Website Optimization: How an optimization manager got 52% more leads in three months

Learn directly from an optimization manager the five-part approach to his successful testing and optimization journey

Includes:
- The four-step framework to running successful tests
- Specific copy changes, creative samples and results data
- Access to resources and tools to improve your own website

MECLABS INSTITUTE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

To succeed at customer-first marketing, you must first truly understand what your customers want — and how you can serve them with your products and services.

One way to do that is with A/B testing. Marketing ideas tend to be company focused, however, A/B testing forces us to form hypotheses that ask a question about the customer.

Bryce Miller, a website optimization manager, recognized the value of knowing your customer and the power of testing — and the impact that both of these can have on conversion and ROI. So, he spearheaded the initiative to cultivate a testing culture within MasterControl, the compliance software company he formerly worked for.

He was able to do what many of us struggle with: gain the buy-in from leadership to make shift in strategy toward uncharted territory. In his case, it was testing.

So, MasterControl started exploring a testing initiative. The company found major success and decided to enlist an outside partner to expand its efforts — MECLABS Institute. The results MasterControl found continued to prove Bryce correct — and earn the company significant conversion increases and valuable customer insights.

Bryce emphasizes that **this entire experience changed him from a conversion rate optimizer to a customer theorist.** And now, he is sharing his knowledge from his time at MasterControl with others. And we want you to hear the story directly from him. He has written about his journey in a handful of articles on LinkedIn. We thought they were too valuable not to share, so we've compiled them together for you in one place. Read on to get the full story, a four-step framework to ensure you are learning from every test you run, even the ones that don't get you a lift.

FEATURED MARKETER PROFILE:
BRYCE MILLER

By iterating online form tests and landing page designs to optimize MasterControl's online conversions, Bryce Miller has been pivotal in producing a $3.5 M increase in the compliance software company's sales pipeline. From start to finish, Bryce has managed a variety of testing and optimization projects designed specifically to find segues into improvement. He leads the way in measured improvements on the MasterControl website, which account for 90% of the company's sales pipeline. He loves being a part of the progress and success that testing affords and enjoys tracking the impact of those successes.

By day, Bryce insists on wearing a tie in a casual work environment (he loves his ties) and has a YouTube video recommendation for any and every occasion. By night, he dreams of turning a mountain into a secret underground lair and becoming a vigilante.

Bryce has graciously offered to answer any questions you may have about his time at MasterControl and testing in general — you can email him at brycermiller@gmail.com or reach out on Twitter. Bryce has also recently launched his own website, Scientific Web Optimization, you can find more valuable testing-related resources there.
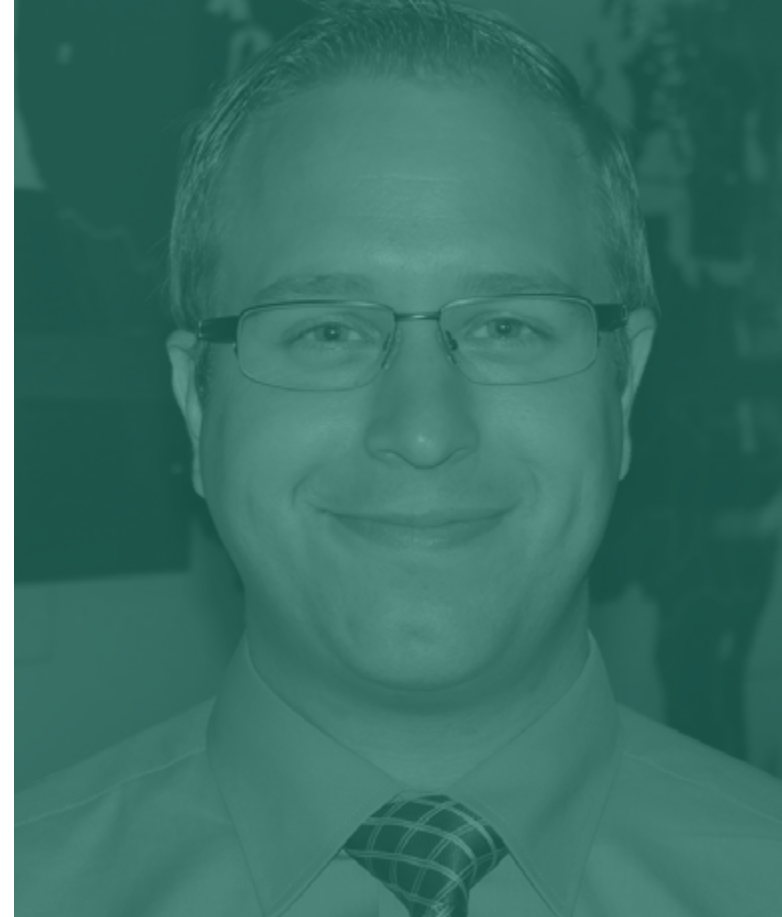
CONTACT BRYCE

✉ brycermiller@gmail.com

🐦 @brycermiller2

➤ ScientificWebOptimization.com

YOUR WEBSITE IS BLEEDING OUT

A BLUEPRINT TO ESTABLISH YOUR OPTIMIZATION APPROACH & TEAM

STOP THE BLEEDING

Your website, much like a body, lives.

It communicates and provides services and products. It may even be your sole source of income. That website of yours, just like the human body, needs blood to survive. This life-blood is called traffic. If your traffic does not get what it wants when it comes to your site, it will go away, potentially forever. If you are not running multivariate tests, or at least A/B tests, your website is "bleeding out," and so is your cash flow.

Most businesses see conversion rate optimization (a.k.a. website optimization or growth marketing) as a nicety. Imagine placing a small amount of text at the start of each landing page and increasing revenue by 100%. Is doubling your income JUST a nicety? What if you could double

your high-quality leads on your lead generation site? This is the sort of thing that business and website owners look forward to, and it is why people like me have jobs.

Website optimization is not about doubling leads/sales; it is about learning. There is a very systematic and scientific approach to this, which I learned all about from MECLABS Institute. MECLABS taught me that each test you run (provided you plan it properly) will provide a "learning" even if the test does not result in increased sales or leads.

WHY WOULD A LEARNING TRUMP INCREASED SALES AND LEADS?

When you learn more about your site visitors, you learn how they like to communicate. Do they like heavy amounts of information or very little? Do they like many options or only one? The list goes on. The list is as long as each user in each industry, and that is why personalization is so important. How else will we know what User A responds to? Using A/B and multivariate testing makes it all possible.

The standard for website optimization teams seems to be three or four people (on the small side). If you cannot get a full team, at least start with one person. First aid is better than no aid. Where I work, we have seen substantial gains

through simple changes to our form, and I am a team of one. Those gains were not the only upside. As I worked on the research, running the tests, analyzing the data, and implementing the changes, I spent time on other tests that were less successful. With the learnings from every test run, I have a better idea of our users and how they want to be approached in their browsing experience.

Whether you start with one "jack of all testing trades" or a full team, the question is not whether or not you want to make more money, the question is: "How fast do you want to stop the bleeding?"

SO THE BLEEDING HAS STOPPED, WHAT THEN?

As you learn more about your user and improve your website, it is true that your successes decrease over time until you reach the point where all gains likely stay in small percentages. How is it possible to keep gaining? There could be many reasons but one thing is for sure — people are a fickle bunch, and they seem to change faster and faster. Today they like one style, and tomorrow another. Both big and small changes occur in the mind of the user altering how they perceive things, and you won't know unless you test.

IF YOU ARE GOING TO LOSE, LOSE BIG

A FOUR-STEP FRAMEWORK TO RUNNING SUCCESSFUL TESTS

I am not advocating purposely failing.

But, take the stock market, when it fails big, it provides people with big opportunities. No one really wants a big fail in the stock market (hopefully), but failing is not the end...if you are smart.

IF YOU ARE GOING TO LOSE... CONTINUED

When you run an A/B or multivariate test, your boss's goal will most likely be increasing revenue, and your goal should be learning more about the users on your website. But if your testing variation loses big, is that bad?

FAILING IS LEARNING

Every test should teach you something about your users, whether or not more of them buy your product or service. As a website optimization analyst, you're in the unique position to craft the kind of test that will help you learn more. Not all tests will do this. You have to follow and implement some basic steps to help you learn from each test.

STEP 1
HYPOTHESIZE

Come up with some assumptions about your users based on any available data you can find.

Consider looking into elements like:

Seasonality   **Age Group**   **Industry**

Once you identify all of the relevant data, you can decide what some of the bigger conversion roadblocks are that may be hindering your users from taking the action you want.

STEP 2
PICK YOUR TEST

You should always decide if a test is worthwhile before launching it. Weigh the estimated time and resources needed to run the test against the anticipated outcome.

For example, just because you feel that your value proposition is lacking does not mean you have figured out how to test improvements to it. MECLABS Institute can help you formulate a solid value proposition like it did for us, but you still need to figure out how effective your new creation will be.

I recently built a value proposition with the help of MECLABS Institute and one of our writers at MasterControl Inc, but we will not know if it is a success until we test it, and figure out how to test it.

Try a number of testing methods, like placing a simple value proposition on form pages and landing pages. In my testing at MasterControl, I am also trying to gain further insights by placing variations of our test in our PPC ads. Time will tell if we built the value proposition correctly.

STEP 3
LAUNCH YOUR TEST

We set out to launch our various tests by reaching out to the right people (for example, web designers and developers, PPC managers, etc.), implementing PPC ads and simple HTML text changes.

While low on development and graphic design resources, we opted to keep things simple. This is a severe handicap, but as I said in my previous article (), first-aid is better than no-aid.

This portion of the testing process is critical. If you launch the test and do not pay special attention to the variation and its implementation, you may find yourself learning nothing because your rushed job caused you to leave out critical components.

STEP 4
ANALYZE THE RESULTS

Once the results are in, you should have a new perspective of the user and how they reacted to the changes you made.

If your test results show an improvement, then hooray! You and your boss are happy campers. If your test variation does not show an improvement, then it is

better to see a big fail, not just a small one. If your test does not show statistical significance in either direction, or you do not see an adverse reaction to your test, your only learnings are likely that users do not seem to notice enough of a difference.

CONCLUSION

If your users have an adverse reaction to your test, you can then hypothesize that doing the opposite should have an equally positive influence on them. In other words, to fail big is the second-best result in testing, because it means you are likely only one test away from a big win and understanding exactly how your users perceive your website.

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DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING

& THE RELATED LEARNINGS

HOW MASTERCONTROL GOT A 52% INCREASE IN LEADS FROM KEY PAGES IN 3 MONTHS

THE SITUATION

When we ran our second form page test, and it too did not succeed, I was discouraged, yet hopeful. You see, I had already done some work on the form page in question and it had already given us some pretty significant lifts, so it made sense that it would be difficult to succeed here. Time was running low though, we only had three more months to run another test, and the form page was the easiest to run tests on because it was a single page.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING... CONTINUED

I suggested we move away from the form page for the time being so we could focus on areas that had not seen significant testing done yet. The team agreed but there were a couple problems. First off, no single landing page of ours produced enough traffic to provide statistical significance, and we did not have many other testing opportunities. That problem had to do with our rock star marketing strategies but should be saved for another discussion. Secondly, we only had a few months to set up the test and let it run.

The good news is, we have an expert team of testers, project managers, data scientists, user experience designers, and developers. Running what we call a multi-page experiment is anything but simple, but with the right team, you can do just about anything.

THE TEAM

A while back, I did an analysis of the requirements to run an effective website optimization team. I discovered a lack of specific resources on our team, and when presenting the evidence and potentially adding those resources to the team to the Director of Demand Generation — I was turned down. Head count is almost always a last resort and for good reason.

Next, I gave an alternative to hiring head count — outsourcing. This in and of itself was a long journey, but it was approved. Yay! Now the real work began. We found the organization that seemed to be a cut above the rest, MECLABS Institute. It is the research organization that fuels MarketingSherpa and seems very capable and methodical at all areas of testing and optimization.

THE MULTI-PAGE EXPERIMENT MONSTER

Having decided on testing the landing pages, which we had hoped to update in a template format, we discovered the template would not work the way we wanted, with the changes we needed. That's when I asked the question: "Well, how many pages DO we need to get statistical significance in a reasonable amount of time?" 45 pages was the answer. Well, 45 pages is a lot less than 1,000, so I was happy.

DATA-DRIVEN DECISIONS

With MECLABS Institute running the data analysis, we were confident that spending the time on these 45 pages would be worth it. I quickly got to work. We worked with MECLABS Institute in forming the design. It went through

DATA-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING... CONTINUED

a few internal revisions until we were satisfied with the thought sequence behind the design, and we were sure the design accurately reflected that thought sequence. (The thought sequence is the design of the conversation between the marketer and the person on the website. I write more about this on .)

We built out the landing page from scratch, and we started duplicating the page for each landing page we would be testing (because we needed to test multiple pages at once to get statistical significance). Then, we migrated the content that would not be changing from the control over to the treatment. This was a slow, methodical process that involved myself along with other resources internally. If you are confident in the data behind the decision, spending the time building the test is a no-brainer.

POST-TEST LAUNCH

We launched the test. Sure, the countless hours of test set-up are over. Now begin the countless hours of tracking and understanding test results (all the while setting up the other tests we have queued up for production).

Test tracking is vital — that is if you want to learn anything from your tests. With the right segments built into our analytics platform, we could accurately measure the results and gain a learning. With that learning sometimes

comes positive, sometimes negative, and the worst kind — "meh" results. This, our third test with MECLABS Institute, has proven to give us positive results, as well as some fantastic learnings.

BIGGEST RESULT

We saw a software-related lead generation relative increase of 52.3% with statistical significance of 99.7%! What does that do to our bottom line? $1,543,320 million in sales pipeline growth from only our top 22 software-related pages!

52%
INCREASE WITH 99% LoC

$1.5M
IN SALES GROWTH

🎓 LEARNINGS

1 *Grouping resources by type better orients visitors, helps them find what they are looking for, and reduces friction.*

2 *Hover-over descriptions of the resources provide more clarity around product content, which will increase the perceived value exchange.*

3 *Providing more supporting value to the videos by displaying them as thumbnails increases their appeal and encourages interaction.*

4 *The use of social media portals is not consistent with visitor motivation or thought process, adding friction (or clutter) to the page.*

At the end of the day, to exist as a business, we need to see a return on investment. But the best way to see that return is through customer wisdom. The better we know the customer, the better we can predict what they'll want, the better we can see a return on that investment. The real win for this test is that now we can apply what we learned to other parts of the site and see significant wins there — and we will.

THOUGHT SEQUENCE & WHY IT RULES DESIGN

KEY PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE YOUR CUSTOMER'S JOURNEY

I was working with a designer and explained, in a nutshell, what a thought sequence is and some ideas on how we could follow it for the new designs for a page. My nutshell version felt too compressed, so here's my augmented explanation:

There are two principles that will be helpful in understanding the thought sequence:

- The micro-yes

- User experience design

PRINCIPLE 1
THE MICRO-YES

I learned years ago about the micro-yes from MECLABS Institute articles like this one, videos and trainings. The micro-yes(s) are the conclusions you want your users to arrive at as they progress along the sales funnel. These micro-yes(s) eventually take the user to the macro-yes, which would be signing up, purchasing, etc.

The first micro-yes occurs when a user lands on a page and, often without realizing it, answers the first question: "Did I arrive on the page I intended to land on?" They look for several elements to verify where they are, such as:

ABC

Page Title   **Image**   **Navigation**

Once they conclude they are where they wanted to land, they seek to answer a new question: "Is where I intended to land going to give me the information I want?"

There are various ways of facilitating this answer in the mind of the user depending on your product. If you sell your basement apartment on Airbnb, you would want to show nice pictures of the apartment, amenities, and

things to do in the area. I like to use these sorts of things to support the true value proposition of your product or service. One of the critical elements of a true value proposition is how your offering is exclusive, or "what [someone] can't get anywhere else," according to Flint McGlaughlin in his book, *The Marketer as Philosopher*.

Now that they want to stay at your basement apartment, they need to see what the rates and availability are. To do this, they need to select dates. This leads to another micro-yes question: "Can I stay at this basement apartment?" Once they know they can stay and if they still want to at that point, they can move on through the purchase process.

PRINCIPLE 2
USER EXPERIENCE DESIGN, SIMPLE RULES

In user experience (UX), you aim to provide every option to the user that they could possibly want (within company guidelines). It is a simple rule and is, of course, a simplified answer — but you get the idea.

The job of an optimizer is not only to provide the user experience, but to test into conversion-improving experiences. How I have seen it work best so far is

13

THOUGHT SEQUENCE & WHY IT... CONTINUED

focusing on 80% of a target segment and making sure the segment's wants, or micro-yes(s), have just the right amount of friction so the user does not have to think about anything other than those micro-yes(s).

So, there is "UX," and there is "UX + improved conversion rates."

There are many facets to user experience, but when it comes to most websites, it stays pretty simple.

THE THOUGHT SEQUENCE — WHAT YOUR DESIGN LIVES OR DIES BY

The thought sequence is a conversation that is taking place between you and your customer (notice I said "you" and not "your website.") You are communicating with your customer through your website, and you are answering these micro-yes(s) for them in the way you present the information.

What happens when the title and hero image for your page are relevant but below the fold? You are not telling the user what they want to know first, and you are likely experiencing very high bounce rates in most cases. This is similar to seeing someone you are attracted to and kissing them, instead of introducing yourself and starting a conversation.

What if you got the title and hero image right, but have the images and description for the apartment in the header and footer as links? Still high bounce rates.

Let's say you have title, hero image, and the images of your apartment in a flowing eye-path across and down the page. Since the user answered the next micro-yes affirmatively, they begin interacting with the date picker tool if they can find it.

If it is not flowing down the same path the title, images and descriptions have all taken, the user has to leave the conversation and figure out how to communicate with you all over again. They then begin hunting for the right element and finally find it in the navigation, or above the title, or in a side-bar to the left...

Can people find an element that is not in the best place? Yes. After all, eventually running around kissing people will (probably) result in one of them responding positively ... which your sore cheeks will be grateful for. Do people want to hunt for things? Only on Easter. But, if they don't want to do something, they won't.

The point here is, "works" and "works well" are vastly different things.

CONCLUSION

This is the thought sequence — the conversation between you and your users through your website. It is a combination of micro-yes(s) and user experience to foster the conclusions you want your ideal prospect to arrive at.

The people you communicate with through your website will unknowingly thank you when you make their lives a little easier by thinking of their thought sequence on your website. How do they thank you? With an increase in purchases and sign-ups.

> *[The thought sequence] is a combination of micro-yes(s) and user experience to foster the conclusions you want your ideal prospect to arrive at.*
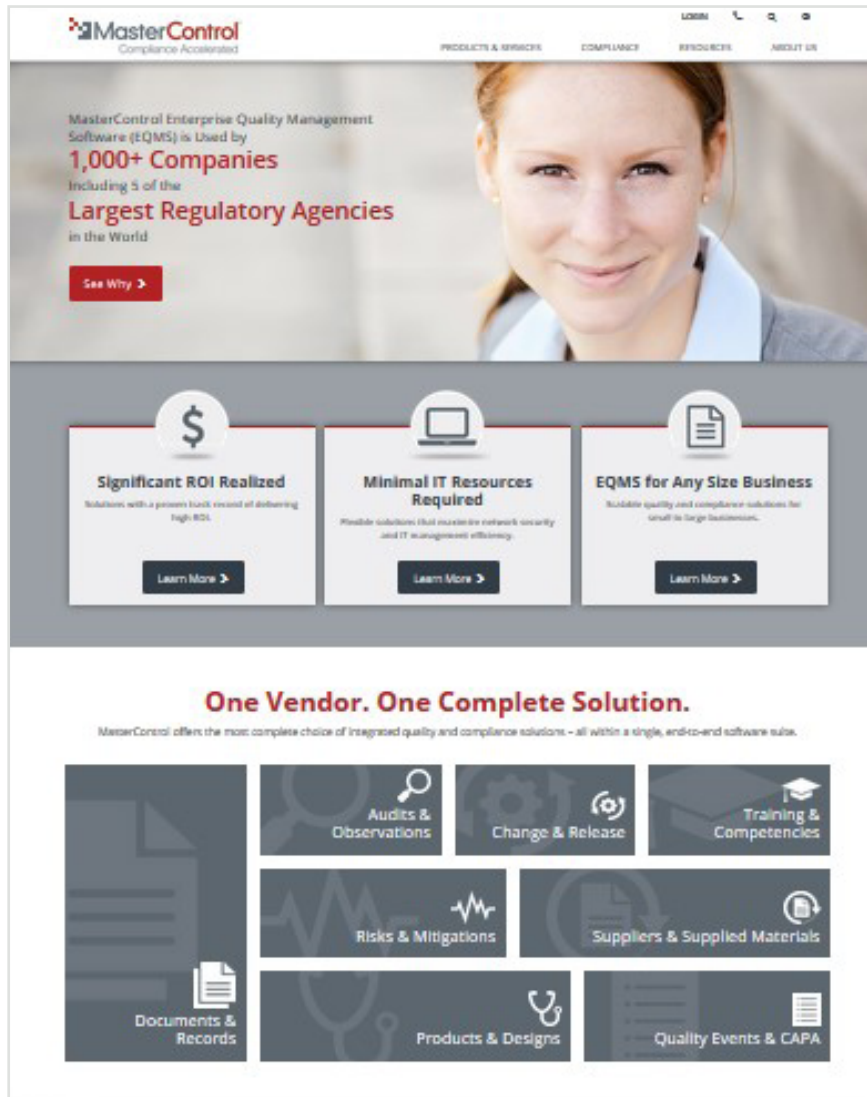
THE HOMEPAGE REDESIGN APPROACH

CREATIVE & RESULTS

HOW A SINGLE HOMEPAGE TEST ACHIEVED A 170% INCREASE IN LEADS

After completing a winning A/B test with our landing pages, our management team decided it was time to launch a redesign of the homepage. A lot of work went into producing the ideas that came out of the brainstorming meetings about the page, and we honestly made some great improvements over the original design.

We started to think more about what the customer might want more so than in the past and designed the page around a few personas. We

focused on those personas and designed the page to cater to them, just like our previous homepages. However, we did not test it (because we were confident in the fresh design being an improvement overall), nor did we have a way to measure the success of those personas through the process.

NEW CONTROL PAGE

Once we launched the untested page, we worked with MECLABS Institute to come up with yet another new design, but this time to test against the new control page. The results were stunning. Our eyes were opened to more ways we could improve our internal processes AND our messaging to site visitors.

STEP 1
IDENTIFY THE GOAL OF THE USER

We first identified who we were trying to target and what they were like. We even leveraged personas from the UX team to help us with this process. Even though we targeted the three personas we were interested in with the control page, we did not consider if they cared about the messaging we provided them *at the time* we provided it

HOW A SINGLE HOMEPAGE TEST... CONTINUED

to them. And, we did not consider if the message would be more useful at a later point in the sales process. I learned that these questions were not addressed and, therefore, realized that we had more work to do to address these in later tests.
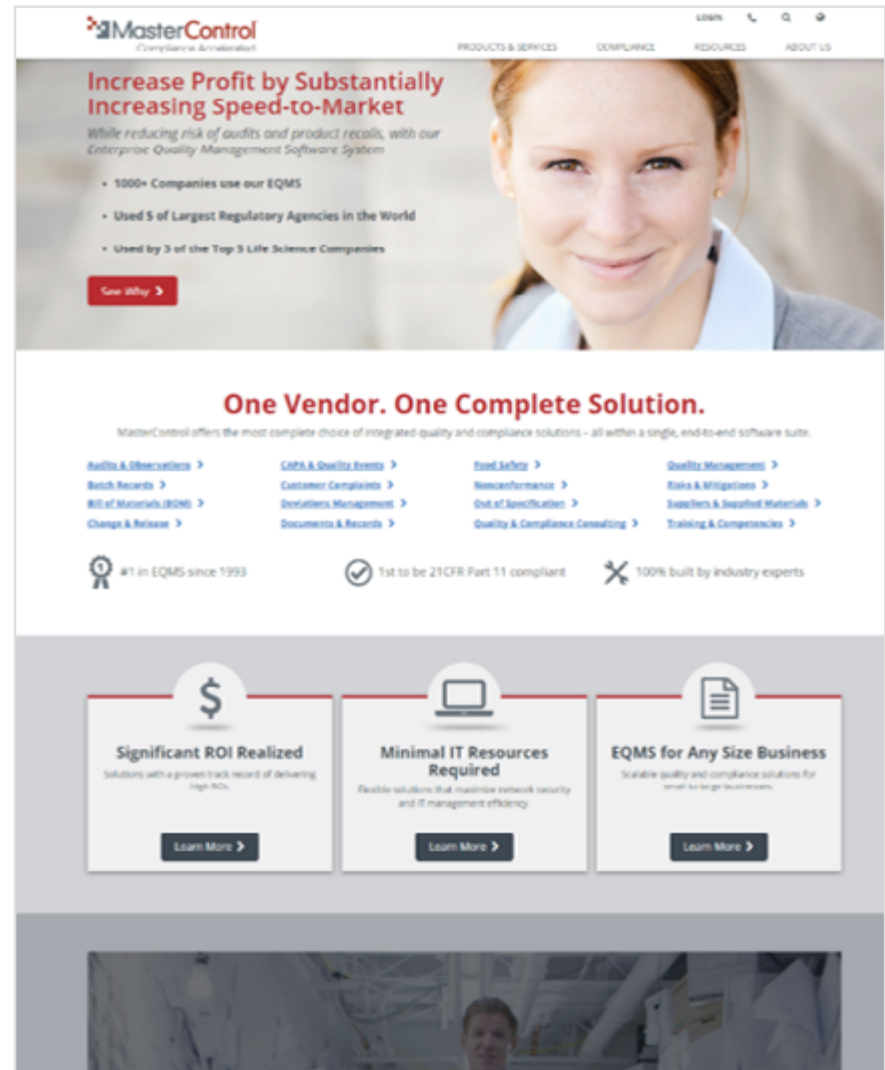
STEP 2
IDENTIFY THE GOAL OF THE COMPANY

We wanted to improve four different elements on the page:

- Clickthrough to the "Contact Us" page

- Bounce rate

- Clickthrough to landing pages and other key pages

- Lead capture

TREATMENT PAGE

We increased clickthrough to the "Contact Us" page by 205.178%. Our changes included making some "Contact Us" buttons more prominent, which was likely the biggest contributing factor to this increase.

Our bounce rate dropped 6.639%, which is fantastic when the page in question is a portal page — you want people

18

to interact with your site because they understand and believe what they see on the page.

Clickthrough to landing pages and other key pages was another great increase of 130.653%. More of our website visitors are actually using our home (portal) page as it was intended and moving further into the sales funnel.

Leads captured increased by 170.629%. Who doesn't want more qualified leads? The changes between the control and treatment were minimal, so why did it have such a large impact?

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

There were two primary changes from the control to the treatment: the value proposition statement at the top of the page and the second section of the page. We found that adding clarity to the conversation drove people further into the funnel and, ultimately, they converted to leads.

If we designed by committee, we would have diluted the reason for the page's existence and ended up with certain elements being in certain places because that was where certain people wanted them. The less we design by committee and instead design by a methodical thought

sequence, the more we will identify key learnings and achieve key successes that allow our business to grow.

We were able to make decisions that impacted the page in this way because of the perspective used in creating the treatment, which minimized the wants of the organization and maximized the motivation of the user.

I am not advocating forgetting the needs of the organization you are working for but rather reducing the amount of time and thought put into what the organization wants in favor of what the user wants. There are already plenty of people in your organization thinking about the needs of the organization, so add some perspective, consider the needs of your visitors, and add more qualified leads.

P.S. I believe this is more difficult than we sometimes think it should be. We won't be able to think this way just because we decide it's important. Just as a muscle needs exercise, we need to exercise this way of thinking if we want to get good at it. So, go get your exercise in for the day and think about what everyone else wants and how you can help them get it because in the end, thinking of what the user wants IS thinking about the needs of your business. Your business needs customers, so deliver THEIR wants, and they will return the favor.

Listen to Bryce tell his story at MarketingSherpa Summit 2017 >

Read a MarketingSherpa case study detailing the 45-page MasterControl test >

Learn to use the web as a living laboratory like Bryce & MasterControl >

Download the free MECLABS Institute Testing Toolkit >

Read The Marketer As Philosopher by Flint McGlaughlin >

Testing Research Brief
ONLINE TESTING
5 STEPS TO LAUNCHING TESTS AND BEING YOUR OWN TEACHER

THE WEB AS A LIVING LABORATORY
By Flint McGlaughlin

THE MARKETER AS PHILOSOPHER
40 BRIEF REFLECTIONS ON THE POWER OF YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

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- Case studies & charts
- Webinars
- Reports
- And more

Access the library ›

2 ADVANCE YOUR EDUCATION

Accelerate your career with the many education and training resources MECLABS Institute offers, including:

- University of Florida & MECLABS Institute graduate certificate program
- Case studies from **both B2B and B2C companies**
- Multiple course options, including: Email Messaging, Value Proposition Development, Online Testing and Landing Page Optimization

Learn more about MECLABS Institute education ›

3 PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

As you've read, Bryce worked alongside MECLABS Institute scientists to make new discoveries and drive significant revenue increases — and you can as well. Each partnership is customized to meet unique challenges faced by Partners and includes:

- Reviewing and understanding your data
- Identifying and prioritizing testing opportunities
- Executing the test plan and driving the most insight from each test to get the maximum ROI and customer discoveries to apply to future testing

Learn more about Research Partnerships ›

ABOUT MECLABS INSTITUTE

WHY DO CUSTOMERS SAY YES?

SEE WHY 80,000 MARKETERS USE MECLABS INSTITUTE TO REFINE THEIR MARKETING

MECLABS Institute uses a proven, patented scientific methodology to help and empower business professionals to better understand their customers' needs and drive measurable improvements.

What makes us experts on the science of choice? Over the past 15 years we have:

- Reviewed over **one billion emails, five million phone calls and 20,000 sales paths**

- Explored more than **10,000 real-life case studies** in order to release over **100 publications**

- World's Largest Testing Library: **Over 1,500 validated experiments** through company partnerships of varying sizes from all over the world

We've done the rigorous research so that you don't have to. Let us help you learn how marketers in your industry are tackling their toughest challenges, measure your campaign success against industry benchmarks and, most importantly, discover what makes your ideal prospect say "yes." If you would like more information about how MECLABS can help you overcome your marketing challenges, feel free to contact us.

22

CONTRIBUTORS

AUTHOR
Bryce Miller, (Former) Website Optimization Manager, MasterControl

MECLABS INSTITUTE

PRODUCTION EDITOR
Annie Summerall, Community Engagement & Insights Specialist

COVER DESIGNER
James White, Senior Brand Designer

ART DIRECTION
Pamela Jesseau, Director, Brand Development & Partnerships
Lauren Leonard, Senior Manager, Design

PUBLICATION DESIGNER
Chelsea Schulman, Designer

COPY EDITOR
Linda Johnson, Copy Editor

MANAGING EDITOR
Daniel Burstein, Senior Director, Content & Marketing

To learn more about this report, please visit meclabs.com or contact research@meclabs.com

MECLABS Institute, 4315 Pablo Oaks Ct., Jacksonville, FL, 32224