

SeaWorld Case Study

The SeaWorld Experience

SeaWorld is a chain of marine mammal parks, animal theme parks, water parks, and rehabilitation centers across the United States with a diverse customer base. The website has a massive rotation of park events, promotions, rides, and attractions—all of which need to be featured on the site without creating friction on the path to purchase.

To better understand its customers and identify the most optimal way to present content or map a buyer journey, SeaWorld launched its own optimization team. However, the team needed help in its infancy to form a robust optimization program, which led them to partner with Blue Acorn iCi and leverage the Optimizely platform.





"When on-site with a client, we want to form a strategic partnership and bring to light other ways we can help the client. We have a depth of analytical understanding that goes far past optimization—A/B testing is only one tool in our chest that we can provide the client."

Jared Hellman, Director of Insights and UX



At the beginning of the partnership, SeaWorld was in the early stages of replatforming its ecommerce site. Initially, as part of the replatforming, Blue Acorn iCi's optimization team worked on UX validation and customizing the CMS for each of its seven different park sites. SeaWorld has a digital team at each of its seven parks, causing a lack of change management. The optimization team's aimed to standardize the CMS process for mapping a customer journey, including product merchandising, descriptions, images, and pricing.

SeaWorld's headquarters are in Orlando, FL, but Blue Acorn iCi's team is dedicated to making sure they are accessible as if they are right down the road. The Blue Acorn iCi team initially visited SeaWorld at the start of the partnership and continue to visit the office. During the initial on-site visit, Blue Acorn iCi set out to accomplish three things: (1) understand SeaWorld's overall KPIs and business objectives, (2) align the testing themes with those objectives, and (3) determine individual hypothesis for each theme.



SeaWorld Entertainment reported a 4.8 percent increase in second-quarter attendance to 6.4 million people. Revenue rose 4.9 percent to \$392 million, and the company reported a profit of \$23 million a year after losing \$176 million.

A Multivariate Test to Improve Digital Ticket Purchases and Downloads

The park's digital team aims to create products that are compelling to a wide range of customers: single park visitors, water park visitors, annual pass shoppers, hotel packages, and international visitors. Users can purchase and download tickets and passes via SeaWorld's site and add the digital ticket to their mobile wallet. However, crafting a seamless user experience for each of these types of customers can be challenging. Adding another layer to the complexity of this user experience is accessibility. Visitors come from a wide range of demographics including non-English speaking visitors along with the elderly. Communicating the ease of online ticket purchases and redeeming the tickets through digital download can be problematic.

To help improve digital ticket purchase conversion rates, Blue Acorn iCi used a multivariate test to specifically experiment the variations of the user experience for the medallion and ticket drawer. The ticket drawer is similar to a drop-down menu that lives on the homepage.

During the on-site business reviews, Blue Acorn iCi aligns future experiments with objectives and KPIs. More tactically, the team collaborates with the broader cross-functional teams within the company. Most of the communication is through the brand or retailer's project sponsor. However, these ongoing on-sites allow the team to have a roundtable discussion with people who normally wouldn't be involved in the process. This can be very helpful to get a full understanding of each function's goals as they relate to customer experience.

The optimization team has been able to adapt their service model to evolve with SeaWorld's changing needs. "Whether it's running an experimentation program, creating a style guide for its new site, or helping augment analytics, we are always able to provide value and reinforce its digital team," adds Hellman.



Variation 1

With any hypothesis, there are three key elements to include: the change, the effect, and the reason.

The Change:

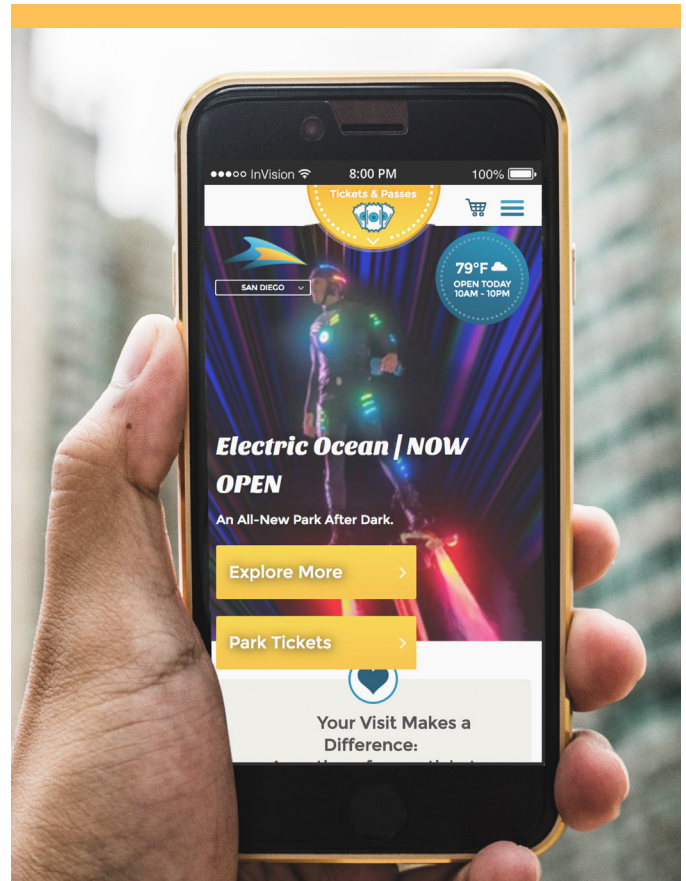
For consumers shopping within the ticket drawer, providing a well-ordered menu for locating appropriate product pages

The Effect:

Will lead to greater Add to Carts and conversion rate

The Reason:

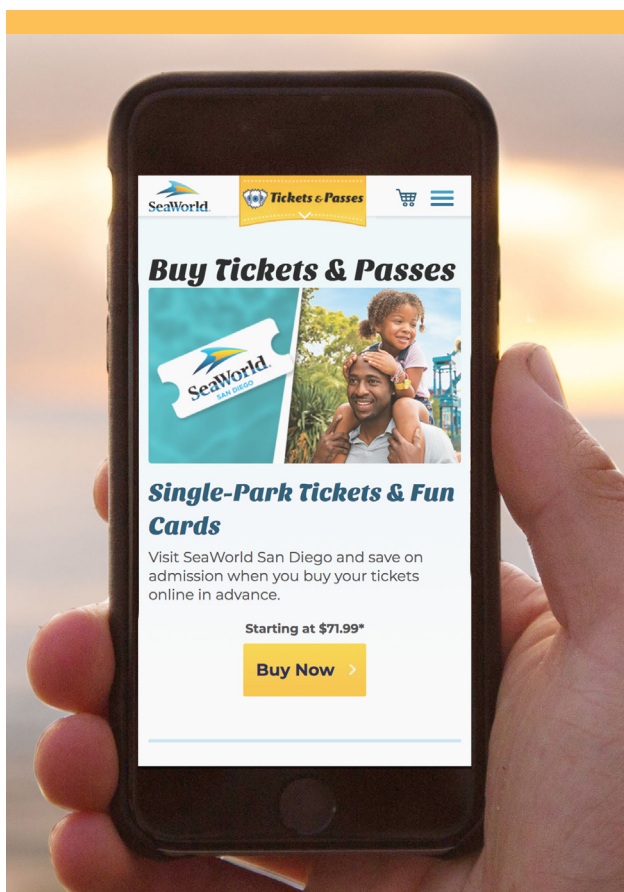
Because there's a more intuitive path to discovering and selecting products

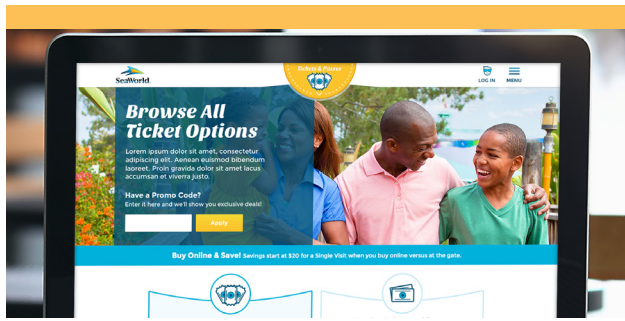


Variation 2

Customers entered the testing experience when they visited a page with a ticket medallion on the SeaWorld San Diego site. Each customer had an equal chance (33 percent chance each) of being in the Control, Variation 1, or Variation 2 group.

There were zero changes to the ticket drawer Control experience. Variation 1 redesigned the ticket drawer and allowed users to filter down their ticket selection. Variation 2 took the customers directly to the Ticket Page once they clicked on the medallion.





Data from this multivariate test showed a clear winner between Variation 1 and Variation 2 across both desktop and mobile. Results suggested that users who interacted with the ticket medallion find it more useful when they can filter down their selection.

Results:

Mobile users who experienced this variation outperformed both the Control and Variation 2 with a 4.7% lift in Conversion Rate, a 5.92% lift in RPV, and a 1.11% lift in Start Check-out rate. Similarly, desktop results showed a 2.74% lift in Conversion Rate, a 3.83% lift in RPV, and a 0.43% lift in Start Checkout rate.



Mobile

Conversion

+4.7%

RPV

+5.9%

Start Checkout

+1.1%



Desktop

Conversion

+2.7%

RPV

+3.8%

Start Checkout

+0.4%

