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BENCHMARK REPORT

2012 WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION

2012 Website Optimization Benchmark Report

Keys to an Effective Optimization Program in Your Organization

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FROM OUR MANAGING DIRECTOR

Dear Marketer:

In this study, **we interacted with 2,504 marketers**. We asked them key questions about their website optimization efforts. And, we benchmarked the effect of their value propositions on their optimization efforts.

In **more than 15 years of research**, we've found that marketers who effectively communicate their organizations' value propositions on their websites can **dramatically impact the P&L**.

However, in those years of research, I have also had **thousands of conversations** with marketers who are frustrated by the task of effectively communicating a value proposition on their websites. They repeatedly ask, **"How can I quickly maximize the effectiveness of my website?"**

This question has been the impetus for much of this study, and has, in turn, led to even more intriguing questions:

- What website components should I optimize?
- How has mobile impacted website optimization?
- What is the best way to measure site performance?
- Which page elements have the largest impact on website optimization?
- How does website optimization inform broader marketing strategy?

The entire process has been guided by our lead authors Meghan Lockwood and Brad Bortone, along with the entire MECLABS Sciences and Research team. Together they have compiled the **most comprehensive benchmarking report in the field**:

- Based on 2,504 qualified survey responses
- In 10 major industry verticals
- Across all 7 continents
- Including responses from CMOs, marketing managers and agencies

I trust you will find the data relevant and useful for your work.



Dr. Flint McGlaughlin
Managing Director
MECLABS

P.S. I personally found the information regarding **value proposition** beginning on page 32 particularly germane to the challenges marketers are facing going into 2013.

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AN EXPLANATION OF WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION MATURITY

Throughout this Benchmark Report, you will view a number of charts and corresponding analyses that break out specific groups of respondents by **maturity level**. At MECLABS, we define marketing maturity by three phases – Trial, Transition and Strategic – each of which corresponds to a specific level of experience and practice within a marketing discipline.

For the purposes of the 2012 Website Optimization Benchmark Survey, and this report, we defined each phase as follows:

- **Trial Phase** – Marketers who do not have a process or guidelines for optimization or testing. Typically, these marketers have some testing and optimization projects, but they are neither valid nor codified, and they do not share the lessons of the tests with other functional groups.
- **Transition Phase** – Marketers who have an informal process with a few guidelines they sporadically perform. Typically, these marketers have some testing processes, but do not test validity. They incorporate lessons from website optimization to some online marketing efforts, but these lessons do not translate to larger macro-level changes.
- **Strategic Phase** – Marketers who have a formal process with thorough guidelines they routinely perform. Typically, they have advanced, statistically valid testing processes that inform customer theory, channel mix and offline marketing efforts.

In categorizing our respondents in this manner, we feel our data becomes more applicable and useful to a wider range of marketers – from those who work for smaller startups, to those from large, well-established corporations. We do this in hopes of creating the best possible marketing resource for our readers.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The website is the hub of all online marketing strategies. Nearly every online effort – PPC, SEO, social, mobile – points back to the website, where your organization can have a controlled conversation with your prospects about what makes your products and services unique.

In short, **the website is where conversion happens**, and is crucial to the success of every online marketing strategy employed by your company.

An effective optimization program can *dramatically* impact a company's financial performance. According to the 2012 Website Optimization Survey – the basis for this report's findings – marketers who track ROI on optimization see very favorable results: **38% report a positive ROI, while only 3% report a negative ROI.**

This improvement comes from not only improving the conversion rate of the investments you've already made to drive traffic to your site, but also from new business intelligence gained about the customer, from the tests and changes that lie at the core of website optimization.

This is why a culture of **testing can change how you understand your audience, position your products and execute your larger marketing campaigns.**

This report will share discoveries about what marketing leaders around the world are doing to deploy optimization successfully in their firms, and **identify the critical industry-wide trends in website optimization that are imperative for leaders to understand.**

As you read through the complete report, you'll also find answers to the following questions:

- Is website optimization a priority for marketers in 2012 and beyond?
- Are website optimization budgets growing?
- How does website optimization inform broader marketing strategy?
- How does website optimization affect marketers' customer theory?
- How do marketers convey value propositions via their websites?
- What factors drive website optimization test design?
- What website components do marketers optimize?
- Which page elements have the largest impact on website optimization?
- How do marketers measure their website optimization campaigns?
- Do marketers understand their websites' conversion paths?
- What channels are touched by website optimization strategy?
- Are marketers incorporating Universal Lead Definitions into their funnel strategies?

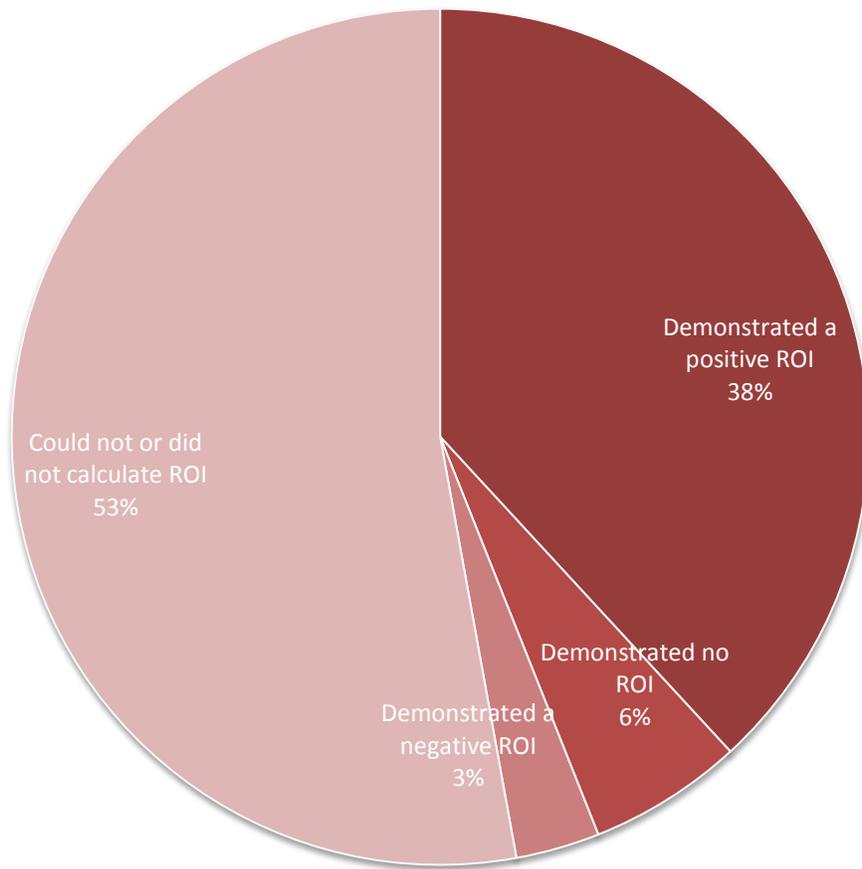
Here are some overarching findings from our survey.

KEY FINDING #1: MARKETERS STRUGGLE TO CALCULATE THE ROI OF WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION

Despite the fact that **nearly 40% of marketers who track ROI on their optimization programs see positive results**, more than half of those surveyed still do not know how to properly do so. An optimization program is only as good as the tools marketers use to measure their results.

We wanted to know how effectively marketers were utilizing website optimization, so we asked them if optimization and testing produced a positive return on investment.

Q. Did optimization or testing demonstrate ROI in 2011?



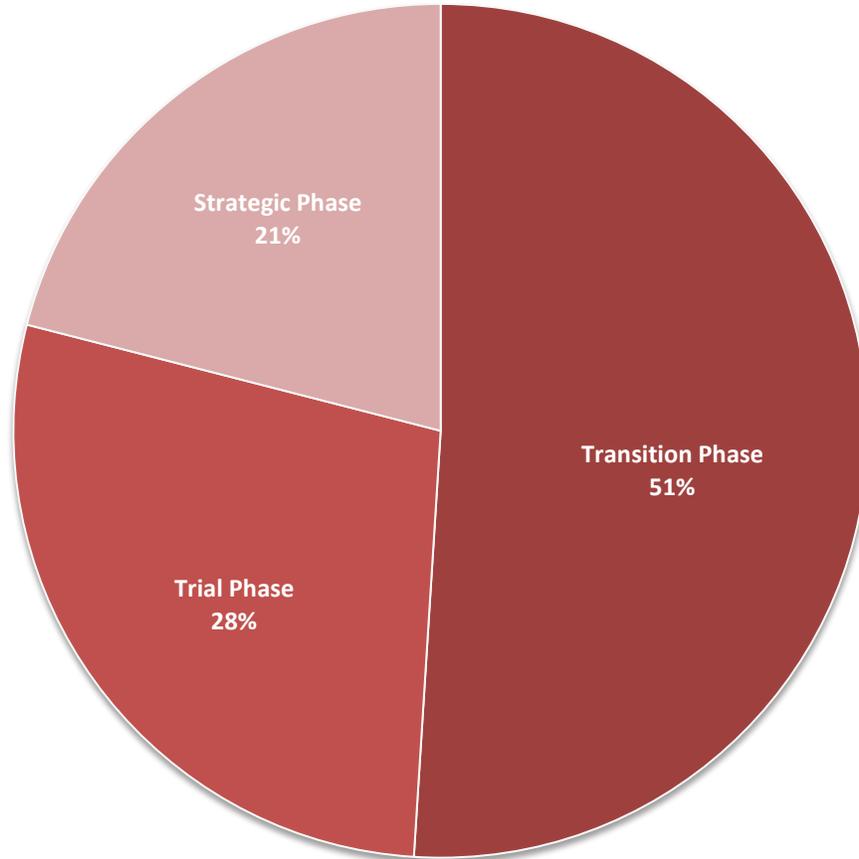
Source: ©2012 MarketingSherpa Website Optimization Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2012, N=789

The website accounts for 25% of all marketing spending, so failing to measure optimization efforts means that marketers do not know whether or not their budget dollars are working.

A variety of challenges contribute to a lack of ROI tracking, from managing multiple constituencies, to the sheer volume of data available online, all of which can occasionally bury marketers under a pile of numbers from which they cannot yet glean lessons.

KEY FINDING #2: MARKETERS' WEBSITE OPTIMIZATION MATURITY HAS EVOLVED

Q. Which statement best describes the process your organization uses to plan, execute and measure the performance of your website optimization programs?



Source: ©2012 MarketingSherpa Website Optimization Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2012, N=2,677

To help you get a better understanding of the data, this Benchmark Report not only provides holistic data and data segmented by industry, transaction type (e.g., B2B vs. B2C) and company size, but also (as you can see in the chart above) by how mature the organization's website optimization practice is.

For example, when segmented by maturity level, marketers reported a more disparate focus on optimization. **Slightly more than 95% of companies in the Strategic Phase prioritize optimization campaigns**, whereas just 84% of Trial Phase firms pay similar attention.

Marketers are more likely to spotlight programs on which they have spent time developing formal processes. Furthermore, the rigorous optimization practices employed by companies in the Strategic Phase are much more likely to produce measurable results, and consequently, further prioritization.

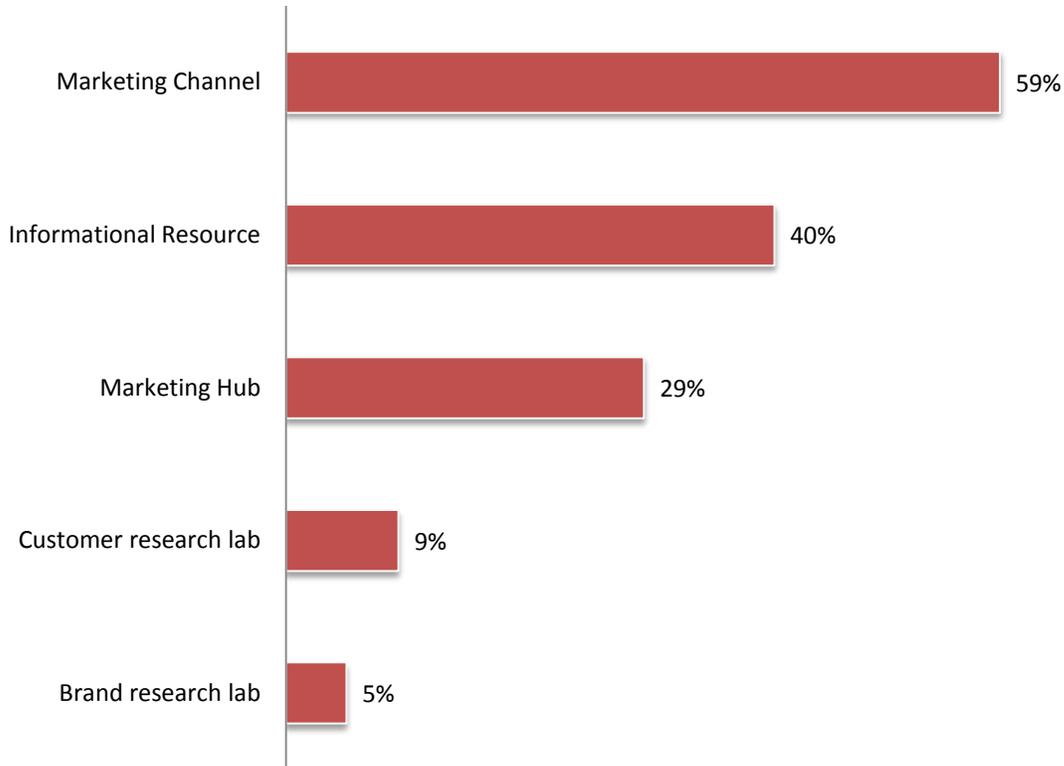
KEY FINDING #3: MARKETERS CONSIDER THE WEBSITE A DISTINCT MARKETING CHANNEL

Encouragingly, 29% of marketers accept a more holistic vision for their digital strategies, where the website – occasionally in conjunction with a blog – acts as the central structure around which companies arrange all marketing campaigns.

Nearly 50% of B2C firms indicated they utilize their website as an informational resource, rather than a distinct marketing channel.

With these firms selling directly to the consumer, they are perhaps more focused on paid ads to generate traffic and appeal for their products.

Q. Which of the following statements are representative of your organization's website strategy?



Source: ©2012 MarketingSherpa Website Optimization Benchmark Survey
Methodology: Fielded April 2012, N=1,705

While it is discouraging that so few marketers (less than 10%) have effectively tapped their website as a resource to research brand strategies or learn about customers, we derived some notable facts from this data.

As we dove deeper into the information, beyond what the above chart depicts, we saw that **44% of CMOs consider using the website for customer research as a facet of their online plans**, while only 37% consider the site an informational resource.

Further, while just 5% of marketers consider their website a brand research lab, large companies were more likely to view their website in that manner (6% vs. 3%, respectively).

ABOUT MARKETINGSHERPA LLC

MarketingSherpa is a primary research facility, wholly-owned by MECLABS, dedicated to determining what works in marketing via exclusive case studies, surveys, and results data analysis. Then we publish what we learn so our community of marketers and weekly readers can improve their results and train their teams. *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site, and Entrepreneur.com have all praised MarketingSherpa.

MarketingSherpa tracks what works (and what does *not*) in all aspects of marketing. While we do not deliver direct solutions, we partner with MECLABS groups to provide private research for our clients. Our findings are published for the entire MarketingSherpa community's benefit.

Our goal: to give marketers of the world the stats, inspiration, and instructions to improve their results.

Our name "Sherpa" refers admiringly to the Sherpas of Nepal who guide climbers up Mount Everest. Our goal is to be your friendly native guides who help make your tough climb toward great marketing results easier by handing you research on 'what works'.

Our research activities include:

- Case study interviews with brand-side marketing VPs and directors, in both business-to-business and consumer marketing. We conduct hundreds of these hour-long interviews per year.
- Surveys of our readership: marketing, advertising, and PR professionals
- Surveys of your prospects and customers, including consumers, technology professionals and business execs, to discover what they think of marketing that's targeting them.
- Exclusive lab tests and partnered research studies provided through MECLABS
- Collection and analysis of "best of" research data published by other research firms, labs, and service providers to the marketing field. We constantly review more than 500 research sources for data that might prove useful.

ABOUT MECLABS

MECLABS is a science lab that uses real-world research to **help business leaders get better use out of sales and marketing technology and resources**, including Internet marketing, website optimization, and lead generation and nurturing. We have been involved in direct research partnerships with companies throughout Europe and North America since 2001.

MECLABS deploys a rigorous methodology to conduct research. This research is compiled from:

- More than **10 years** of research partnership with our clients
- **1,300** experiments
- Over **1 billion** emails
- **10,000** landing pages tested
- **5 million** telephone calls
- **500,000** decision maker conversations

Insights from our work are then codified within our Primary Research groups, known under the MarketingSherpa and MarketingExperiments brands. Much of this information is published for free via our websites, newsletters, blogs, and Web clinics. In aggregate, our research is made available in more than **100 conferences**, and through more than **1,000 case studies**, **753 articles** and **180 research briefs**.

You've probably seen our research in action and never even realized it. In addition to the direct impact our Conversion Group has had on the way Internet marketing is done, our Training Group has educated marketers from countries such as the United States, Canada, Israel, the Netherlands, Singapore, Thailand, Portugal, Australia, New Zealand, the UK, United Arab Emirates, Belgium and France.

We've influenced the Internet marketing industry in many other ways as well:

- MECLABS was the **first Internet-based research lab to conduct rigorous experiments** across multiple industries to objectively identify what really works in marketing.
- The group's findings have been quoted in more than **13,000 sources** ranging from *The Economist* to the Harvard Business School.

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This highly anticipated Benchmark Report identifies the critical industry-wide trends in website optimization that are imperative for leaders to understand, including:

- How website optimization informs broader marketing strategy
- How website optimization affects marketers' customer theory
- How marketers evaluate their value propositions
- Which page elements have the largest impact on website optimization

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