

GUIDE

Creating Delight

How to optimize your e-commerce experience at every customer touch point.



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Gartner predicts that by 2023, Alibaba and Amazon will have captured 40% market share of global online retail [\(source\)](#). That's a staggering number.

So, how do today's retailers set their organizations up for success—differentiating from the e-commerce giants in the marketplace?

One key piece of the puzzle is continuous optimization of the customer experience to foster customer affinity and loyalty. This involves:

- Understanding and mapping your ideal customer journey (both online and offline), and
- Optimizing each touchpoint within that journey to create a seamless, delightful shopping experience

In this guide, we will focus specifically on optimizing the online (e-commerce) experience.

The first step to optimizing your e-commerce experience? Understanding what's happening behind the scenes when your shoppers make buying decisions, as well as what influences those decisions.

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“Being competitive in the retail market today means being able to learn and adapt more quickly to the experiences that customers want.”

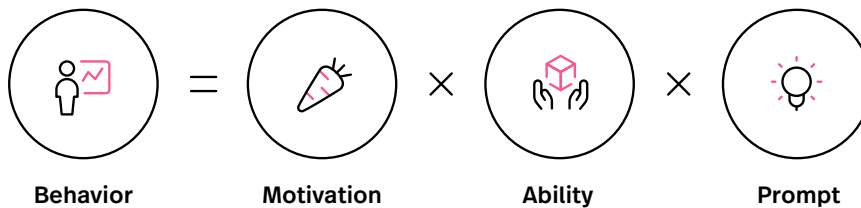
“HOW RETAIL RESPONDS
TO DISRUPTION” [MIT SLOAN
MANAGEMENT REVIEW](#)

Behavior = Motivation x Ability x Trigger

As an e-commerce leader, it's important to understand what is happening behind the scenes when your shoppers make buying decisions, as well as what influences those decisions.

The Fogg Behavior Model explains that three elements must come together at the same time for a behavior (like “transacting on your site”) to occur: motivation, ability and a prompt. When a behavior does not occur, it means at least one of those three elements is missing.

The Bottom Line



The prompt sets a person in motion to do the desired behavior. It could be a set of instructions, a sound, an animation, etc.

The success of a prompt in triggering a behavior relies on ability and motivation.

1. **Ability:** How easy is it for your shopper to take an action? How much effort is required?
2. **Motivation:** Does taking action correlate with pleasure or pain? Hope or fear? Social acceptance or rejection?

In this guide, we will focus primarily on usability within your e-commerce experience. Ultimately, your customers have a finite amount of “click energy” before they lose the will to continue. Your job is to provide a seamless pathway to their desired action.

Note: If you'd like to learn more about boosting motivation by creating emotional resonance, check out this whitepaper from Widerfunnel.

The Complete Guide to Creating an Emotionally Resonant Customer Experience



WIDER
FUNNEL

How to make the most of this guide

While we will review examples and trends in this guide, keep in mind that your shoppers and your business context are unique. Tips and best practices are a great place to start, but the insights behind why those tactics work (or don't work) for your shoppers is where you will find longevity.

And those insights are derived by hypothesizing, testing, and validating or invalidating best practices and hunches.

When you are developing hypotheses around improving customer experience, the more evidence you can get your hands on the better. This is where FullStory comes in. FullStory allows you to observe and capture how your shoppers are using your e-commerce experience. This data can be used to justify testing an industry trend or best practice and to confirm the “why” behind a test result.

So let's get started! In the following sections, we'll explore the most common touchpoints within the e-commerce journey, starting with the homepage.

A DELIGHTFUL FIRST IMPRESSION

Optimizing your E-commerce Homepage

When a potential customer enters your e-commerce website, they likely have one of two intentions: 1) They are searching for a particular product, or 2) they are browsing to discover what products you offer and whether you have products that will meet their needs.

Your homepage is often your first chance to “introduce” your website. And it may be the first interaction a potential customer has with your brand.

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“The best way to improve experiences for your visitors is to think from their perspective. And the best way to do that is to use frameworks, and framework thinking, to get robust insights about your customers.”



CHRIS GOWARD,
FOUNDER & CEO,
WIDERFUNNEL

Not all shoppers enter a site through the homepage, but, for those who do, it should effectively introduce the site and explain what your company sells and how it is different from competitors. Your homepage must communicate who you are, and, for e-commerce, should expose the main product offerings and enable users to start shopping. ([NNGroup](#))

To get a sense of your specific shoppers' intent when landing on your homepage, you can leverage user research methods, such as session recordings and clickmaps. How are people navigating your homepage? What are they looking for? What elements are they engaging with?

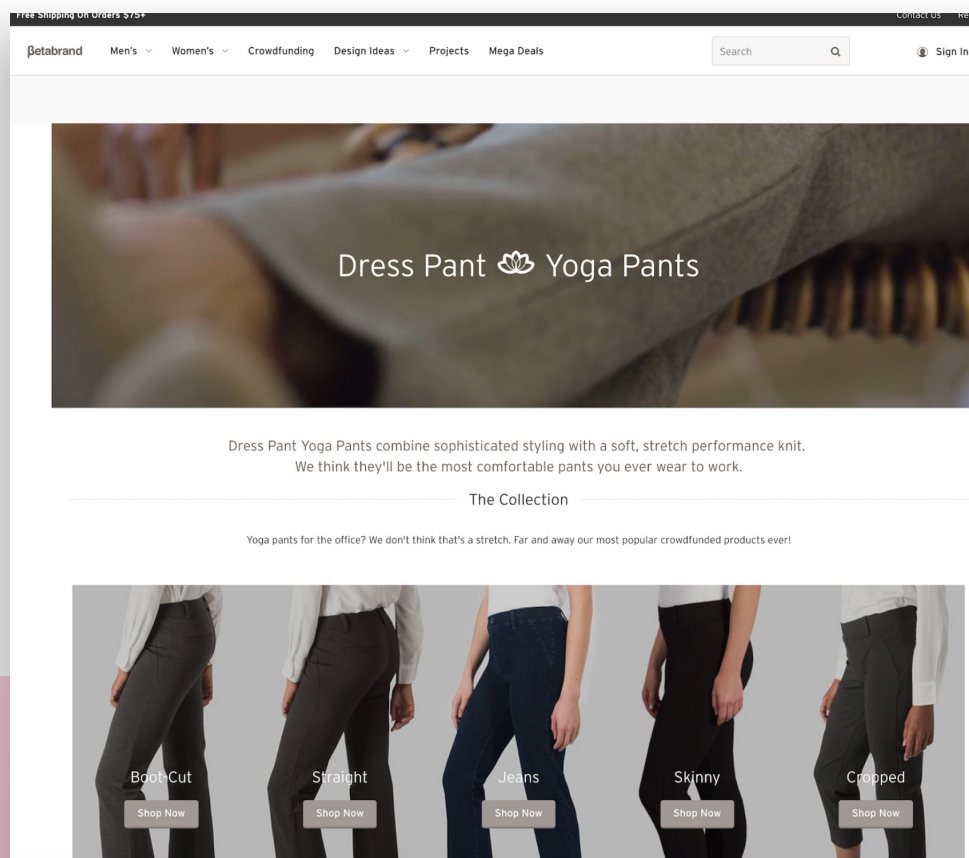
A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: **Understanding the Shopper's Mission**

Betabrand is an online clothing community based in San Francisco. They are constantly designing, manufacturing, and releasing new products through a crowdsourcing model that has helped the company build a thriving e-commerce business since 2005.

Using [Optimizely](#), an experimentation platform, and FullStory, Betabrand's digital team is working to increase purchases among first-time visitors to the site.

BEFORE

The original homepage distracted first-time visitors from purchasing the item they sought



On this page, the company highlights many variations (cut, color, etc.) of their best-seller, aiming to show first-time visitors that no matter what their preference, Betabrand has a product that will fit their needs. But the company's data also confirmed that the best-selling item for first-time visitors is the original Dress Pant Yoga Pant in black.

After watching sessions for first-time visitors, the Betabrand team wondered if introducing additional product options was actually distracting first-time visitors from purchasing the one product they were likely looking for: the Black Dress Pant Yoga Pants. Based on this evidence, the team developed the following hypothesis:

HYPOTHESIS

Prominently featuring the Dress Pant Yoga Pant in black for first-time visitors will result in increased conversions (add to cart) among that audience.

AFTER

RESULT

When shown the variant compared to the original homepage design, Betabrand saw a +10% increase in "Add to Cart" among first-time visitors. The hypothesis was confirmed.

For some e-commerce sites, introducing new visitors to a variety of products that might pique their interest could be a recipe for success. But for Betabrand, it wasn't. Understanding your visitor's goals and reducing the barriers to achieve those goals is your mission when crafting your customer experience. Best practices serve as a helpful guide, but testing what works for your audience is essential.



A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: Streamlining for an airline

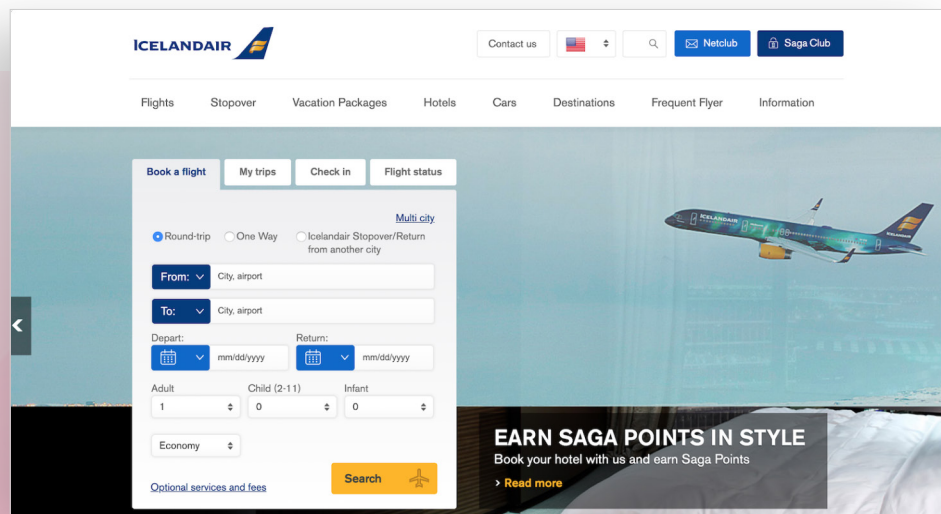
If you've ever booked a flight online, you know that travel sites often highlight an array of options on their homepages that have little to do with looking for flights or hotels. From loyalty rewards programs to exclusive credit card offers, there's often quite a lot to take in on a typical travel site homepage.

Using FullStory, Icelandair recently experimented with ways to increase engagement with their booking engine—a prominent and highly valuable homepage feature. They hypothesized that increased engagement with the booking engine on the homepage would lead to an increase in flights booked successfully.

As they watched customers attempt to find and book flights and dug into their conversion funnel, the Icelandair team suspected that by simplifying the homepage and reducing distraction around the booking engine specifically they could increase overall searches and thus increase conversion as a whole.

BEFORE

This was the original experience.

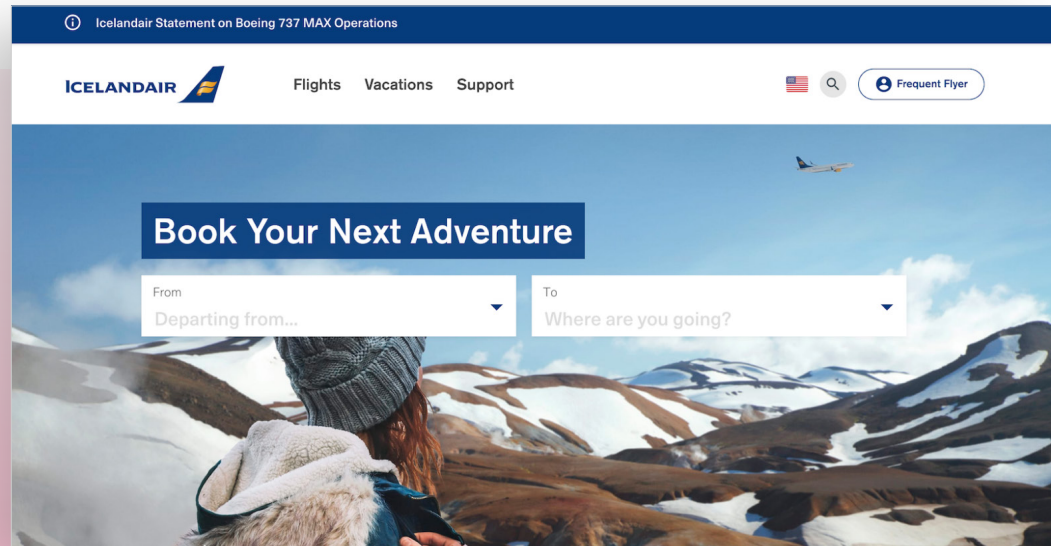


HYPOTHESIS

Reducing distractions on the homepage will increase engagement with the booking engine.

In the variation, the Icelandair team focused specifically on “booking a flight” and simplified the form to include only Departure and Arrival destinations.

AFTER



The team ran the test in 16 key global markets, including the U.S. and Iceland. They saw as much as a 20% lift in engagement with the booking engine as a result of their efforts to simplify the home page and booking engine.

Keep in mind that, while reducing distraction on the homepage can be extremely effective, you should always try to consider the entire customer journey. Increasing engagement at the site entry point is great, but if it causes confusion further down the funnel, you may need to revisit when and how you are introducing relevant information.

Let's take a look at subsequent touchpoints in the e-commerce experience.

SEAMLESS E-COMMERCE SITE EXPLORATION

The Navigation

Your site header is one of the most important areas on your e-commerce website. It is seen by almost every visitor and is a crucial element in guiding people through your site.

As Shopify Plus stated in [their article on e-commerce navigation](#), “Your shoppers don’t want to think as they browse. Make their journey smoother by designing a header that is tailor-made to their wants and needs. It should be simple, clear, and most importantly, attractive to your visitors.”

Site-wide navigation best practices abound. From search bars to hamburger menus to sub-headers and promo offers, there is a lot you can do with this space. But what works for Amazon or Walmart may not work for your shoppers. You should always start with determining what is important to your specific shoppers.

Your ultimate goal must be to enable your shoppers to get where they want to go as easily as possible. This sounds like common sense, but it may mean de-emphasizing categories, language, or promotions that you think are important.

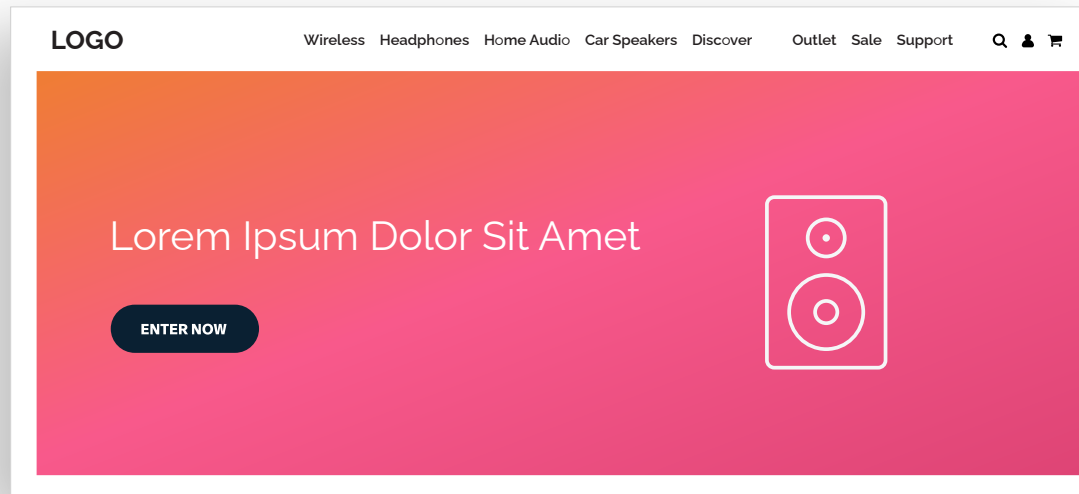
A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE:

Reducing distraction in the Nav

One of Widerfunnel’s partners is a global electronics retailer. In the following example, Widerfunnel Director of Experimentation Strategy, Mike St Laurent, was working with this company’s e-commerce team to optimize the site-wide navigation.

BEFORE

The original experience featured quite a few navigation links



With the first variation, the team decided to adjust the relative prominence of select product categories. The goal was to make it easier for users to identify and navigate to the company's top products without being distracted.

HYPOTHESIS

Focusing users on the main navigation menus will drive users further down the funnel and increase transactions.

Search is often a very powerful feature in e-commerce, as shoppers who conduct a search tend to convert at a higher rate. For this company, heatmaps indicated that search was very popular. However the navigation experience didn't promote the search. Rather, users were forced to use an extra click to open the search.

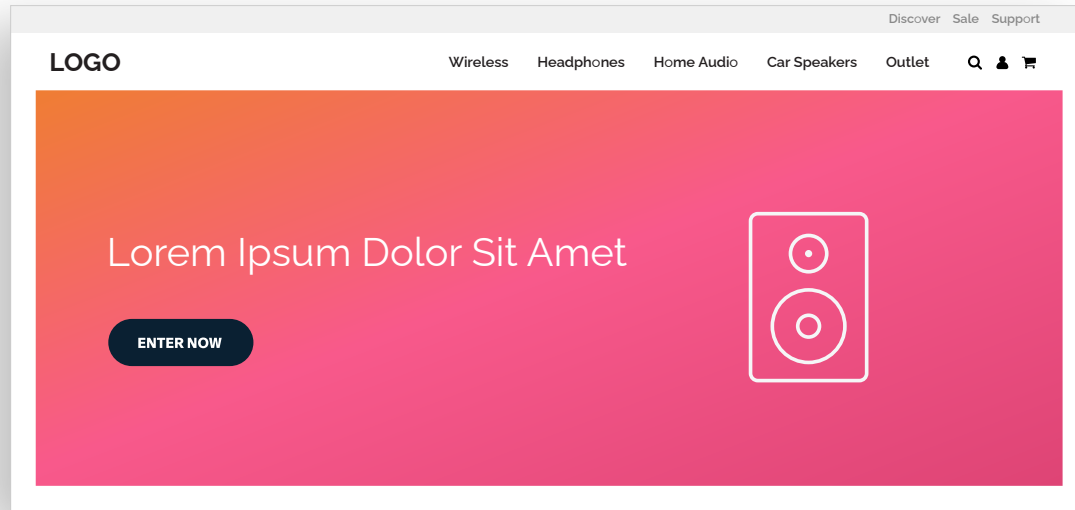
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When we were doing our LIFT analysis, we identified a lot of potentially distracting content in the navigation. The majority of this organization's revenue was coming from a handful of products, but the menu wasn't making it easy for users to focus their attention on those categories.”



MIKE ST LAURENT, DIRECTOR,
EXPERIMENTATION STRATEGY,
WIDERFUNNEL

VARIATION 1

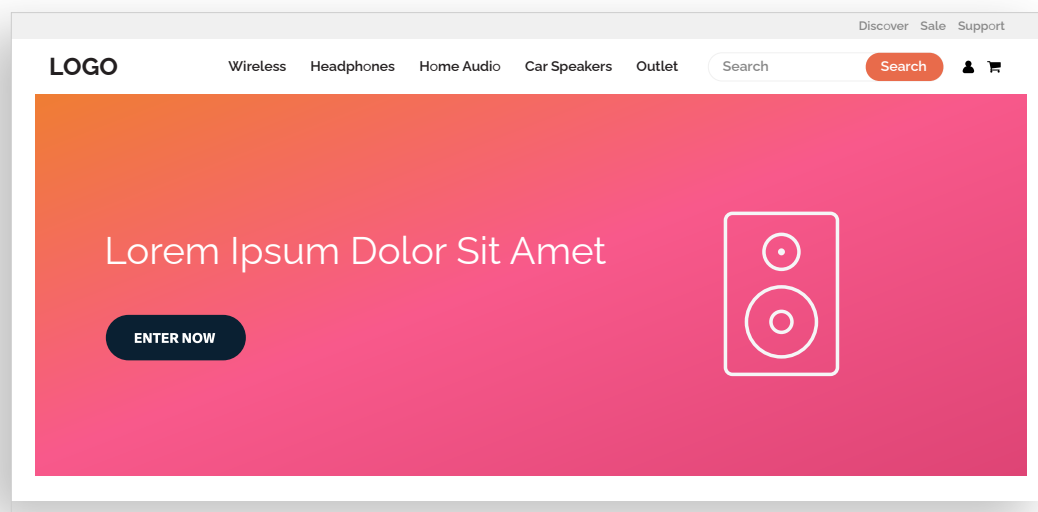


In the second variation, the team wanted to test making the search functionality more prominent, the idea being that this would make it easier for users to find and engage with the search. Would driving more “searches” result in more conversions?

RESULT

This experiment ran on the company’s desktop experience for just over four weeks.

VARIATION 2



The first variation resulted in a +4.95% increase in transactions. The hypothesis was confirmed: Focusing shoppers on the primary shopping elements and reducing distractions had a positive effect on conversions. All of the product categories we were emphasizing saw between a 3-15% increase in engagement, while the categories we de-emphasized received reduced engagement.

The second variation saw an interesting result. The WiderFunnel team was able to increase engagement with the search by over 50%, but reduced overall conversion rate by nearly 5% compared to the first variation. Upon further investigation, the team found that shoppers were visiting the search results page significantly more, but were not moving on to product pages and completing purchases.

SEAMLESS E-COMMERCE SITE EXPLORATION

Product Listings Page

A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: Reducing distraction in the Nav

For another Widerfunnel partner—a sporting goods retailer—the Strategy team was focused on optimizing the product listings page with user intent top-of-mind.

In the first variation on this experience, the focus was on improving scannability, to help the visitor save time. The team wanted to focus on color, particularly—other e-commerce experiments have revealed high sensitivity to color.

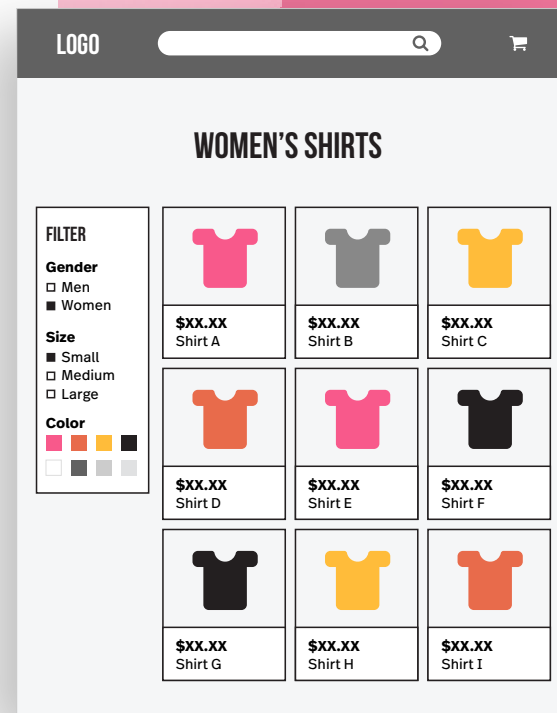
BEFORE

This was the original experience.

“Although this variation was a loss in terms of performance, it still generated a strong insight that the team had to improve their search algorithm for more relevant products.”



MIKE ST LAURENT, DIRECTOR,
EXPERIMENTATION STRATEGY,
WIDERFUNNEL



In the control experience, the page is communicating that these products are available in other colors, but it is forcing shoppers to interact with the colors one by one to find the color of their choice.

Imagine you're in a brick-and-mortar store and there is only one default color for every piece of clothing. You have to walk up to each piece and interact with it in order to see other color options. Ridiculous, right? In any retail store, you can easily scan and see several colors of a product on display on the same rack or shelf. The team wanted to bring that experience to the web.

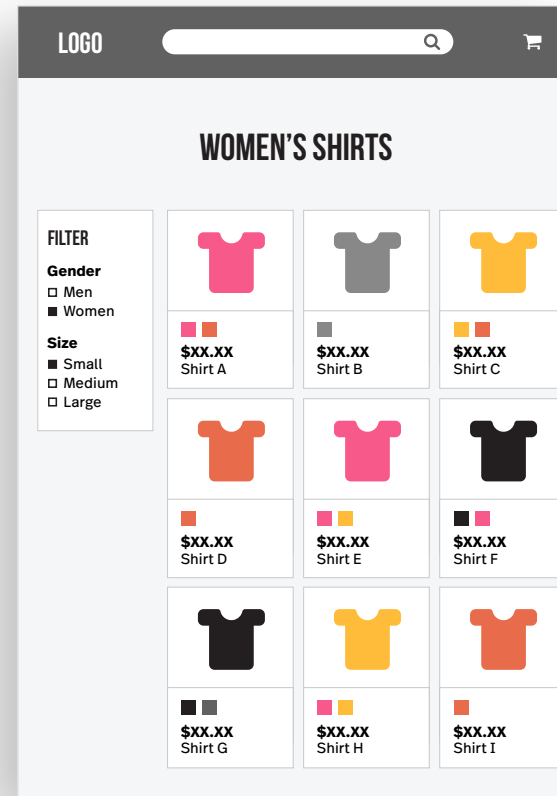
By exposing the colors available, they hoped to improve shoppers' ability to scan tenfold, creating an experience where a shopper could scan their entire viewport with little effort. On top of that, shoppers could update the color on the listing page and then be directed to the correct product page.

HYPOTHESIS

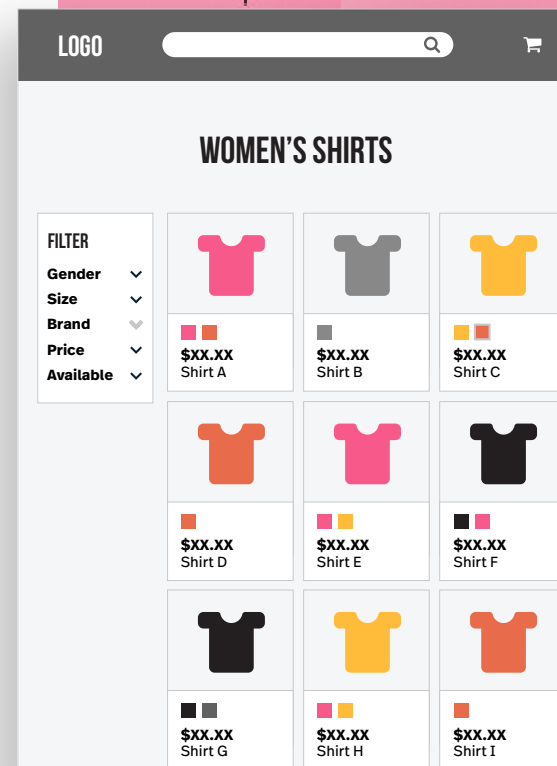
Exposing colors for users will make it much easier for them to browse different versions of products and lead to more conversions.

The second variation in this experiment is what the Widerfunnel team calls a "research" experiment type. The intent in this type of experiment is not to necessarily move the needle (although that is always a nice bonus), but rather to discover something interesting.

VARIATION 1



VARIATION 2



Strategists wanted to understand which filters shoppers would engage with naturally when each is given equal prominence—the goal being to help inform future filter experiments.

RESULT

This experiment ran for just over two weeks on the product listings page within the desktop experience.

The first variation was a winner, resulting in a 160% increase in shoppers engaging with the colors and a nearly 4% increase in shoppers adding products to their cart. In terms of the primary metric, this experience led to a +3.16% increase in transactions.

With the “research” variation, transactions were nearly flat, as expected. However, this variation led to some powerful insights: The team found that several filter options listed were not valuable enough to warrant the prime real estate they were given. This resulted in new hypotheses around reordering the filter options: Could exposing options that are buried in the original experience be beneficial in a future experiment?

Whether you’re testing on your homepage, your navigation, or your checkout, you should always balance running experiments meant to drive growth and increase transactions with experiments meant to uncover insights. There is a time and a place for both—while growth-driving experiments can lead to incremental improvement, one key insight can take your experimentation program to the next level.

SEAMLESS E-COMMERCE SITE EXPLORATION

The Product Detail Page

A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE:

Personalizing the product page

Our next example features a large apparel retailer and an experiment they ran on their site’s product detail page.

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“We can’t really do this exercise using analytics because when all of the menu items are exposed some of them are given a lot of prominence at the top, while others are pushed very far down. Experimentation gives us a good opportunity to gather data without the risk of affecting the entire traffic segment.”



MIKE ST LAURENT,
DIRECTOR,
EXPERIMENTATION
STRATEGY, WIDERFUNNEL

After conversations with their e-commerce team, the Widerfunnel Strategy team decided to test giving this feature more prominence. The goal was to validate whether getting more eyes on this feature would result in greater engagement, improved transactions, and increased average order value through cross-selling.

Increasing the prominence of the related products will increase the conversion rate.

This experiment ran for three weeks across all devices. At first glance, the results were disappointing showing a relatively flat lift, with only a small improvement.

This was the original experience.



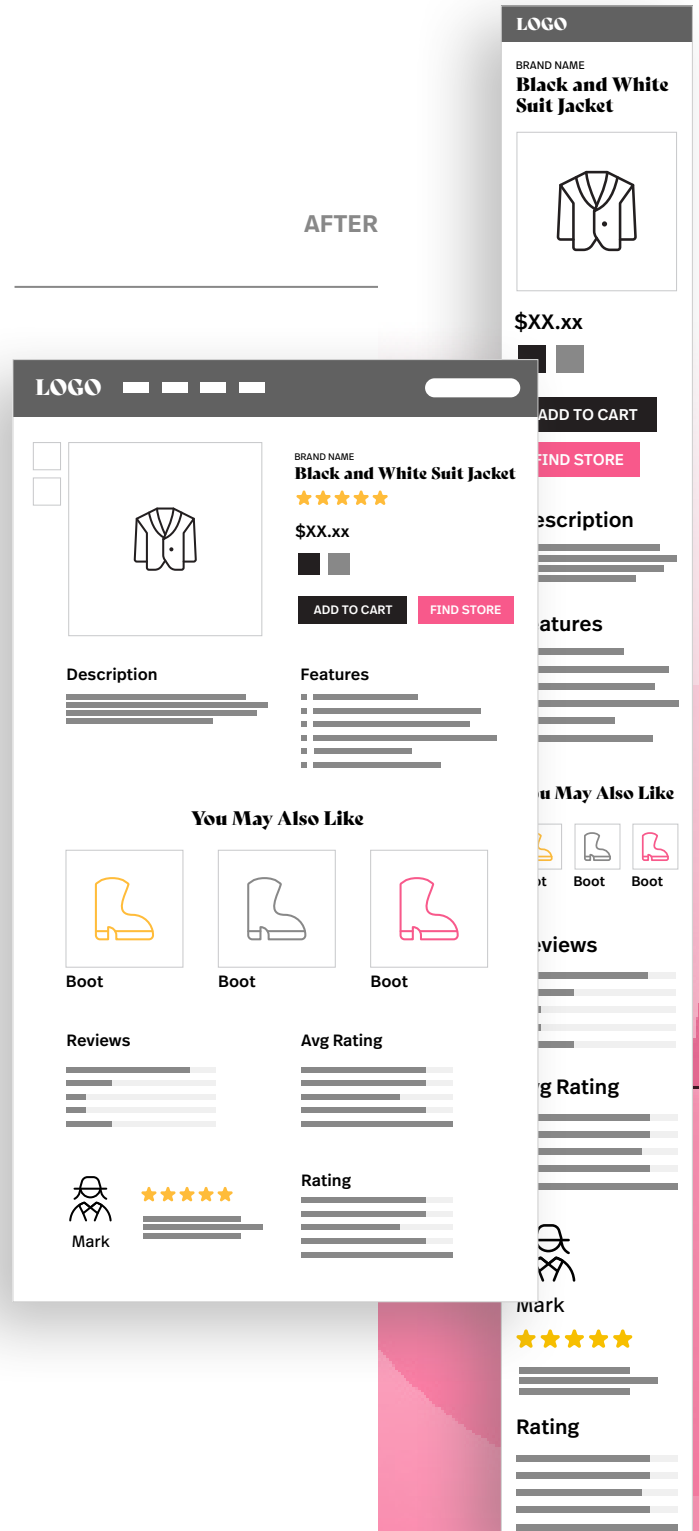
To help explain the difference in performance, Mike St Laurent explains that you need to consider the context of the shopper in the journey:

When a shopper is browsing this site on their mobile device, they are likely in a “browsing state”. They may be on the bus or sitting on the couch, and are more open to recommendations to guide them through their shopping journey.

On desktop, we see shoppers acting with more intent, as they are more likely to be ready to make a purchase. So while the recommendations were extremely successful for those mobile users, they were actually somewhat distracting for shoppers at a different part of their journey.

Of course, this is just one piece of evidence to support our theory. We will continue to look at which algorithms may be best suited for these different contexts.

The result on desktop is a clear example of ineffective personalization. Just because something is personalized, does not mean it's a better user experience. It is important to validate what the best experience is for your shopper if possible.



SEAMLESS E-COMMERCE SITE EXPLORATION

The Checkout Experience

Far too often, shoppers will make it all the way to the checkout page of an e-commerce website, only to abandon ship. Reasons for abandonment range from unexpected shipping costs, to a long or overly complicated checkout process, a lack of credibility or trust, or an unimpressive return policy.

Remember we mentioned “click energy” at the beginning of this guide? Once your shopper has arrived at the checkout, they likely have very little click energy left. They are also in a much more risk-averse mindset, as they are about to actually part with their hard-earned money.

This means distraction, anxiety, and/or friction at the checkout stage can be extremely costly.

A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE: Red light, green light.

This example follows an experiment run on the checkout experience of a company that sells tickets to events across Canada and the United States. This company was fairly new to experimentation when they partnered with the Widerfunnel team and the checkout was identified as a high-impact place to begin testing. It is a key decision point in the customer journey, with high importance and high potential.

BEFORE

This was the original checkout experience.

The screenshot shows a checkout page for 'The Nutcracker' event. The header includes a 'Logo' and a 'SIGN IN' link. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains event details: 'Thur JAN 08 8:00pm', 'The Nutcracker Main Ballroom', 'Seat Location: General Admission', 'Delivery Method: eTicket', and 'Quantity: 2 Tickets'. Below this is a 'Contact Info' section with fields for 'Email Address' and 'Phone Number'. The right column contains an 'Order Summary' with a table listing 'Tickets x2' for \$127.80, 'Service Fee' for \$23.00, and 'Delivery' for \$4.95, totaling '\$155.75 USD'. Below the summary is a checkbox for 'I agree to the terms and conditions' and a large pink 'PAY \$155.75' button. At the bottom right, there is a yellow checkmark icon and a guarantee text: 'Your tickets are protected by our guarantee! They will arrive on time, be authentic, and valid for entry and you will be fully refunded if the event is cancelled and not rescheduled.'

Event Details	
Thur JAN 08 8:00pm	The Nutcracker Main Ballroom
Seat Location	General Admission
Delivery Method	eTicket
Quantity	2 Tickets

Contact Info	
Email Address	Phone Number

Card Information			
Card Number	MM/YY	CVV	
First Name	Last Name		

Billing Info	
Street Address	
Country	State/Province
City	Postal Code

Order Summary	
Tickets x2	\$127.80
Service Fee	\$23.00
Delivery	\$4.95
Total	\$155.75 USD

☐ I agree to the [terms and conditions](#)

PAY \$155.75

✓ Your tickets are protected by our guarantee! They will arrive on time, be authentic, and valid for entry and you will be fully refunded if the event is cancelled and not rescheduled.

In this experience, Widerfunnel strategist Alex Mason identified several elements that could have been causing anxiety for shoppers at a crucial moment in their journey: Notably bright red text and red calls-to-action, along with emphasis on the price.

Additionally, there were no trust symbols or customer protection guarantees that might help to alleviate some of this anxiety, even though this company has excellent money-back guarantees.

The variation removed a number of bright red elements on the page, replacing these with a softer green to match the company's brand colors and reduce anxiety. It also gave more prominence to the customer-protection guarantees, and reduced the visual size of the price.

HYPOTHESIS

Placing more emphasis on key customer-protection guarantees and policies that are already in place, while reducing emphasis on cost will increase trust and reduce anxiety, resulting in an increase in successful purchases.

AFTER

This experiment ran for just over three weeks on the desktop experience. Results were impressive: +33.5% increase in ticket purchases at 99% statistical confidence.

“This was a pretty revolutionary finding for this company’s team,” Mason said. “These strong customer guarantees had been downplayed throughout their site, but now we knew they were potentially really powerful: Perfect for follow-up experiments. Changing the color of a call-to-action or placing emphasis on value propositions may not seem like a large change, but as these results show, small changes can dramatically change visitor behavior.”

Optimizing the full e-commerce journey, and beyond

From site entry to exploration to the final transaction, your job is to provide a seamless experience for shoppers throughout your e-commerce site. This involves conducting customer and user research and heuristic analyses to identify characteristics about your unique customers:

- Why are different shoppers coming to your site? What is their intent?
- How are shoppers engaging with different elements across your site? Does increased engagement with one element, such as search, correlate with increased transactions?
- Does your website include unnecessary distractions? Are there elements that are causing anxiety or frustration? Where can you increase clarity or relevance? Where can you add urgency?

“

“Changing the color of a call-to-action or placing emphasis on value propositions may not seem like a large change, but as these results show, small changes can dramatically change visitor behavior.”



ALEX MASON,
EXPERIMENTATION
STRATEGIST,
WIDERFUNNEL

As you gather evidence and develop theories based on that evidence, you can translate those theories into experiment hypotheses. Experimentation allows you to validate whether an “improvement” is actually an improvement. It provides a real-time feedback loop with your shoppers and is a proven path to improved customer experience.

Of course, a shopper’s experience with your e-commerce site is just one piece of their overall experience with your brand. While this guide has focused on the online, you should also consider how online insights can help you create more delight offline.



Widerfunnel is the experimentation and optimization company. We partner with change-makers in growing organizations to implement, accelerate, and scale integrated experimentation systems that drive actionable insights and fuel growth. Partnering with leading companies since 2007, such as HP, GM, Intercom, Sport Chek, and The Motley Fool. To learn more about WiderFunnel, visit: widerfunnel.com.

fullstory

FullStory’s digital experience intelligence platform enables businesses to continuously improve their digital customer experience across sites and apps. The platform proactively surfaces actionable insights from billions of data points, helping product teams make digital improvements that reduce costs and reclaim revenue.

FullStory’s industry-leading technology is flexible and easy to use, making it a clear choice for organizations that want to operationalize digital experience management and break down internal information silos, while upholding end user privacy.

FullStory was founded in 2014 on the belief that everyone benefits from a more perfect digital experience; today the company has 200+ distributed employees with offices in Atlanta and London. FullStory is the go-to solution for thousands of product leaders across the world’s most innovative consumer brands and Fortune 100 companies. To learn more about FullStory, visit: fullstory.com.