conductor

A Beginner's Guide to
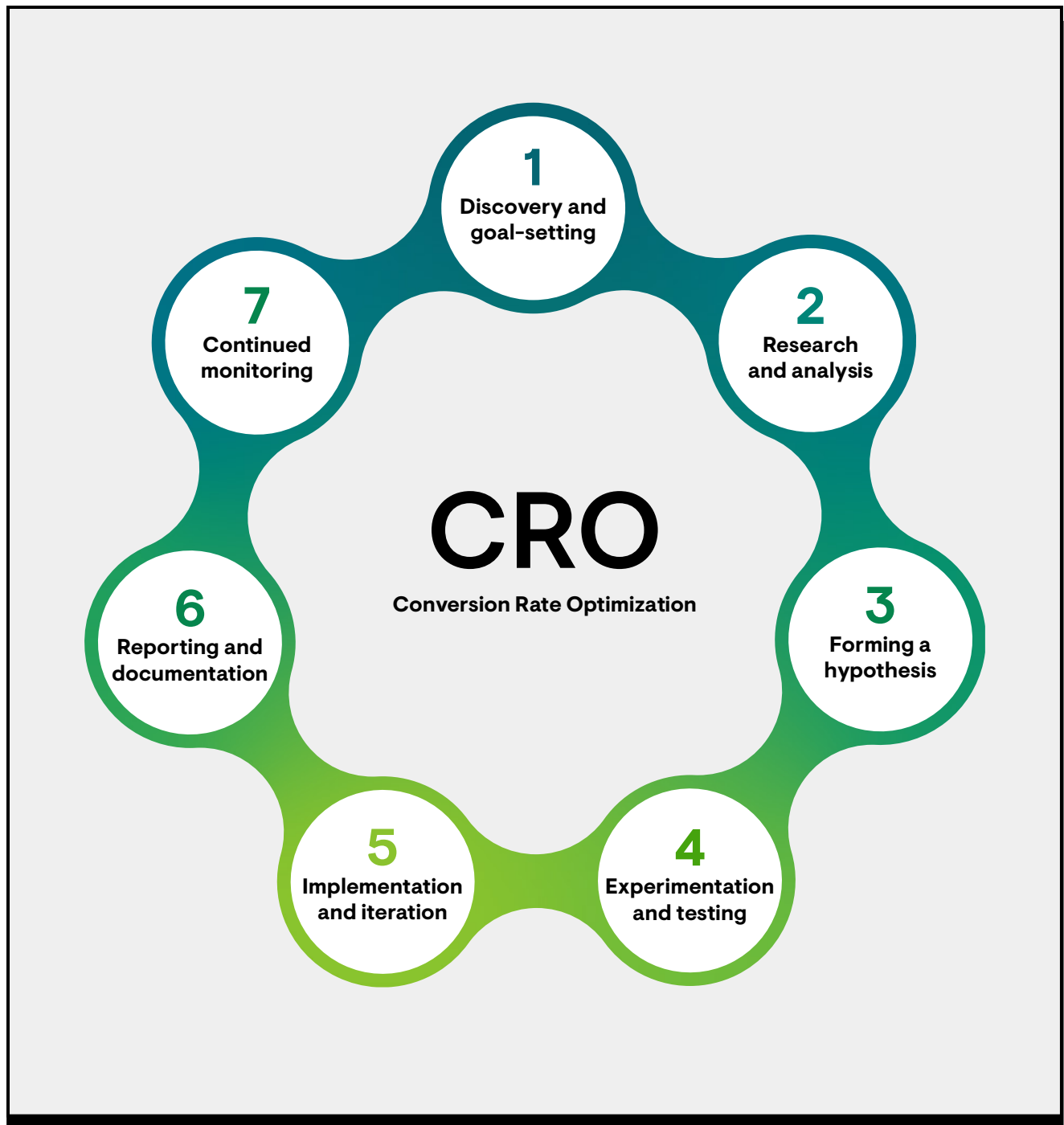
Conversion Rate Optimization

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Introduction

Conversion rate optimization refers to the process of maximizing the percentage of users or website visitors that take desired actions on your site to generate leads and revenue. CRO can include anything from content optimization to page speed.

Since CRO is inherently tied to content optimization, technical SEO, UX, and other aspects of website optimization, creating a repeatable improvement strategy is a constant challenge. In addition, CRO benchmarks shift depending on your particular industry and business goals, so optimization won't look the same for every brand.

With this in mind, we've broken down the fundamentals of conversion rate optimization to help you implement proven strategies to maximize your conversions and generate high-quality leads going forward.

Steps to optimize conversion rates

1. Discovery and goal-setting

Conversion rate optimization starts with reviewing your data and reflecting on your site's performance. Specifically, at the start of the process, you should ask yourself the following questions:

• What are my current conversion rates?

• What are the average conversion rates in my industry?

• Are my conversion rates in line with industry benchmarks?

• What is a realistic conversion rate goal for my site?

The answers to these questions will help you tailor your optimization plan to your specific needs.

Example

For example, say you run an eCommerce website. The goal of your site is to drive site visitors to make a purchase. This is important context because not all conversions are created equal. A user registering for a webinar is a conversion, but it likely isn't the kind of conversion you're after as an eCommerce site owner.

Consider your specific site needs when you're setting your goals, as well as benchmarks from across the industry. Generally, a strong conversion rate for eCommerce sites is about 2-3%, so setting a goal of a 1% conversion rate may be realistic, but isn't going to lead to sustainable ROI.

2. Uncover opportunities to improve conversions

With your goals and benchmarks in place, you'll need to conduct more research to identify concrete opportunities to optimize your site. As you research, keep an eye out for pages and site sections that aren't performing as you would expect.

Take note of pages with strong traffic but comparatively few conversions. Where are those pages in the conversion funnel? Should they be driving more conversions than they are, or are those top-of-funnel pages that won't drive many conversions? Ask yourself these questions to decide which pages and content to optimize.

Example

Continuing with our eCommerce site example, say that during your research, you notice that one of your most important product pages is driving half the amount of conversions you expected.

Upon further inspection, you notice that it's driving traffic, but very few of those visitors are making a purchase. As a result, you're not driving conversions or revenue to the pages that need them most, taking a toll on your ROI.

From here, you need to get to the bottom of the issue and identify why traffic isn't converting.

3. Develop a hypothesis

Creating a plan to optimize your conversion rate starts with unleashing your inner scientist.

Based on your research and goals, create a hypothesis on why your pages aren't converting at the rate you expect. Things that can impact your conversions range from content and design to your site's technical foundation and UX, so you may need to create multiple hypotheses in order to fully optimize your conversion rate.

Example

Again, say that your product page isn't converting well enough, and in your research, you discover that the page is taking as long as 2-3 seconds to load. According to an Amazon study, all it takes is **100ms of added page load time** to cause a 1% drop in revenue. So, load times of even a few seconds can torpedo your conversions.

You might then form the hypothesis that your on-page **images are the wrong size** or file format, causing slower page loading times. This hypothesis gives you a plan of attack to optimize the images on the page to improve page load times and, in turn, conversion rates.

4. Test your hypothesis

Once you have your hypothesis (or hypotheses), you'll need to create a repeatable, structured experimentation process.

Implement your plan to improve and create detailed reports on the initiative's impact over time. This will help you decide what further improvements are needed to boost conversions. It's also important to test multiple hypotheses to see which efforts have the most impact and whether it pays to focus on multiple improvements at once.

Essentially, since so many factors impact conversion rates, you don't want to put all of your eggs in one basket and expect to drive significant conversion gains.

Example

For example, say you follow your hypothesis that images are increasing your page load times because they're too large or in the wrong format. This likely isn't the only thing that's causing your pages to load slowly. Maybe you have another hypothesis that website chat support is causing pages to load slower. You should A/B test these theories to see which has the desired impact.

This means you'll keep one page as-is for reference, that's Page A. Page B is the one you'll test your hypothesis on and compare the results to Page A. Page C is where you can test multiple hypotheses together, for example no chat support and improved image SEO.

5. Implement and standardize an optimization strategy

Once you have enough data to show which of your hypotheses were true, you need to implement a plan to optimize your remaining pages and make those optimizations a standard part of your process going forward.

You'll also need to continue iterating on the hypotheses that didn't prove fruitful. Just because your idea in its initial form didn't improve conversions doesn't mean the idea was without merit.

Example

For example, maybe you implemented a plan to improve page load speeds, but a different hypothesis about changing the copy on CTA buttons didn't move the needle much. There may still be opportunities to improve your on-page content—you just need to rethink your plan of attack.

6. Thoroughly report on your progress

Tracking the results of your initiatives and standardizing the process is key to making optimizations repeatable. Reporting is particularly important because it allows you to see how your pages are performing over time, so you can get a clear view of performance before and after your optimizations.

You can track whether those optimizations still have their intended impact days, weeks, and months afterward to see if further iterations are needed. With **Conductor's Workspaces feature**, you can even send automated reports to key stakeholders customized to include your most important metrics.

7. Continuously monitor your pages

Closely tied to reporting, you need to keep an eye on your pages' performance and technical health so you can catch issues before they impact conversions. **Conductor Website Monitoring** audits all of your pages 24/7 and instantly alerts you to any changes or issues that arise.

That means that if your pages suddenly start loading slower despite your plans to optimize, you'll have a chance to solve the issues before visitors bounce to competitor pages.

Get around-the-clock monitoring for your most important pages with a Conductor Website Monitoring free trial.

Start your free trial

Strategies for CRO

When you're optimizing your conversion rate, you need to start by understanding what pages need to be optimized. This will likely be different for every site, but a good place to start is by researching your top-performing pages. Look at the pages that are converting well. What do they have in common? What about them are driving visitors to convert?

Then, compare those pages to those that have strong traffic but comparatively few conversions. What do these have in common? Can you draw any conclusions about why visitors are bouncing?

These high-traffic, poorly-converting pages are where you should start testing your hypotheses.

Testing optimization opportunities

When you're forming hypotheses and testing optimizations, you need to consider the conversion process holistically.

For example, on an eCommerce website, a conversion isn't guaranteed just because you have a fast-loading page and intent-driven keywords. Say you're selling running shoes, but you only accept payments through credit cards. Any visitors who want to pay with PayPal will likely not convert. That's why it's helpful to think of conversions from a visitor's perspective.

Some other optimization opportunities include:

- **Streamline your UI:** This could include anything from the color of CTA buttons to font to the specific copy within certain buttons. For example, say an "Add item to cart" button on your site is shaded in a way that makes the text hard to read. Visitors may not be able to locate the button, much less make a purchase through it.

- **Improve CTA positioning:** Where you choose to place your CTAs and lead gen forms will also impact your conversions. It's important to have forms and CTAs follow tangible value and benefits for visitors. Nobody wants to feel like they're being told to buy something with no clear benefits. Make sure to have your forms and CTAs somewhere visitors can easily find them, but also after you demonstrate the value of converting.

- **Optimize your order funnel:** Oftentimes, when you purchase something online, the order funnel won't have the usual navigation tabs you'll see on other pages across the site. This is so you don't give visitors an easy way to click out of the conversion funnel. Without that navigation, they'd need to close the window or click back through multiple tabs.

  Connected to this idea is optimizing where you include opt-ins and other sign-up options for visitors during checkout.

  For example, you offer an opt-in newsletter to keep customers informed about new products and sales. Including this step before conversion is complete may not run off too many potential customers, but you still don't want to add hurdles to the conversion process. So you can just as easily house these selections in a *Thank you* confirmation page after the conversion is complete.

- **Leverage social proofs and reviews:** Dig into your social media and customer reviews to find success stories and brand evangelists. Nobody wants to buy something that they're not sure is right for them, so including testimonials or badges from public review sites on lead gen pages is a great way to move the needle.

  For example, at Conductor we have a free trial sign-up on **our homepage**. Right above the CTA to sign up for a free trial, we leverage reviews from external review sites like G2, TrustRadius, and SoftwareReviews. These reviews and customer testimonials are a simple and straightforward way to help build trust among visitors and make them more likely to become leads.

- **Offer flexible payment options:** As we mentioned above, having flexible payment methods helps more people to convert. Having more payment options makes it more likely that someone will be able to comfortably make a purchase without having to worry about specific accounts and financials.

- **Highlight scarcity:** Another method of improving conversions is to highlight the scarcity of a product, event, or experience. Pushing an exclusive new running shoe in partnership with a famous athlete? Maybe include a pop-up on the page that notifies visitors there are only XX pairs remaining. This helps build excitement and urgency for the product, making folks more likely to jump at the chance to buy or else risk missing out.

- **Consider coupon codes:** Coupon codes can be tricky because on one hand they're a great way to get your foot in the door with visitors. Maybe you offer free shipping on orders over a certain price, which entices a visitor to buy an extra pair of shoes. That's the upside.

  The downside is that when visitors see the "Coupon code" section in an order funnel, many of them might leave the current tab to search for coupon codes. Taking a visitor out of the conversion funnel is never a good move, so it's important to keep that in mind when considering coupon codes.

- **Optimize for mobile:** This is a huge aspect of improving your website's growth potential in general. **Mobile accounts for more than 50% of searches**, and your pages need to be optimized for mobile as well as desktop, or you'll definitely see conversions fall.

  Say that your product page isn't optimized for mobile, and a potential customer visits the page on their phone. The page displays a desktop view, forcing the user to scroll horizontally and zoom out to see the whole page. That makes for a frustrating experience, means they're unlikely to make a purchase, and that they will likely bounce from your site to buy from a competitor instead.

This list is by no means comprehensive, there are plenty of other measures you can take to improve your conversion rates based on your particular website, industry, and goals. That said, the provided strategies are a great place to start optimizing your website to improve conversions.

Do CRO experiments and SEO work well together?

Experimenting with the content and technical aspects of your website is daunting, especially since you don't know exactly how changes will affect your existing traffic and conversions. That said, CRO experiments and SEO can not only co-exist, but they actually work together quite well.

For example, both SEO and CRO prioritize high-quality, relevant content that meets user needs, so when you optimize for conversions by improving content clarity, relevance, and user experience, you're often also improving factors that search engines value. In addition, many technical factors, such as page speed, mobile responsiveness, and clear navigation, impact both CRO and SEO.

That said, it's important to thoroughly test your CRO hypotheses before rolling out large-scale changes on your pages. If you implement a plan to optimize 15 high-profile pages at once and the updates don't have the intended effect, it's a lot harder to backtrack than if you only updated one page. So make sure to test and iterate your hypotheses and document your updates to make a more repeatable process going forward.

CRO platforms

There are several tools and platforms on the market that can help you test and implement your optimization strategies, even with Google sunsetting Google Optimize in 2023. Paid tools like **Optimizely**, **AB Tasty**, and **VWO** can help fill all of your A/B testing needs, though it's important to keep in mind that the features and prices will vary depending on your personal needs.

ABTasty AB Tasty offers a comprehensive suite of personalized experimentation features that make it accessible for both beginners and advanced users. Its AI-powered recommendations and server-side testing make it particularly well-suited for mid-market to enterprise B2C companies, especially those in retail and eCommerce.

Optimizely Optimizely is a robust enterprise-level platform that provides advanced experimentation capabilities across web, mobile, and connected devices. Optimizely works best for large enterprise organizations, particularly B2B companies with dedicated development teams and complex testing needs.

VWO Visual Website Optimizer is a good fit for small to mid-sized businesses that want to start testing quickly without extensive technical resources. The platform is particularly popular among B2C companies and marketing teams looking for an all-in-one solution that includes user-friendly visual editing alongside traditional A/B testing and more.

CRO in review

Understanding and implementing conversion rate optimization is crucial for maximizing your website's potential to generate leads and drive revenue.

By following a structured approach—from setting realistic benchmarks and forming data-driven hypotheses to conducting thorough testing and maintaining consistent monitoring—you can create a sustainable CRO strategy that evolves with your business needs.

Whether you're focusing on technical improvements, content optimization, or UI enhancements, remember that CRO is an ongoing process that requires regular attention and refinement. Now that you have these foundational strategies and best practices, you're ready to start optimizing your website to capture more value from your existing traffic and outperform your competition.