Five Steps to Design a Website That Drives Conversions

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Introduction

You will learn…

- How to develop a proactive, user-centric conversion strategy

- Five steps for targeting conversion pain points on enterprise websites

- How to strategically prioritize website improvement projects

- Why you should keep testing (and when you should stop)

Enterprise Website Design Is More Than Aesthetics

When it comes to improving enterprise website design, conversions is one of the most useful numbers your company can measure. Many business goals are tied to keeping people engaged on your website as a way of moving them closer to becoming a customer. Conversions allow you to track their level of engagement and target which areas of the user experience need improvement.

A conversion is often measured as a click on a website. There are macro-conversions (big steps that indicate major commitment such as scheduling a product demo) and micro-conversions (smaller actions, such as clicking on a blog post, that indicate growing interest). Combined, these conversion rates show how successful your website is at turning prospects into customers.

Having a strategy for optimizing conversions on your website is a powerful advantage. So where do companies go wrong?
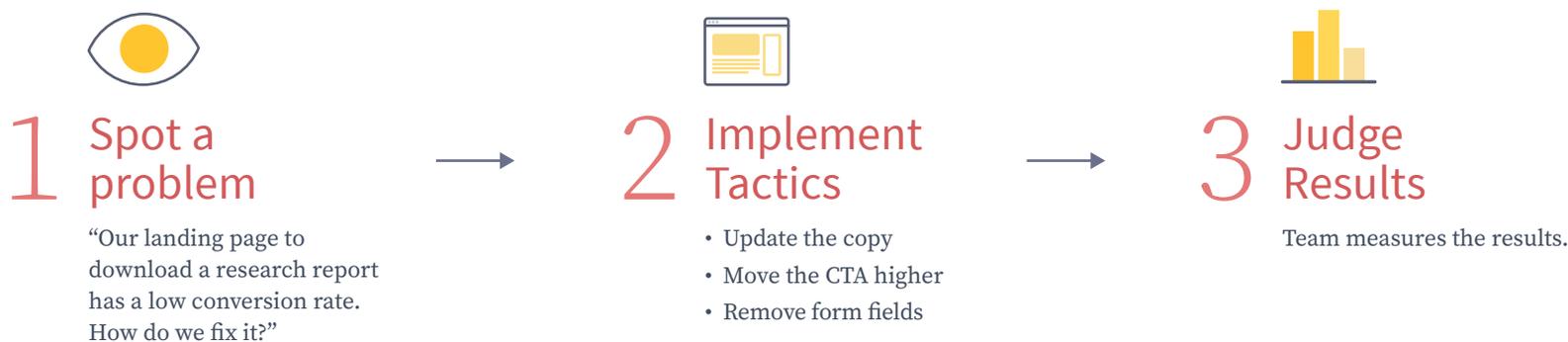
Filling in the Blanks With Enterprise Website Design Strategy

A recurring misconception about web design is that it's only about aesthetics and interface. User experience is a multi-dimensional field, and should include elements such as desirability, credibility and value.

Without these additional elements, common advice for improving conversions becomes about changing a button color or implementing a banner ad. Though these tactics can work, such advice usually doesn't explain *why* they work. Without knowing the *why*, you risk wasting time and resources on solutions that make no sense for your context.

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Here's a typical journey stakeholders might go through when improving a landing page on their website:

1 Spot a problem

"Our landing page to download a research report has a low conversion rate. How do we fix it?"

→

2 Implement Tactics

• Update the copy
• Move the CTA higher
• Remove form fields

→

3 Judge Results

Team measures the results.

A common yet problematic approach

Part of the problem with this strategy is, even if it works, you don't gain insight into why it worked, or if you could have done more for even better results. This leaves room to create the same mistakes in your next landing page.

This process overlooks several crucial steps that should be part of any effort to drive conversions.

Successful companies use a more thorough strategy for driving conversions:

1. Spot a problem
2. Implement tactics
3. Judge results

→

1. Set a conversion goal
2. Pursue obstacles
3. Identify solutions that benefit users
4. Sanity check: Is it worth the cost?
5. Test and test again

A more proactive strategy

These five steps switch you from a reactive stance to a proactive one. Instead of trying to address problems in isolation, you can hone your website into a tool that drives conversions and shortens sales cycles for your company. Additionally, it leaves room to measure cost which forces your project to stay aligned with business goals. Most importantly, it requires you to stay focused on the user at all times, ensuring that you never compromise on customer experience.

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Having a really good user experience ensures that your company gets a return on its investment. It ensures that all the money you put into the website generates into measurable value for your business.

Leanne Byrom - Crazy Egg
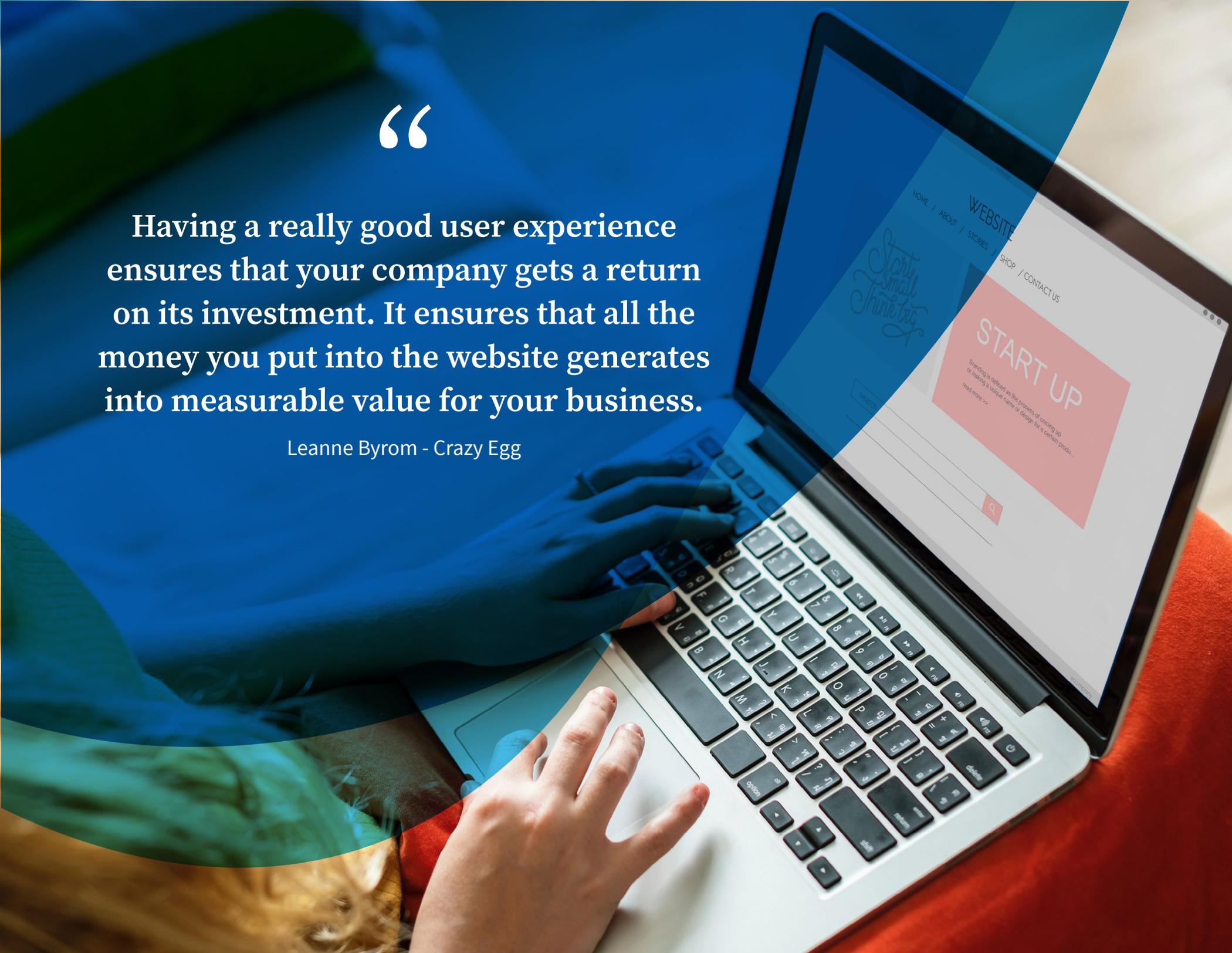
01

Set a Conversion Goal

The first and perhaps most obvious step is to set a conversion goal for your website. Where most companies go wrong is setting page goals in isolation from one another.

Take our landing page example. A monthly review of page performance might uncover its low conversion rate, which would prompt stakeholders to start improving it to a goal of X% conversions. That X might be based on anything from an industry benchmark to a gut instinct.

A better approach is to set conversion goals at the site level and consider each page as just one channel that contributes to the goal. This will help keep priorities in perspective. This one page may have a low conversion rate, but deeper conversion problems may exist elsewhere on your site.

A similar approach used by many enterprises is to set conversion goals at the audience level. If your company serves multiple audiences with different concerns, you may have a series of independent pages that contribute to each user journey. Either way, the key is to set goals in a broader context.

Before you begin making improvements, it's also important to ensure that you're only counting the right kinds of conversions towards your goal. Here are some ways to begin validating your current enterprise website design and the user journey it supports:

- **Write a one-sentence summary of the main purpose of your website.** Ask other key stakeholders to do the same, then discuss the differences between the statements and how those differences play out in decisions that have been made in the past six months to a year. This will allow you to begin identifying dissonance in your current user experience, and will hopefully give you guidelines to follow as key stakeholders align their own understandings of the website.

- **Put web tracking software in place that will allow you to see what percentage of prospects become customers.** You may already have this data, and it will be a good way to begin measuring how effective your current conversion tactics are. At the least, it will give you a baseline to measure against once you begin to improve. If you have a high volume of prospects and leads, but a low percentage of customers, you may be drawing the wrong audience to begin with. Of course, there can be other explanations — maybe the product price is prohibitive, or maybe the sales process is confusing. It's critical to keep asking questions in order to root out the true obstacles in your customer journey.

- **Find your best customers and track their journeys backward to see what steps they took to purchase.** How did they find the website? What were the first few pages they clicked on? How long did it take before they spoke with a Sales Representative? Once you have this information, compare it to the average journey of all your prospects. Is it easy for customers to go through this same journey, or are most taking a different path? It makes sense to align to your best customers' journey, since that will help you drive similar conversions in the future.

02

Pursue Obstacles

Rather than wait for low-performing areas to surface on your website, you should be proactive about seeking the obstacles that are impacting conversions.

With your overall conversion goal in mind, look at the major touchpoints in your customer journey:

Regardless of your specific touchpoints, the user journey
should flow through them without interruption.

Start with a simple review of traffic to each page, then focus on the touchpoint with the lowest conversion rate. Common problems can be some of the following:

- **Audience Issues:** Users are coming to your page from an unexpected source, or your target audience isn't finding your page.

- **Technical Issues:** Things like form submission errors, site bugs or browser incompatibility impede conversions, but are straightforward to fix.

- **Directional Issues:** Users are converting (clicking on a link), but to a different page. This often happens in blog posts when you link to an external site and users click through and leave your page.

First address the obstacle that is having the biggest impact on the overall goal. Once you make progress in solving that problem, you can return to the big picture and find the next biggest obstacle to tackle.

To drive conversions, you need to have an accurate analysis of the bottlenecks in your user journey. But you only have the perspective to correctly identify that when you are comparing them across every touchpoint.

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03

Identify User-Centric Solutions

As you focus on a problem and start to identify solutions, it's important to keep one question in mind: **Does this benefit the user?**

The goal of conversions is not to trick or force people into clicking where you want them to click. A conversion-driven website should attract the people who are truly interested in what you have to offer and use continuous improvements to guide them to the page that provides the most value.

The user is always the most important stakeholder. One way to keep your website design user-centric is to put feedback mechanisms in place on your site. Make sure users have a way to share negative experiences as they happen. This allows you to quickly course-correct solutions as you implement them. Each time you encounter hard UX decisions that don't have a clear answer, make sure you are prioritizing the user's preference, rather than that of your CEO or other executive. They likely aren't web designers and aren't necessarily the audience your site is trying to target. Making important UX decisions according to their preferences won't increase your conversions.

04

Sanity Check:
Is It Worth the Cost?

Priorities and projects pile up quickly for enterprise websites, and staying on top of things requires you to remember that your development team's time is a limited resource. Do the work of deciding whether a solution is worth investing in first. Then you won't need to pay for it in rolling back costly solutions later when they turn out to be unnecessary, ultimately saving your resources for optimization efforts that have maximum impact.

Intercom has a great examination of how many factors go into making even small changes in digital experience. The company wanted to change its product reviews to allow only 140 characters. The reasoning was that they might want to send these product reviews via SMS in the future.

In terms of coding, this would only take a developer a few minutes to implement. However, here is a sampling of the design questions Intercom required before this change could be made:

- What happens when the review is above 140 characters? Where and how will the error message appear?

- Should users receive an explanation of why they're being limited to 140 characters?

- What happens to old reviews that were greater than 140 characters?

- Should there be a character countdown so users know how many characters they have left?

PRODUCT REVIEW

What did you think?

0 / 140

PRODUCT REVIEW

What did you think?

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155 / 140

PRODUCT REVIEW

What did you think?

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Please keep review under 140 characters

PRODUCT REVIEW

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83

PRODUCT REVIEW

What did you think?

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PRODUCT REVIEW

What did you think?

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-15   Submit

These are just the user experience questions that they needed to go through. There are additional technical questions, such as testing on supported browsers or alerting the support team that users who are accustomed to longer reviews may call because they think something is broken.

After everything, the estimate to implement this simple change goes from a few minutes to a few hours of designer and developer time.

The question that the product manager now needs to ask is, how likely is it that they will need to send these product reviews via SMS in the future? If it's a high probability, then it's very likely worth the two hours it will take to design and implement the solution. Knowing that cost ahead of time is crucial to making the decision.

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Here is a basic review process for assessing the cost of making changes to your website.

- Give your UX team time to estimate the work to create a new feature (rather than expecting immediate solutions). If you don't have a UX team, estimate how long it will take your stakeholders to solidify the requirements they want for a new feature.

- Have your development team estimate the work only for the best options after talking with UX or stakeholders.

- Weigh these costs against the potential gains of the new feature, and ensure that you have a plan for testing its success. If it turns out that this change doesn't help drive conversions, how much of this work will end up wasted?

Implementing small, quick fixes without looking at overall impact often adds to the site's complexity and slows down future development. Up to 15% of IT projects are abandoned and at least 50% of a programmer's time during the project is spent redoing work. If proper measurements, goals and test processes were implemented upfront, the majority of this wasted time could be prevented.

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Test and Test Again

As you begin to identify areas to improve and decide on ways to fix them, you'll need to determine a testing strategy. Plan on ongoing improvement, rather than big changes that solve everything at once. There are two key benefits to knowing how you plan to test an improvement before you try it out.

FIRST, YOU WILL HAVE A BASELINE AND A CONCRETE NUMBER to show just how much your conversions have been able to improve. This is obviously critical for deciding if you need to improve the number more or move onto another feature.

SECOND, YOU CAN BEGIN TO EXPERIMENT WITH SMALLER AUDIENCES to test ideas before committing to huge changes across your site. Currently, split or A/B testing is a popular way to see whether one solution offers an improvement over the current design by measuring changes before committing to them across your entire site.

Testing should take the bulk of your time when optimizing a specific touchpoint on your website.

The other steps should be consistent from touchpoint to touchpoint. For instance, you won't need to recreate your overall conversion goal every time you work on improving a weakness in your site.

But only repeated testing will let you know when it's time to move on from optimizing a specific touchpoint.

Once you optimize a feature to the point where it's no longer your biggest problem, you can move on to the next block in your user journey.

Case in Point: The Amazon.com Buy Button

Amazon is famous for the amount of tests it runs on its website, with at least 200 tests going at any one time. The company runs these by identifying small test cells and rolling out tweaks to its website to see how users react. Take, for instance, the evolution of Amazon's buy button.


Over time, the design has become more simple, with less words and minimal icons.

When you line up these designs next to each other, you can begin to see the logic of Amazon's testing process. Are smaller buttons just as effective? How much of a difference does the color of the CTAs make? Does tweaking the copy improve conversions?

Amazon will never finish optimizing the buy button, one of the most important features of its site, especially as its product offerings grow more complex. Here is a sample of some of the buy buttons you can see on its website today, depending on the type of product you're viewing:
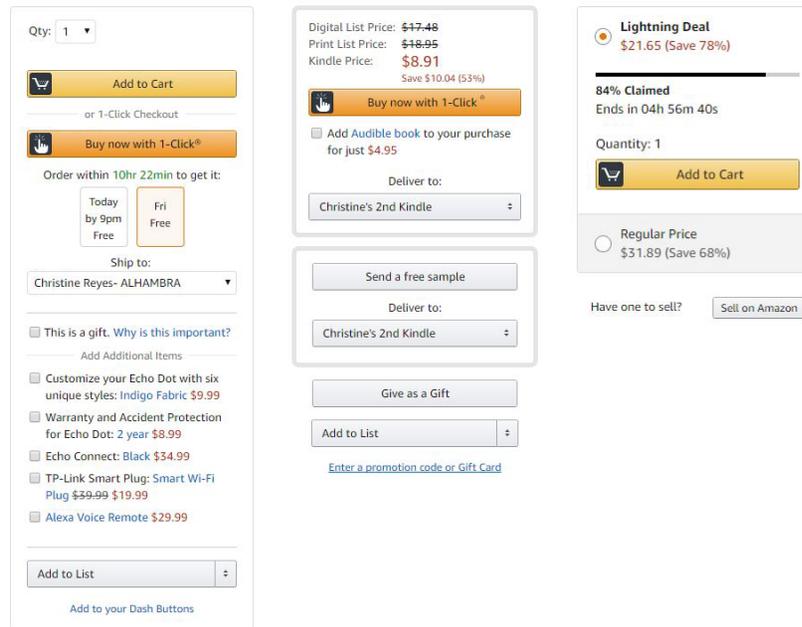
From left to right: Logged-In Buy Button, Kindle Store Buy Button and Lightning Deal Buy Button

If a company were designing these buy buttons from scratch today, it couldn't expect to have the perfect variations for each product type right out of the gate. The process of continuous testing allows you to improve your understanding of what works on your site, guided by which changes positively impact the conversion rates.

Keep in mind that you must test something worth testing. If conversion rates are low, it might be better to start with tests for impact. Sometimes Amazon tests something as small as removing a line of text. Other times it makes a complete shift in the visual design. Testing big ideas allows you to identify which one gives you a lift, and then you can begin the process of refining that direction. It doesn't matter yet that you won't be able to pinpoint which variable had the biggest impact if the overall conversion rate isn't high enough to justify that level of optimization.
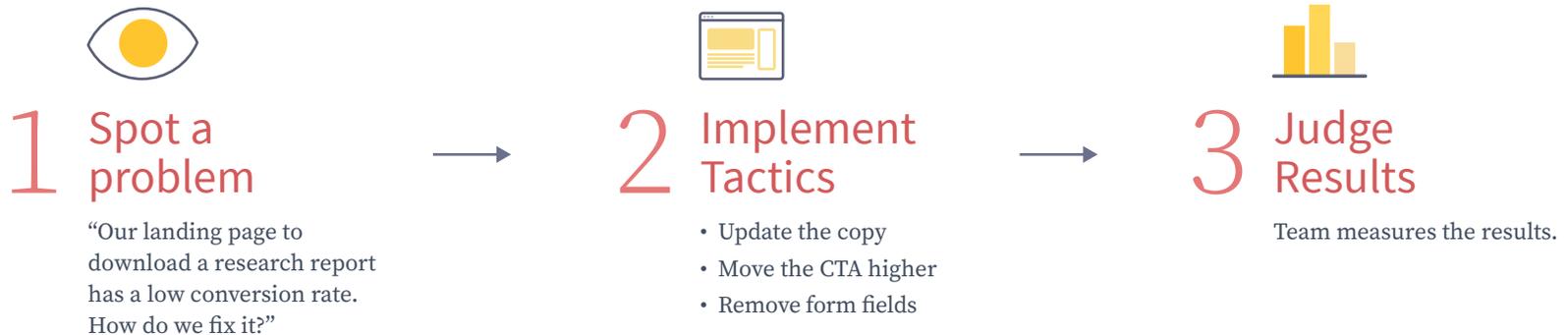
Fine-grained testing may eventually take you to the right direction, but it will take you there much slower if you're starting from a design that's completely off base.

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Don't Neglect the Basics

Some of these steps might seem basic, but a surprising amount of enterprises disregard them.

Often, enterprise websites evolve without a central purpose. Over time, different sections of the site are added in response to needs, and the end result is a user journey that wanders, rather than leading potential customers down a clear path.

Investing in a unified, customer-centric website design allows you to find greater business value and avoid the common website design mistakes that drag down many companies.

1 Spot a problem

"Our landing page to download a research report has a low conversion rate. How do we fix it?"

→

2 Implement Tactics

- Update the copy
- Move the CTA higher
- Remove form fields

→

3 Judge Results

Team measures the results.

Conclusion

When it comes to enterprise websites, aesthetics aren't the only thing that matters. Strong visual design is important, but to really address business needs, enterprises should treat their customer-facing websites as tools that accomplish concrete business objectives. Enterprise website design should result in a culture of constant improvement that seeks out weak points and strengthens them to support business goals.

Like all tools, websites need to be regularly evaluated and adjusted to ensure their effectiveness. There is always something to improve, and any strategy that depends on the website as a channel should include a plan to keep improving the user's journey.

Ultimately, what makes a website valuable is the same for both enterprises and the audience they're trying to reach: An easy experience that lets users get something done as smoothly as possible. When website design is thought of as a way to achieve these goals, rather than just a reflection of brand aesthetics, companies can build more successful websites that provide ongoing value.

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