

THE HEAT IS ON

The pressure on travel media buyers' metrics seems likely to continue. While search is crucial to the travel industry there is some confusion around just what search inventory is cost effective. Search is great for high margin niches with low CPA and a good way of cleaning down distressed inventory. But what about the mainstream inventory which makes up the rump of business? Many airlines are moving toward zero commission which cuts the options. With more and more direct to client selling, competition for traffic can only go one way.

There is a clear answer to this challenge. Online marketers have long been focused on acquisition and traffic metrics. If they are to stay ahead they must deploy more sophisticated tools and techniques to boost income from their landed traffic. Analytics is a critical technology providing analysis and decision support tools. But what about serving the right content, having the user experience, the optimal booking engine and the most targeted offers?



This is where Maxymiser's solutions come into play. We are in the business of creating uplift in conversion rates and adding new value as a result of our engagement. The good news is that it works and when progressively applied, our clients can be more competitive. With better onsite conversion metrics they can also scale up and play harder at the acquisition game.

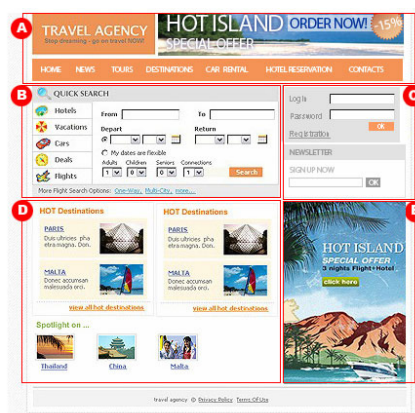
Maxymiser tests multiple variants of content areas (which we call Maxyboxes) on a page, or across a series of pages. Our algorithms then drive increasing proportions of traffic to the page combinations that are statistically proven to convert more visitors. We also segment visitors automatically where we consider which variables best define different customer groups and then serve optimal content to them. Finally, when we add a user's historical behaviour to the system's decision, content can be personalised and targeted dynamically.

OPTIMISING KEY AREAS OF TRAVEL SITES

Home Pages

Starting with your Home Page or landing page(s), we focus tests on the following:

- form and structure of the page,
- calls to action
- navigation
- promotional content
- search boxes and their positioning
- sign up / login processes



Multivariate testing allows us to cover a lot of ground quickly as we can test thousands of page combinations in the course of one test. The picture above shows a typical set of Maxyboxes for which variants can be prepared. In this case there are five boxes and we might test five variants for each giving you 3125 different page combinations. Maxymiser's content intelligence technology will immediately calculate which variants are the most likely winners and serve them to more customers. As a result we can arrive at a statistically valid result comparatively quickly, allowing you to move on and chase more ROI uplift in other parts of your site.

Content for Intent

Most visitors have already declared something which relates to their intent in the process of finding your site. Maxymiser allows you to respond dynamically with the most appropriate content combinations.

Intent Factors:

Branded or other traffic may include new or repeat visitors. This will affect onsite behaviour as people with a history of interactions with the site will respond differently to new visitors.

Customers arriving from search and affiliate traffic have, to varying extents, declared their intent before they arrive.

Time of day or geo information from a visitor IP may also provide valuable information on how visitors are likely to respond to your content

All these environmental factors and many more can form the basis for our Automated Segmentation. We consider which factors are most significant to conversion and use them to automatically create segments. We then optimise content for these segments. The result is visitors are served targeted and optimised content, and are more likely to convert.

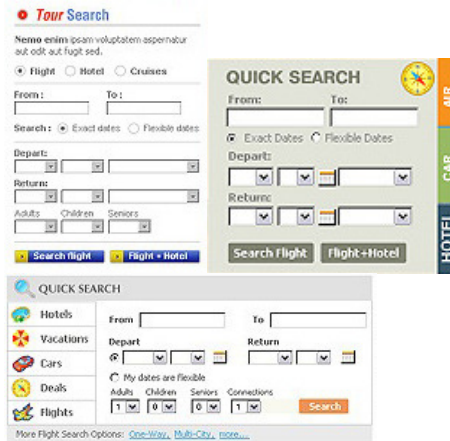
Similarly Our Pay Per Click Optimiser allows landing page tests to be carried out based on keywords and groups so that visitors get what they are looking for more quickly. Unsurprisingly, conversion goes up.

Onsite Search.

Most purchasers of online travel have searched onsite. Therefore having optimised search functionality provides considerable scope to improve the customer journey and conversion.

Some starting points for optimising search processes include:

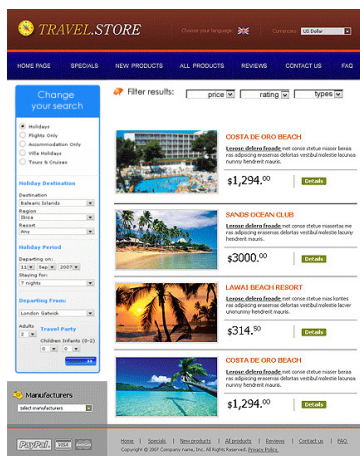
- Position, design and copy of search boxes
- Variants of Advanced Search capability
- Layout, information and calls to action in results listings
- Search functionality used such as morphological, expanding matches etc.



Search can be presented in many different ways dependent on your customer's focus. When we are optimising the performance of onsite search we track specific metrics including:

- the number of searches
- the number of views of a category page
- the number of click throughs from results pages
- the average number of searches per visitor.

Ultimately conversion to sale is always the goal but by using these metrics we get a closer look at how visitors are interacting with search and responding to content variants.



Booking Paths

Booking Paths are inevitably an exit point for travel customers, not least because they are where research ends.

- Typical focus areas for Maxymiser within booking paths:
- Test different page combinations and variants of page layout with distinct process functions
 - Test how variants and positioning of information supports users through the buying process
 - Test combinations of supporting information about purchases that precede the actual payment pages
 - Test how input variants and pre-populated fields, like addresses, support conversion.
 - Test up-sell solicits and segment them by user group to find best converting solicit.

Then likewise for each of the following Process Architecture benchmarks analyse yours and competitors' sites then score out of ten:

Number of clicks to conversion	
Onsite search performance	
Clarity of purpose for staged process	
Number of inputs for process stages	
Up selling efforts	
Supporting information on client status	
Average Score out of 10	

PLANNING FOR OPTIMAL JOURNIES

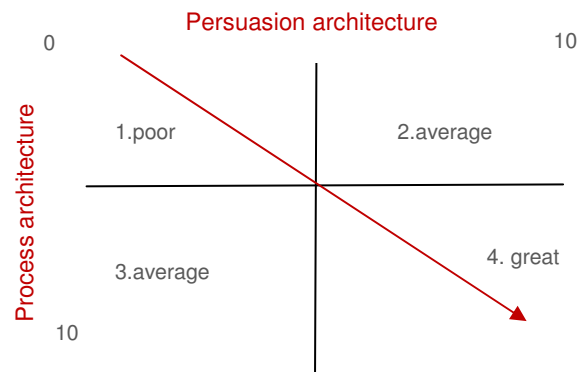
Before starting multivariate testing and more advanced optimisation it is not a bad idea to take stock of where you think your site performs against your competitors. Maxymiser's technology will determine the best performing content in each area. Using the model below you can identify strengths and weaknesses in your current site as basis for preparing of new content variants to test. This is not a definitive methodology but a quick and effective one as a basis for test preparation.

The results of these benchmarks will give you an informed view of how competitive your user journey is and its weak points against competitors.

For each of the following Persuasion Architecture benchmarks, analyse your site against your competitors' sites, then score out of 10 against the following criteria:

Finally plot your position on the following matrix.

The match of information architecture to customer intent	
Clarity and positioning of calls to action	
USP communications and their placement	
Service and support information	
Average Score out 10	



How to use the results

Quadrant 1.

Your start point is with A/B split testing or multivariate testing of the form and structure of your site. By benchmarking against better higher scoring competitors, testing plans can be prepared and executed to quickly resolve the core issues. The chances are your conversion rate is low for you sector and some substantial uplifts on conversion % can be attained. At the same time your volumes may be lower and ROI gains will reflect this.

Quadrant 2.

You have achieved good marketing orientation but search, registration, booking and check-out process are holding back your conversion. We can test different multi-stage processes, formats and their supporting information. ROI gains can be substantial processes optimisation can provide some big wins in uplift.

Quadrant 3.

Multivariate testing will start with calls to action, information that supports sales and promotional content solicits. Often users are exiting because they cannot find the products and services quickly enough. They may be using tabbed browsing and simply go to another vendor for convenience. Both uplift and ROI can be sizable across a number of tests.

Quadrant 4.

Your site has an excellent opportunity for ROI uplift from more complex and granular testing. This is particularly applicable to larger operators who have detailed analytics experience. It is important to take a longer term approach to how our optimisation can contribute different uplift levels to different areas. The emphasis is on continuous user experience improvement. A site in this quadrant will probably benefit from segmentation and behavioural targeting approaches. Sites with higher traffic levels benefit from more accurate content targeting.

CONCLUSIONS

Optimising your content can provide some easy and pleasing uplift in the short term. Creating loyalty is becoming critical to achieving greater life-time value from customers because repeat business enables operators to off-set their acquisition costs more effectively. This means sites need to continually innovate and refine their customer experience to stay ahead of the pack. Those who do this effectively will have more competitive strength in their acquisition campaigns. Unless this is systematically managed through an ongoing program of optimising customer experience someone is always going to do it better than you.

Optimisation completes the virtuous circle of improvement started by analytics that will ultimately power winning travel businesses.

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“The Maxymiser team delivered an ROI of more than four times their annual fee across two tests in our first three months of engagement”

Christian Menniss - Job Site December 07