EA Uses A/B Testing on 2013 SimCity Launch

Removing promotional offer increases SimCity pre-order revenue by 43.4%

Challenge: In March 2013, EA was preparing to release its latest, highly anticipated version of SimCity. As one of EA's most popular games – the new SimCity launch was expected to gain a significant attention. Maxis, the division of EA in charge of SimCity, wanted to maximize online revenue from the launch.

The Maxis digital marketing team opted to extend a promotional offer in order to drive more pre-orders of the game on SimCity.com. The offer was displayed as a banner across the top of the pre-order page and as part of the ad creative in paid media buys. This prominent placement put the promotion in front of many potential buyers, but according to the Maxis team, was not driving the increase in SimCity pre-orders they had expected.

While many site visitors were seeing the promotional banner, its large size moved the actual call-to-action button down on the page.

Hypothesis: The Maxis team hypothesized that moving the call-to-action higher on the page by changing the way the promotional offer was displayed could drive more purchases and increase revenue generated from SimCity.com.

The Test: The Maxis team set up an A/B test pitting the original SimCity pre-order page against several variations that displayed the promotional offer in different ways. Each variation corresponded with a hypothesis the team had set beforehand regarding placement, color, and display of the promotional offer. One variation removed the promotional offer from the page altogether.

After building each variation in Optimizely's visual editor, the team set their experiment goal — clicks on the "Pre-Order" button — to track purchases generated from the test. They allocated 100% of site traffic to the experiment in order to find an optimized solution as quickly as possible during the high-traffic SimCity launch period.

At a Glance:

Customer:

Website: http://ea.com

Industry: Entertainment Software

About: Electronic Arts Inc. (EA) is a leading global interactive entertainment software company that develops and distributes interactive software worldwide. Maxis is a division of EA and the creator of The Sims and SimCity video game franchises.

Goals: Maximize online revenue from SimCity launch

Test: Changes to promotional offer on pre-order page and paid advertising

Results: 43.4% increase in pre-orders

" Optimizely helped us learn a lot about our users - what's working and what's not - so we could make changes on our site to optimize our conversion percentages. In the end, this translated to higher revenue for us."

Mike Burk
Senior Online Product Manager, Maxis

Before: The SimCity microsite displayed a pre-order promotional banner that bumped the "Buy Now" button down on the page.

After: Removing the promotional banner moved the "Buy Now" button to a more prominent position on the page.

Results: The Maxis digital marketing team quickly discovered very surprising results – the variation with no offer messaging whatsoever drove 43.4% more purchases.

Experiment	Conversion Rate	Improvement
Winning Variation	10.2%	**43.4%**
Original Variation	5.8%	---

> "We found that the variations with the promotional offer actually performed worse than just a clean version of the page. This was really surprising to us, but it had a pretty significant impact." — Mike Burk, Senior Online Product Manager, Maxis

Turning a Big Win into a Huge Win:

Armed with data-driven knowledge and significant results from their initial test, the team decided to go even bigger. A follow-up test on EA's paid media creatives that mirrored the initial test (removing promotional text from each ad) also increased conversions from highly-qualified ad traffic.

> "EA's new version of SimCity which launched in March has sold 1.6 million units to date. 50% of sales for SimCity were "digital downloads" through EA's digital distribution network." — Pocket-lint.com, May 7, 2013

The Takeaway:

- *Question assumptions.* A/B testing provides real, actionable data to help you better understand how your web properties are performing. Even if think you've optimized your site, test it out. In EA's case, the common belief was that promotional offers will drive more purchases — this turned out to be false. Testing gave them the information needed to maximize revenue in a way that would not have been otherwise possible.

- *Apply learnings across channels.* Testing arms you with information that can increase conversions beyond just your website. EA applied the lessons from the experiment on the SimCity pre-order page to their paid advertising campaigns, yielding exponential results.

About Optimizely:

Optimizely is a world-class website optimization platform that enables users with and without technical expertise to make dynamic changes to their websites, test the variations to live traffic, gather immediate results and start achieving goals.

Optimizely helps more than 7,000 clients drive more leads, sales and conversions through simple website testing and optimization.

Optimizely By the Numbers
(As of May 2014)

7 Billion
web experiences delivered

500,000+
experiments run since launch

7,000+
customers

Happy Customers: