

# Upworthy Tests Recommended Content Module

RECOMMENDED CONTENT INCREASES SOCIAL SHARES BY 28%

<p><b>CUSTOMER:</b></p> 	<p><b>GOAL:</b></p> <p>Find the highest performing recommended content module that would increase social shares</p>	<p><b>TEST:</b></p> <p>Tested various recommended content designs and layouts</p>	<p><b>RESULTS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>28%</b> increase in social shares</li> <li>• Major lift in visitor engagement</li> </ul>
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## DATA-DRIVEN FROM DAY ONE

It's not often a founder is so heavily involved in website optimization – but Peter Koechley likes to do things differently. He's has been evangelizing A/B testing at Upworthy since just after its website launched back in 2012.

“We want people on our site to really enjoy a piece of content and share it in huge numbers. Part of that is in curating the exceptionally meaningful videos and graphics that we find. But it's also about taking the time to optimize every part of the experience for maximum shareability and satisfaction.”

As an online media company focused on elevating issues that matter on social media, Upworthy aims to combine compelling videos with a seamless sharing experience. And from Day One, Peter has focused on A/B testing to achieve this. He's built a company-wide testing culture that relies on data, not opinions, to make decisions – testing headlines, content, and other modules across Upworthy's site to see what performs best.

“Testing is something Peter mentioned even when I was interviewing for company in the first place,” explains Daniel Mintz, Upworthy's Director of Business Intelligence. “It provides a level playing field for everyone. Decisions feel pretty democratic because we have the numbers to tell us what does and doesn't work. No one's splitting hairs or anything like that over certain decisions.”

## RECOMMENDED CONTENT MEETS SOCIAL SHARING

“In the earliest days of Upworthy, our goal was to find people on social media and grab their attention,” explains Peter, “and then get them to share back out to social media as well. We wanted to optimize that loop.”

We're maybe as good as a coin-flip at guessing what's going to work best for our users. We rely on testing to just make better decisions. People are really fascinating and interesting... and weird! It's really hard to guess their behaviors accurately.

**PETER KOECHLEY**  
CO-FOUNDER, UPWORTHY

But as Upworthy's audience grew, the team realized that the site's design was not keeping up with the needs of frequent visitors. Engagement was growing and people were spending more time on the site - but it was difficult to find additional content after landing on a particular video or graphic. "Our users wanted to dig deeper, but there was no obvious way to get to a second piece of content," says Peter. Peter's goal was to increase sitewide engagement, while **maintaining the share-optimized user experience**.

"Our users wanted to dig deeper, but there was no obvious way to get to a second piece of content"

**HYPOTHESIS:**

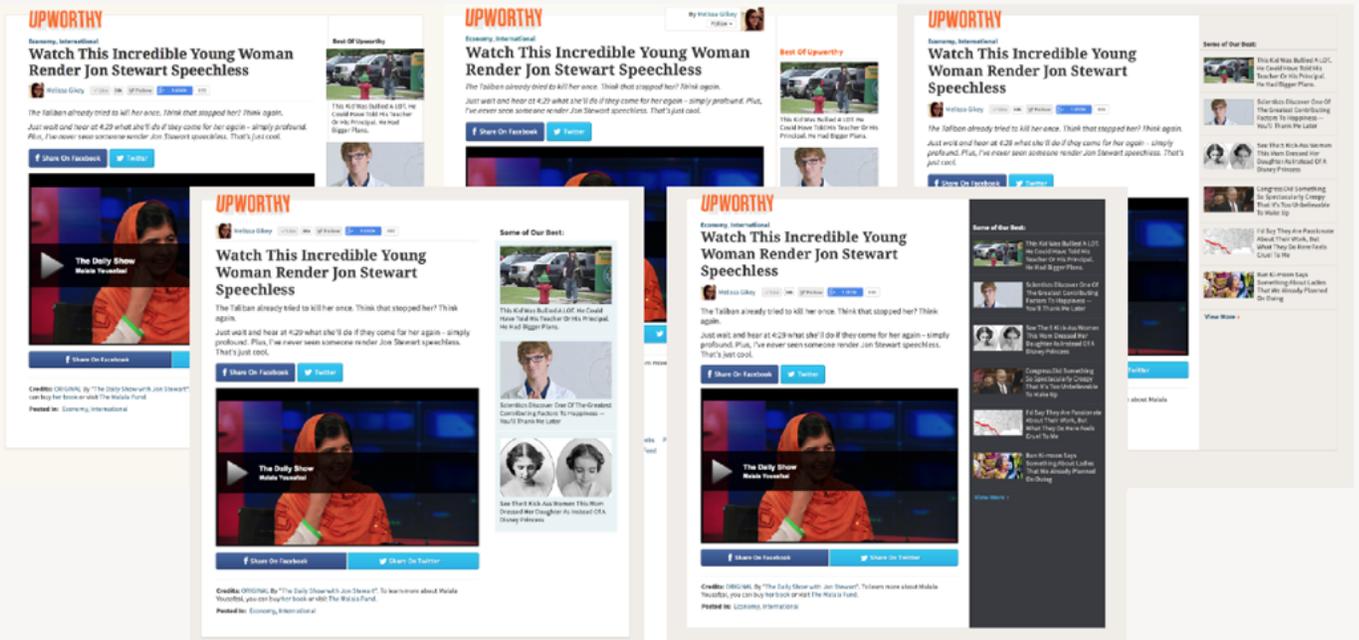
Peter believed that adding a recommended content module would decrease the number of social shares for each article on average. "We had already done a lot of testing and found that when we added distractions, user sharing went down," says Peter, citing the "Paradox of Choice" concept. "We were actually hesitant about adding the module at all."

The team decided to test it out, experimenting with variety of recommended content module designs and layouts. They hoped to find an option that would provide users with more content without getting in the way of those who wanted to share on social media.

**TEST:**

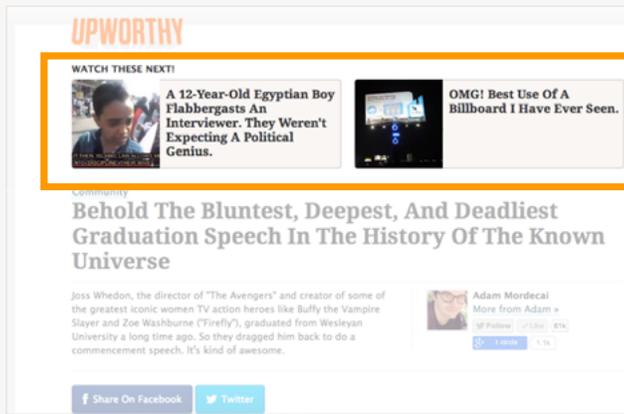
The Upworthy team opted to take a two-phased approach. **For phase one, they built and tested 7 different placements and layouts for the recommended content module to see which performed best.** They tested content nuggets above and below the featured content, as well as left and right sidebars, and combinations that included a footer.

**SIDEBAR VARIATIONS**



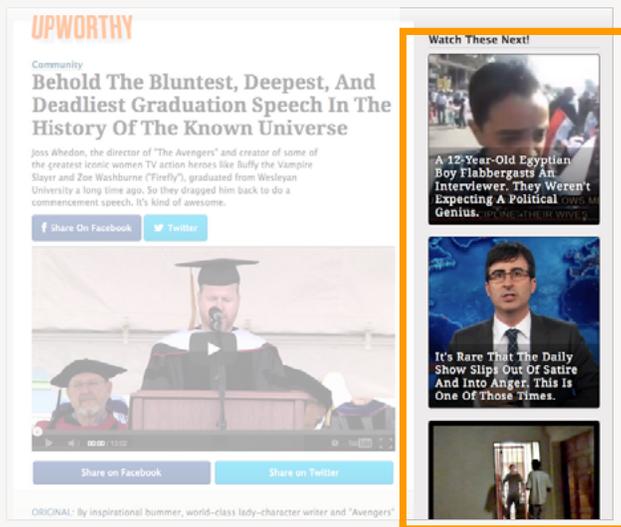
Some of the sidebar iterations that were tested during phase one

## VARIATION 1



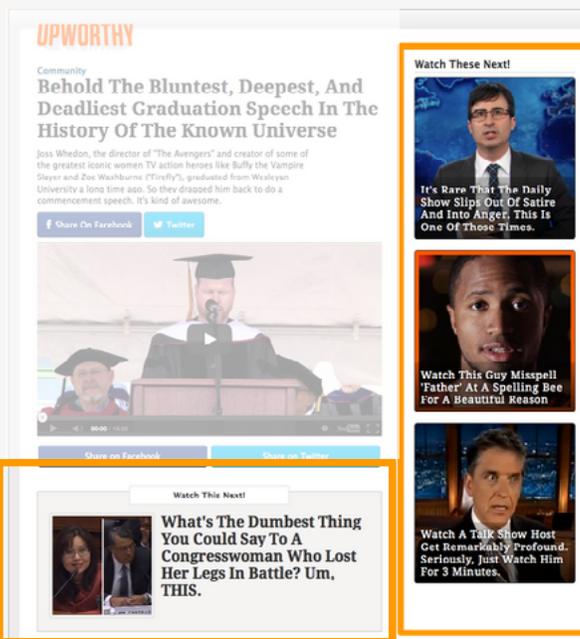
One variation displayed recommended content nuggets about the feature.

## VARIATION 2



Another variation tested a ride sidebar module.

## VARIATION 3



One variation included a sidebar and a footer.

Each variation used Javascript to pull in a selection of Upworthy's most popular content.

After running the test for just a few days, the team uncovered some surprising results. Contrary to their hypothesis, the recommended content module actually **increased social sharing for all variations**. "With recommended content, it turns out that users would eventually land on something they wanted to share if they didn't feel like sharing that first piece of content they landed on," explains Peter. "Sharing did go down on the first page, but up for the entire visit."

Upworthy adopted one of the highest-performing placements for the recommended content - a right sidebar displaying three recommended content options.

The right sidebar, paired with a minimal design, increased social shares by 28%.

Then, it was on to Phase Two, during which the team used Optimizely to hone in on the module's design. "Once we decided on that location, we wire-framed different designs and tested them out," says Peter. "We were testing in order to figure out the right design concept." They tested different image sizes, fonts, text layouts, and spacing, landing on a much lighter-weight version that performed nearly as well as the Phase One original.

### RESULTS:

The right sidebar, paired with a minimal design, increased social shares by 28%.

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PETER KOECHLEY  
CO-FOUNDER, UPWORTHY

## FINAL ITERATION

**UPWORTHY**

## Watch This Incredible Young Woman Render Jon Stewart Speechless

Melissa Gilkey Like 58k Follow 1 vote 895

The Taliban already tried to kill her once. Think that stopped her? Think again. Just wait and hear at 4:29 what she'll do if they come for her again – simply profound. Plus, I've never seen someone render Jon Stewart speechless. That's just cool.

[Share On Facebook](#) [Twitter](#)

**The Daily Show**  
Malala Yousafzai

[Share On Facebook](#) [Share On Twitter](#)

**Best Of Upworthy**

**This Kid Was Bullied A LOT. He Could Have Told His Teacher Or His Principal. He Had Bigger Plans.**

**Scientists Discover One Of The Greatest Contributing Factors To Happiness — You'll Thank Me Later**

**See The 5 Kick-Ass Women This Mom Dressed Her Daughter As Instead Of A Disney Princess**

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**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 6,000 clients drive more leads, sales and conversions through simple website testing and optimization.

**Optimizely By the Numbers**

(As of Oct. 2013)

**2.2 Billion**

visitors tested across all customer websites

**300,000+**

experiments run since launch

**6,000+**

customers

**TESTING TAKEAWAYS:**

- **OPTIMIZE FOR MAXIMUM SHAREABILITY:** “We’re very focused on creating the best possible experience for our users and the Upworthy community,” explains Peter. “We want people on our site to really enjoy a piece of content and share it in huge numbers. Part of this is about curating great content. But it’s also about taking the time to optimize every part of the experience for maximum shareability and satisfaction.”
- **TEST AND ITERATE:** Peter’s two-phased approach first solidified the strongest placement for the content module and then honed in on design specifics. By finding what module actually performed best and then dialing in on the details, Peter was able to find the best possible user experience.
- **QUESTION ASSUMPTIONS:** Peter and his team believed that adding distractions to their site’s pages would decrease social sharing. “We care about testing because, we think we’re clever and all, but whenever we think we know what’s going to win a test, we’re almost always wrong,” says Peter. Without Optimizely, they would not have learned that the recommended content module was actually a valuable addition to their site – both in terms of sharing and engagement.

See Optimizely in action. Schedule a demo today.

[www.optimizely.com/demo](http://www.optimizely.com/demo)