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**Message Testing can be Surprisingly Simple®
and Still Say a Lot**

Summary

A/B Split Testing is a method that can be utilized to determine what customers think without having to send them a formal survey or perform an expensive focus group. In this paper, methods of doing simple A/B Split Testing are discussed with an eye towards leveraging technology as an enabler of the technique.

Every Customer Counts and has Something to Tell You

In healthcare marketing, a Healthcare Professional's explicit opt-in to receive communication is invaluable. This information signifies trust in a product, a brand, and even an entire company. It is not something to be taken for granted.

If you have managed to build or are just starting to build a database of HCP (Healthcare Provider) contacts that are interested to hear what you have to say, what new products you have to offer, what product promotions you might be running, what trade shows you'll be attending, or what webinars you are conducting, you owe it to those professionals to take them seriously. Taking them seriously means you do what you can to avoid wasting their time with emails that don't make them smarter, promotions that aren't relevant, or product offerings that are too confusing for even a doctor to make sense of.

One technique that can really help prevent making mistakes with your target audience is the judicious use of what is known as A/B Split Testing. A/B Split Message Testing can be defined as a method of marketing testing by which a baseline control message is compared to multiple single-variable test messages with an objective of increasing the rate of response. The basic idea behind A/B Split Testing is as follows:

1. Define something you want to test for in a marketing message (e.g. price, language, promotional offering, etc).
2. Create multiple copies of a marketing message where you only change the part of the message you are testing for. These copies are typically referred by name as A, B, C, etc.
3. Define a different random segment of a population to receive each message variation.
4. Send the messages to each of your defined segments.
5. Analyze the results side-by-side.

Even simple testing done in this way can yield useful results. Simple A/B testing can allow you to optimize things like link placement in emails or on websites, pricing and discount offers, color and font choices, tone of voice, and product naming. It can mean the difference between causing large members of your interested population to opt-out, and driving substantial revenue for the business.

In some cases marketers will spend a non-trivial amount of capital on consuming research studies that attempt to determine the proper messaging choices. Sometimes this approach is the right one, but in most cases marketers would prefer to have information in days not months, and they would prefer to have this information at a fraction of the cost.

Driving Marketing Programs Base on Real-Time Insights...

Modern technology can make A/B message testing quick and easy. In some cases it can even be Surprisingly Simple®. You can do it with almost any marketing tool that gives you the ability to randomly sample test populations from focused market segments using personalized messaging and compare the results side by side in real time.

To get some insight into how something like this might be accomplished, let's consider a pharmaceutical company that has developed a new type of drug designed to slow the progression of Alzheimer's Disease. Clinical trials have shown a wide range of symptom improvements it is capable of providing - critically improving the health and quality of a person's life. Let's call this fictitious drug Alzenda.

Now let's assume that this pharmaceutical company has a history of releasing quality drugs in the past, and they have a considerable database of doctors and hospitals who have opted-in to receive communication from them. Getting the strategy and the messaging right around the launch of this new drug is critical.

One thing this company might want to do, as a component of their launch campaigns, would be to send out email communications to doctors who work at hospitals and that specialize in Neurology, Geriatric Psychiatry, and Geriatrics. Let's say one of the strategic components of their launch campaign is centered around drug performance. In particular, it is centered around a set of 10 possible symptoms Alzenda is able to treat related to Alzheimer's. Based on data from the clinical trials for Alzenda done against 12,000 test subjects in age ranges from 60-95 across men and women, we might know that improvements in each of these symptoms could be found according to the data in the following tables:

Symptom	Before	After	Change	
	# placebo	# placebo	#	%
Memory loss that disrupts daily life	3,769	3,581	-188	-5%
Challenges in planning or solving problems	4,395	4,193	-202	-5%
Difficulty completing familiar tasks	5,409	5,097	-312	-6%
Confusion with time or place	4,826	4,910	84	2%
Trouble with images and spatial relationships	5,143	4,806	-337	-7%
Problems speaking and writing	4,249	4,174	-75	-2%
Misplacing things / inability to retrace steps	4,232	3,979	-253	-6%
Decreased / Poor Judgment	5,198	4,846	-352	-7%
Withdrawal from work or social activities	4,203	3,929	-274	-7%
Changes in mood and personality	4,699	4,608	-92	-2%
Average Change			-200	-4%

Figure 1: Alzenda Clinical Results Placebo Group

Symptom	Before	After	Change	
	# treatment	# treatment	#	%
Memory loss that disrupts daily life	4,478	4,031	-447	-10%
Challenges in planning or solving problems	4,612	3,466	-1146	-25%
Difficulty completing familiar tasks	5,461	3,289	-2172	-40%
Confusion with time or place	5,739	4,736	-1003	-17%
Trouble with images and spatial relationships	4,646	3,674	-972	-21%
Problems speaking and writing	4,218	3,587	-631	-15%
Misplacing things / inability to retrace steps	5,195	4,240	-955	-18%
Decreased / Poor Judgment	4,803	3,178	-1625	-34%
Withdrawal from work or social activities	5,169	3,933	-1236	-24%
Changes in mood and personality	4,346	3,063	-1283	-30%
Average Change			-1132	-23%

Figure 2: Alzenda Clinical Results Treatment Group

It is easy to see from these fictitious results that Alzenda results in an average reduction of symptoms of 23%. What is not so easy, however, is figuring out which particular symptoms are most relevant to discuss with potential HCPs. Is it the symptoms that are most reduced that will resonate the strongest? Does particular symptom reduction not matter at all, and instead it is the symptoms the doctors see most often in their patients that matters? Is there a particular set of symptoms that, when mentioned together, really trigger a patient's HCP to want to learn more? Does discussing all symptoms at once vs. a particular subset of symptoms work better?

This is where running side by side A/B messaging tests can provide insight on an optimal course of action. Let's assume we wanted to perform a quick messaging study to answer the question: "Which subset of symptoms resonates best with potential HCPs?" Answering this kind of question could really benefit from performing an Adaptive Conjoint Analysis study. Realistically, however, that type of study can be time consuming for participants, and might require more time to gather decent results. Using ACA might be a better second step in the research process once we know whether or not this question matters at all, and we need more clarifying information to proceed.

To get a quick answer to this question, however, it should be possible to pick the top set of obvious hypotheses, and test those out with email messages. We can break up the top set of obvious groupings using the following guidelines:

- A: The set of symptoms with the best improvement in the treatment group
- B: The set of symptoms with the worst improvement in the treatment group
- C: The set of symptoms including the middle range of improvement

Based on these guidelines, we can craft an A/B/C messaging test where we put together similar variations of the same email message inviting participants to register to win some kind of promotional offering for learning more about Alzenda. Each email will vary only by the set of

symptoms we want to highlight. Based on the guidelines above, we would create A/B/C emails with the following message content differences:

Group	Symptoms Discussed	Improvement
A	Difficulty completing familiar tasks	40%
	Decreased / Poor Judgment	34%
	Changes in mood and personality	30%
B	Confusion with time or place	17%
	Problems speaking and writing	15%
	Memory loss that disrupts daily life	10%
C	Challenges in planning or solving problems	25%
	Withdrawal from work or social activities	24%
	Trouble with images and spatial relationships	21%
	Misplacing things / inability to retrace steps	18%

Figure 3: Symptom Based Messaging Groups

Getting these different test messages loaded and finding the right random samples of people to send to should be straightforward using a quality marketing management tool. After sending out the sample messages to prospective HCPs we can then analyze the results. Ideally the tool you're using will allow you to view these results easily in a side by side fashion letting you see how the recipients interacted with the message. At a minimum, however, it should be possible to generate an A/B/C comparison report that looks something like the following:

Group	Open Rate	Click-Through Rate	Opt-Out Rate
A	65%	39%	4%
B	44%	4%	3%
C	57%	8%	6%

Figure 4: Comparing Messaging Test Results

Using this report as a guide, we can see clearly that the messaging in group A was more effective than in groups B or C. We also see that there appears to be a direct correlation between the total percentage improvement and how interested the recipient was to learn more. Because all three messages contained identical information otherwise, and they all included the same call to action for the same prize, it is fairly reasonable to conclude that discussing the particular symptoms from group A is optimal.

What is more important about this conclusion, however, is the fact that each of these sample mails was sent to only a sub-set of the intended population, maybe 3,000 total HCPs at 1,000 in each group. Performing this smaller study provides justification for sending out the group A messaging to a much wider audience because it is most likely to drive the best awareness for Alzenda, and ultimately aid in driving high revenue for the company.

Conclusion

In the example provided in this paper, we discussed testing for a single variable in outbound messaging to attempt to determine which set of language would be most effective. Utilizing an A/B Split Testing technique like this can be a valuable marketing tool for uncovering all kinds of information about a market segment and to optimize marketing campaigns in a minimally invasive and cost effective manner.

For help getting started with tools for deploying A/B Split testing in your organization, give Appature a call at 206-493-5450 or visit us online at <http://www.appatureinc.com/contact> to set up a free consultation.

About the Author

Christopher Hahn is the co-founder and Chief Technology Officer of Appature, Inc. He has over 14 years of experience architecting, managing, and developing both hardware and software applications. He has worked on problems ranging from 3D Graphics acceleration at ATI Research to digital inking and the Windows shell in Microsoft's Windows division. Passionate about technical architecture, building scalable web applications, and solving challenging business problems, he is responsible for driving all of Appature's applications to meet the stringent demands of healthcare marketers around the world.

About Appature

Appature, Inc. provides Surprisingly Simple® Web-based marketing solutions designed exclusively for healthcare companies. At Appature, we integrate multiple data sources to make your customer information actionable while providing a platform to launch our marketing applications — or for you to optimize your own. Our solutions allow organizations to quickly gain new customer insights and create programs to deepen brand relationships and drive greater sales growth. Leaders in the pharmaceutical, medical device, and health and wellness industries rely on Appature to realize the true potential of their marketing efforts.

For More Information

Learn more by calling us at 206-493-5450, or visiting us at <http://www.appatureinc.com/contact> to set up a free consultation.

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