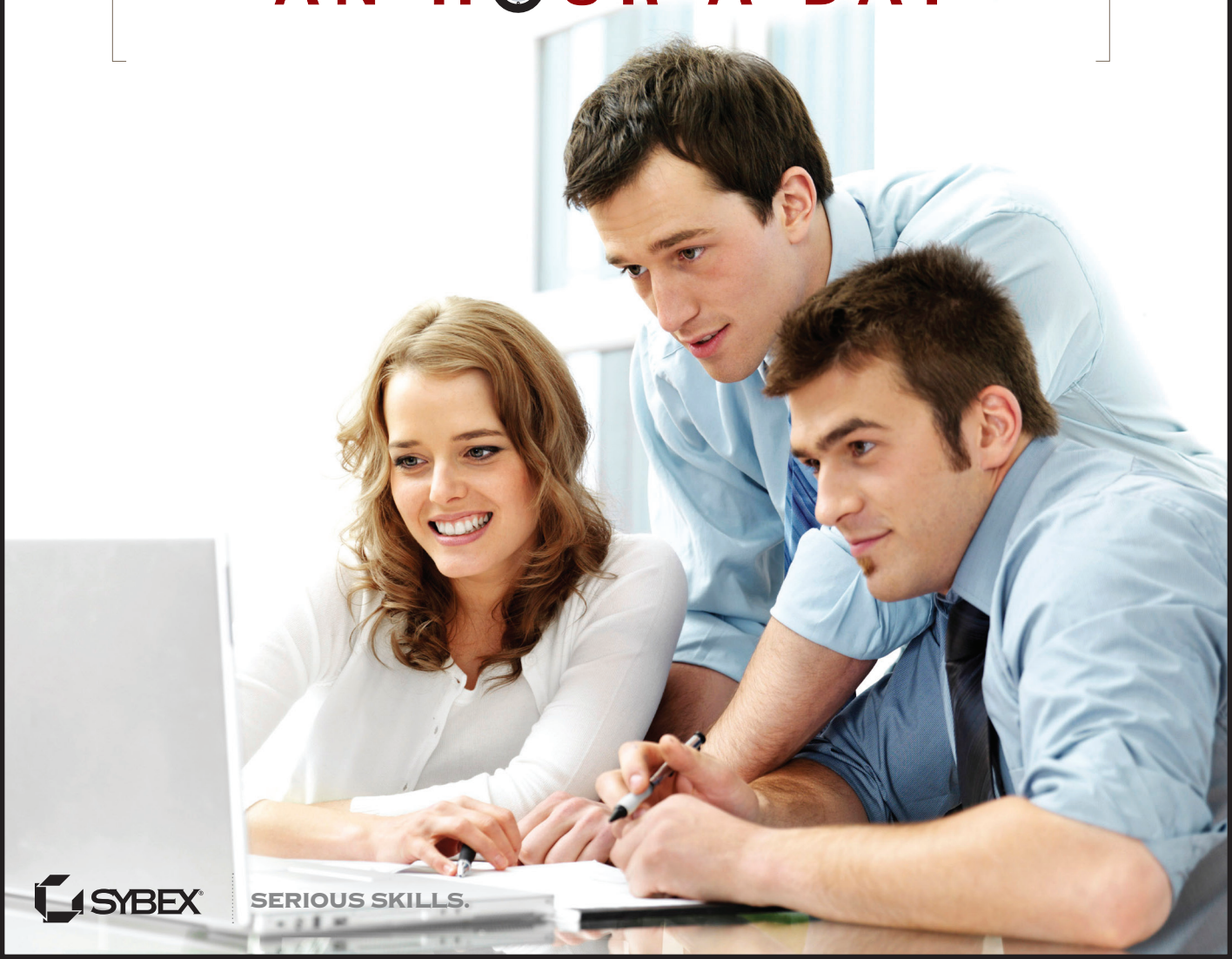Rich Page

Foreword by **Bryan Eisenberg**, Marketing Speaker, Advisor, and best-selling Author

Website
Optimization

AN H⊙UR A DAY

SYBEX® | SERIOUS SKILLS.

Advance Praise for
Website Optimization: An Hour a Day

Attempting to achieve digital success without a robust experimentation and web analytics strategy is like trying to go to the moon on a bike. It will take a long time, might even be impossible. In nine exciting chapters Rich shows you, soup to nuts, exactly how to leverage usability, testing, and web analytics to transform your organization and achieve magnificent success!

> —AVINASH KAUSHIK, author of *Web Analytics 2.0* and
> *Digital Marketing Evangelist*, Google

Rich Page has done the impossible with this book. Before reading it I'd have sworn no single book could explain conversion optimization and provide a road map for how to do it properly. I stand corrected. If you want to learn how to supercharge your website business performance, this is the book you've been waiting for. It's practical, actionable advice from a master practitioner. You could pay an optimization consultant $100K, or you could buy this book.

> —LANCE LOVEDAY, CEO of Closed Loop Marketing and author of
> *Web Design for ROI*

These days, there are thousands of guys who say they are "website optimization experts." Ninety-nine percent of them couldn't improve a web page—much less a site—if their lives depended on it. Rich Page is different. He's among the one percent, and this "optimization bible" proves it. Jam-packed with proven tips and tricks on how you can improve your website without breaking the bank, you'll find everything you need to know about how to set benchmarks, develop meaningful tests, design shopping carts and lead forms for maximum conversion, enhance your performance, and much more. This isn't a book from someone who did a bunch of research on Google; it's written by someone who has done the work and knows the answers.

> —AMY AFRICA, CEO, EighyByEight

The value of site optimization is clear. It is an absolute must for all companies serious about the digital channel, but most companies struggle with how to make it core to their digital strategy. Rich does a great job of identifying the needed steps to build a successful optimization strategy. This book is a must-read for companies serious about site optimization whether you are new to the game or have tried it with limited success in the past. Follow his steps and avoid the common mistakes that will derail your efforts!

> —JASON BURBY, Chief Performance Marketing Officer,
> ZAAZ/Possible Worldwide

Website Optimization: An Hour a Day *should become a bible for any individual or business wanting to get maximum value from their own or their clients' web properties. A focus on optimization is a no-brainer for companies at a time when competition for customers has never been greater. The an-hour-a-day approach is perfect for those who want to take a systematic and step-by-step approach to understanding how they can optimize their websites. The book is full of useful tips and insights, which will help you turn a sea of data into meaningful insights which will improve your business performance and bottom-line. The book will inform both the more experienced digital practitioner, as well as those who are new to the arts and science of conversion rate optimization.*
    —LINUS GREGORIADIS, Research Director, Econsultancy

Optimization is a hot topic in our industry today, and many people don't know where to begin. Choosing the right tool for the job is tough enough, let alone having to come up with the appropriate tests and strategies for your business. Fortunately, Rich has provided a fantastic resource in Website Optimization: An Hour a Day. *This book has something for everyone, regardless of your level of familiarity with optimization. The amount of tips, action items for you to implement right away, and example tests will not only help you move forward but it will also help you build the business case internally for a successful testing program. If optimization is on your wish list this year in your organization, this is the book for you.*
    —BILL BRUNO, CEO, Stratigent

Rich Page provides a detailed road map for creating a powerful conversion improvement practice at your company. Get this book before your competition does!
    —TIM ASH, Chair of Conversion Conference, CEO of SiteTuners, and author of
        Landing Page Optimization

Page has done an outstanding job of thoroughly covering the landscape of the many aspects of measuring and improving the performance of your website. This is a must-read both for novices who need to understand the process and experts who want to ensure they aren't missing anything. Solid and comprehensive!
    —WILLIAM SEARS, Senior Manager, Search Engine Marketing, Walt Disney
        Interactive Media Group

Website Optimization: An Hour a Day *is great for any online business that wants to learn how to better test and improve their website, and lays out some great foundations that optimization novices and even experts will find useful. It's definitely worth a read if you are in online marketing—you'll find it hard to put down!*
    —KIMEN FIELD, Senior Product Manager, Adobe

Ecommerce is changing the global economy and it's amazing how few companies have deep insight into their web business. You can quickly identify the winners and losers based upon the emphasis they place on analytics. Rich carefully builds on this and creates a testing and optimization plan to help you take your business to the next level. With a combination of practical suggestions and current optimization theory, this book defines the basics that will help eliminate the guess work. The most important aspect that Rich clearly illustrates is that optimization is not a one-time activity, it's a change in your website culture and process. Success can be hard to achieve, but Rich will give you the confidence to define a strategy that keeps your web business achieving goals.

    —BRIAN ROGERS, Director of Global eCommerce, 5.11 Tactical

You've got a website and you haven't optimized yet? What are you waiting for?! Block off an hour a day and, for the next 27 weeks, follow Rich Page's detailed, step-by-step guide for getting started with website optimization. It could be the most profitable hour of your day.

    —CHRIS GOWARD, President of WiderFunnel Marketing Optimization and
        author of *You Should Test That!*

About time! Optimization has been shrouded in a mist of ineffective tips and advice from people who think it's easy for way too long. Rich's book stands out by honestly stating that optimization is actually hard and that intent doesn't equate to success. He then breaks down the multiple required disciplines in a way that makes it accessible for any web/marketing practitioner to increase the ROI of their online business.

    —OLI GARDNER, Co-founder of Unbounce.com

Website Optimization

An Hour a Day

Rich Page

WILEY

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Dear Reader,

Thank you for choosing *Website Optimization: An Hour a Day*. This book is part of a family of premium-quality Sybex books, all of which are written by outstanding authors who combine practical experience with a gift for teaching.

Sybex was founded in 1976. More than 30 years later, we're still committed to producing consistently exceptional books. With each of our titles, we're working hard to set a new standard for the industry. From the paper we print on to the authors we work with, our goal is to bring you the best books available.

I hope you see all that reflected in these pages. I'd be very interested to hear your comments and get your feedback on how we're doing. Feel free to let me know what you think about this or any other Sybex book by sending me an email at `nedde@wiley.com`. If you think you've found a technical error in this book, please visit `http://sybex.custhelp .com`. Customer feedback is critical to our efforts at Sybex.

Best regards,

Neil Edde
Vice President and Publisher
Sybex, an Imprint of Wiley

Acknowledgments

First of all, huge thanks go to my mentors and inspirations in the world of website optimization and web analytics. Without their words of wisdom and help, I would not be where I am now. First, a special "bow down" and big thanks to Tim Ash, who has been a great mentor to me and who also gave me the great privilege and honor of helping him write the 2nd Edition of *Landing Page Optimization: The Definitive Guide to Testing and Tuning for Conversions* (Sybex, 2012). Without first doing that, I don't think I could have written this book!

Huge thanks and respect then go to the authors who kickstarted my passion for website optimization and web analytics: Bryan and Jeffrey Eisenberg (their *Call to Action* [Thomas Nelson, 2006] was a real optimization eye opener to me), Avinash Kaushik (who "converted" me into a web analyst with his fantastic *Web Analytics: An Hour a Day* [Sybex, 2007] and his blog), Steve Krug (for his pioneering *Don't Make Me Think* [New Riders, 2005], and Jakob Nielsen (for his great books that began my love affair with website usability many years ago).

Thanks also to some of the genius website optimizers and bloggers whom I have learned a lot from: Linda Bustos (for her outstanding GetElastic blog and her fantastic tech editing on this book), Chris Goward at WiderFunnel, and Amy Africa at EightbyEight.

A big "cheers" also goes out to all the consultants, account managers, product specialists, and clients whom I have had the privilege of working with and learning from in my website optimization role at Adobe. Also a mention and thanks to my great boss at Disney Online, Erik Tarui, for the support and helpful knowledge of testing he gave me during my time there.

And last, I would like to express my great appreciation for the wonderful team at Sybex who helped me put this book together, including Willem Knibbe, Pete Gaughan, and Kathi Duggan. Without them, the words in this book would still only be in my head, itching to get out.

Oh, and I guess I should also give thanks to Starbucks for their free wireless Internet and also their good coffee keeping me awake during the countless hours I spent working there on this book!

About the Author

Rich Page has been analyzing and improving websites for over 10 years, and is currently a Conversion Solution Specialist at Adobe, where he helps major Fortune 500 clients improve their testing and optimization strategies. Before this, he worked for Disney Online in their web analytics and optimization team.

Rich comes from a background in online marketing, website usability, and web analytics, and has previously worked in roles like these for Z57 Internet Solutions, Gartner, and several startup web companies. He has considerable expertise with Adobe SiteCatalyst and Test&Target, in addition to Google Website Optimizer and Google Analytics.

Rich graduated with a master's degree in Information Technology from the University of San Diego, where he did a thesis on website usability. Rich also holds a bachelor's degree in Management from Royal Holloway University of London, where he did a pioneering thesis on e-commerce. For the last five years, he has been the author of a popular blog about web analytics and optimization topics at his website (`www.rich-page.com`) and is a regular speaker at the Conversion Conference and other industry conferences.

He has spent much of the last 10 years living and working in sunny Southern California and is currently living back in London, England, for a while. In his spare time, he is a passionate classic rock fan, loves to play tennis, and is a karaoke aficionado.

Contents

Foreword

When my brother Jeffrey and I first began evangelizing for conversion optimization in the late 1990s, most companies had dreams of the "new economy" and accompanying fantasies of "eyeballs" being the most important metric; we naively saw this as a C-suite responsibility. Today, most organizations have many people responsible for driving traffic but virtually no one responsible for converting that traffic into revenue. In the offline world's equivalent, there is an executive responsible for sales (conversions) and an executive responsible for marketing, but online marketers have no counterpart.

E-commerce managers may be responsible for revenue, merchandisers for the product selection and presentation, user experience and development teams for the experience, and analytics for measurement; but it's unclear who owns the crucial multi-disciplinary function of conversion.

I have seen a handful of companies with individuals who have conversion in their title, but they are quite rare. In those companies that do, their conversion people have access to tools and resources that demonstrate a very different corporate metabolism than those that don't have them. These companies are also passionate about being customer-focused and data-driven, testing continuously, understanding lifetime value, and are quick to act.

Most companies aren't structured to make conversions a core responsibility. They may assign "conversions" to the PPC manager or even the director of analytics, but they only look at it from their narrow vertical and they aren't given the resources needed to gather the insights, to create and modify landing pages, and to set up personalization and go beyond landing pages into complex testing of customer paths.

Increasing sales conversion rates offers a greater ROI than what you can get from optimizing your traffic; either from paid or earned media. The math is simple— even if many never do the calculations. Companies with higher conversion rates almost always have better marketing efficiency ratios (net contribution/marketing expenses). The upside is that these companies make more money, and that's a good thing. The downside is that it's hard work to accomplish better marketing efficiency ratios. These companies are led differently; they have higher levels of collaboration and higher standards of accountability.

The top performing companies consistently convert visitors to sales at rates in the double digits. They've been doing that for years, while the vast majority converts at low single-digit rates. The gap between the top performers and the middle of the pack continues to grow.

However, there is great news. Over the last few years there has been an explosion of tools to help companies identify opportunities to improve, as well as tools to create landing pages and to do testing. In your hands is another critical component; *Website Optimization: An Hour a Day* is the resource you need to learn how to optimize your site daily. The final piece of the puzzle is, will you dedicate your time and resources to getting it done?

Bryan Eisenberg
Marketing Speaker, Advisor, and best-selling Author

Introduction

Website optimization is a newer art that tests and improves websites to better engage and convert their visitors, by combining website testing, analytics, usability, and online marketing best practices. Unfortunately, it's not something that is quick or easy to do, and you need much more than just a testing tool. That's where this book comes in!

  Website Optimization: An Hour a Day will help you test and improve your website (no matter what type) by navigating you through important steps and common pitfalls and ultimately help you build a long-term successful website optimization program. From learning how to measure success and picking the right tools to learning best practices and high-impact test ideas for many common types of pages, you will develop a much deeper understanding of website optimization every week.

  By implementing the best practices and test ideas in this book, you will stand a much better chance of improving your website in several ways, by engaging your visitors so that they come back more often, improving your conversion rates and success metrics, and ultimately increasing the bottom line revenue for your online business. Everyone wins!

  And remember that testing and optimizing your website is a journey, not a destination—this unique book will ultimately serve as a great companion and compass to check while you head down the long winding road of website optimization.

Who Should Read This Book

This book is intended for anyone that wants to optimize a website for an online business and generate more revenue from it. Website optimization and testing beginners will find it very useful, in addition to those with more experience who will find advanced techniques to get even more juice from their optimization efforts.

  It will be particularly useful for many types of web professionals who want to expand their understanding of the subject and help improve a website, including online marketers, web designers, web project managers, website optimizers, web analysts, web information architects, and web strategists. It will also be useful for web developers to understand the reasons why testing tools need to be implemented on websites.

  It's also beneficial for anyone who is considering moving into this newer website optimization field from a closely related online field like online marketing or web analytics (as I did). As you will read about in Chapter 1, previously there was little understanding of this field, let alone job titles relevant to it. But these days, there are many more

opportunities for individuals who are skilled in website optimization and testing; for example, you can much more easily become a director of website optimization or a test manager. And it really is quite amazing to be able to influence what millions of visitors do and experience on websites.

Even "offline" business people will find it valuable to read this book and gain an understanding of optimizing online business, particularly as the line continues to blur between online and offline business worlds.

The best practices and test ideas found in this book are great for all kinds of businesses that are engaged in some kind of online business (or want to be), from individual startups to major Fortune 500 companies. It also doesn't matter if you have a small real estate agent website or a huge multi-national online store—there are specific sections that cover test ideas for key types of pages found on many types of websites.

What You Will Learn in This Book

You will learn literally hundreds of test ideas and best practices that are designed to optimize any type of website. You will also discover how to make use of many website tools and techniques to become even more effective at optimization. Ultimately, you will learn how to better engage and convert your visitors, improve your website success metrics and conversion rates, and by doing so, make a big impact on revenue and profits for your online business.

What You Will Not Learn in This Book

You won't learn perfect conversion rates, because there is no such thing—every online business is different and comparing is foolish. It's much more important to beat your own current success metrics.

For the same reason, you also won't discover a silver bullet test idea that will improve any website 100 percent of the time. While some tests have a higher chance of impact than others, there is no such thing as a perfect test—you will need to try running and iterating many of the tests found in this book before you find one that has greatest impact.

And although you won't learn about search engine optimization (SEO) best practices in this book, you will learn about the key differences between website optimization and SEO in Chapter 1.

How Long until I See Good Results?

It's possible to get some optimization results from using this book fairly quickly, and this can be as short as it takes for you to create and test different versions (plus a few weeks to gather some results). However, it may take much longer to get results (up to many months in the worst case), depending on how much effort is required to prioritize the test, create test variations for it, and implement.

Getting "good" results is another matter entirely. Just creating a test doesn't ensure you will get good results, and you will need to continually iterate and learn from your tests to gain really good results. You may get lucky and get good results from one of your first tests—or you may have to wait until many more before you get your first good result. The key is to always learn from test results and to not give up!

Also, it's not as simple as just setting up tests and waiting for results, either. As you will learn in this book, there are many internal processes you need to adopt and barriers to break down, and there are many testing best practices and fundamentals that you need to know before you can truly become effective with your website optimization efforts.

What You Need

Having an understanding of any of the major disciplines needed for effective website optimization is definitely very useful to increase the chances of success. These disciplines are web analytics, web usability, website marketing, and website testing. This book will definitely help plug some of those knowledge gaps that you might be lacking, though.

You will also need to use several tools, including web analytics tools, testing tools, usability tools, and survey tools. In order to use the more advanced tools that you will learn about in this book, you will need to obtain a budget for them (although there are some free options, which you will learn about in this book as well).

And last, you will need patience. Things won't improve overnight, and as mentioned previously, there is no silver bullet test that will improve every website. You will require a great deal of persistence, innovation, and ability to learn from your test efforts, and by doing this, you will be rewarded with a much greater chance of website optimization success.

What Is Covered in This Book

Chapter 1: Setting the Website Optimization Scene. In the first chapter, you will get an introduction to this art, learn about the history of website optimization, and then learn about key differences between other similar web testing fields.

Chapter 2: Set Up and Improve Usage of Key Web Analytics and Testing Tools. Here, you will learn the importance of analytics and testing tools and how to set them up. You will then learn key success metrics for your website and set targets.

Chapter 3: Lay the Foundations for Optimization Success. This critical chapter teaches you some key organizational and testing fundamentals that you need to learn before you can embark on an effective website optimization program.

Chapter 4: Understand Your Visitors and Their Needs—the Keys to Website Optimization. Learning more about your website visitors is essential to be able to meet their needs, engage them, and convert them better. This chapter covers creating use cases, personas, and a unique value proposition for them, and how to generate important insights from them.

Chapter 5: Build the Foundation of a Better Converting Website. This chapter helps you build a better foundation that will maximize your conversion and engagement rates and includes key website usability and design best practices.

Chapter 6: Learn the Power of Influence and Persuasion on Visitors and Conversions. Here, you will learn some great ways to influence your visitors so that they engage and convert more often on your website that involve building trust and social proof, and optimizing your use of calls-to-actions, images, and other influencers.

Chapter 7: Optimization Best Practices and Test Ideas for Different Page Types and Flows. In this chapter, you will start to learn ideas and best practices to optimize particular types of website pages and conversion flows, from home pages to checkout flows.

Chapter 8: Keep Them Coming Back—Optimize for Repeat Visits. It's critical to get your website visitors to come back, because repeat visitors are more engaged and convert at a higher rate. In this chapter, you will learn how to do this by optimizing key pages on your website and your email marketing campaigns.

Chapter 9: Review and Learn from Your Results, and Keep Testing and Optimizing. In this last chapter, you will revisit your recent optimization efforts to see how they have been faring, learn from them, set more targets, and continue optimizing.

Appendix A gathers together the many important website optimization tools that are discussed in this book.

Appendix B gives you a worksheet to list and prioritize your test ideas.

Appendix C gives you a worksheet to store your test results and help you learn from past results.

How to Contact the Author

You can contact Rich Page on his blog at `www.rich-page.com,` and you can also contact him via Twitter at `www.twitter.com/richpage`.

Legal Disclaimer

The website optimization best practices and test ideas that are discussed in this book represent the views of Rich Page and his experience and knowledge, and not the views of any of the companies that he works for or has worked for, including Adobe Systems and Disney Online.

Setting the Website Optimization Scene

1

Before diving into the many website optimization best practices and test ideas in this book, it's important to first give you some background and history on this subject and also some key differences between this and other types of optimization relating to websites and search engines.

Introduction to Website Optimization

The online business world continues to change and evolve at a frenetic pace. No longer are online businesses just throwing money at creating and marketing their websites and hoping for success; many are now getting increasingly savvy when analyzing and improving their websites.

Unfortunately too much emphasis is still placed on two things: the aesthetics of the website and how to best drive traffic to it. Very little emphasis is placed on the actual visitors to the website and how well it engages and converts them for key goals like purchase or signup—in a nutshell, how well optimized the website is. To illustrate just how little attention is usually placed on conversion, recent studies by Forrester and eMarketer found that for every $80 spent online to acquire traffic to websites, just $1 is spent to proactively convert this traffic once it has arrived.

Remember, you could have the best-looking website in the world, but if your visitors find it hard to use or it doesn't fulfill their needs , they often won't come back (and will likely go to a competitor that's only a few clicks away on Google). And you could spend hundreds of thousands on paid search and Facebook ads driving visitors to your website, but if your website isn't optimized to engage and convert them for your key goals and doesn't influence them to come back, much of this money will be wasted down the drain.

This is why it is so critical to build and run an effective website optimization program for your online business so that it does indeed engage and convert your website visitors much better. More important, as a result of having a website like this, your online business is far more likely to generate greater revenue and profits in the future.

Unfortunately though, this optimization and improvement of websites isn't as easy as you might expect, and you need much more than just a website testing tool. In addition to this, there are many disparate online disciplines you need to learn and apply before you can become truly great at optimizing websites. Web analytics fundamentals are vital for analyzing success metrics and key reports, and to generate better test idea insights from them. Web usability best practices are essential to make your visitors happier when they interact with your website. A great grasp of online marketing best practices (in particular copy writing) is a must if you are to be able to truly influence your visitors with your headlines, images, and calls-to-action. Finally, website testing skills are essential to create high-impact tests needed to optimize your website. See Figure 1.1 for a visual representation of how these disciplines overlap to form website optimization.

Rather than have people need to rely on reading multiple separate books in all of these disciplines, I decided to make website optimization easier to learn by pulling all these skills together and presenting them in the format of Wiley's Hour-a-Day popular book series.

Figure 1.1 Interlocking disciplines needed for website optimization

In particular, one of the most important skills you need to help power your website optimization and testing efforts is a sound understanding of how to use web analytics. This is because web analytics data not only helps you measure the success of your optimization efforts, but they can also provide you with some excellent insights to help form your test ideas. Web analysis techniques will be put to great use throughout this book, from learning and measuring the success metrics for your type of website to learning advanced analysis techniques to find high potential conversion pages.

However, even before starting your website optimization and testing efforts, you will likely be met with several challenges in your organization preventing you from doing so with speed and efficiency. Therefore, you will also become versed in fundamentals to help overcome these, improve your internal processes, and ultimately help build an optimization organization that will ensure you get the most out of your optimization efforts.

To help you make changes to optimize your website, you will then learn important website testing strategies and fundamentals, including how to target and personalize your content to better meet the needs of your all-important visitors. These strategies and fundamentals will ensure your A/B and multivariate tests are set up, run, and analyzed optimally for the most impact on your conversion rates and success metrics.

You will also learn to focus on your visitors and their common journeys through your website so that you can better meet their needs, engage them, and convert them. You will learn how to build personas and use cases to help you do this, in addition to gaining the voice of your visitors by using survey, feedback, and task completion rate analysis tools. Remember that your website would be nothing without your visitors!

Over the remainder of the book, you will then learn many advanced best practices, tools, and tips that will help increase your conversion rates and keep your website visitors coming back for more—no matter what type of website you have. You will also learn some "out of the box" optimization best practices that involve more than just

your regular website—for example, emerging mobile website best practices and vital email marketing best practices.

Understanding and adopting these optimization best practices and test ideas will also help give you a competitive edge over your rivals. This is because they more than likely aren't doing a very good job of testing and optimizing their websites, and it will have them wondering exactly how your website is doing so well.

In order to get the most out of this book, I suggest that you spend one day reading each week, and try not to be too tempted to skip through the weeks and read it all in one sitting. I also recommend that you take notes while reading the book and mark down any particularly relevant tips you notice for your website. Don't forget to use the test idea tracker in Appendix B to list any tests in this book you want to try on your website, and then use the test results tracker in Appendix C to document and help you learn from your results.

The final chapter is also very important to pay attention to, because this is when you will revisit your key success metrics and conversion goals to see just how much you have optimized them and, therefore, your website.

The Rise of Website Optimization: The Aftermath of the Dot-com Bubble Bursting

What started off as just a way of exchanging research between institutes in the early 1990s, the World Wide Web quickly came to mainstream prominence in the mid-1990s. This was due to the increasing ease of online access and the rise of websites like Yahoo .com and Amazon.com, with millions of people coming online to experience new exciting ways to find information and shop. And with this huge demand for these new websites quickly came huge revenues from advertising and product sales for many online businesses.

Traditional businesses and new business ventures began to invest millions in getting their own online business to get their slice of the pie, with these online businesses quickly and affectionately become known as dot-coms.

The growth in revenues for many of these dot-coms increased with amazing velocity, and with that came crazy high market valuations. As a result of this, major investments were made by venture capitalists into these hot dot-coms and new dot-com startups, eager to also earn their slice of the pie. Unfortunately though, in this new gold rush, very few checks and balances were put in place to make sure these dot-coms' long-term strategies and business plans were sound.

As a result of this, money was usually spent very fast to grow most dot-coms and their market share as quickly as possible, often by expensive lavish marketing campaigns aimed at attracting as many new visitors as possible. The 2000 Super Bowl ads were the pinnacle of this frenzied spending, with 19 dot-coms like Pets.com spending

millions on advertising that looked and seemed cool but yielded extremely low return on investment (ROI). Eight of those no longer exist.

All this investment in marketing meant very little money was spent on understanding the visitors to these websites and improving the usability of them so they better engaged and converted their visitors. Consequently, many of the visitors to these dot-com websites either rarely came back or purchased very few times in the future. Certainly not enough to warrant the huge marketing investments made.

Soon after this, the stock market valuations of these dot-coms became untenable, with many dot-coms still leaking money like a sieve, constantly looking for the next round of funding to stay alive. In March 2000, the stock market came crashing down with the emerging realization of this, and the dot-com bubble had burst. Many dot-coms folded soon after this, and it was only then that surviving and new online businesses began to become more prudent with their spending and analysis of online business.

This overdue rise in web analysis in 2000 was helped by the growing demand for new advanced log-file website analysis tools like WebTrends (which was a pioneer in this at the time). However, most of the analysis being done was concerned with measuring website hits (as they often were referred to) and revenue. Very little emphasis was placed on understanding visitor interaction and ways to improve websites, and what was done often relied on obtaining this from expensive usability labs.

Along with this rise in web analysis was a long-overdue emphasis on website visitors and the usability of websites. Usability experts like Jakob Nielsen released books that exposed the huge number of issues that many websites had at the time and detailed how to resolve them. Steve Krug's groundbreaking book *Don't Make Me Think* (New Riders, 2001) helped put usability and user focus further into the spotlight, using a very simple format that was very easy for anyone to understand (including examples of how to email your boss to start cheap usability testing!). I strongly suggest you read this if you haven't done so already.

However, at this time there weren't many tools available that could easily test these recommended usability improvements, and there was a lack of understanding of the ROI from doing so. This meant that online businesses were doing very little website testing when building or launching new content, merely hoping their efforts would perform better.

The testing that was done was usually handled informally with no tool, by putting up a new version for a while to see which version seemed to do better. This often resulted in bad consequences for website stability and user experience. And it wasn't until years later when some online businesses started showing great results and ROI from improved testing rigor and process that other online businesses started to notice and slowly follow suit.

Unfortunately, creating and optimizing websites then took a further step back with the rise of tools that made it very easy to create and launch websites with no

programming knowledge. This meant that anyone could create an online presence with very little expertise, which unfortunately meant a deluge of quickly built but bad websites with poor user experiences, with little understanding about how to engage and convert visitors (none more so than the rush of slow-loading intro splash pages).

All of this meant that testing and optimization continued to take a back seat to marketing websites for the first half of the 2000s. This didn't really change much until 2004, when website testing tools like Offermatica and Optimost started to appear that made it much easier and less risky to test making improvements to websites and understand the benefits and ROI from doing so.

Then in 2007, testing became accessible to a much wider market with the launch of Google's free Website Optimizer tool. Although much more primitive than paid testing tool solutions, it allowed online marketers to finally start to dip their feet in the testing waters with little cost or technical knowledge.

Now five years later, there is a much better understanding of the need to optimize and test websites and the ROI and benefit from doing so. This has resulted in the appearance of many new testing tools offering greater functionality but at a fraction of the cost of expensive tools. For example, testing tools like Visual Website Optimizer have allowed businesses to test with better functionality than Google Website Optimizer but at a far lower cost than Offermatica (now called Adobe Test&Target). This has helped begin a long overdue shift away from just visitor acquisition, with much greater focus on and understanding of the need to improve and optimize websites.

However, even with these newer and better testing tools and increased focus on testing, you should realize that website optimization is still in its infancy and that few online businesses are doing a great job of this (particularly in regions outside of the U.S.). This means that you have a huge opportunity to capitalize on this and beat your competitors in the online world by testing and optimizing your website to a better extent.

Indeed, had many of the dot-com companies devoted more money to understanding the needs of their visitors better, made better use of analytics to make more informed decisions on their website, and adopted more focus and rigor in their testing initiatives, many of them would have made greater profits and survived much longer.

The Differences between Landing Page Optimization, Conversion Rate Optimization, Website Testing, and Website Optimization

Before you discover and learn how to optimize your website, it's important to actually know what website optimization actually *is*, and how it differs from other similar web improvement fields. And there are many of them: landing page optimization, conversion rate optimization, website testing, and A/B testing.

All of these terms are bandied about, often with little understanding of the differences between them, and this can often confuse people. They all mean very similar

things in that they all help improve aspects of websites, but let's review these to help clear up any confusion. This will also help you articulate this to others in your organization, which will be a key part of building a website optimization culture there. Here are the main different common fields associated with website optimization:

Landing Page Optimization Many people consider this the same as website optimization, but it is often considered as the art of optimizing pages that visitors directly land on after clicking on a search engine or other advertising link. The problem with this though is that the page doesn't have to be landed on directly to have an impact on your conversion rates—any page on your website can have potential impact on your conversion rate, regardless of whether visitors arrive on it from Google or a newsletter, or arrive from another page on your website. You also need to optimize a visitor's whole journey through your website and common conversion-related page flows, not just their landing page.

Conversion Rate Optimization Conversion rate optimization is quite similar to website optimization, but it places too much emphasis on solely increasing conversion rates. While it is very important to increase your conversion rates, this is somewhat shortsighted because you can increase your conversion rate in many ways, but it doesn't always mean that your website visitors will be happier or more engaged. And for certain types of pages and websites like media ones, there is no major conversion goal due to them not really selling anything or capturing leads. Therefore, these websites are generally left ignored when discussing conversion rate optimization, to the detriment of these and their visitors.

Website Optimization The art that you are learning about in this book covers much more than the previous two disciplines and places greater emphasis on testing and improving websites from a usability and visitor perspective, in addition to testing and improving conversion rates and success metrics. It also involves optimizing any kind of page, whether it's landed on from offsite or not, and whether there is even a major conversion goal for it or not.

Website Testing (or A/B Testing) Last, website testing is actually the act of testing changes on your website in order to optimize it for one of your goals, whether this involves doing simple A/B testing (a popular euphemism for website testing) or advanced multivariate testing. This is done with a testing tool and is a very important process of any of the fields mentioned previously.

The Difference between Website Optimization and Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

It's also really important to clear up another common misinterpretation. Many people not very familiar with the term website optimization often confuse it with search engine optimization (SEO). SEO companies even still continue to bid on the phrase

"website optimization" in Google, which only serves to confuse people even more. To help clear this up, first here are definitions of the two:

Website Optimization Website optimization is an art that tests and improves websites to better engage and convert their visitors, by combining website testing, analytics, usability, and online marketing best practices (Source: Rich Page).

Search Engine Optimization Search engine optimization (SEO) is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a website from search engines via "natural" (or "organic") search results (Source: Wikipedia).

Next, here are some other reasons why website optimization is different from SEO and why it's important:

- Website optimization affects your visitors when they arrive on your website and how they engage and convert for your goals. SEO has an effect on the visitor *before* they get to your website, in the actual search engine results pages (SERPs).

- It doesn't matter how much you optimize your website rankings in Google if your website isn't fully optimized to meet your visitors' needs and convert them. You are simply pouring money down the drain if you don't optimize your website—many visitors from search engines will simply leave if their needs aren't met.

- Website optimization initiatives are often much cheaper to execute than running expensive SEO campaigns. In fact, leading web analysts like Avinash Kaushik firmly believe that in order to start optimizing your website, you need just 10 percent of your SEO budget.

- Once you optimize your website so that it engages and converts your current traffic better, you should then engage in SEO to drive further traffic, and then optimize how well this SEO traffic converts on your website.

I'm not saying that you should ignore SEO—in fact you should start to think of onsite factors that influence SEO while doing website optimization (URL structure, page names, page interlinking, and keyword usage). Indeed, any website owner who wants the best chance of generating significant revenues and profits in the long run should engage in SEO, but just make sure you optimize your website to engage and convert your visitors before heavily focusing on it.