How to Create an A/B Testing Program That Gets Results

A/B tests tell you whether changes you want to make will improve your conversions. The most common example is a test that compares two website headlines. Half of the people who visit the website receive one headline (control), while the other visitors see the other headline (variant). The purpose of the test is to determine which headline wins at converting people to sign up.

In this PDF, we'll go through why Kissmetrics is a great tool for tracking your A/B tests. You'll learn how to run and optimize your A/B testing process using one of the best A/B test reporting tools on the market. But before that, we'll get into how you can find the big wins when you're first starting.

FINDING THE BIG WINS

If you've never tested before, you'll find several 5-20% increases to your bottom line. I'm not talking about increases to some random conversion rate. **This is an increase to your revenue** and customer base. Finding a few 10% improvements to your revenue will take your business to a completely new level.

The best part? These are usually permanent increases to your customer growth. Make a single change to your business and reap the rewards for years to come.

But randomly testing all sorts of stuff on your site won't find these big wins for you.

We need some guidance on where to start looking.

If you're not an optimization pro that throws out A/B tests like candy, this is the process you want to use in order to get moving quickly.

To find the big wins with A/B testing, follow these steps:

1. Get qualitative insights (customer feedback)
2. Predict how to improve
3. Confirm the prediction with an A/B test

Let's work through each of them:

1. Get Qualitative Insights

Qualitative data does a great job with alerting us to problems. More importantly, it helps us learn the WHY behind the WHAT. Using analytics, you'll see where you customers bail, which features they use, and who your most profitable customers are. But to understand why your customers are doing what they're doing, you need to go talk to them. At Kissmetrics, here are our 5 favorite ways to get customer feedback:

1. Surveys

2. Feedback Boxes

3. Reach Out Directly

4. User Activity From Your Analytics

5. Usability Tests

To find the big-win optimizations, we want to continue to look for trends in the feedback we're receiving while diving deeper into issues we think are stirring up trouble.

Let's say you've been looking at your funnel and you notice that only a few people upgrade to a paid plan or purchase your product. You have a TON of people clicking on your offers but as soon as they see the price, they bail.

THIS IS WHERE WE WANT TO GET SURGICAL WITH OUR QUALITATIVE DATA.

Throw up a one-question survey on the purchase page asking people if they have any questions about the product. You could also include a support button to collect feedback. And reach out to customers that HAVE purchased and ask them why they chose to become a customer. Once you've gotten feedback from 15-20 people, I bet you'll be able to find a trend in the responses. Maybe you've oversold your offer in your marketing. Or maybe you haven't addressed a critical objection in your copy.

Here's the main take-away: **qualitative data helps us understand which elements will have the biggest impact when running A/B tests**.

Set up you customer feedback systems so you can easily spot emerging trends. And when one pops up, dive deeper so you know exactly what's going on.

2. Predict How to Improve

This step is pretty straight-forward. You've already collected a bunch of qualitative data on how your customers are behaving. And you know WHY they're behaving that way.

So it's time to brainstorm some solutions to your problem.

Remember, this is a "prediction." It's just a hypothesis. It might work, it might not. And we won't know until we get data to back it up.

3. Confirm Your Prediction With an A/B Test

Notice how the actual test comes at the END of this process, not at the beginning? By using qualitative data to help us understand what changes could be the most important, we're setting ourselves up to find big wins with these tests.

Now it's just a matter of testing to see if you're right. You need to confirm that people will BEHAVE the same way they SAY they will (usually, they don't). So get your hands on some data and run that A/B test.

Focus on finding your big wins and solving the major problems that you find from customer feedback. You can then make a huge impact on the growth of your business with a small amount of work.

With the Kissmetrics A/B Test Report, you can track how your A/B tests impact an entire funnel. You aren't limited to running open-rate or click-through tests. Instead, you can test against actions that actually matter to your business.

You can run a test at the top of the funnel (i.e., homepage headline test) and see how it impacts actions further down the funnel (sign ups). And, you can go as far down in the funnel as you'd like. The A/B Test Report doesn't stop at sign ups. Use the Report to measure variables that actually move the critical levers of your business.

ALL YOUR DATA IS TIED TO PEOPLE

Kissmetrics is a people-based analytics platform. That means all visits and sessions are tied back to a specific person.

Why does this matter?

Because if you want to run A/B tests that go deep in your funnel, you'll need people-tracking analytics. Running tests for outcomes deep in the funnel typically require multiple visits on multiple devices and take an extended period of time. The only way to accomplish this accurately is to track each person.

And, since you've already set up tracking in Kissmetrics, you don't need to spend additional time with another tool tracking your data. This allows you to spend less time tracking and more time building.

LESS TIME TRACKING, MORE TIME BUILDING

Because you'll spend less time tracking tests and more time building, you'll be able to get tests out the door quicker.

This matters because **the more tests you run, the higher your conversions will be**. If you run high quality tests back to back, you'll eventually find the variables that increase conversions. Then, you can build off those variables and keep testing to further increase your success. You can pitch out the variables that don't move the needle and quickly move on to your next test.
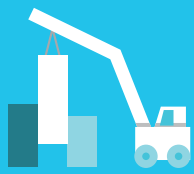
To build an A/B test and track it in Kissmetrics, you can either use one of our integrations or build it yourself in Kissmetrics. We integrate with the following tools:

- **Optimizely**
- **VWO**
- **AB Tasty**
- **Convert**
- **Unbounce**

If you're running the test yourself, you can easily set up tracking. Check out our documentation if you're interested in running a test using our JavaScript library or your own server side code. When creating the test, name the property the name of your test. You then split control people by giving them a control value on the property, and you split variant people by giving them a variant value on the same property.

At Kissmetrics, we create the test ourselves for any major test we run (full page redesigns, product redesigns, sign up flows, etc.).

If you're using Optimizely to build your tests, you'll need to do a couple of things to get the data into Kissmetrics:

1. In your Optimizely account, click on "Integrations"

2. Flip "Kissmetrics" to On:

Data is very volatile in the first few days of a test. Even if you're testing on a high traffic site, you'll still want to wait at least one week. Because the sample size is smaller in the first few days of a test, a small number of people will have a big impact.

The A/B Test Report recommends that you let a test run for at least a week. This will help ensure that sufficient data is received and that false positives have a minimal impact.

There are different rules of thumb that suggest how long you should run a test. The Report uses 95% certainty and 1 week of data before it calls a winner. At Kissmetrics, we let our tests run at least 1 week; we make sure at least 2000 people get in the test; and we wait until we reach 99% certainty.

There is an opportunity cost for letting tests run too long. For example, if you let a test that gives you a 6% boost run for 6 months, you could have found two 20-30% wins in that same time, which would have a much larger impact on your growth. At Kissmetrics, we kill tests if the impact looks like it's less than 10% when the test has been running for 1 month.

You'll need to find the balance between getting enough data and making sure you don't run a test too long. If too many tests run longer than necessary, you'll have fewer overall tests and it will take you longer to find the variables that move the needle. This is why it's important to get your workflow set before you run tests. Before you begin a test, you'll need to know what will determine a winner, and when it will be called.

Now, let's go back to our common example of comparing two website headlines.

We'll wait one week, and then we'll use the A/B Test Report to see how things are progressing.

When using this Report, we first need to select the Event we're tracking. In our case, we're looking at how signup rates compare for our two headlines.

We'll click the dropdown box and select the event "Signed up":
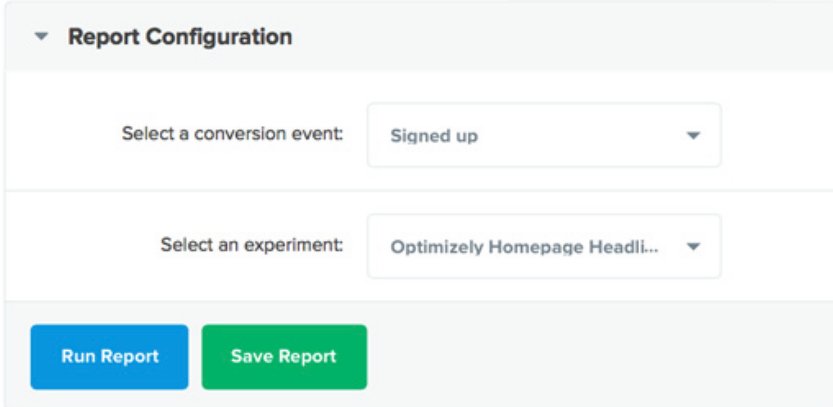
Remember that Optimizely (and many of our other integrations) automatically saves the test name as property. If you build your own test, the name of your property will be the name of your test.

For our example test, we'll select the property "Optimizely Homepage Headline Test GA," which was a previous test we ran in Optimizely:

We click "Run Report" and get our data:
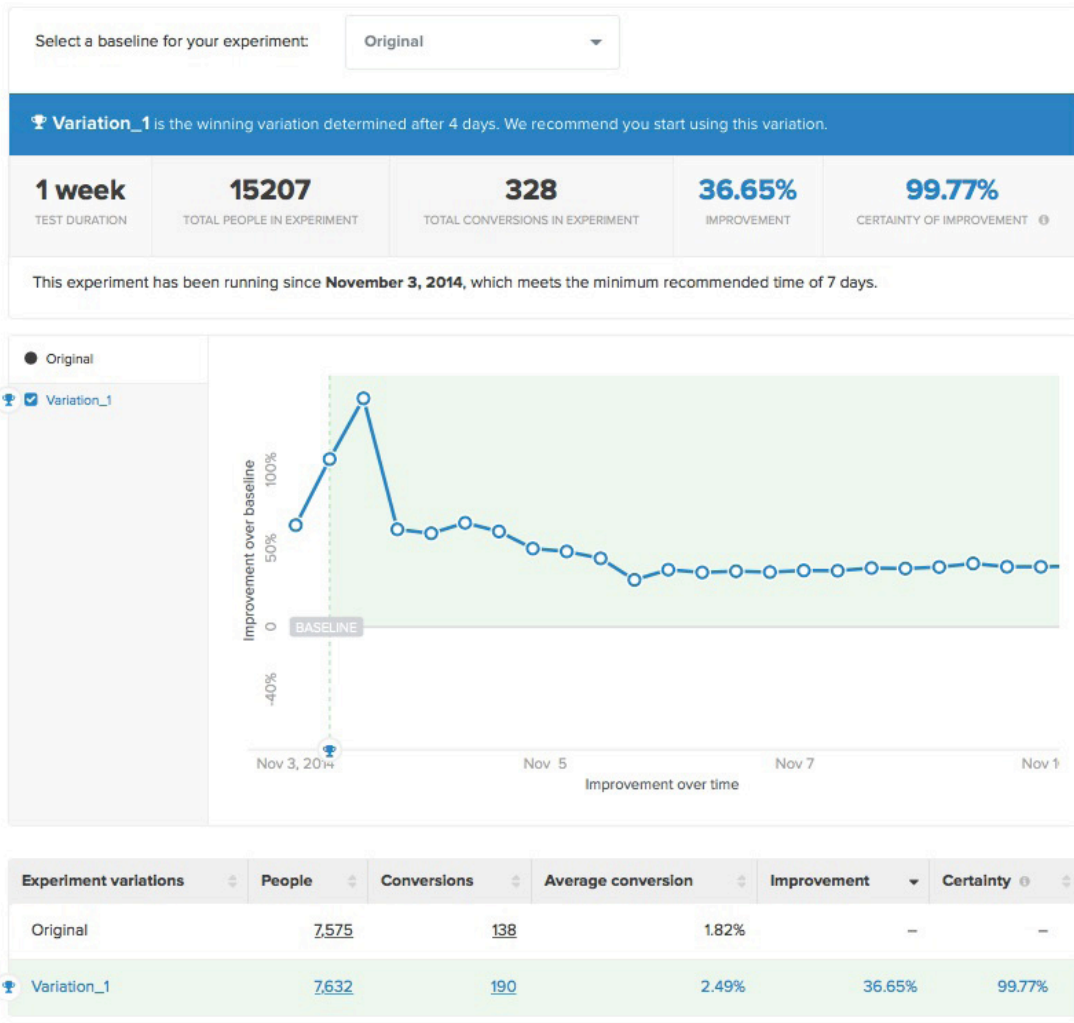
This is how our A/B Test Report looks. At the top, we select the baseline for our experiment. In our case, we're choosing the original headline and comparing it against the variant. As you can see, highlighted in bright blue, the Report has declared the variation headline a winner after 4 days of running the test.

Below that declaration, we see various metrics about the number of people in the experiment, the percentage improvement, and how certain it is. "Certainty" in Kissmetrics means statistical significance. When a test is statistically significant, it basically means that the data has become reliable enough to call a winner.

Next, we see a graph. The dotted line represents how the variation headline performed against the original headline.

And, in the last section, we see the number of people who saw each headline, how many people converted, the conversion rate for each headline, the percentage of improvement, and the certainty of improvement. In this test, the variation is the winner with a 36.65% improvement over our control, and the certainty is over 99%.

USING MULTIPLE VARIANTS

The A/B Test Report isn't limited to one variant. In fact, the report can handle as many variations as you need.

Here's how the Report appears with multiple variants:
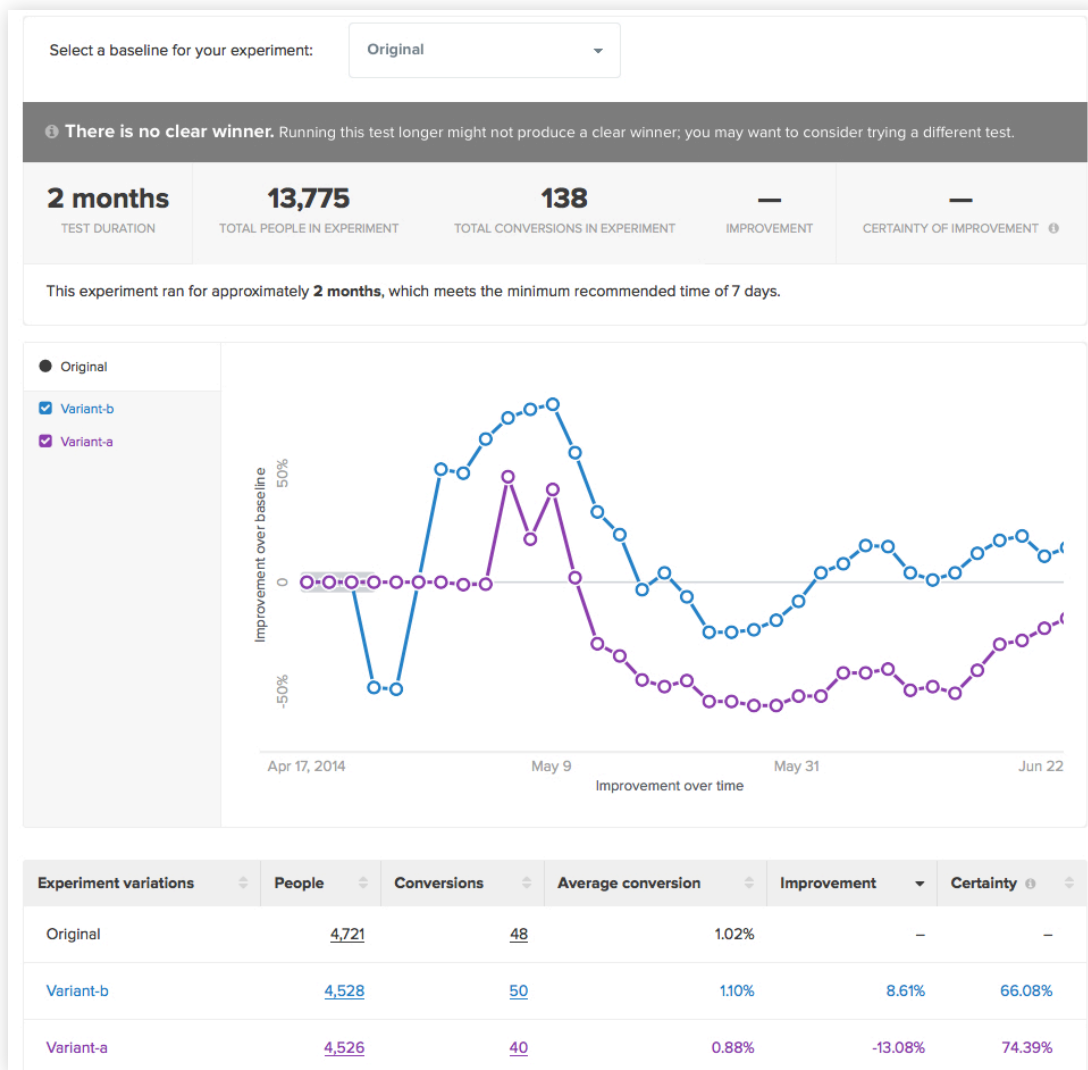
In this test, we tested two variants against the original control. We selected the original as our baseline. The test ran for 2 months, had over 13,000 people in the experiment, and did not produce a clear winner. We'll stick with the original.

As mentioned, you'll want to launch a variant only if it has achieved certainty. Data in the first few days of a test is unstable and can change wildly with only a couple of conversions. To ensure that you reach certainty with your test, you'll need enough people in the test to minimize false positives, or variations that appear to be winners but actually aren't. The industry standard says it's safe to call a test when it reaches 95% certainty. If you want to be extra careful to minimize false positives, make changes only when certainty reaches 99%. At Kissmetrics, we always wait for 99% certainty.

A good testing strategy ensures you learn something from every test. To do that, you need great documentation.

The problem with a haphazard approach to testing is that your tests become very difficult to track. It doesn't take many tests before it is hard to remember what you were testing with which tests and why.

To really get the most out of your tests, it's best to write out your strategy in advance. For example, if you want to know if a new CTA improves your conversion rate, you might put together a spreadsheet like this:

See how each test sets up the next test? You learn something from each iteration and then use that to guide your next test.

Plus, everything is thoroughly documented, so if anyone ever wonders why you made a certain choice, you've always got a handy reference!

A lot of testing tools will document your results, which is helpful, but if you don't document the thinking behind the test, the results won't do you much good.

LET'S RECAP A FEW OF THE MAIN POINTS:

1. **Finding the Big Wins** - When you first start testing, you'll find several variants that will result in 5-20% increases to your bottom line. But to find these big wins, you'll need to follow a process. The first step is gathering qualitative feedback. This is customer feedback that you can get through a number of ways. The second step is to write your hypothesis for why you think your solution (the variant) will win. The third and final step is to run the test and confirm your hypothesis with data. Focus on finding your big wins and solving the major problems that you find from customer feedback. You can then make a huge impact on the growth of your business with a small amount of work.

2. **Why use the A/B Test Report** – With this Report, you'll be able to **test against actions that matter.** You're not limited to click-through or open-rate tests. You can test for outcomes that actually matter to your business, no matter how far down the funnel. You can do this because **all your data gets tied back to people**. This makes it a super accurate platform for A/B testing. And because you've got tracking set up in Kissmetrics, there is no need to spend any extra time setting up additional tracking. This matters because **the more tests you run, the higher your conversions will be**. You'll find the few variables that actually matter and you'll be able to build off of them.

3. **Easily track your A/B tools using Kissmetrics** – The A/B Test Report does not create the test for you. It reports the results of the test, does the math to give you a recommendation, and ties all that back to people. We have five integrations that you can use to tie your data back to Kissmetrics. Integrating Kissmetrics with Optimizely takes less than 2 minutes. Or, if you prefer you can build your own A/B testing tool and integrate it into Kissmetrics.

4. **Run your tests until a winner is determined** – Most A/B tests will take at least one week to produce a clear winner. And, typically, the data will be volatile in the first few days of a test. A couple of conversions have a bigger impact than they should. You usually have to wait at least a week, or until at least 2000 people are in the test. At Kissmetrics, we like to wait until our tests hit 99% certainty. The industry standard says you can determine a winner at 95%. Whichever percentage of certainty you choose, you'll want to make sure a clear winner is established.

5. **Only two steps are required to run the test in Kissmetrics** – The first thing you'll need to do is select the Event you are testing. Then, select the property.

6. **Launch the variant if you achieve at least 95% certainty** – It is bad A/B testing practice to declare a winner before it achieves certainty. Ensuring you reach certainty will reduce the number of false positives, or variations that appear to be winners but are not. If you don't wait for enough certainty, you'll lower your conversion rates accidentally. This is why many companies have difficulty raising conversion rates over time. They launch false positives too often, which eventually kills the effects of any of their real wins.

7. **Document your results and learnings from each test** - In order to get better with each test, you'll need to document the results of every test. You should include the original hypothesis for the test, the results of the test, and lessons learned. After some time of doing this, you may start picking up patterns with your tests. For example, maybe all your tests that have text-heavy pages perform worse than the more visually-centric pages. If this is the case, you know your audience prefers visuals and future tests should include more visuals.

More Great Resources

Haven't had enough A/B testing content? We've got you covered. Here's some of our favorite posts and webinars:

BLOG POSTS:

- **10 Things Every Marketer Should Know About A/B Testing**

- **How to Run A/B Tests That Give Your Business Big Wins**

- **How to Find a Winning A/B Testing Hypothesis**

- **Most of Your A/B Test Results Are Illusory and That's Okay**

WEBINARS:

- **A/B tests for 6 Stages of Your Company's Growth**

- **11 Obvious A/B Tests To Do Today**

- **How to Keep Your Gains from A/B Tests Without Accidentally Killing Them Later**

Find out how you can grow your subscribers, signups, and revenue.

Sign up for a personal demo by clicking the CTA below. We'll show you how Kissmetrics will help you know if you're going in the right direction with your A/B tests.

Request a personal demo today to see how you can use Kissmetrics to optimize your marketing.

REQUEST A DEMO TODAY