

innervate

BEYOND BASIC CREATIVE TESTING

•
A Proven Framework for Perpetual
Digital Creative Optimization



The question isn't if you should be testing digital creative, but how.

There's no shortage of advice on why you should test and the benefits you'll reap, but things get less clear when it comes to how to actually go about it. While you've probably heard terms like iterative testing and concept testing, how do you use these methods? Do you stick with just one, or use both – and if both, how? How do you prioritize and order your tests so they're both efficient and effective?

Whether testing and optimization is engrained in your team's DNA, or whether you're just starting to build your organization's testing capabilities, this guide will provide a high level overview of how different testing methods can be incorporated into your digital marketing efforts in a way that identifies and optimizes high performing creative.

CONCEPT TESTING

Practically speaking, concepts are creatives that are visually distinctive enough to look different from five paces away from a screen. More scientifically, different creative concepts should pass the ‘change blindness test,’ meaning that viewers are likely to notice strong visual differences when compared.

Although concepts are by definition drastically different in look and feel from one another, it’s important to note just what makes each execution different. There are two main components at play in developing any new concept: Messaging and Visual Design.

MESSAGING

Messaging in this context does not refer to specific copy, but rather a larger holistic idea. This type of messaging conveys a fundamental offering or over-arching strategy that can be conveyed using a wide variety of copy and illustration combinations. Essentially, it is the key takeaway the audience obtains from experiencing the creative. Messaging is typically meant to last a long time and transcend multiple campaigns. The messaging to the right for a fictitious retailer is designed to get customers into a store to make a shoe purchase - however a variety of methods have been used to achieve the ultimate message.

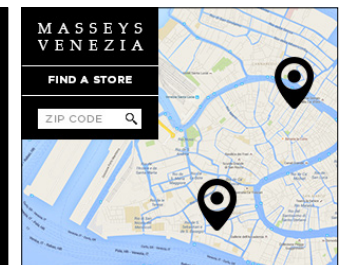
Examples of messaging approaches:

- Retargeting price discount
- Finding a store
- Offering new merchandise
- Sharing product specifics
- Radically simplifying messaging
- “Soft-selling” the product with an emotional human connection

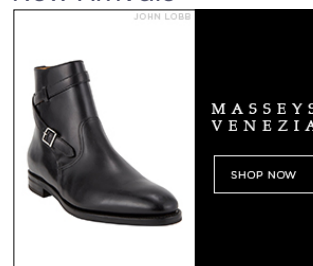
Save 15%



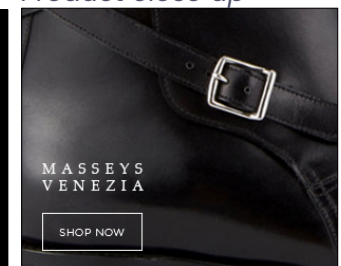
Find a store



New Arrivals



Product close up



Radical simplicity

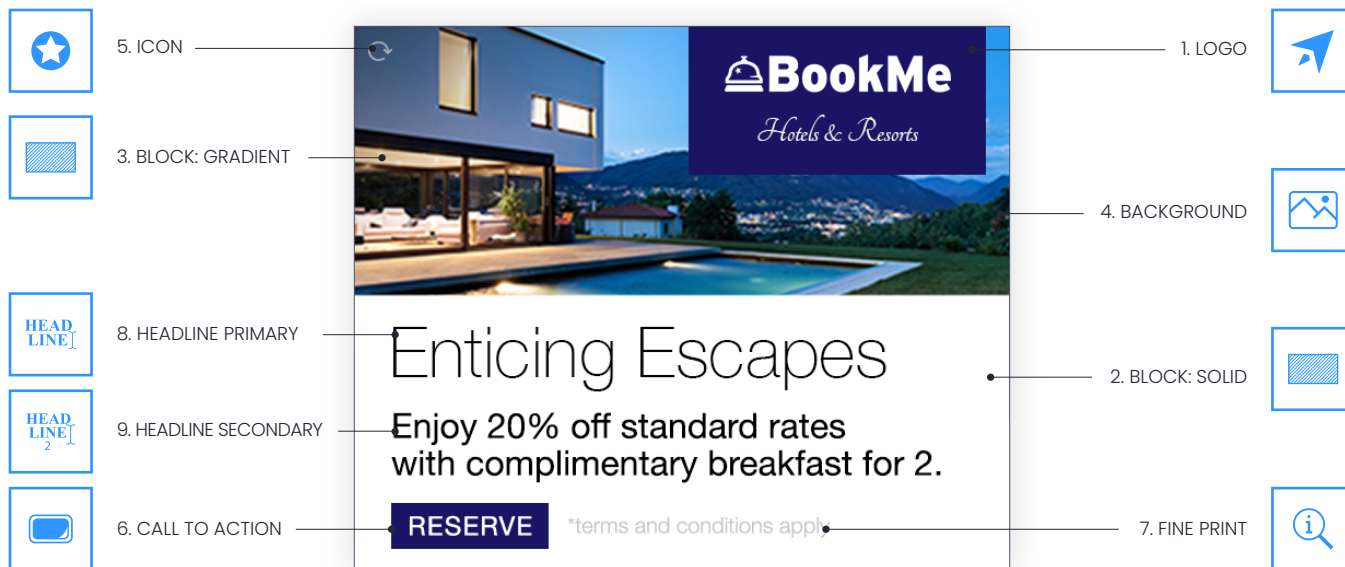


Model/Soft sell



VISUAL DESIGN

Unlike messaging or themes, visual layouts are purely visual constructs, or “archetypes” of a creative type. Looking past specific copy, images and animation, creatives have a certain distinct structure.



Possible layout examples include:

- Carousel
- Heavy Copy
- Heavy Graphics (Primary Headline)
- Interactive Games
- Mini-Site and other Rich-Media
- Multi-Choice (promoting several products)
- Multi-Element / Multi-Image (Features)
- Multi-Frame Story
- No Graphics (Very Simple)
- Personalization (using retargeting data or directed to the user’s geo)
- Price-Forward (Putting the prices or sale or comparison as the primary element)

In practice, we find it helpful to think of concepts as a matrix of **visual design and messaging**:

		PRIMARY MESSAGING		
		Message 1	Message 2	Message 3
VISUAL LAYOUTS	Layout A	Concept A.1	Concept A.2	Concept A.3
	Layout B	Concept B.1	Concept B.2	Concept B.3
	Layout C	Concept C.1	Concept C.2	Concept C.3
	Layout D	Concept D.1	Concept D.2	Concept D.3

EXAMPLE – MESSAGE 1: PRODUCT-FOCUSED MESSAGING

A concept is the intersection of messaging and visual layouts, below are a few different concepts within the theme of showcasing the appeal of the product (e.g., boots).



MORE ON CHANGE BLINDNESS

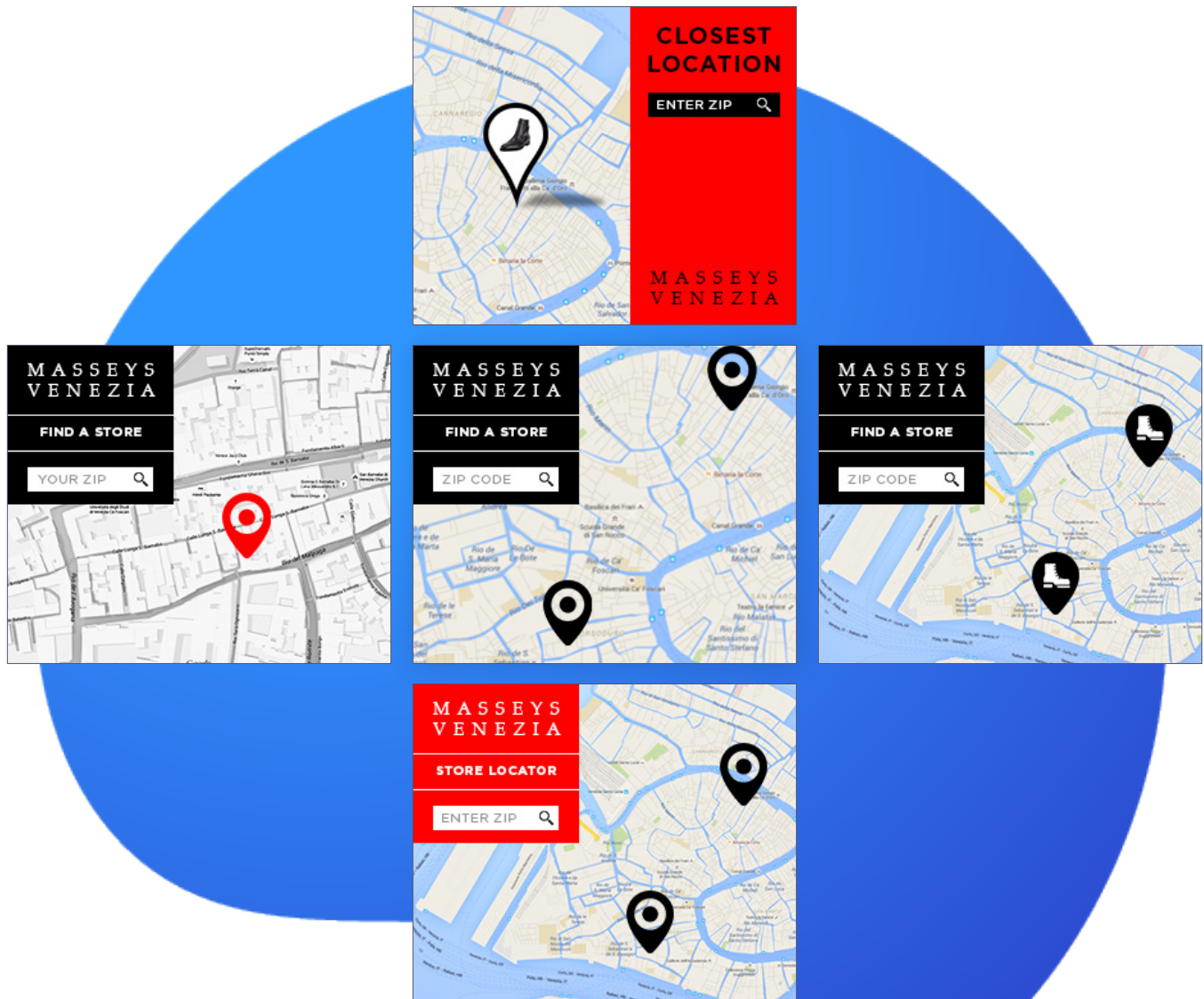
Scientists have determined that the world we think we see is largely a scene made up by our brains. Our conscious or subconscious attention directs the eyes to focus on parts of the world that we deem important, and the brain fills in the rest. This leads to a phenomenon that scientists call “change blindness”.

If something occurs outside the focus on our attention, we sometimes don't see it because the brain simply fills in what it was expecting to see. This is important to marketers as it dictates what customers may, or may not, see when you are testing large vs small creative changes.

ITERATIVE TESTING

An iteration involves a set of different assets presented in the same concept. With iterative testing, the messaging and layout remain unchanged while the smaller, more subtle aspects of the content are adjusted. Think of dividing up your creatives into spaces that you'll always need – like calls-to-action, background images, buttons, and copy. Where they are in the concept stays the same, but what's contained within them can be changed and tested.

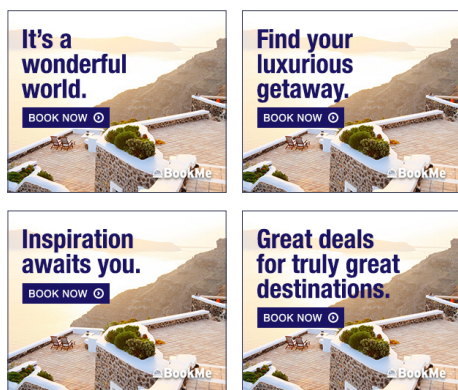
As opposed to concept testing, the iterative versions may not necessarily pass the change blindness test. Have a look below for examples of how to iteratively test from a single concept.



EXAMPLE IDEAS FOR ITERATIVE TESTING

**Role: Background
Adjustment: Imagery**

Your background image is the base layer for your creative. It could be an image, for example, a landscape or the product itself, or it could be as simple as a single color. Swapping out images, even when visually similar, can have a major effect on generating initial attention.

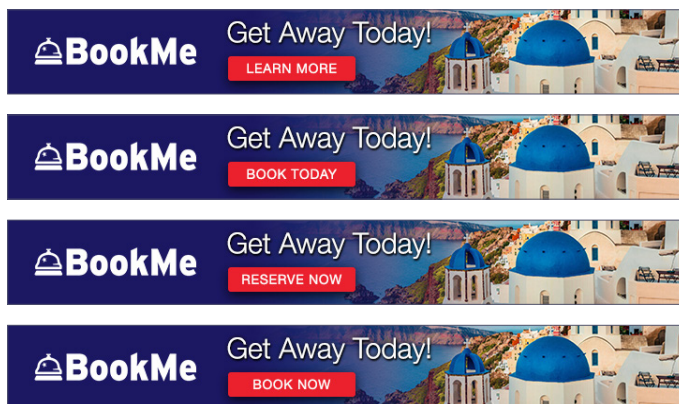


**Role: Headline
Adjustment: Copy**

The Headline is the central text in the content. It's also typically the phrase in the largest font. Given the sometimes extremely limited real estate of digital creative, the few words available for a headline and/or tagline must be selected carefully. Take the opportunity to test all the different headlines you've considered for a campaign to see which generates lift.

**Role: Call To Action
Adjustment: Copy**

The call to action is the action desired from the viewer, for example "Click here" or "Shop Now." Even if you're hoping to get the user to take the same action, the words you use in a call-to-action can make a big difference. Experiment with introducing urgency and framing the call-to-action in a different context.

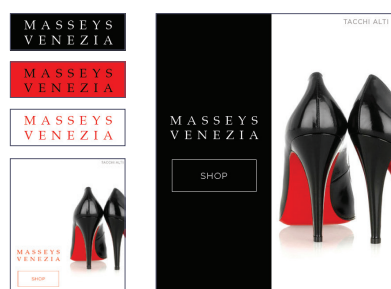


**Role: Call To Action
Adjustment: Button Appearance**

Testing buttons is often one of the first things that comes to mind when you talk about A/B testing. Even little tweaks like button color, size, or placement can cause a lift in clicks and conversions.

Roles: Headlines & CTA
Adjustment: Fonts & Colors

Even within brand guidelines, experimenting with color combinations, size of text, and approved fonts can change the look of the creative and create new opportunities to catch potential customers eyes.

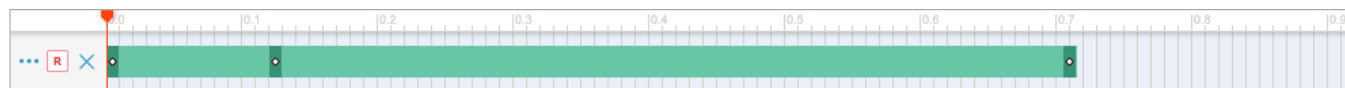


Role: Logo
Adjustment: Placement, Size and Color

Your logo is the brand’s identity within the creative. While you want your brand to be recognizable and you have standards to adhere to, experimenting with different logo treatments or brand representations has been demonstrated to be effective. Changing logo placement, size or color are good starting points.

Role: Any
Adjustment: Animation

Animation is motion or action within the creative. This could be as simple as sliding in text from the side or as complex as video interaction. Sometimes a simple animation can make a big difference. Introduce animations and test animated versions against static versions. If you’re already using animation, test the length or details of the animation. You can also try testing animations of different elements.



Role: Background, Primary Graphic, Headline
Adjustment: Dynamic Personalization

A primary graphic is the main image in a creative, where that role is not served by the background image. In this case we’ll use that image to introduce elements that change based on real-time user data like location, current weather, or experiment with highlighting different products.

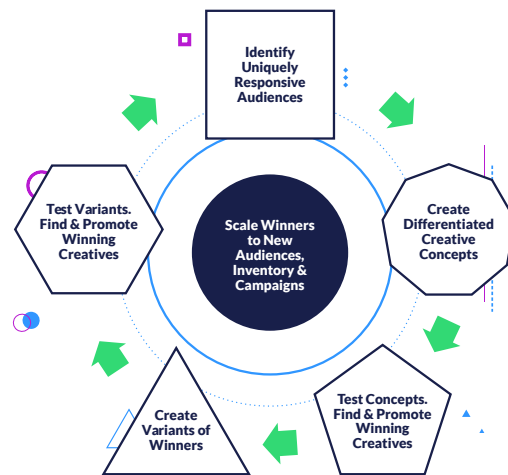


BLENDING CONCEPT AND ITERATIVE TESTING TO PIVOT

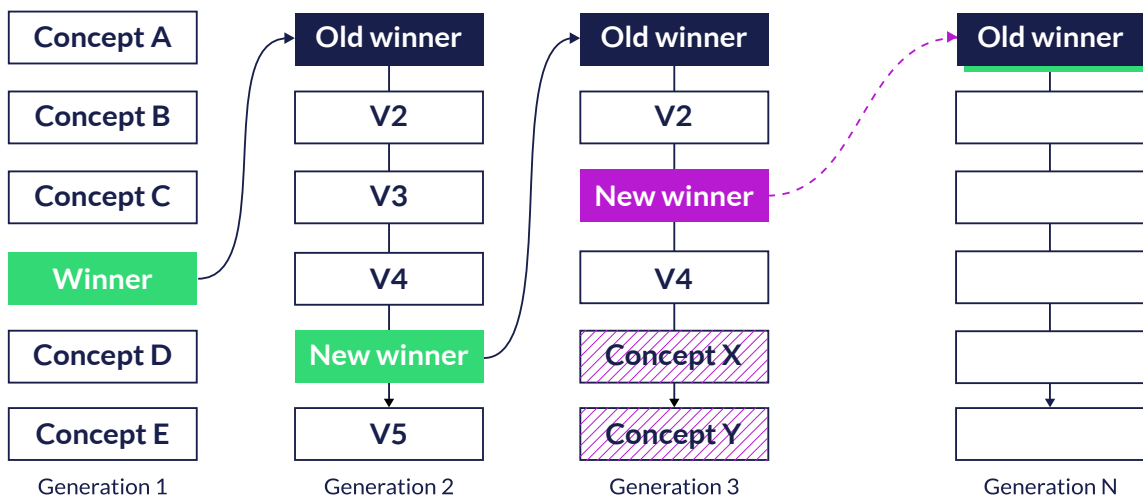
Innervate follows the perpetual, iterative, velocity-oriented testing method, or PIVOT, which uses a combination of concept and iterative testing. PIVOT requires a framework to organize the iterations and to prioritize the order in which they should be tested, and the various types of iterations should be organized in a common Iteration Testing Planner, which should provide guidance on what to test next.

Tests are typically rank-ordered based on results of prior tests, which are maintained in the library. Both creative concept and iterative testing should be blended seamlessly into a single always-on experiment, illustrated below.

- For any given audience, you should create new, differentiated creative concepts
- Once you find a winner, take that as the seed of the next generation of iterative testing
- Test different iterations of the winner
- While you're iterating on your first winner, develop new concepts



From the perspective of a single test-group, this blend of concept and iterative testing looks like this:



Using the PIVOT method, you'll never need to waste marketing spend on 'good enough' content. Rather you'll be continuously finding and serving the best performing creative based on feedback via engagement data.

GETTING READY TO PIVOT

Ready to start PIVOTing?

Before you evolve your testing process to include PIVOT, you'll want to support the process with the following foundational solutions:

- A digital asset library that goes beyond creative versions. It should contain collections of different content 'building blocks', such as buttons, background images, logos, etc....so that iterations can quickly be picked, pulled, and added in.
- If your current testing process is relatively simple or you don't have one in place yet, now would be the ideal time to start thinking about what metrics should define your 'winning' creatives. Keep in mind there are likely several different metrics to track tied to customer audience segments, buyer stages, etc.
- Part of your marketing techstack should provide the capability to track and store testing results for concept, iterative, and blended testing. Keep in mind that you may need flexibility to set custom success metrics depending on your organization's goals for digital marketing.

Once these are in place, you're well on your way to setting the stage for perpetual, iterative, high-velocity (not to mention high efficacy) testing.



**For more information on the PIVOT methodology,
contact us at info@Innervate.com
or visit www.Innervate.com to learn more.**