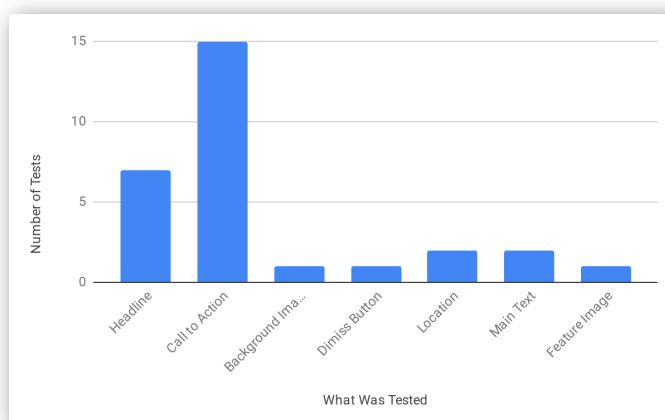
Key Learnings

In our personalized conversion software – Journity, we run hundreds of tests each year and one of our most common variables is the CTA copy. Oftentimes, marketers use creative language like "Save a life today" or "Do something amazing". However, not all audiences respond better to creative, clever language. Some prefer direct copy that tells them exactly what to do. Hence, testing is essential to your copywriting.

Recently, we tested the copy "show your support" versus "donate now". Running this simple copy test helped us learn more about our client's audience and if they respond better to emotional or direct copy.

Below, we're sharing a few key learnings we've picked up over the years of testing.

Testing Email Subject Lines

Your ability to automatically insert the name with merge tags will change depending on the platform you use. However, we've learned the more personalized you can be in the subject line, the better the results you'll get.

More opens = increased conversion rates. Each time we include someone's name in the subject line, email open rates skyrocket. The more personalized you can be, the better results you'll achieve.

What should I test first? Headline or CTA?

Our advice – pick the variable you're least sure of. If you feel unsure and don't know which one to choose, test it. Whatever looks weaker to you is a good place to start.

When you start testing for the first time, you don't have any data. As you gather data over time, you'll get better at testing. The point is to **start.** Once you've started, you can build on what you learn with each test.

Pointers for Writing Better Subject Lines

Here are a few of our top pointers for writing better subject lines. Depending on the audience you serve, these pointers may be something to consider when it comes to testing subject lines.

#1 – Test brand recognition. For example, include your organization's name in the subject line to see if "brand recognition" generates a higher open rate as opposed to the same subject line without your organization's name in it.

> Variation A: *Make an impact with [Org Name] today by doing this one thing...*
> Variation B: *Make an impact today by doing this one thing...*

#2 – Test statistical vs. emotional copy. Testing specific language helps you better understand if your audience prefers data and statistical language or copy written from a place of feeling, emotion, and impact.

> Variation A: *93% of NYC's homeless population are women and children.*
> Variation B: *Thousands of women and children are starving every day.*

#3 – Focus on what you think your audience is looking for. Are they wanting to financially support your cause, volunteer for an event or promote something they believe in? Test different audience segments to see if you can group your visitors by what they're looking for on your website and how they want to support your mission. This will help you write copy that is more effective and serves your audience based on their needs.

> Variation A: *We need 10 more donors to reach our goal. Can you give today?*
> Variation B: *Be part of something bigger. How will you change the world today?*

In summary, testing is critical to your marketing success. Optimizing the traffic that is already visiting your site is a smart (and resourceful) way to boost your conversion rates. A/B testing will help you get more email subscribers, volunteers, and donors without spending more of your budget. Get started today and you'll start noticing results in no time!

Next Steps

Our team of digital experts can help you set up your first A/B test with Journity! Contact us today and you'll get a free month of strategy consulting with our team!

First, we'll take a deep dive into your website and data, then make testing recommendations to produce the greatest impact. Next, we'll help you set up your first test so you feel confident when it comes to running future tests!

References:

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