Build an effective optimization team

This article will help you:

- Build a well-rounded optimization team that is visible, sustainable, and efficient
- Consider which hard and soft skill sets your testing organization needs when you're hiring, expanding internal resources, or considering working with a Solutions Partner

Many optimization programs see their first success as a small, talented team or a solitary hero doing it all. This is a great way to start the optimization journey. But before long, even the most stellar teams hit a wall. They reach a point where they lack the resources to run the complex campaigns and experiments of a mature organization.

Often, the problem is a technical bottleneck - but it can be any kind of gap, as every team is different. If your team is facing this problem, you have an opportunity to think deeply about the future of your program and the makeup of your team. To keep growing, your program must add to or deepen its skill sets.

The best optimization teams have a robust mix of hard and soft skills that are needed to develop advanced roadmaps for testing and personalization. The right mix helps you build your program into a center of excellence: a team that helps create a data-driven culture and affects business decisions at the broader company level.

Use this article as a resource when evaluating how to turn a strong team into a center of excellence. As you read on,
evaluate your team’s current strengths and how they map to the different core stages of experience optimization. Consider which skill sets you need to grow and whether you’ll acquire them by expanding your testing organization's access to internal resources, hiring new members, or working with a Solutions Partner.

Optimizely's Program Management feature, enable on select plans, enables your team to scale an experimentation program with collaboration tools and program-level reporting.

Looking for more tips on gathering more resources for your team? Read this blog post on the common problems optimization teams face, and how to address them. Or check out our Optimizely Academy course, Build Your Optimization Team.

Evaluate whether your company might benefit from working with an agency or Solutions Partner.

Build the right skill sets

Which skill sets does your team need in order to grow? There’s no one answer to this question, but most successful teams cover five core functions: ideation, planning, implementation, interpretation, and communication.

During ideation and planning, your team sources testing and personalization ideas from analytics data, marketing campaigns, audits of your competitors’ sites, and different parts of your organization. You also plan and prioritize your test and campaigns at this stage by aligning impact and effort with your program’s core objectives. Marketing analytics, project management, optimization, and communication skills are key in this stage.

The implementation stage is when your team builds, QAs, and manages tests and campaigns. These are big opportunities for both creative and technical talent. User experience, writing, design, HTML, and JavaScript skills are all valuable at this stage. In particular, design and development resources can help reduce your team’s time to implementation, so you can get experiments and campaigns up and running quickly. Implementation can generate excitement about testing at your company, so communication skills are vital in this stage as well.

After campaigns and experiments run, you’ll interpret your results. Statistics and analytics help you figure out the implications of your data and make the right business decisions. Use communication skills to socialize your results and build company-wide investment in optimization.

Aim to build a team that has competencies in hard skills, soft skills, and Optimizely platform skills. These skill sets can be covered by specialists, team members with expertise in multiple areas, or by outside agencies.

Hard skills are specific, formal competencies that usually require training to develop expertise in. The following is a list of hard skills for a mature optimization program.

- HTML and CSS
- jQuery and JavaScript
- SEM and SEO
- Statistics

Soft skills aren't necessarily formally taught, but are often are honed through experience. These skills can be trained as
well, but are frequently developed organically in the world of experience optimization.

- Project management
- UX principles and best practices
- Analytics
- Communication
- Writing
- Basic design

Optimizely platform skills are a mix of hard and soft skills. For example, an intuitive sense of what makes a good experiment or how to test through a redesign are powerful soft skills. Implementing variations in Optimizely is a hard skill.

- Using the Code Editor
- Managing user accounts
- Troubleshooting
- Integrating other platforms
- Prioritizing campaigns and tests
- Setting the right goals
- Making decisions about winning and losing variations
- Segmenting results
- Building audiences
- Managing campaigns
- And more ...

Create a center of excellence

You may be thinking, “I already have all these skill sets!” And if you have a strong optimization program, you’re probably right. So how do you use these capabilities to become a truly great optimization center of excellence - a program that helps build a data-driven culture and affects business decisions at the company level? The key to elevating a strong program is not only to cover this range of skills but draw from each with deep expertise that’s focused on optimization.

With deep expertise, you can build sophisticated experiments and campaigns that work toward bigger, longer-term objectives and iterate on the insights generated at each stage. You also lower the bar for effort across your entire program, so you can run any kind of experiment you want. The freedom to optimize based on advanced roadmaps, business goals, and data-driven ideation rather than effort will help your program make a bigger impact.

Experts who focus on optimization uncover additional opportunities that would otherwise be missed.

Imagine that you request an analytics report on a page you’d like to test. You want to know whether traffic and conversion rates are high enough to run a good experiment on the images on the page. Any savvy analyst can pass you this data. But one who is invested in testing might notice an unusually high bounce rate and use of the search bar on
this page; she realizes that visitors aren’t finding what they’re looking for. Your optimization-focused analyst suggests that you test around this problem instead. She’s handed you an opportunity to make a bigger impact by fixing a glaring issue affecting your customers’ experience.

This type of cross-skills collaboration focused on testing makes your program much more efficient and more successful. An analyst who isn’t truly involved in testing and doesn’t understand the testing program’s objectives won’t apply his or her unique expertise in ways that allow for this.

Cross-skills collaboration also makes your program more sustainable. One optimization specialist focused on user experience will eventually hit a wall. The natural ebb and flow means that optimizing from a single discipline will be limiting at times. If someone on your team works with SEM and SEO, she can ask an entirely different set of questions about your site to generate more insights and ideas.

For example, someone running the SEM program knows she spends a lot of money driving traffic to a certain high-potential landing page, but that landing page is underperforming. Maybe after a certain time she gives up on the campaign. She decides to spend those SEM dollars on other terms. If she were involved in testing, she might have tested how to turn that losing SEM campaign into a true winner. This perspective complements the optimization efforts focused on user experience and helps build a balanced and sustainable program.

Finally, great communication skills go a long way in building an optimization culture that’s ingrained at your company. By communicating your program’s successes and insights, you translate the lessons from your program into meaningful data that can be applied in other parts of the organization. Your optimization program helps bring the voice of the customer - who she is, what her expectations are, what kind of language and imagery compels her - into decision-making processes at your company.