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# Using A/B Testing for Campaigns on Digital Media

A useful tool to refine and improve  
creative materials on digital media  
platforms



**Authors:** Pallavi Puri, Felicia Mangwani, Dane Svenson, Luyanda Majija, Nalin Singh Negi, Meena Maharjan. December 2021.

**Editors:** Karen Schmidt and Hana Raskin

**Design:** Shantal Henry and Johnny Hsu

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## What is A/B testing?

A/B testing, also known as split testing, is the process of comparing two or more versions of a creative material to figure out which performs better with the intended target audience.

During an A/B test for campaigns on digital media, target audience of your chosen platform are shown one of two or more versions of a post, webpage, advertisement, video, or other campaign material, with one varying element, allowing you to test them against each other. You can then measure how the target audience responds to each version of the creative material (e.g., by clicking through, signing up or viewing a video) so that you can select the top-performing version for your campaign.

# Pros and Cons of A/B Testing

## PROS

### Improved user engagement

Testing versions of creative material with one variation at a time, will help you understand what version garnered a larger number of the desired result from users. Modifying the creative material based on these results will help improve the target audience's experience, ultimately optimizing the campaign for success. For example, if you have a final advertisement ready but you are not confident about one element, like the call to action, you can test multiple versions of it and choose the one that performed the best.

### Increased conversion rates

A/B testing is the simplest and most effective way to determine which content urges most viewers to complete a desired action. In digital marketing this is referred to as "a conversion." Knowing what works and what does not work will help you improve conversion rates for desired goals; this might include click throughs, sign ups or views on a video.

### Ease of analysis and quick results

Determining which creative material wins or loses an A/B test is straightforward: you simply measure which copy or image metrics come closer to your goals (e.g., click-through rate, user engagement or retention, etc.). Even if the A/B test has a small sample size, participants can still provide important feedback on the aspects of the creative materials that are most engaging for users.

## CONS

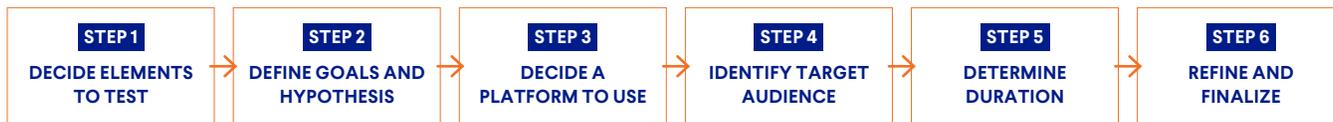
### Can use a lot of resources

It is essential to understand that A/B testing works best when we test one element at a particular time, hence, if you plan to test multiple elements, you could end up using a lot of your resources and time.

### Only works for specific goals

A/B testing is ideal if you are confused about one element (call to action, image, color, etc.) that would impact your desired result online (e.g., clicks, views, shares, etc.). However, if you want to test multiple elements at one time or want to test two completely different creative materials, offline testing, like focus group discussions, would give you a solution more cost-effectively.

## METHODOLOGY FLOW CHART



## Methodology

### STEP 1

#### Decide which elements you would like to test and develop a hypothesis

Almost every element of creative material can be tested using an A/B test, however you should **choose only one element to test at a time** (e.g., the color of the text, an image, headline, call to action, etc.). You can determine which elements to test by breaking your creative material down into separate elements and then reviewing the possible options for those elements (e.g., wording, layout, design, etc.).

#### FOR EXAMPLE

Imagine you were going to test the following end frames of a video advertisement against one another:

**Version A:** Uses “Protect your family and sign the petition!” with a red background.

**Version B:** Uses “Sign the petition!” with a black background.

You run the test, and see that Version B tested better. However, which element made the difference? Was it the different call to action or the background color? This dilemma illustrates why it is best to test one element at a time.

Once you have decided on the single element to test, develop your hypothesis. For example: “Changing the color (variable) from red to black will increase click-through rates (result).” In other tests, you can compare responses to a change to the call to action, and then your hypothesis might become: “I think stating ‘Protect your family and sign the petition!’ will perform better than ‘Sign the petition!’” It is critical that you are clear on what you’re testing and why you are testing it, before beginning the A/B test.

#### **You can A/B test multiple elements of your creative material. The most common ones are:**

**Creative** Compare multiple images, layouts, colors, headlines or calls to action. For example, you might have two different images that you are considering, and you want to test which image draws the most engagement from your target audience before investing in the post. You can A/B test two creatives with the only variation being the image and all other elements staying the same, and then use the image that received the most engagement, or choose to conduct additional testing on the other elements.

**Video Length** Research shows that the average adult attention span is about eight seconds long. It is important to determine the video length that your target audience is most receptive to, which typically ranges from 10 to 20 seconds. If you calculate based on the video completion rate, a 10-second video may be the best option. However, if your longer video is captivating enough to stop people from clicking away, it may be the better option.

**Ad Format** Each social media platform has different types of ad formats, with Facebook having the most options. You can use A/B testing to determine which format is best for your target audience and your message.

## STEP 2

### Define your goals and hypothesis clearly and how you would measure it

After running the A/B test, you might want to measure your results based on all of the metrics collected, however, it is advisable to **focus on the metric that will help you to test your hypothesis.**

#### FOR EXAMPLE

Imagine that while testing the call to action in the end frame of video advertisements A and B, your target audience clicks on the link provided to sign the petition and is redirected to a new webpage, but they don't end up signing the petition. In this case, "number of petitions signed" is not the best measure to compare the two versions because when the target audience was redirected to a new page, there were other elements on the page that might have influenced their decision of whether or not to sign the petition. Instead, you might like to know the number of clicks on the link provided under each call to action to see which version performed better.

It is essential to remember that the goal of the analysis is to test which call to action generates the most clicks.

However, if you do want to understand why people clicked on the link but didn't sign up, you would like to first check if your creative material is communicating what the website is offering or if there are other disturbing elements (complicated links, long forms, etc.) that has obstructed your target audience from signing up.

## STEP 3

### Decide which platform to use for the test

A/B testing can be performed on digital media platforms including [Facebook](#), Instagram, [LinkedIn](#), Twitter and [Google Ads](#). Once you have determined the element you will test, your hypothesis and the metric you are interested in, you can use that information to select the platform you would like to run your A/B test. It is recommended to test your creative material on the same platform that you will host your campaign. You can run the same test on multiple platforms, however, please note that the results may vary because of different algorithms and cannot be compared.

Here is what you can test on various digital platforms:

- [Facebook and Instagram](#) allow you to test a variety of materials, including:
  - videos; images; carousel ads (combines multiple videos or images into a single ad);
  - side banner ads (a small bar ad that appears at the bottom or top of your content);
  - messenger ads (a relatively new ad feature that allows viewers to initiate a text conversation with you); and
  - [collection ads](#) (features a primary video or image above several smaller images, with a focus on audience acquisition).
- [LinkedIn](#) offers various format options for an A/B test, including:
  - [ad rotation](#) (allows you to test individual creative elements to optimize ads);
  - [sponsored content ads](#) (delivers native ads, which match the look, feel and function of LinkedIn to the feed of your target audience);
  - [dynamic ads](#) (ads personalized depending on each member's LinkedIn profile data);
  - [text ads](#) (ads on the right-hand side or top of the LinkedIn desktop feed); and
  - [sponsored messaging](#) (direct, one-on-one messages to the target audience's LinkedIn Messaging).
- [Twitter's](#) limits on post length make it ideal for an A/B test of short text. While the platform doesn't offer many types of ads, you can choose Twitter to test tweets paired with different versions of keywords, tone, hashtags, images, and videos. You can also test the day and time that works best for the tweet.
- [Google ads](#) has a lot to offer when performing an A/B test. You can test:
  - emails; ad creatives (texts, videos and graphics);
  - [landing pages](#) (webpage where people end up after they click your ad); and
  - changes in elements such as dashboards and navigation.

## **STEP 4**

### Identify your target audience

On digital media you can target audiences based on demographics (age, gender, income, location) or interests to find the segment of audience that relates to, or is interested in, the topic of the campaign. Defining and serving the creative material to the right target audience will decrease the odds of wasting ads on uninterested eyeballs. Many digital platforms have the capability to refine target audiences, with Facebook and Instagram offering the greatest range of options. For A/B testing, the creative material should be tested with the target audience for your campaign.

## **STEP 5**

### Determine the duration of the test

The duration of an A/B test is an important factor in helping to ensure accurate and meaningful results. Patience is important: experimenting for a short period of time can result in inaccurate data. It is recommended that an A/B test be run for a minimum of one to two weeks for meaningful results.

## **STEP 6**

### Refine and finalize creative material

Once you have analyzed your results and determined which version of the material performed best, you can run more tests on different elements to refine the creative. For example, after selecting the image that received the most views when compared to the other, you may want to also test the call to action to determine which version resonates the most with your target audience. Once you've determined the top-performing variations, you can combine them into the final ad to use in your campaign.

## Best Practices for Effective A/B Test Results

**Limit the changes you make.** The only visible difference should be the element you are actively testing. Focusing on testing one varied element at a time helps you understand which variation is the most effective and keeps you from overcrowding too many different elements into one A/B test.

**Take advantage of the algorithm to make the most of your campaign investment.** An algorithm is a set of instructions that enables a computer program to put together different sources of information and generate a result. The A/B test can help you better identify your audience and determine the best way to spend your fixed budget; many digital platforms have campaign budget optimization features to help you do so.

**Start from the beginning and repeat.** Even though experts recommend that you run each test for a minimum of one to two weeks, A/B testing should be continuous to keep your content relevant, crisp, and attractive. A/B testing enables you to develop new ideas and quickly evaluate what is working throughout your campaign.

## Conclusion

While effective A/B testing takes time and resources, it is a very useful tool to refine and improve creative materials on digital media platforms. If conducted carefully, A/B testing can help you optimize your campaign budget and focus your energy and resources on achieving your campaign goals.