



BEYOND BEST PRACTICES

What seven organizations learned about converting more donors on their web donation forms

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SUMMARY

We've all heard that it's easier to convert an existing supporter than to go out and find a new one.

So, we're constantly amazed by how much money is spent on marketing programs aimed at attracting incremental supporter traffic to nonprofit organization websites, while so little is spent working to improve the user experience for existing audiences on donation landing pages to increase conversion.

In our experience, a typical web donation page that has never been tested converts less than 15 percent of the visitors that reach it. Consequently, form optimization remains a tremendous revenue opportunity for many nonprofit organizations at minimal cost.

If you're like most fundraisers, you want to figure out how to persuade more people to actually make a donation when they reach your donation landing pages.

What our latest research has found is that there's no single set of changes to a donation form — horizontal or vertical gift string, one-column or two-column form field layout — that's guaranteed to work for every organization. We did find out which elements on donation forms most influence donor "conversions," and that can make your testing faster and cheaper, just in time for the all-important year-end giving season.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

This paper examines our recent multivariate testing work with 7 "power users" of Convio's fundraising software. Participants were large U.S. nonprofit organizations in the environmental, animal welfare, international development and health sectors.

The project goals were to:

- 1. Identify donation form best practices if they exist that improve conversion rates across organizations.
- 2. Help participants raise more money online through donation page optimization.
- 3. Provide insights to the Convio product development team as it continuously works to enhance standard donation forms.

Because we sought to identify best practices on donation forms across organizations, we didn't test page elements that are highly brand, mission or audience-specific, e.g. marketing offers, gift string values, photos, color palettes, graphics, copy, premiums, etc. While these creative elements can have a big impact on form conversion rates, they're best tackled individually.

Variables We Selected for Testing

- » Gift String Layout: Horizontal vs. vertical
- » Column Layout: Form fields in one column vs. two columns
- » Form Length: one-page vs. two-page forms
- » Field Group Order: re-ordering contact info, payment info, gift string field groups
- » Trust Seals: placement of BBB, Charity Navigator and VeriSign seals on page

Why test these variables? We can boil it down to two key opportunities on donation forms:

- » Reduce the time or difficulty involved in completing the form
- » Reduce a donor's anxiety about the organization's credibility/effectiveness/page security

Improvement in any of these areas leads to greater form completion rates.

Target Audience

Our multivariate donation page tests focused on optimizing high volume, general web donation pages rather than forms geared to narrower audiences (e.g. email or targeted marketing campaigns) where preferences were more likely to differ.

Our decision to focus on general web donation forms was based on the theory that the broader the audience mix, the more likely we were to find similarities in user preferences across organizations.

KEY FINDINGS

Our tests revealed marked differences from one group to the next with the same variables, and undermined the assumption that there are form best practices at the variable level — in fact they're largely elusive.

But there's a silver lining. Since many creative changes on donation forms have little to no impact on user behavior, the ability of marketers to identify the changes that matter most can save lots of time and money. On this front, we made several important discoveries.

Our results suggest the following elements meaningfully affect user behavior on most donation forms:

- » Form length: A one-page form does significantly better for most organizations.
- » Column layout: One or two columns let your audience decide.
- » Trust seals: Prominent placement above the fold matters, and more than one may help too.

Figuring out what your audience prefers requires direct testing, but we're confident you can make some breakthroughs by focusing in on these variables.

In contrast, changing gift string layouts produced material differences for some but not others, while re-arranging the field group order was not, by itself, significant for anyone.

TEST RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Columns and Gift String Layouts

Four groups tested these two variables, and results were all over the map.

Table I

Organization	Columns & Gift String Layouts	Page Conversion Improvement
PETA, I st test	Vertical Gift String, 2-column form beat Vertical Gift String, 1-column baseline form	99% chance that it's 97% better
PETA, repeat test	Vertical Gift String, 2-column form beat Vertical Gift String, 1-column baseline form	90% chance that it's 26.4% better
Leading Conservation Organization A*	Horizontal Gift String, 2-column form lost to Vertical Gift String, 1-column baseline form	95% chance that it's 20.7% worse
International Development Organization	Horizontal Gift String, I-column form beat Vertical Gift String, I-column baseline form	96% chance that it's 21.3% better
World Wildlife Fund	2 side-by-side Vertical Gift Strings, I-column form beat 2 stacked Horizontal Gift Strings, I-column baseline form	76% chance that it's 10.7% better

^{*}Unlike the other tests in this project, Conservation Org A's experiment was run with an email audience rather than a general web audience (due to traffic constraints).

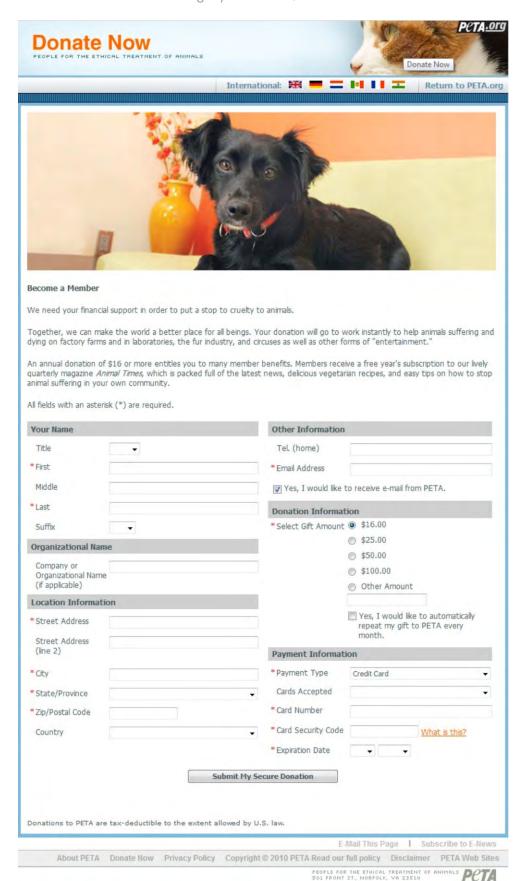
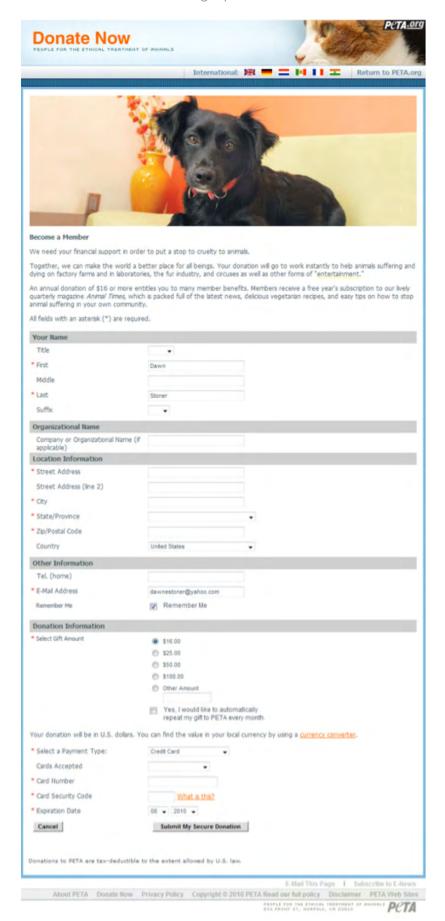


Exhibit 2: Columns & Gift String Layout Baseline, PETA



Form Length & Gift String Layouts

In these tests, results were more consistent, reinforcing our belief that one-page forms convert more donors than two-page forms:

Table 2

Organization	Form Length & Gift String Layouts	Page Conversion Improvement
National Wildlife Federation	Horizontal Gift String, I-page form beat Vertical Gift String, 2-page baseline form	99% chance that it's 109% better
American Diabetes Association	Vertical Gift String, 1-page form beat Vertical Gift String, 2-page baseline form	90% chance that it's 20.0% better
Leading Conservation Organization B	Vertical Gift String, 1-page form lost to Vertical Gift String, 2-page baseline form	77.5% chance that it's 10% worse

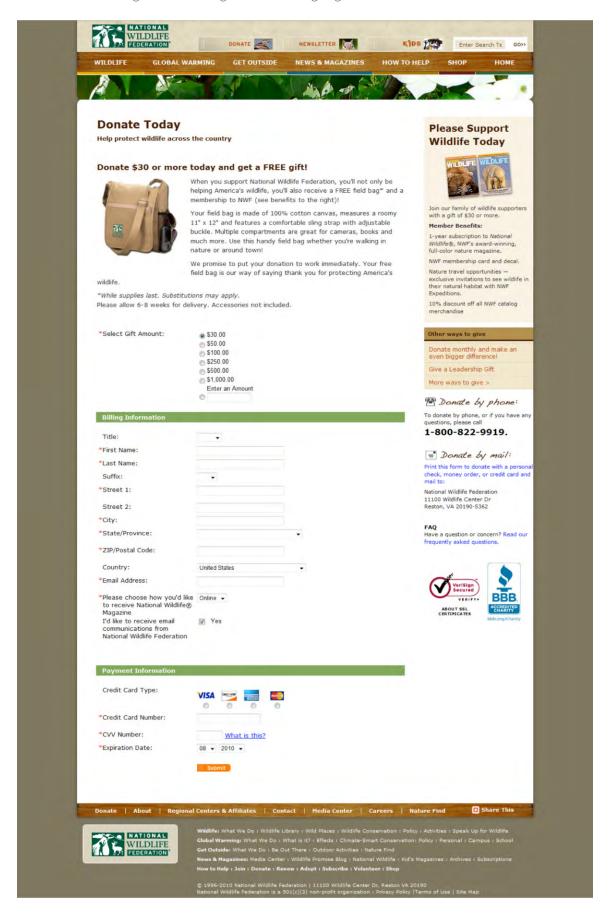
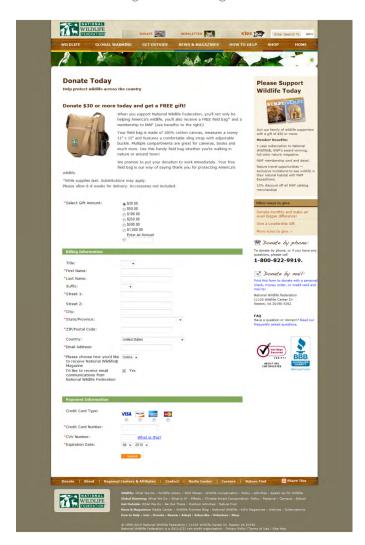


Exhibit 4: Form Length & Gift String, NWF Baseline





Trust Seals

Results in this set of experiments provided further evidence that placing trust seals (e.g. Better Business Bureau & Charity Navigator) higher on the page where more visitors will see them increases donor conversion. In one instance, two trust seals were found to be better than one.

Pages with the Verisign security logo displayed near payment field information or the donate button also performed better. Field group order changes on their own were <u>not</u> found to affect form conversion rates. Below are the significant findings:

Table 3

Organization	Trust Seals & Field Group Order	Page Conversion Improvement
International Development Organization	BBB logo added to upper right corner of page alongside Charity Navigator logo beat Baseline with Charity Nav logo in upper right corner of page and BBB logo below the fold	95% chance that it's 20% better
World Wildlife Fund	BBB and CN logo displayed in the upper right corner of the page replacing a rotating GIF image (of a premium) beat Baseline with BBB & CN logos shown below the fold and a rotating GIF image in upper right corner of page	90% chance that it's 20.0% better
	Trust Seals & Column Layout	
American Diabetes Association	2-column form, BBB & VS logos above the fold in the Payment Info section beat Baseline with I-column form, BBB & VS logos halfway down the page (below the fold) in the Payment Info section	94% chance that it's 77% better

Exhibit 5: Trust Seals & Field Group Order, World Wildlife Fund Winning Page

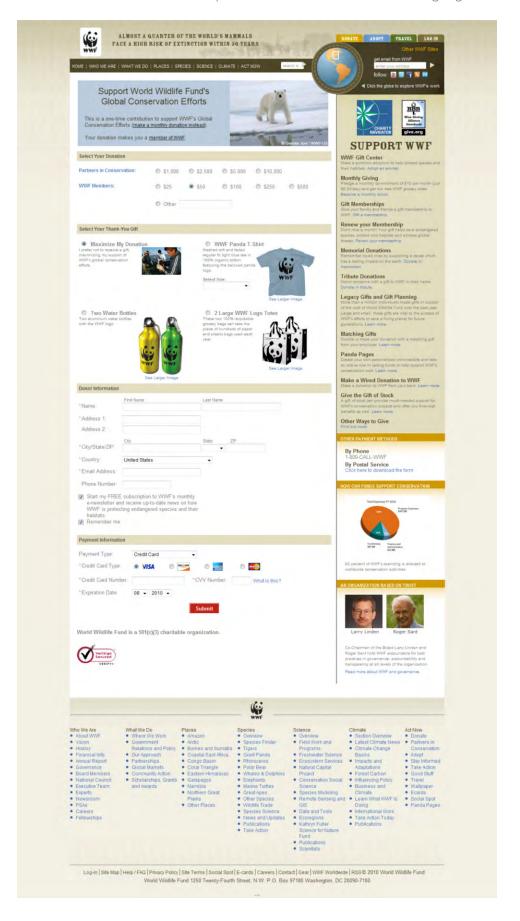


Exhibit 6: Trust Seals & Field Group Order, World Wildlife Fund Baseline Page

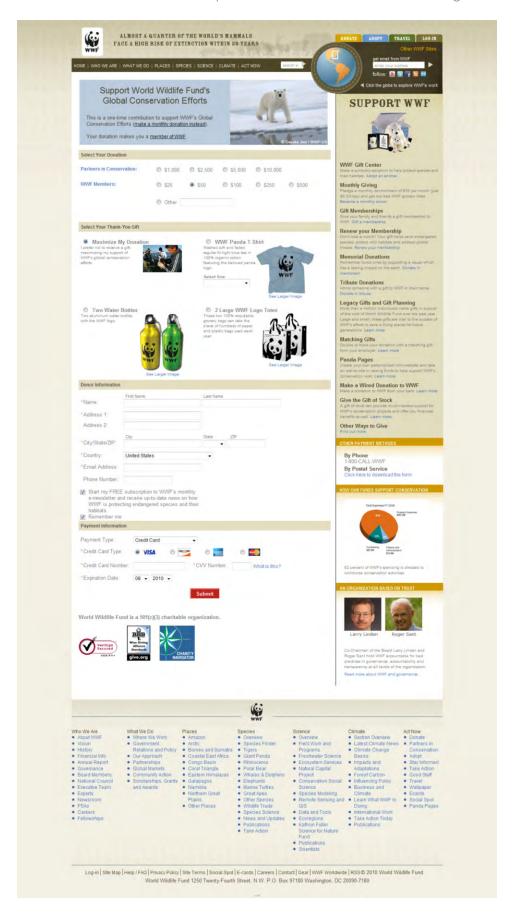


Exhibit 7: Trust Seals & Column Layout, ADA Winning Page

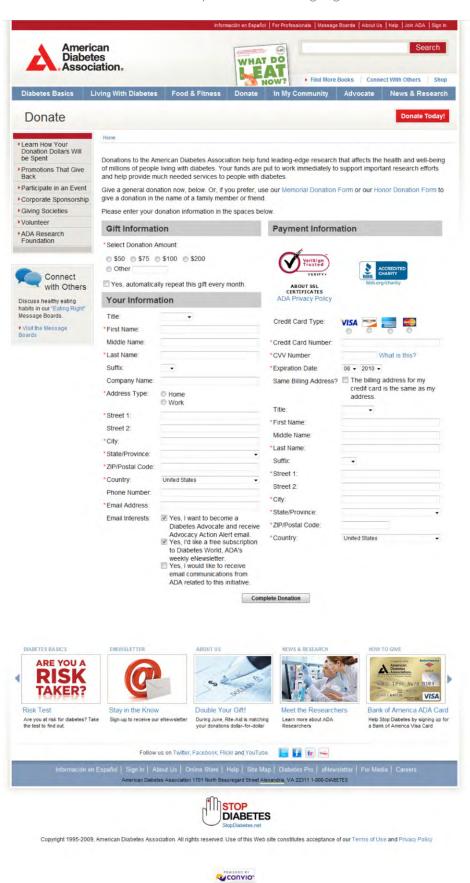
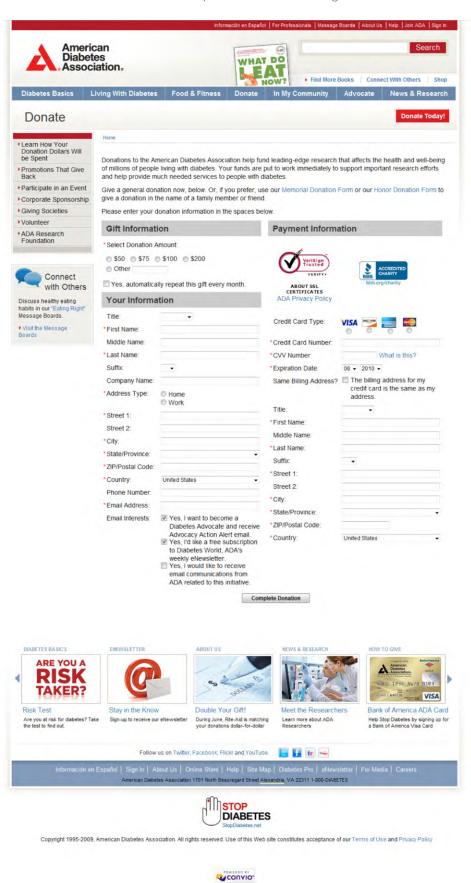


Exhibit 8: Trust Seals & Column Layout, ADA Baseline Page



UNDERSTANDING THE RESULTS

Our tests revealed that no single approach works on every donation form. That's likely because creative changes on a page (such as switching form fields to display in 2-columns instead of 1-column) aren't tested in isolation — a web user experiences that change within the context of the overall page creative. How a single change fits into this broader context is not the same from one organization's donation page to the next. Consequently, how a user perceives it may not be the same.

Moreover, we've noticed from our testing that if the user experience on the baseline form is difficult (as measured by a low page conversion rate), one or two formatting changes typically has a more positive impact on conversion rate than the same changes on a form where the user experience is already pretty good. This is based on the law of diminishing returns — significant improvement on

a form already converting at a high level is much harder to achieve than on a form with a poor conversion rate.

These factors are key to understanding why the same creative change can meaningfully impact the form conversion rate of one organization but not another.

But there were still lessons learned. Our tests showed that the following elements meaningfully affect user behavior on forms *most* of the time:

- » Form length: One-page forms generally do significantly better than two-page forms.
- » Columns: One or two? Let your audience decide.
- » Trust seals: Placement above the fold (where they are highly visible to users) often provides a significant lift to donor conversion, and two may be better than one.

WHAT'S NEXT?

If best practices at the variable level are largely elusive, how do we take forms to the next level?

To optimize a web donation form, or any other landing page for that matter, you must evaluate how well it answers a user's top three questions:

- I. Where am I?
- 2. What can I do here?
- 3. Why should I do it?

All donation pages converting at a high level answer the first two questions in seven seconds or less (the attention span of the average web user). A page visitor should <u>never</u> have to scroll down the page to answer them!

Addressing the third question successfully is perhaps the biggest challenge in the optimization process. It's about effectively communicating your organization's unique

value proposition to donors, and can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including better marketing copy, compelling photos, trust seals, a mission statement, supporter testimonials, etc.

We realize that evaluating your donation pages in this way may require a new way of thinking, by stepping into the donor's shoes, and out of an "organizational" mindset. But even though it may be politically difficult to make changes to your forms based on a user's perspective, it is well worth the effort. Your current donation page may be causing you to leave real money on the table with folks who were already on your website and motivated to give.

With the Convio Donations API allowing clients to customize their donation forms top to bottom, there's more opportunity than ever to experiment and figure out what's most effective with your audience.

Want to read more research like this?

Visit www.Donordigital.com to access past landing page testing whitepapers.

APPENDIX: SELECTED TEST RESULTS IN DETAIL

Gift String & Column Layouts

PETA

In our test of gift string and column layouts, PETA's audience demonstrated a clear preference for a challenger page showing a two-column form field layout and vertical gift string.

This version produced nearly double the conversion rate of PETA's Become a Member baseline form (which featured a one-column form field layout and vertical gift string), and was significant at a 99 percent confidence level.

Table 4: PETA – Gift Strings & Columns

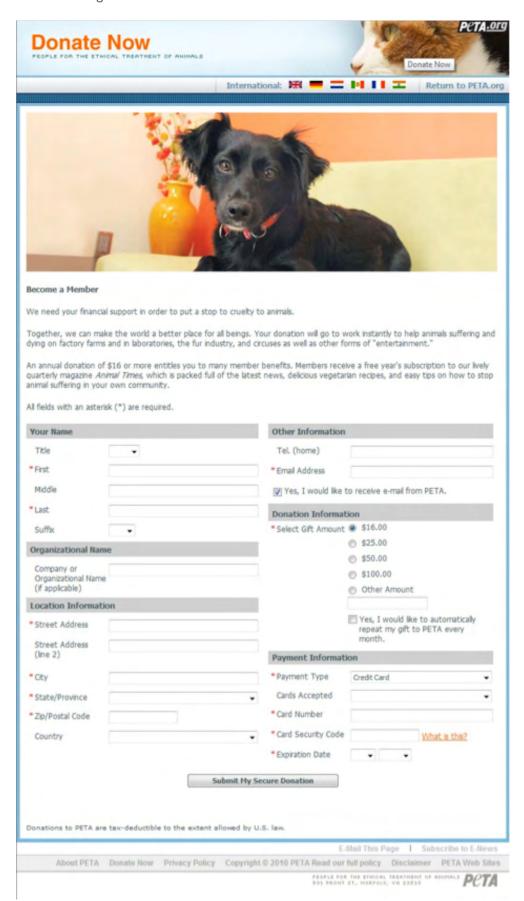
Test Version	Page Creative	Conversion Rate % Change	Result Significantly Different from Baseline?
Baseline	Vertical Gift String, I-column form		
Challenger I	Vertical Gift String, 2-column form	97.0%	YES, at a 99% confidence level
Challenger 2	Horizontal Gift String, I-column form	24.3%	NO
Challenger 3	Horizontal Gift String, 2-column form	-5.7%	NO

Given the stunning results achieved in just a week's time, we decided to repeat the experiment in an effort to validate our findings (there was a small chance that audience sampling bias had skewed results).

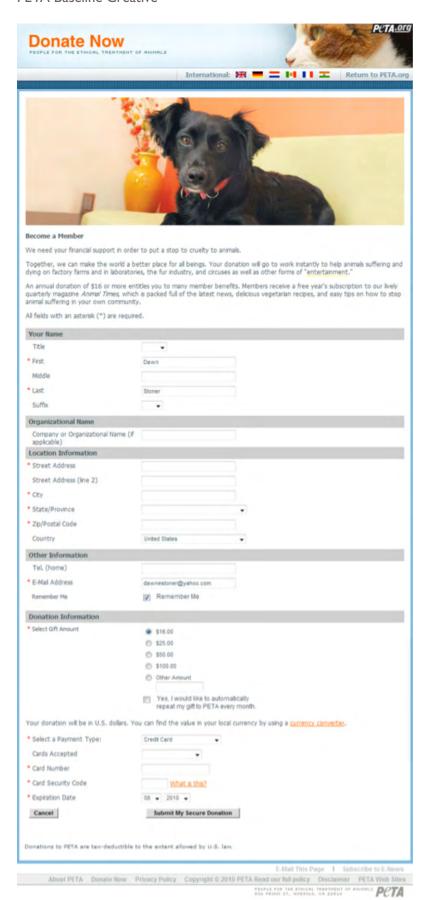
Sure enough, we replicated our findings in the second test with a much larger data sample – the same page won for a second time, producing a 26 percent improvement in donor conversion versus the baseline, which was statistically significant at a 90 percent confidence level.

Table 5: PETA Round | Experiment - Repeat Test

Test Version	Page Creative	Conversion Rate % Change	Result Significantly Different from Baseline?
Baseline	Vertical Gift String, I-column form		
Challenger I	Vertical Gift String, 2-column form	26.4%	YES, at a 90% confidence level
Challenger 2	Horizontal Gift String, I-column form	13.5%	NO
Challenger 3	Horizontal Gift String, 2-column form	7.4%	NO



PETA Baseline Creative



U.S. International Development Organization

With the main web donation form of a large international development organization, we found their audience preferred a one-column form field layout and horizontal gift string. The exact opposite of PETA's audience!

The winning page delivered a 21 percent better conversion rate than the organization's baseline form, which featured a one-column form field layout and vertical gift string, and was significant at a 96 percent confidence level.

Table 6: U.S. International Development Organization – Round I Experiment

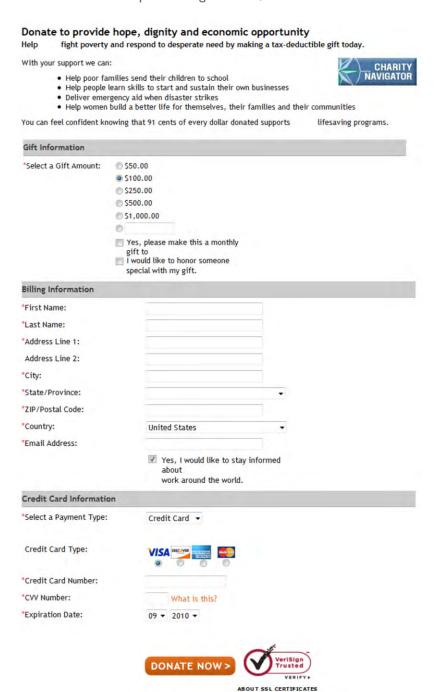
Test Version	Page Creative	Conversion Rate % Change	Result Significantly Different from Baseline?
Baseline	Vertical Gift String, I-column form		
Challenger I	Horizontal Gift String, 1-column form	21.3%	YES, at a 96% confidence level
Challenger 2	Vertical Gift String, 2-column form	-2.5%	NO
Challenger 3	Horizontal Gift String, 2-column form	2.8%	NO

While audience differences likely contribute to the different test outcome, we believe that the more streamlined set of form fields on this organization's donation page, which required less scrolling relative to PETA's, as well as the higher overall conversion rate (showing greater user satisfaction with the page) also contributed to the layout changes having less impact on user behavior.

International Development Organization, Winning Creative

Help poor families send their children to school Help people learn skills to start and sustain their own businesses Deliver emergency aid when disaster strikes Help women build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and their communities Help women build better life for themselves, their families and monthly gift to would like to honor someone special with my gift.	With your support we can:		CHARI
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International Development Organization, Baseline Creative



Trust Seals & Field Group Order

World Wildlife Fund

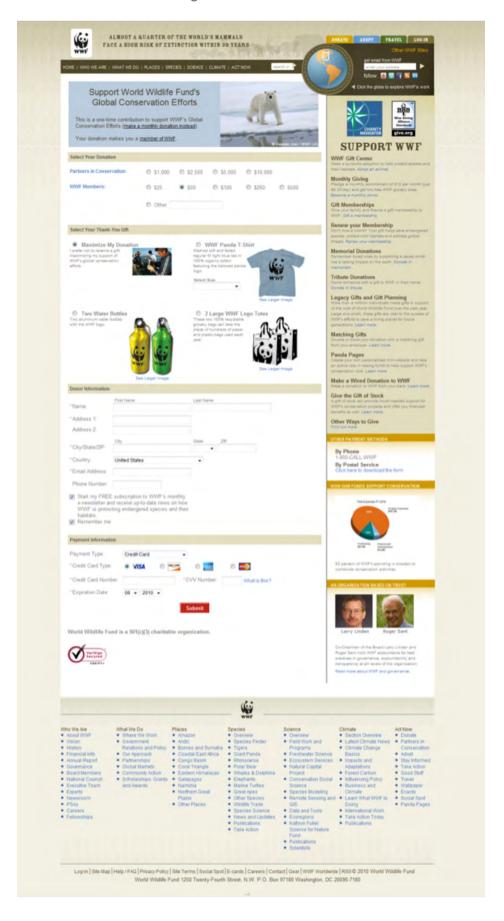
Our test with World Wildlife Fund (WWF) focused on placement of trust seals in a more visible location in the upper right corner of the page, while at the same time eliminating an animated GIF image (something many web users find annoying) of a premium in that location, in combination with a new field group order on the page.

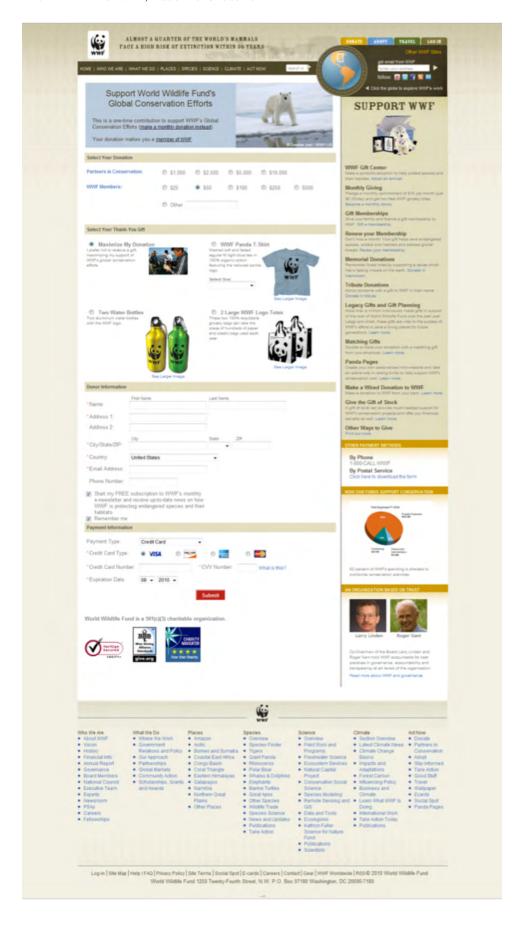
We found that moving trust seals from the bottom of the page to the upper right corner of the page, while eliminating the rotating GIF image of a polar bear plush delivered a 27 percent lift in conversion on WWF's main web donation form. Results were significant at a 95 percent confidence level.

The field group order change by itself, and in combination with the trust seal placement change, was not significantly different from the baseline.

Table 9: World Wildlife Fund

Test Version	Field Group Order & Trust Seals	Conversion Rate % Change	Challenger Significantly Different?
Baseline			
Challenger I	New field group order, original trust seals	19.4%	
Challenger 2	Original field group order, BBB & Charity Navigator logos in upper right corner of page replacing a rotating GIF image of a premium	27.3%	YES, at a 95% confidence level
Challenger 3	New field group order, BBB & Charity Navigator logos in upper right corner of page replacing a rotating GIF image of a premium	17.1%	





International Development Organization

Our test of trust seal placement and field group order with a large international development organization corroborated our finding with WWF that increased visibility with trust seals provides a material lift in page conversion.

Table 10: International Development Organization

Test Version	Page Creative	Conversion Rate % Change	Challenger Significantly Different?
Baseline	Original Field Group Order, Charity Navigator logo in upper right, BBB logo below the fold		
Challenger I	New Field Group Order, Trust seal placement same as baseline	22.6%	NO
Challenger 2	Original Field Group Order, BBB logo placed next to Charity Navigator logo above the fold	51.5%	YES, at a 94% confidence level
Challenger 3	New Field Group Order, BBB logo placed next to Charity Navigator logo above the fold	5.9%	NO

International Development Organization, Winning Creative:

Donate to provide hope, dignity and economic opportunity Help fight poverty and respond to desperate need by making a tax-deductible gift today. With your support we can: · Help poor families send their children to school Help people learn skills to start and sustain their own businesses Deliver emergency aid when disaster strikes Help women build a better life for themselves, their families and their communities You can feel confident knowing that 91 cents of every dollar donated supports lifesaving programs. Gift Information "Select a Gift Amount: \$50 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1,000 Yes, please make this a monthly gift to I would like to honor someone special with my gift. Billing Information *First Name: *Last Name: *Address Line 1: Address Line 2: *City: *State/Province: *7IP/Postal Code: *Country: United States *Email Address: Yes, I would like to stay informed about poverty-fighting work around the world. Credit Card Information *Select a Payment Type: Credit Card -Credit Card Type: *Credit Card Number: *CVV Number: What is this? *Expiration Date: 08 - 2010 -DONATE NOW > ABOUT SSL CERTIFICATES Programs by Activity How Expenses are Allocated Click here to view privacy policy. If you have questions about donating online, please e-mail us or call 1-800-Your contribution is tax-deductible as described on your receipt and to the extent allowed by law A copy of the latest financial report and registration filed by this organization can be obtained by contacting toll-free 1-800 . or by writing directly to toll-free 1-800 , or by writing directly to of certain states can click here to find out how this information can also be obtained. is organized under the laws of the District of Columbia, United States and is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. EIN/tax ID number:

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International Development Organization, Baseline Creative:

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TESTING METHODOLOGY

We used Google Website Optimizer to track page views and conversions on test pages for all experiments. The amount of traffic flowing to test donation pages was the main limiting factor in determining the number of test variables we could run.

To determine test significance, we compared the conversion rate of "challenger" donation pages to conversion rate of the "baseline" donation page, and calculated its z score.

The Convio platform was used to host donation pages and process transactions for all organizations participating in the testing project.

ABOUT DONORDIGITAL

Donordigital helps nonprofit organizations, campaigns, and socially responsible businesses use the Internet for fundraising, advocacy, and marketing. We provide strategy and implementation to enable organizations to use e-mail, the Web, and other communications to build their constituencies and change the world. Visit www.Donordigital.com to learn more.

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ABOUT CONVIO

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