

E-BOOK

Choosing a website optimization tool in 2021

Selecting the right A/B testing
and personalization suite for
your business

Introduction

For a period of time, one could barely take a step without bumping into a new experimentation or personalization platform. And just when it seemed the sheer number of choices created a buyer's market across a spectrum of function, price, and scalability, things began to contract via a series of acquisitions. In many cases, this has left conversion optimization professionals in a provider-driven wake of product rationalization and integration headaches they never anticipated. Add to that a global pandemic that caused an unprecedented need for online business remodeling, many CMOs and CDOs saw that it was time to reassess their optimization technology ecosystem.

This eBook provides a way to assess your optimization technology needs, and the questions that every company should be asking their current and prospective technology providers.

Needs assessment

You'll start on solid ground by reviewing your company's culture, goals, and optimization program maturity. Take a look at the following areas to help identify and gain consensus on "who" you are.

General goals

The goal of an optimization program is naturally to drive higher profits, but what are the sub-goals to this end?

- Is your focus to greatly improve the front-end user experience? To optimize a mobile application?
- Do you wish to frequently iterate on product features and releases, decrease time to market, and reduce the risk associated with that?
- Does optimization cost more than you think it should, both in terms of pricing and the resources it takes to build, launch, and analyze?
- What are your business KPIs related to optimization? Are you seeking simply to increase conversion, or do your goals include increasing order value, driving brand loyalty, increasing use of certain parts of the site, etc.?
- Finally, are there things you don't even think to ask from your solution because you already assume it won't do those things?

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Organization & culture

Despite many commonalities, every company's culture, organizational structure, and processes are unique. Examine the following facets of your organization and how your optimization solution aligns and supports them.

Do you describe your culture as “customer-centric”? Are employees empowered with processes and tools that allow them to deliver on this vision?

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- Is marketing the only team responsible for revenue growth and improving user experience, or are these shared across other teams like development, product management, and network operations? Do any of the teams performing optimization have conversion increase or revenue growth as a formal goal?
- Is your optimization team model distributed or centralized? Is it one person or many? Are you launching optimization for the first time?
- Who will be using an optimization solution and what is their skill set? Do you need to accommodate people that wish to use graphical user interfaces and visual editors as well as those who wish to use APIs and code to run campaigns?
- Do you need certain skills or headcount cycles to augment your team? Could your team benefit from experts who specialize in ideation, results analysis, and program management?

Scalability needs

Like any good thing, once organizations realize the value of optimization, they immediately want to do more. They quickly find additional areas to optimize, want to test more, and expand the capability to new teams and new digital properties.

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Considering this:

- Do you need to optimize different parts of your site?
- Do you need to support a large volume of experiments and personalization campaigns running at the same time?
- Do you need a solution that supports your users being part of numerous experiments and personalization campaigns at once?
- Do you care about the speed of your site? Do you think site speed correlates to a positive user experience and higher conversion?

Choosing a solution

A lay of the land

As a starting point, let's look at four main groups that provide optimization and personalization solutions:



Internal tools

Internal tools are those you have chosen to build versus buy. The benefits of these are complete control of the roadmap, performance, function, and availability. The downside of course is complete blame for any lack thereof. While some companies attempt to build their own optimization solutions, the ROI and perceived competitive edge of doing so are rarely if ever realized.

In most cases, companies that build their own solutions find themselves with narrow functionality that requires a custom integration with every change to their MarTech stack. Homegrown solutions are also often heavily reliant on institutional knowledge. Many struggle to operate at scale due to the complexity of campaign setup and performance degradation when more than a handful of experiments are deployed. Some organizations may find they can prioritize the development of an internal optimization solution, but it's not long before this internal "product" takes a backseat and becomes functionally stale.

Optimization solution suite providers

Optimization solution suite providers are those companies whose portfolio is focused mainly on user experience, personalization, and site optimization. SiteSpect is a prime example of an optimization solution suite provider. The benefits of these types of provider are a deep R&D and consulting focus on user experience and conversion growth, and an ability for their customers to significantly impact that roadmap.

The downside is that while these tools typically offer vendor consolidation within user experience and optimization technologies, their focus on optimization means that by nature, they won't offer solutions far outside that realm. However, a good optimization solution suite provider integrates seamlessly with a broad range of other tools without added cost or painful implementation.

Digital experience platform providers

Digital experience platform providers are companies that offer a comprehensive online commerce or digital experience framework, of which optimization and personalization are a part. Optimization solutions are either baked into the base platform or offered as options.

The major benefit of a digital experience platform provider is technology consolidation. The major downside is that in many cases, the benefits of optimization and personalization can only be realized if you use the larger platform. This can pose two challenges:

- **Scenario 1:** You have a commerce platform in which you're heavily invested but its optimization and personalization functionality is lacking and they won't allow you to integrate an alternate solution.
- **Scenario 2:** The optimization solution your team has used for years is acquired by a digital experience platform provider that mandates you to move to their entire commerce platform.

Whether these challenges exist depends on the platform. Some understand that customers will want to integrate best-of-breed point solutions and third-party services, while others are more closed. If you're using a digital experience platform provider, understanding where they stand on this is important.

Multi-solution providers

Lastly, **multi-solution providers** are larger technology companies that have acquired or added other functions including optimization to an expansive portfolio. The major benefit of buying an optimization solution from a multi-solution provider is vendor consolidation. If you already have an enterprise agreement and use many other solutions from one of these providers, their acquisition of a solution you were already using on a point-solution basis may come as good news.

One downside however is that in many cases, optimization is an afterthought to the R&D and strategic focus of these companies, so the roadmap specific to optimization may slow, and the product may be either amalgamated into an existing suite or retired at some point.

Lumen is an example of a multi-solution provider. Unlike many companies in this category, however, it has the particularity of approaching optimization through a partnership with solution provider SiteSpect. SiteSpect is one of the performance modules available in Lumen's modular edge delivery framework that gives customers control of which solutions they wish to implement.



Detailed decision criteria

Within the four groups outlined above there are often vast solution differences. The questions in this section should help you parse the differences of each platform regardless of the group they are in.

Multi-team support

Multiple teams contribute to revenue growth and user experience. A strong optimization solution will address the needs of each team, while also providing a holistic platform and reporting capabilities across shared revenue and user experience goals.

Is the goal of improving user experience and digital revenue growth shared by multiple teams in your organization? And if so, does the solution offer shared and unique benefits for each of these teams?



Feature set completeness

A complete solution should offer A/B and multivariate testing for both client- and server-side user experience elements. It should support testing and rollout of full release candidates and provide personalization and product recommendations consistently across all channels.



Professional services, training & support

Those providing training, consulting, and support should be extensions of your own team. Look for services that provide designated resources and can outline alignment of those resources to your team.

Segmentation, analytics & reporting

Solutions should offer advanced segmentation, analytics, and reporting, and also allow for easy export of raw data, integration with other platforms. The solution should additionally track business, site speed, and engagement metrics for a complete view of the user experience.

ROI & cost

You should expect a double digit return on your investment with normal use and collaboration with a provider's team. Choose a provider who is willing to sign up for this result and who can report on these metrics as part of their service.

Ease of use

Unless you plan to leverage only development resources for optimization and personalization, you'll want a solution that provides a visual editor and a user-friendly interface for building experiences and viewing results.

Other considerations:

Impact to site speed

Optimization solutions that slow page load times by more than 50ms can hurt conversion and revenue goals. Choose a solution that can support no flicker effect without adding to page load times. Make sure that the underlying delivery framework leverages state of the art cloud, edge and content delivery technologies.

Security & privacy

Nothing you optimize will matter if user privacy and site security is breached. Choose a solution that has security and privacy accreditations and works well with third-party application security solutions.

Data accuracy & quality

Business decisions are only as good as the data on which they are based. The most accurate data comes from solutions that are not prone to JavaScript tag misfires, are not impacted by newer browser privacy provisions, and integrate easily with other data platforms.

SPA, PWA, CDN, & other integrations

The solution should support your specific application stack including single page applications (SPAs), progressive web applications (PWAs), and content delivery networks (CDNs) or cloud solutions. You should also ensure the solution can integrate with other third-party components of your ecosystem (CMS, CDP, email, etc.).

Stability & transparency

You should expect transparency about solution performance and availability. You'll also want to understand how the provider manages fault tolerance and plans for adequate capacity each year.

Conclusion

Optimization and personalization solutions have not always been the highest profile items. In 2020 and into 2021, however, companies with the strongest solutions in place were able to quickly manage customer expectations, enforce purchasing rules, set up operational safeguards, and assess the impact of all those moving parts when it mattered most.

With good fortune, the next online revolution will come not by force but by strategic choice. When that happens, you'll want to be armed with technologies that are fully aligned with your goals and maximize your ability to succeed. Revisit this ebook periodically as a guide in self-assessment. Maintaining clarity on your business's needs over time will keep you ready for market changes. Demanding this of your optimization and personalization solution provider can only help.

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SiteSpect is leading the advancement of customer experience optimization solutions for the world's most successful businesses.

SiteSpect's patented solutions enable customers to optimize the entire digital experience from the frontend to the backend while managing across channels, business units, and product lines.

Lumen offers SiteSpect as part of its modular edge framework for application performance and security.

SITESPECT

Why Lumen?

With global network scale, a secure and programmable delivery platform, and dedicated focus on improving business outcomes, Lumen is trusted by many of the world's leading enterprises to help them create new and differentiating user experiences all over the globe. Whether you are delivering video streams, popular games, online storefronts, or next generation applications, the broad capabilities of Lumen edge delivery services enable businesses to stand out from the crowd.

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