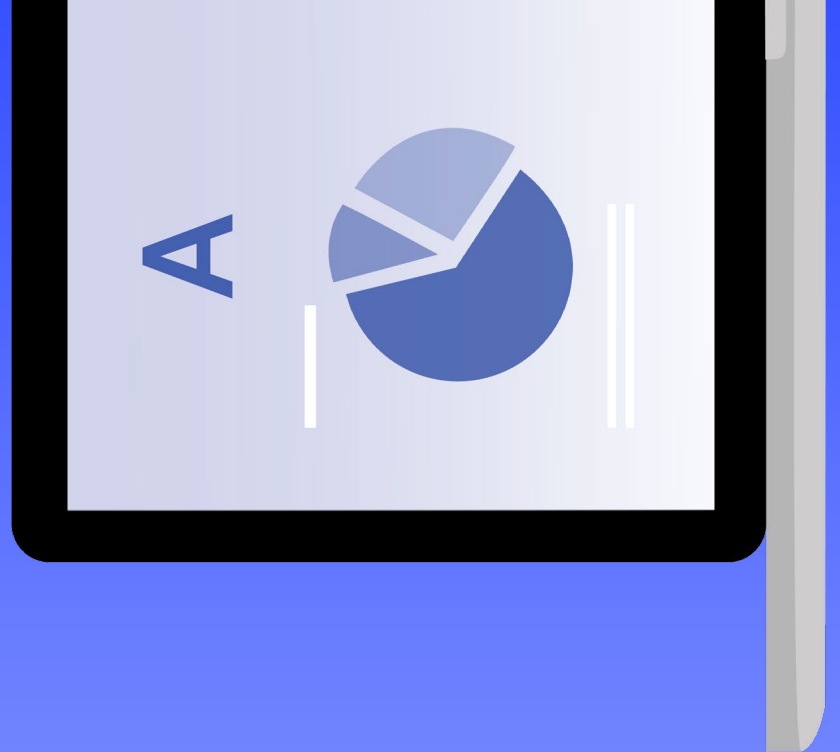kissmetrics + HubSpot

AN INTRODUCTION TO USING A/B TESTING FOR MARKETING OPTIMIZATION

Using Split Tests to Optimize Landing Pages, Email, and Calls-to-Action

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WHY SHOULD I CONDUCT A/B TESTING?

Split testing, commonly referred to as A/B testing, is a method of testing through which marketing variables (such as copy, images, layout, etc) are compared to each other to identify the one that brings a better conversion rate. In this context, the element that is being testing is called the "control" and the element that is argued to give a better result is called the "treatment."

Running A/B tests in your marketing initiatives is a great way to learn how to drive more traffic to your website and generate more leads from the visits you're getting. Just a few small tweaks to a landing page, email, or call-to-action can significantly affect the number of leads your company attracts.

Such increases in lead generation can provide a huge competitive advantage for your company. In fact, chances are your competitors aren't doing A/B testing right, giving you more room to grow and create better content that converts.

In other words, if you're not A/B testing, you're missing out on opportunities to increase your conversion rates and glean learnings to improve your marketing content over time. Luckily, this A/B testing kit from Kissmetrics and HubSpot includes everything you need to know to hypothesize, test, and analyze your A/B tests to become a more effective marketer.

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GUIDELINES FOR EFFECTIVE A/B TESTING

A/B TESTING OR MULTIVARIATE TESTING:
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Although the two terms are both thrown around in the marketing world, multivariate and/B testing are not the same thing.

A/B TESTING allows you to test one variable at a time. It's used to pick the better out of two variables. For instance, if you are testing the background color of your landing pages to determine which one helps you generate the most conversions, you would use an A/B test. You can also test on the page level, which means that you are looking at the entire page as the variable.

MULTIVARIATE TESTING, on the other hand, enables you to test many variables simultaneously. Theoretically, multivariate testing combines a series of simultaneous A/B tests. In order to conduct statistically significant multivariate testing, you need to have a lot of traffic (the type of traffic YouTube and Google might get, for example).

While this ebook and corresponding kit focus on effective A/B testing, many of the practices mentioned in it can be applied to multivariate testing as well. Let's dive into A/B testing and start with a look at how to create an effective A/B test and how to measure its significance.

When you're starting out, you probably have a number of questions about what to do with A/B tests. What variable should you test? How long should the test last? What makes a test significant? Things get confusing fast.

There are certain guidelines you should keep in mind before you implement your tests. In this section we will cover some best practices that will make it easier to measure your results and find out which variation performed better. Such knowledge will guide you in figuring out how to best optimize your landing pages, calls-to-action, and email.

1. ONLY CONDUCT ONE TEST (ON ONE ASSET) AT A TIME

Let's say you have a new offer coming out that's promoted via an email that links to a landing page. You might decide to test the audience segment you're sending the offer and you might also be interested in testing which landing page image improves conversions.

However, if you conducted both tests simultaneously, you're actually muddling the results. How will you know which change ultimately impacted the conversion rates? Maybe it was the audience, maybe it was the image, or maybe it was both! But if you test one hypothesis at a time, you'll have results that will lead to stronger conclusions.

2. TEST ONE VARIABLE AT A TIME

In order to evaluate how effective an element is on your page, call-to-action, or email campaign, you have to isolate that variable in your A/B test. Only test one element at a time. For example, don't test the landing page image and the copy on the page and try to run your test. Like we mentioned in the previous tip, it'll muddle your results. Note that by testing the entire, email or CTA as the variable, you can achieve drastic improvement. That said, you may not be able to pinpoint which changes caused that improvement.

3. TEST MINOR CHANGES, TOO

Although it's reasonable to think that big, sweeping changes can increase your conversion rates, the small details are often just as
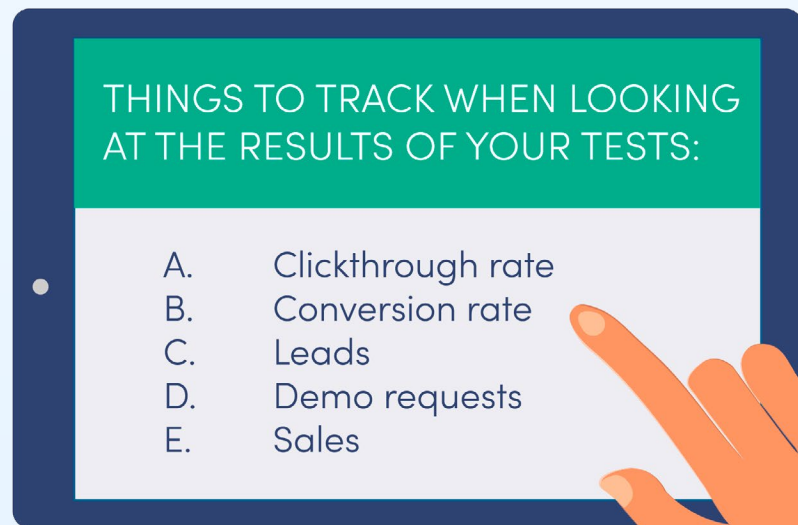
important. While creating your tests, remember that even a simple change, like switching the color of your call-to-action button, can drive big improvements.

4. YOU CAN A/B TEST THE ENTIRE ELEMENT

While you can certainly test a button color or a background shade, you should also consider making your entire landing page, call-to-action or email one variable. Instead of testing single design elements, such as headlines and images, design two completely different pages and test them against each other. Now you're working on a higher level. This type of testing yields the biggest improvements, so consider starting with it before you continue your optimization with smaller tweaks.

5. MEASURE AS FAR DOWN FUNNEL AS POSSIBLE

Sure, your A/B test might have a positive impact on your landing page conversion rate, but how about your sales numbers? A/B testing can have a significant effect on your bottom line. You may even see that a landing page that converted fewer prospects produced more sales. As you create your A/B test, consider how it affects metrics such as visits, click-through rates, leads, traffic-to-lead conversion rates, and demo requests. Need a tool to help you measure the impact of your tests on your full funnel? Kissmetrics does the work for you with its A/B test report.

THINGS TO TRACK WHEN LOOKING AT THE RESULTS OF YOUR TESTS:

A.   Clickthrough rate
B.   Conversion rate
C.   Leads
D.   Demo requests
E.   Sales

6. SET UP CONTROL & TREATMENT

In any experiment, you need to keep a version of the original element you're testing. When conducting A/B tests, set up your unaltered version as your "control:" the landing page, call-to-action or email you would normally use. From there, build variations, or "treatments:" pages, calls-to-action or email you'll test against your control.

For example, if you are wondering whether including a testimonial on a landing page would make a difference, set up your control page with no testimonials. Then create your variation(s).

Variation A: Control (the unaltered, original version)

Variation B: Treatment (the optimized version which you expect to perform better)

The screenshot below is an example of HubSpot's advanced landing pages A/B testing tool. You can easily clone the control and modify it to create a treatment page.

7. DECIDE WHAT YOU WANT TO TEST

As you optimize your landing pages, calls-to-action and email, there are a number of variables you can test. You don't have to limit yourself to testing only one color background or text size. Look at the various elements on your marketing resources and their possible alternatives for design, wording, layout.

In fact, some of the areas you can test might not be instantly recognizable. For instance, you can test different target audiences, timing of promotions, alignment between an email and a landing page, etc.

8. SPLIT YOUR SAMPLE GROUP RANDOMLY

In order to achieve conclusive results, you need to test with two or more audiences that are equal.

For instance, in email A/B testing each of your email variations must have as similar a group of recipients as possible. List sources, list type, and the length of time a particular name has been on a list are all factors that may cause large differences in response rates.

Your test results will not be conclusive or you may draw the wrong conclusions if you do not split your lists randomly.

If you want to compare the performance of two or more lists, keep all other aspects of the design and timing identical so you get clean results based on list and nothing else.

9. TEST AT THE SAME TIME

Timing plays a significant role in your marketing campaign's results – be it time of day of the week, or month of the year. If you were to run test A during one month and test B a month later, you wouldn't know whether the changed response rate was a result of the different template or the different month.

A/B testing requires you to run the two or more variations at the same time. Without simultaneous testing, you may be left second-guessing your results.

10. DECIDE ON NECESSARY SIGNIFICANCE BEFORE TESTING

Before you launch your test, think about how significant your results should be in order for you to decide that the change should be made to your website or email campaign. Set the statistical significance goal for your winning variation before you start testing. 95-99% statistical significance is usually a good percentage to aim for. Want a deep dive into statistical significance means? Check out this full explanation from Kissmetrics.

Don't worry, we've included an easy-to-use Statistical Significance calculator that will tell you just how significant your results are in this kit.

WHAT VARIABLES SHOULD YOU TEST?

WHAT ELEMENTS SHOULD I TEST AND OPTIMIZE?

As you build landing pages, calls-to-action, and email campaigns, you've probably wondered about the elements you can test and optimize to increase conversion rates. Should you change the background color of the landing page? How can you modify the language on the call-to-action to attract the most clicks? What if you removed all images from your email campaign?

Not all variables are created equal, and some may prove more worthy of your time than others.

In fact, there are some variables you shouldn't bother testing at all because they won't impact click-through or conversion rates all that much. Focus on testing elements that have the most impact on your end result (like conversion rates). Below is a list of areas to focus on for landing pages, emails, and calls-to-action.

ELEMENTS THAT YOU CAN OPTIMIZE ON A LANDING PAGE
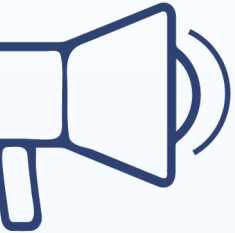
Offers

You should start your optimization process by finding out what types of offers convert the most visitors into leads and which offers help you push leads down the sales funnel.

Examples of offers to test include ebook, webinars, discount codes, coupons, sales, demos, and more. For instance, at HubSpot we have found that ebooks perform better than webinars in converting visitors to leads, but webinars do better than ebooks in converting leads to customers. That has led us to maintain a balanced mix of content types.

More middle-of-the-funnel offers, such as sales consultations and demos, will most likely be characterized by high customer close rate.

You can also test different topics and find out how they compare in driving business results.

Copy

How should you position your offer? What messaging will entice your reader? Should you add testimonials to strengthen the visitor's incentive?

People looking for information online will pay attention to the description of your offer. Consider different landing page copy that can help you drive more conversions. For instance, bullet points and data-driven content have traditionally performed well for us, at HubSpot. Start with a radical test in which you compare a short, one-paragraph long description to long form but still valuable copy.
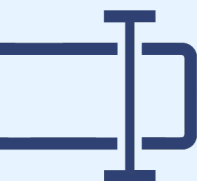
Form Fields

Should your lead capture form only request an email address or should it ask for more information?

ELEMENTS THAT YOU CAN OPTIMIZE ON A LANDING PAGE
CONTINUED

Inbound marketers diverge in their decision whether to place content behind a form or keep it form-free with no exchange of information. Some argue that forms create frictions in the lead generation process, while others believe that forms are essential for qualifying traffic and prioritizing work for the sales organization.

Landing page A/B testing enables you to evaluate how your audience reacts to different questions -- what prospects are willing to answer and what information they would rather not share. Form fields help you qualify leads and nurture them. With form-free content, you have to relinquish more lead nurturing control -- you didn't ask for their information, so how can you get back in touch with them unless they bookmark your site?

You can also test the placement of your form fields. For example, using an exit-intent lead flow on your pages or fully gating your content.

Whole Page

As we mentioned earlier, taking the entire page as the page variable is the fastest way to achieve drastic results and produce a landing page that drives many conversions. It's also a great approach when you're not seeing gains from micro optimizations (like changing the color, image, or copy).

Make iterations to the whole page that affect image placement, form length and its copy. Once you have a statistically significant result pointing to the variation that performed better, you can continue optimizing through smaller tweaks.
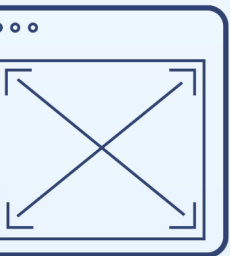
ELEMENTS THAT YOU CAN OPTIMIZE ON A CALL-TO-ACTION
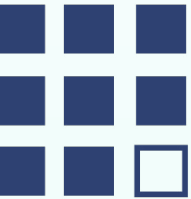
Placement

The argument over where the "best" place to put a CTA is never ending. Some say the best place to a put a CTA is in the top left hand of a page. After all, we start reading from left to right and from top to bottom.

However, at HubSpot, we've found that different assets (including blog posts, emails, landing pages, and more) have seen different results for which CTA placement performs best. That's why we're constantly testing our placement over time. Try A/B testing the right and left side of the page. Later, try testing in-text CTAs vs. traditional CTAs. You can even try pop-up, exit flows, and more.

Run an A/B test (remember, just one treatment variable at a time!) to see if you get more clicks and find a winner.

Size

The size of a CTA is tightly related to the context of the page and the other characteristics of your call-to-action. For instance, the CTA will naturally be large if it includes a graphic or an image that strengthens the message. Create an A/B test to see if a big call-to-action that adds value to the message--e.g. a customized blog CTA--attracts more clicks than its control.

Remember: bigger CTA's will help draw attention to the desired action you want your user to take, but if it's too big, it can also overpower your content and decrease your conversion rates.

ELEMENTS THAT YOU CAN OPTIMIZE ON A CALL-TO-ACTION
CONTINUED

Color

What's the ideal color for CTAs? Should you use a bold, in-your-face color like bright red or should you focus on brand consistency and determine the color based on the design of the page the CTA is on?

It's a never ending question that can only be solved for each individual brand through A/B testing. The goal of a CTA is to stand out and draw your user's eye so they take your desired action. Make sure to use a contrasting color from the rest of your page, but run A/B tests to determine which colors do a better job of capturing users' attention. Pay attention to your brand recognition, however. Choose colors that make sense for your brand and website, not just colors that you think will be the loudest.

Copy

The copy of your CTA should be short, sweet, and to the point. But it should also effectively describe what the user will get if they take your intended action. A/B testing copy is an effective way to test what kinds of copy resonates best with your audience. Maybe it's copy that uses social proof to convey the impact of an offer. Or, perhaps it's bulleted copy that describes the details of what's inside the offer. Only one way to find out: A/B test it.

Graphic

While you should focus on your call-to-action text, don't forget that graphics can help convey meaning and strengthen your message. Experiment with various shapes besides the standard button-like CTA form and test how the new look affects your click-through rate.

ELEMENTS THAT YOU CAN OPTIMIZE IN YOUR EMAIL

You must have noticed that many of the elements to test and optimize we have discussed so far overlap across different channels. Offers, copy and image are certainly some of the variables you want to always keep in mind. They apply to email marketing as well, so we won't repeat them here but discuss the few new ones we haven't mentioned so far.

Format

What's the best way to lay out your email content to drive the most engagement? Should your message be structured as a newsletter, digest or a dedicated send?

A/B testing can help you determine the right format of your email marketing campaigns. For instance, newsletters can perform well in spreading the news about a few different pieces of information, such as events, new offers, discounts and event product announcements.

Dedicated sends, on the other hand, can help you drive the most conversions to one call-to-action. Run an A/B test to determine which format yields the results you seek to achieve.

Layout

Similar to testing formats, layout is another element that you can test and optimize for on an ongoing basis. Experiment with different image and call-to-action placements and watch not only your click-through rates, but also your conversions to determine which layout is most effective.

Timing

Naturally, the optimal timing for sending marketing emails will vary by industry and even company. Should your prospect be sent your next email one hour later or one day later? Identify the best time to convert prospects into leads by running split test based on your audience.

Sender

A/B email marketing tests that we ran at HubSpot way back in 2011 showed that messages coming from a personal sender name receive higher CTR rate than messages from a generic sender name.

So instead of sending emails from Marketing Team, we to this day started make the senders of our marketing emails be the real experts from our marketing team. To reinforce this personalization and create consistency, we have been add the person's signature at the end of the message and include an image, their title, and social links.

Personalization is a well-known best practice in email marketing but you should still test sender names with your audience. Ensure that a change like this yields positive results for your company before you implement it.

Subject Lines

Subject lines are the part of emails that can grab your recipients' attention immediately and convince them to open the email and read more. You really want to get the subject line right.

Try testing the tone of the message, using personalization, asking questions, and more.

If you decide on testing email subject lines, try to deduct a lesson from your experiment. Is it the Length of the subject line, mention of a discount or certain formatting (e.g., brackets or colon) that made the difference?

Target Group

Who are you sending that email to and why will that particular audience find the content valuable? Segmentation can help you get high response rates because your recipients will find the messages particularly valuable.

That will also increase the chances of them sharing your email with friends and coworkers.

RUNNING AND EVALUATING YOUR TESTS

How to Conduct a Split Test:

Now that we have covered the reasons why you should run A/B tests, what variables to optimize, and best practices for running test let's look into the details of how you actually implement a split test.

How do you create multiple versions of the same element you are testing?

How do you split traffic randomly? How do you know if your results are statistically significant?

In this section we will look behind the scenes of a few tools that will enable you to do A/B testing and automate the process so that you don't have to maintain a dozen excel spreadsheets. What's more important, we will point you to the actions you can take after running a successful test.

How to Conduct a Landing Page Test

With landing page A/B testing you have one URL and two or more versions of the page. When you send traffic to that URL, visitors will be randomly sent to one of your variations. Standard landing page A/B testing tools remember which page the reader landed on and will keep showing that page to the user. For statistical validity split tests need to set a cookie on each visitor to ensure the visitor sees the same variation each time they go to the tested page. This is how HubSpot's advanced landing pages tool and Google's Website Optimizer work.

HubSpot's advanced landing pages enable you to create A/B tests and track a number of metrics to evaluate how your experiment is performing. It keeps a record of the number of people who viewed each variation and number of the people who took the intended action. For example, it might inform you that each of your landing page variations was viewed 180 times, with the top-performing one generating 20 clicks and the lowest performing one generating five clicks.

Want a deep dive into the results of your A/B tests once you've split the traffic? Kissmetrics provides an easy interface for you to see the impact of your A/B tests on the rest of your funnel.

While this information is important, it's not enough to make a decision about whether or not your results were significant.

Determine Statistical Significance:

From a high-level view, you can probably tell if your test results are significant or not. If the difference between the tests is very small, it may be that the variable you tested just doesn't influence the behavior of your viewers.

However, it's important to test your results for statistical significance from a mathematical perspective. There are a number of online calculators you can use for this, including Kissmetrics' A/B Significance Test Calculator. But don't fret! We've also an included your very own significance calculator inside with this kit.

HubSpot's advanced landing pages will tell you when the A/B test becomes statistically significant and whether you should continue the test or stop it. Once you're done with the test, simply disable the variations that are losing and run with the winning page.

kissmetrics + HubSpot

Testing is About Measuring Over Time

You may conduct an A/B test but not find statistically significant results. This doesn't mean that your A/B test has failed. Figure out a new iteration on your next test. For example, consider testing the same variable again with different variations, and see if that makes a difference. If not, that variable may have little bearing on your conversion rates, but there may be another element on your page that you can adjust to increase leads. Effective A/B testing focuses upon continuous improvement. Remember that as long as you keep working towards improvement, you're going in the right direction. Statistically insignificant tests aren't failures; they're just additional learnings that will save you time in the future.

How to Conduct a Call-to-Action Test

Call-to-action split testing works pretty much the same way as landing page split testing. You create two variations of your CTA, place them on the same page and they should be displayed to visitors randomly. The goal here is to determine which call-to-action attracts the most clicks.

However, we mentioned earlier in this ebook that it is important to look for results further down in the sales funnel. This very easy to do with Kissmetrics's A/B test report. So it will be most useful to know the number of conversions each of your CTA versions drove. This result is influenced by the landing page and how well it is aligned with the call-to-action.

HubSpot's call-to-action module enables you to quickly build A/B tests and drill down to the data that matters the most to your organization. For instance, you might look at the views-to-click rate in an effort to optimize the call-to-action, but if your click-to-submission rate is surprisingly low, then the problem might lie with the landing page. That is why, ultimately, you want to be keeping an eye on your view-to-submission rate and try to optimize that.

Remember that you should be running only one A/B test at a time, so don't try to optimize both the call-to-action and the landing page simultaneously. Make changes to one variable at a time so that you understand which element triggered the results you are seeing.

How to Conduct a Email Test

Most email providers automate the split testing process and enable you to compare different elements about your email. They randomize the list of recipients into two or more groups (you need to ensure the groups are big enough to give you a statistically significant result) and associate each email variation to each of the groups.

HubSpot, for instance, splits your email campaign to help you find out the best subject line and time of day to send an email. The great thing about a tool like this is that it can send the winner to the remainder of your group. This is a fantastic way to optimize your list and deliver the message that attracts the most attention.

HubSpot and most standard email providers enable you to pick a winner based on either open rate or click through rate. However, you also want to see which email is bringing in the most conversions. In other words, identify which variation, combined with the right landing page, delivers the best results. For this type of reporting you need to integrate your email marketing to marketing analytics.

# CONCLUSION AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

A/B testing gives you the opportunity to maximize conversion rates, solve problems, and challenge your assumptions. More importantly, A/B testing will significantly increase the knowledge base of your company by allowing you to determine a set of optimized practices to boost your overall ROI.

In this ebook we covered the foundations of A/B testing, walking you through processes that can improve the performance of your landing pages, calls-to-action and email campaigns. You now know how to conduct split testing and what variables to isolate. You also know where to start and what to spend the least time on.

Now, start keeping track of the tests your running with the complimentary A/B test track and test for significance with the Significance Test Calculator featured in this kit as well.

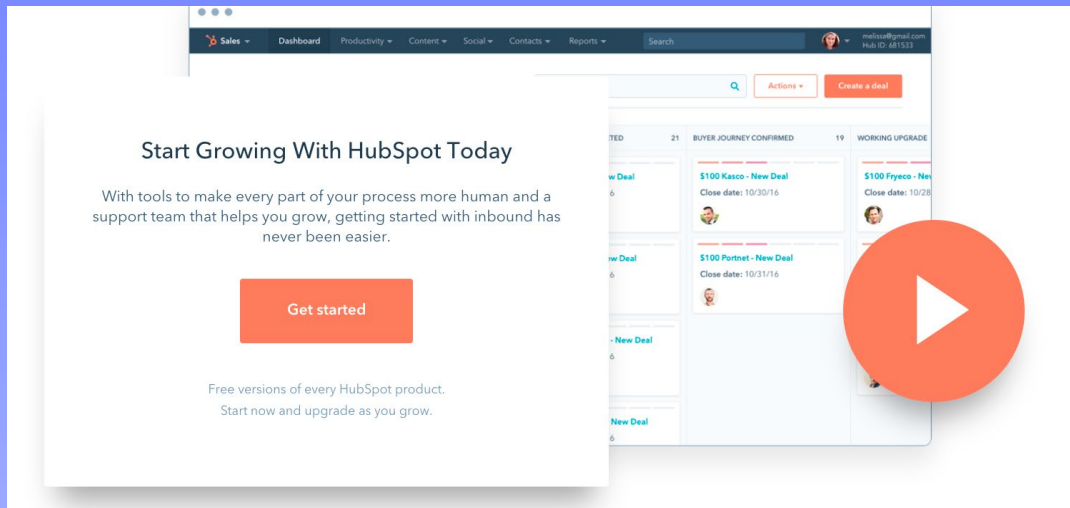Look for tools to help you improve your marketing, run A/B tests, and more?

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+
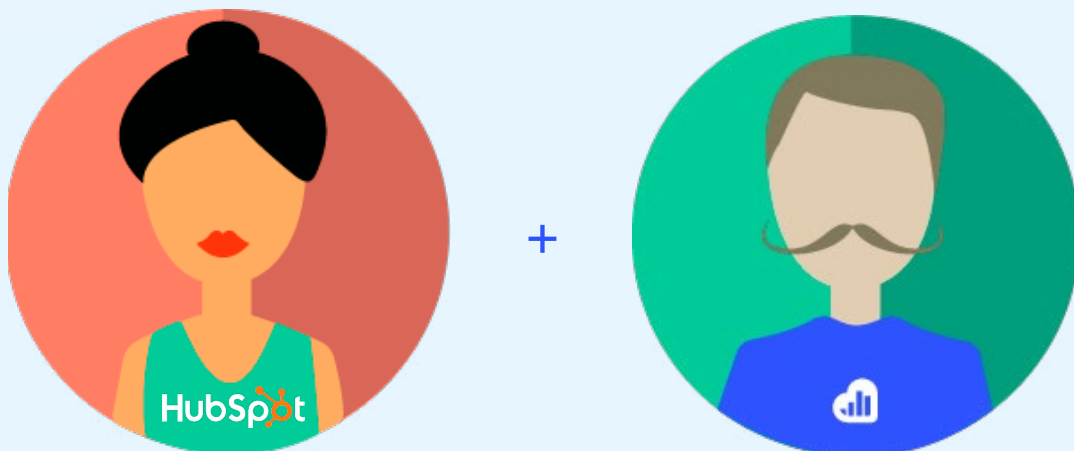
HubSpot

THE HUBSPOT GROWTH STACK

With HubSpot's marketing, sales, and CRM software, you can focus on generating leads and revenue and forget about managing a stack of scattered tools. Includes A/B testing, landing page optimization, SEO, and more.

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KISSMETRICS CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT AUTOMATION

Understand what people are doing on your website and products, and deliver behavior-based engagement every step of the way.

Populations
Segment your users with populations

Campaigns
Engage users based on their behavior

Analyze
Deeply understand customer behavior