



Published
November 2016

How to Build a Culture of Growth

A Guide for Leading Your Marketing Team to Focus on Testing, Growth, and Profit

Google Analytics 360 Suite

Foreword

This guide is for executives, directors, managers and anyone else who is focused on championing a growth mindset across their marketing organization.

If you're a top-level executive who is thinking this way, you'll want to foster a culture that embraces the use of data, testing, and optimization as a means to improve the customer experience every day.

While your support will be critical, the truth is that it's typical for growth and optimization efforts to spring from the bottom up. It often begins with a few people who have a passion for challenging the status quo, the urge to test new ideas, and the determination to beg, borrow, or steal resources to make it happen—plus the patience to learn from failures as much as successes.

It's hard to identify and hire such people on purpose. But as a leader, you can clear the path for that culture to grow. You can set the tone and make resources available. You can keep an eye out for people who are looking for a new adventure, who are creative and hungry and might be growth-minded. You can give those people the permission to tinker and test, and the room to make it happen.

The rewards are great. And this approach is perfectly suited to today's data-rich digital world. Testing and optimization improve the customer experience, and more relevant and personalized experiences make people happy. A culture of growth is one where you build the bottom line by truly making the most of your efforts and insights.

We talked with customers, partners and digital leaders across our company to identify how best to build a growth-minded culture. We hope their stories and tips will be helpful to you and your team.



Casey Carey

Director of Marketing,
Google Analytics Solutions

INTRODUCTION

“Creating a culture of growth isn’t a mystery. It’s simply about using the data you have to build a better experience for your customers and your business every day.”



Krista Seiden

Global Analytics Education Lead, Google

Welcome to the data-rich world, where the old challenge of gathering enough data has been replaced by a new one: making sense of too much data flooding in 24/7.

499,999,999,041

Half a trillion digital moments a day are now processed by Google Analytics²

In a recent *Economist* survey, more than half of senior marketing leaders said that the blend of mobile lifestyles, accelerating changes in technology, and the explosion of potential digital marketing channels will change marketing the most by 2020¹. *Half a trillion* digital moments a day are now processed by Google Analytics².

In response to this new data-driven world, many of today's most successful businesses have turned to a new approach: building a **culture of growth**.

¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "The Path to 2020: Marketers Seize the Customer Experience." Survey and a series of in-depth interviews with senior executives. Survey base: 499 CMOs and senior marketing executives, global, 2016.

² Google Analytics data, global, Oct-Dec 2015.

A culture of growth is one where everyone in a company is ready to:



Most companies have a few people who are optimizers by nature, interest, or experience. Some may even have a “growth team.” But what really moves the dial is when everyone in the company is on board and thinks this way reflexively, with full support from C-level leaders.

Why Does It Matter?

86% of CMOs and senior marketing executives believe they will own the end-to-end customer experience by 2020, according to that same *Economist survey*³. And a culture of growth offers the best path to major gains in those experiences.

This kind of culture doesn't happen by command. It starts with small-scale testing on one or two spots, with changes made based on what the data shows. As testing proves itself, it tends to generate higher-level investments of support, talent, and resources. The payoff arrives in the form of more visitors, more sales, happier customers, and a healthier bottom line.



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of CMOs and senior marketing executives believe they will own the end-to-end customer experience by 2020.

If you're curious about building a culture of growth and optimization, this guide offers help in four parts:

- 1

An outline of the critical elements
- 2

Notes on how to build that culture (and overcome the typical challenges)
- 3

A framework for testing and experimentation
- 4

Lessons from leaders who've succeeded

³ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "The Path to 2020: Marketers Seize the Customer Experience." Survey and a series of in-depth interviews with senior executives. Survey base: 499 CMOs and senior marketing executives, global, 2016



Test Everything

“Not long ago, a large fashion brand in Europe worked for nearly two years on a full mobile site redesign. They were very thorough, very detail-oriented: They gathered best practices, they took insights from the best people, and they included it all in the new design.

When this very careful company finally pushed their new site live all at once, they had a shock: It was a disaster. They were worse off than where they started. They had to roll back everything completely.

Then they took a breath and started thinking, ‘What happened here? How can we learn from this moving forward?’ That’s how they came to the critical idea: *test everything*.

Because even though you may read that other people have done something that works very well for them, that doesn’t mean that it will work well for you. It might actually make your experience a lot worse than it was before. There’s only one way to tell: You’ve got to test it.”



Max van der Heijden

User Experience & Conversion Specialist, Google

PART 1

What Does a Culture of Growth Look Like?

How can we be more useful to our customers today? That's the simple question that drives a marketing organization focused on growth. While culture is different for every business, our conversations with experts in this field show that successful growth and optimization cultures include these elements:



Three key
personality
types



A long-haul
roadmap



Apples-to-
apples
measurement



A focus on
small steps



Smart
sharing

“Marketing today is as much about being useful for people as it is about brand awareness or entertainment.”



Joshua Spanier

Senior Marketing Director, Global Media, Google

The Three Key Personality Types

The goal of the culture of growth is to get *everybody* in the company working and optimizing together. The marketing team often leads the way, because it's already focused on the customer journey and on [using customer analytics to create value](#). "CMOs are in the midst of reorganising their departments around data and analytics as much as content and media channels," notes the Economist Intelligence Unit⁴.

Although it's a team effort, three key types of people often seem to show up organically to get the ball rolling: the Pioneer, the Champion, and the X-Team.



The Pioneer

This person is a passionate change-maker who is ready to forge ahead with testing and experimentation.

"The trend we see with companies at first is typically one or two persons doing the optimizations," says Max van der Heijden, a Google user experience and conversion specialist who works with advertisers across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. "They are usually mid-level people, a designer or a data analyst, or maybe a product manager, who reaches out to different departments to get the insights that they want."

If you want to find the pioneer in your own company, here's a clue: Look for the person who is testing and optimizing already with their own projects. (Try asking your developers who's been bugging them already for help creating tests.)



The Champion

This could be you! This C-level employee, often the CMO or even CEO, discovers and supports the pioneer with the resources needed to move ahead: money, talent, developer time, and a sense of urgent priority. This champion isn't usually active in running tests, but realizes their value and gives them full support.



The X-Team

Right behind the pioneer comes this cross-functional cadre: a small group of experts who can make tests happen. Jesse Nichols, head of web and app analytics and growth for Nest, says the group is usually a trio of one analyst, one designer and an engineer. "Put them in a single room with a single focus: optimization," he says. "With that group, you can ship something in weeks that would normally take months to get off the ground." As a bonus, they'll share the new culture across the organization and help gain buy-in from their various teams.



⁴ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "The Path to 2020: Marketers Seize the Customer Experience." Survey and a series of in-depth interviews with senior executives. Survey base: 499 CMOs and senior marketing executives, global, 2016.

A Long-Haul Roadmap

The technology landscape changes almost every day, and it's often up to the head of digital to keep searching and working toward "what's next." Testing and experimentation is a great way to explore those possibilities in a low-risk way.

Know as you start that this cultural shift is by nature a slow process, not a sprint. One or even two years is not an unusual time frame to help people understand the role of testing and get them excited about a culture of growth.



Apples-to-Apples Measurement

“Repeatable learning and apples-to-apples measurement is really important,” says Joshua Spanier, Senior Marketing Director for Global Media at Google. “I want to know that we can measure the same thing with the same methodologies next quarter and next year, and I want to know that our campaign in Greece and the UK and around the world will follow the same way.”

Data always trumps opinion with testers, but there are still technical barriers to getting data right. It’s much more challenging in a world with YouTube and video on demand and cable and social media and mobile, all with different metrics and different approaches for how the quality of media is measured.



“If you spend all your time merely trying to optimize things you already know work, you likely will not achieve exceptional performance. [And] you have to set internal expectations that testing will never end.”



Adam Levelle

Chief Growth Officer, Merkle

Small Steps

Testing is about hitting singles, not home runs. Of course the goal is to discover the billion-dollar game-changer, just like every video wants to be viral and every scientist wants to win the Nobel Prize. And indeed, some of your tests will turn out to be big winners. But there will also be lots of big losers and lots of small wins along the way.

A few key points:

Start simple

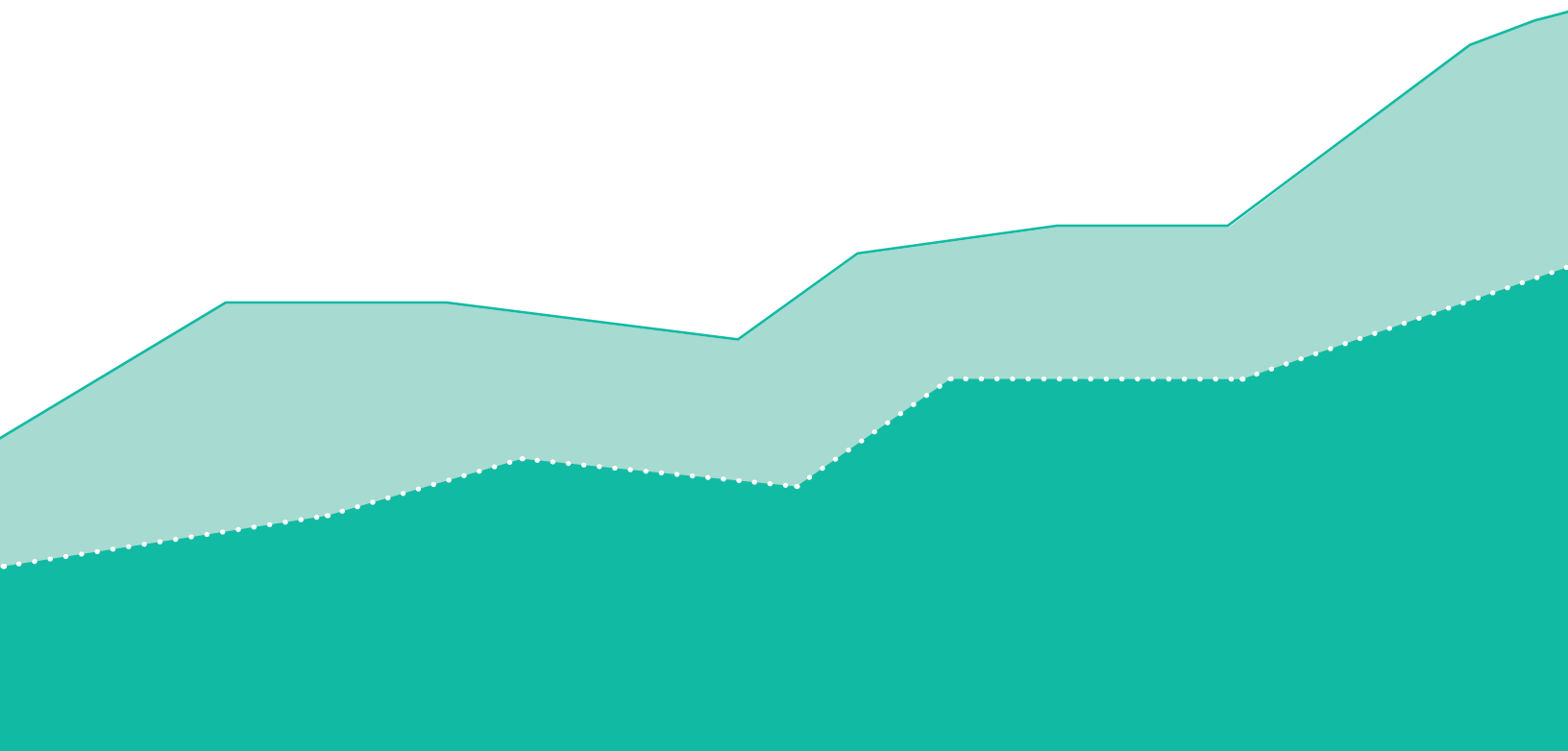
Begin your testing with insignificant things, not major changes. Give yourself a safe space to learn; you don't want your first tests to change (or break!) your whole platform.

Be incremental

Don't redo the entire homepage all at once; change just an image, or a headline, or the call to action, testing each one at a time. You'll get a much clearer picture of what's actually working.

Be scalable

Small is only beautiful if it's also useful. As you move forward, make sure those small changes will scale across your site, your company, and your global teams.



Smart Sharing

An inherent challenge with small victories is that they may not be trumpeted up to the people who need to hear about them.

This is partly because the victories are often significant but small—too small for one alone to merit mention at the weekly staff meeting. A larger issue is that in-the-weeds testers who are happy to win their small-but-important victories are typically not people who think about shouting to the world (or the CMO) what they've done.

So getting the word out is something that needs to be explicitly planned for. “Document the hell out of everything you do well,” says Jesse Nichols. “Because you're going to find yourself presenting to a series of leadership teams to show them what you can offer.”



CASE STUDY



Precious metals dealer APMEX prides itself on its concierge-level customer service, both on the phone and online.

Though the company has a limited marketing budget, “We refuse to believe that our customers’ experiences should be limited by our resources,” says Andrew Duffle, the company’s Director of Analytics. “We test everything. Creative versus non-creative, conversion rate optimization on low-performing pages, new user experiences, and even the price sensitivity of different products.”

“We refuse to believe that our customers’ experiences should be limited by our resources.”



Andrew Duffle

Director of Analytics,
APMEX

One test, for instance, offered a new homepage experience to people who had recently put Silver Buffalo coins in their shopping cart and then abandoned the cart. The change doubled the conversion rate for the Silver Buffalo coin with this audience.

[Read more about the APMEX growth culture](#) 

PART 2

Challenges and Cultural Roadblocks

So that's what a culture of growth looks like. Now let's look at the roadblocks in getting there. We talked to optimizers, CMOs, and other interested parties, and these are the challenges they described.



Finding Resources

Resources are a classic chicken and egg problem: It takes time and effort and dedicated people to run tests, but nobody wants to commit resources until they see results. When the choice is between testing something and releasing something, most of the time the drive to get the new web page published or the next email out the door is going to win.

This is where the pioneer often plays a critical role. They get the ball rolling as they beg, borrow, or steal the help needed to run the first tests, often asking like-minded people to “donate” some time of their own. Their early experiments are the first steps towards a change in culture.

Reaching Success

“Our test success rate is about 10%,” says Jesse Nichols of Nest. “We learn something from all our tests, but only 1 in 10 results in some kind of meaningful improvement.”

That means that as you’re convincing people to try testing, you have to convince them to stick with it through the strikeouts until you start hitting more singles. Veteran testers will tell you that the sure-fire ideas are often the ones that go nowhere, while what starts out as a throwaway test could end up adding a surprise \$500,000 to the bottom line.

“We learn something from all our tests, but only 1 in 10 results in some kind of meaningful improvement.”



Jesse Nichols
Growth Lead, Nest Labs



Getting Leadership Buy-In

No surprise: Support from the top is key to getting resources and wider interest and action across the organization. To find their C-level champion, the pioneer (and the head of digital) will need to frame the issue clearly and use numbers to support their case. This kind of “data storytelling” is an essential part of the process.

Once the 800-pound gorilla is on board, it’s also important not to let them become the 800-pound HiPPO. Long-term planning can be disrupted very easily by the Highest-Paid Person’s Opinion. It’s a good idea to outline testing criteria and a framework for decision-making before you start to keep good testing on track.



Getting Everyone Else to Buy In

Once you get a few testing wins under your belt, and win the support of a C-level champion, you’ll find others in the company coming around. With these colleagues, the problem is less getting them to buy in and more one of training and understanding.

“Simply telling people to innovate is almost impossible,” says Joshua Spanier. “People don’t know how to do it, and if they don’t have a real passion for the space they’re just going to do what they’re familiar with.” Then you end up with the status quo, or worse: people running tests without really understanding the goal or the process.

Leading marketers are more than twice as likely to employ strategic experiments than the mainstream⁵.

Econsultancy and Google,

Analytics and Measurement Survey, 2016

⁵ Econsultancy and Google, Analytics and Measurement Survey, 2016, Base: n=500 marketing and measurement executives at North American companies with over \$250MM in revenues



Rallying Team Members

Data should trump opinion when discussing test results and determining next steps. But, voting is a great way to build testing morale in your organization by inviting everyone to participate in the process and predict the winner.

One of our teams set out to test four versions of a page: the current one as a control, and three others. It was a simple page with text, a video, and a call-to-action to sign up for a trial. Before we ran the test, I sent an email to everybody in the group inviting them to vote for which variation they thought would win. Everybody got excited about it, and we offered a T-shirt to anyone who picked the right choice.

So we ran the test, and the version that everyone liked—the one that nearly everyone voted for—failed miserably. It performed very poorly in getting people to go into trial. But the last-place choice, the one only one person voted for, actually created a 65% increase in trials. It was huge.

Krista Seiden

Global Analytics Education Lead, Google

Building Up Processes

Once you've trained everyone on best practices for testing, you need to help them execute with clear, repeatable frameworks and methodologies for testing and experimentation.

One way to generate interest is with a quarterly failure report. Sound unusual? It is, and that's why it works. The failure report highlights the biggest, most miserable test fails people have had recently, and—crucially—what they've learned from them. Besides being a lively read, the failure report helps to reinforce the culture of learning and keep people interested in the testing process.

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Problems With Success

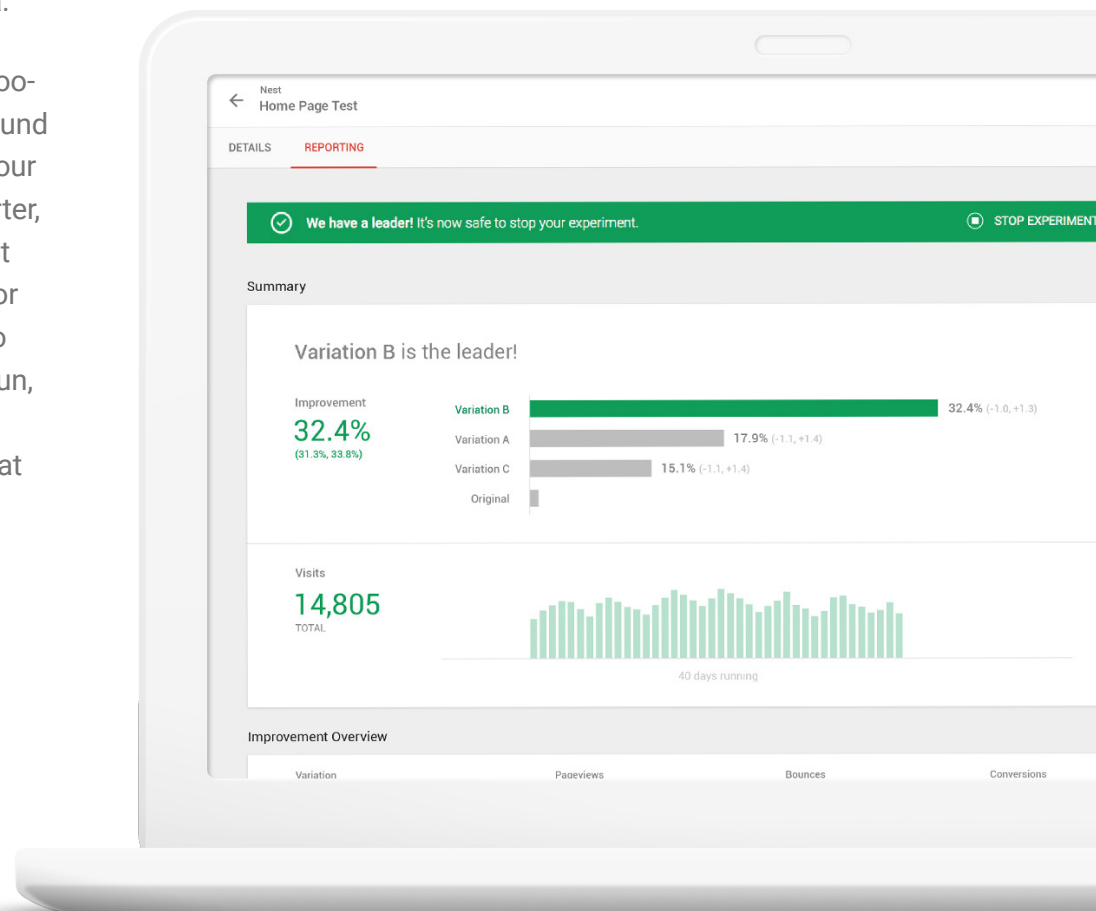
Many testing veterans describe a tipping point: As a culture of growth begins to take hold, a whole new set of challenges arise.

Specifically: If everybody wants to test, but nobody knows how to run a good test, then you've got problems. That's where a regular training program becomes important.

Even well-run tests can be a problem if they overlap—with, for instance, two teams running different tests on the homepage at once. You may want to create a testing council with one representative from each area of the business. They can coordinate tests and keep a master plan to make sure that overlapping tests don't ruin everyone's data.

Another issue can arise from too-enthusiastic leaders. It may sound like a good idea to challenge your team to run 100 tests in a quarter, but that can lead to scattershot "test blasts" that don't reveal (or help) anything. It's important to make sure that tests are well-run, in an orderly succession, with controls for all the variables that may be involved.

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CASE STUDY



The Motley Fool

For financial information service The Motley Fool, a main marketing goal is increasing the number of its paid newsletter subscribers.

Using analytics, its marketing team spotted a weak link in the sales chain: Email campaigns were driving visitors to the newsletter order page, but “we could see that a high percentage of those sessions weren’t leading to an order,” says Laura Cavanaugh, Data Analytics Manager for The Motley Fool.

Her team began by re-imagining the simplest design elements on their order page. Would more visitors click the order button if it was more prominent on the page? What if some form fields on the page were rearranged or removed? Just over a month after testing began, The Motley Fool team was already seeing a **26% lift in conversion rate**.

[Read the full Motley Fool case study](#) 

PART 3

What Does a Successful Test Look Like?

What do successful tests look like in a growth-minded organization focused on continually improving the customer experience? Think of test planning as a two-part job: create a basic framework that everyone on the team can follow, then teach everyone what to test with that framework.

Building a Framework

What you test will depend in large part on your business. But *how* to test is very much the same across industries. The key to building testing into your culture is to establish a repeatable framework that will help make those apples-to-apples comparisons easy.

A TYPICAL FRAMEWORK LOOKS LIKE THIS



1. Start with an insight.

Don't just pick random experiments. Start by reviewing your data and analytics and looking for things that are working very well (or badly) that you can try to replicate or improve.



4. Prioritize...ruthlessly.

You can't test every idea at once. Start with the ones that will be simplest to test and have the biggest impact potential.



3. Come up with a lot of ideas.

Think about all the ways you could test your hypotheses. Be "small-c creative" and don't be afraid of unusual ideas.



2. Develop hypotheses.

Consider why that element is performing well (or badly). What is the experience of the user as they encounter it?



5. Create processes for rapid testing.

Don't let tests drag on forever. Make sure you have a workflow for testing, analyzing and deploying over the course of days or weeks, not months.



6. Test small.

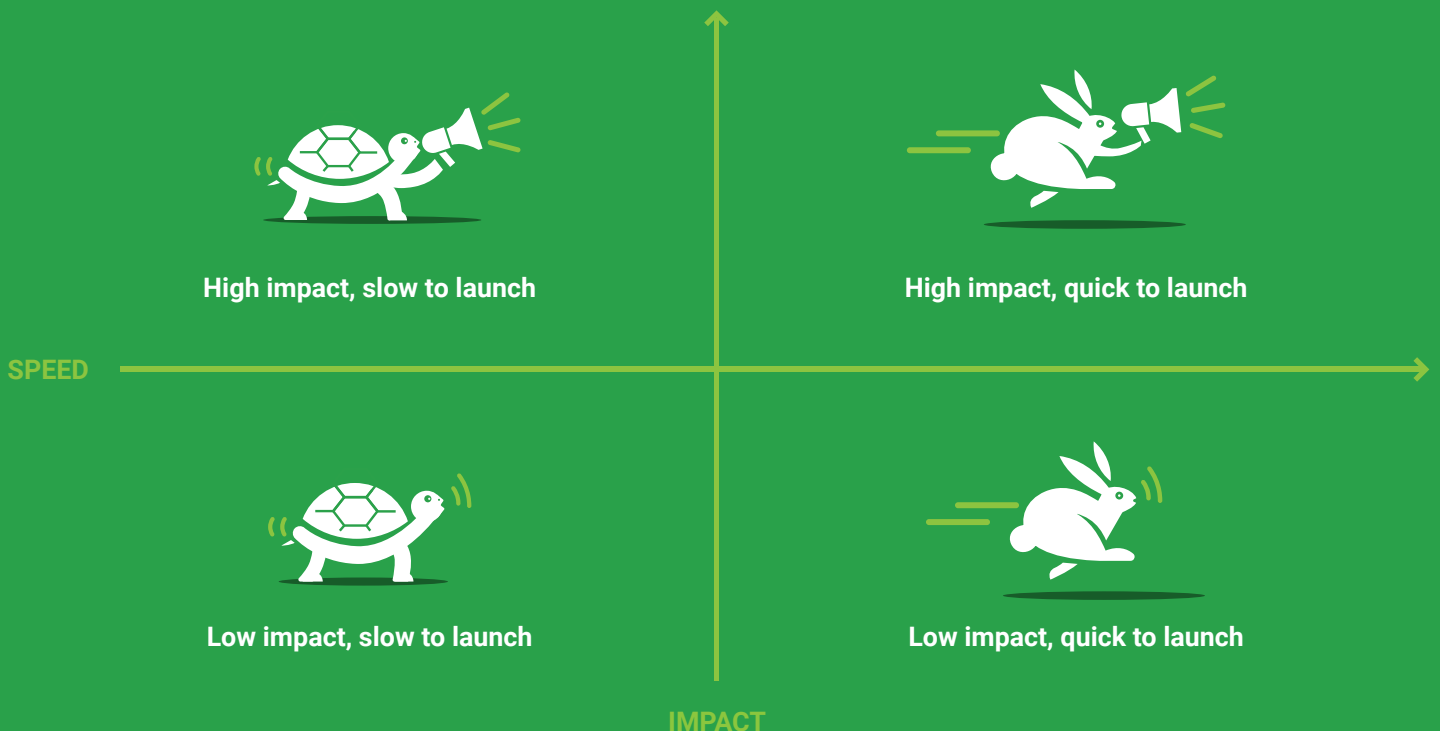
When in doubt, keep it simple. You want to test lots of small incremental tweaks, not sweeping changes. You'll be surprised how much difference one right tweak can make.

A clear and sturdy framework like this will go a long way toward making people comfortable with testing—and keeping them on track as they do.

Speed vs Impact

As you think about items to test, it may help to visualize a grid of testing velocity versus impact. “The x-axis is speed, where you want to evaluate how quickly you can get a test built and shipped. The y-axis is impact, where even if you double the performance of a test metric, will you really have moved the needle enough to matter?” says Jesse Nichols.

Naturally, you want to pick the items on your grid that are high in both velocity and potential impact. But when in doubt, give speed the edge. Impact is harder to gauge beforehand: Small changes can lead to big results, and vice versa. But if you can see going in that a test will be relatively simple and fast to run, you know you’ll be able to test, get results, take action (or not) and move on. As you progress, you’ll naturally start to focus more on the impact side of the grid.

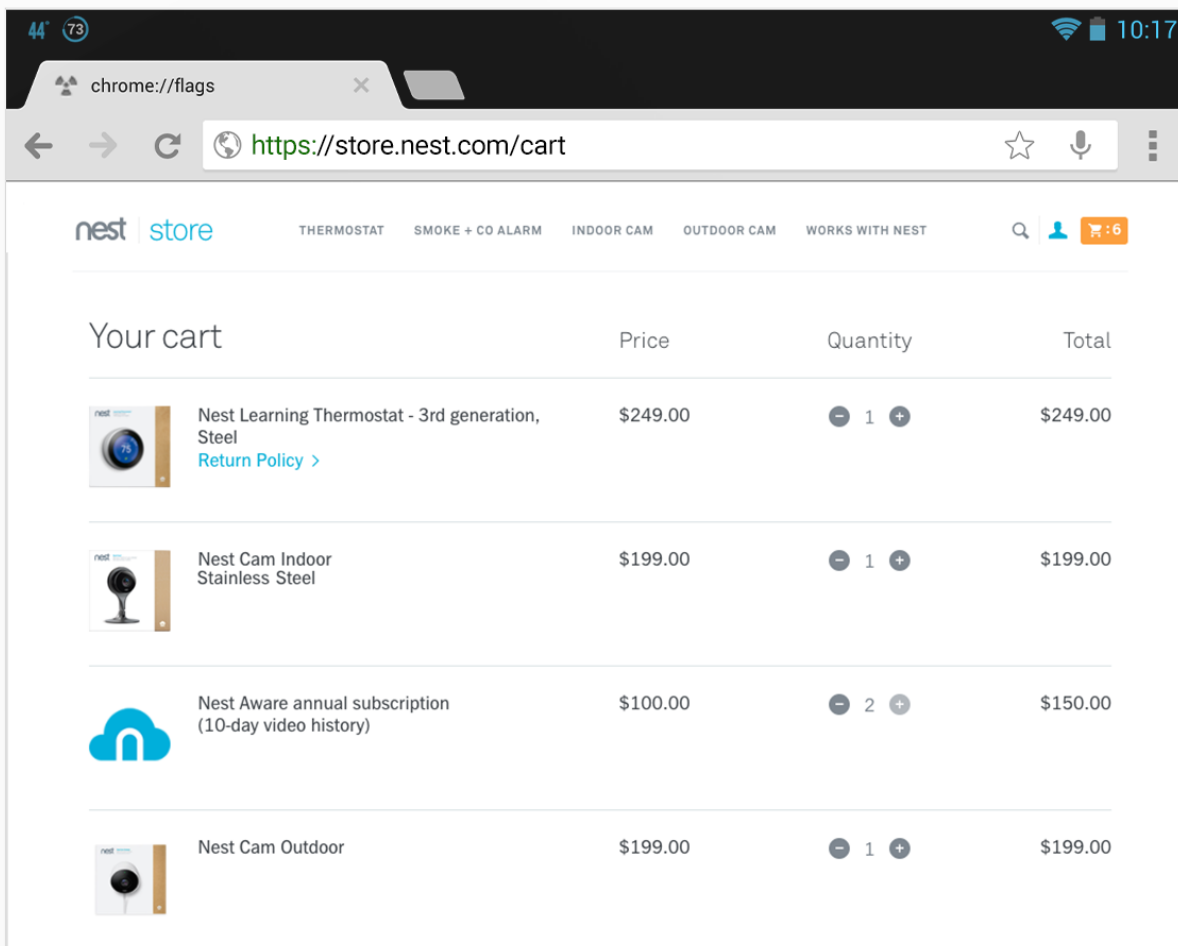


You want to pick the test ideas on your grid that are high in both velocity and potential impact. But when in doubt, give speed the edge.





Start Near the End

When in doubt, test items that are closest to your conversion point. If you're a retailer, changes made on the last page of your checkout funnel will probably have the biggest impact on your conversion rate. Beyond that, the cart page is likely to move the needle most significantly, and

then the pages leading to the cart page. "The further you go from the conversion point, the harder it gets to have a test that really rocks—where the ripple effect can carry all the way through to impact the conversion rate," says Jesse Nichols.



The screenshot shows a mobile browser interface with the URL <https://store.nest.com/cart>. The page displays the 'Your cart' section with the following items:

	Price	Quantity	Total
 Nest Learning Thermostat - 3rd generation, Steel Return Policy >	\$249.00	1	\$249.00
 Nest Cam Indoor Stainless Steel	\$199.00	1	\$199.00
 Nest Aware annual subscription (10-day video history)	\$100.00	2	\$150.00
 Nest Cam Outdoor	\$199.00	1	\$199.00

Conclusion

At its best, testing isn't a technical thing bolted onto one corner of your business. It's a trellis on which the vines of your business can blossom. A growth-minded culture focused on testing and optimization offers a path for making smart and user-friendly choices that will flow straight to your bottom line.

A culture of growth begins with clear goals and small tests, continues with teamwork and adjustments and bigger victories, and carries through down the road for months and years ahead. Happy optimizing!

About The Google Analytics 360 Suite

The Google Analytics 360 Suite offers powerful and integrated analytics solutions for today's biggest enterprises. Measure and improve the impact of your marketing across every screen, channel, and moment in today's customer journey. It's easy to use, and makes data accessible for everyone so the "aha" moments are simple to discover and share. Move from insight to impact faster with the Google Analytics 360 Suite, and as a result, make the most of every consumer connection.