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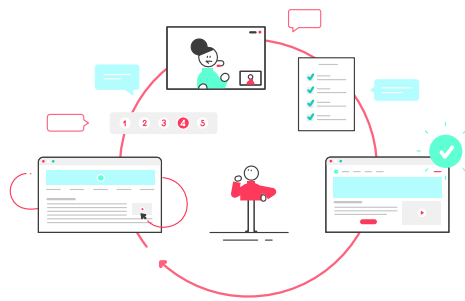
CRO: the user-centric approach by Hotjar

Forget about best practices and quick hacks: to increase website conversion rate, your best move is to understand your visitors, users, and customers, and give them what they need.

In this guide, we dispel a few myths about conversion optimization, talk to 20+ conversion experts, and give you a free, downloadable 3-step CRO plan to help you gather the data you need to improve your conversion rates over and over again.

[Use Hotjar to improve conversions](#)

See what's really happening on your site, identify problems, and increase conversions.



The standard definition of CRO

Conversion rate optimization (CRO) is **the practice of increasing the percentage of users who perform a desired action on a website**. Desired actions can include purchasing a product, signing up for a service, or clicking on a link.

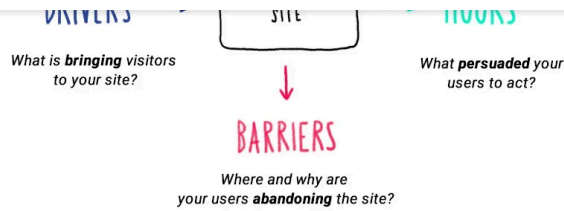
The user-centric definition of CRO

Standard definitions of CRO, like the one we just wrote above, place their focus on conversion percentages, averages, and benchmarks. This emphasis on a numerical approach comes with a downside—the more you look at spreadsheets full of conversion data points and actions, the less you think of the individuals behind them.

Here is an alternative, more holistic and user-centric way of defining CRO: think of it as **the process of focusing on understanding what drives, stops, and persuades your users, so you can give them the best experience possible**—and *that*, in turn, is what makes them convert and ultimately improves your conversion rate.

Why do we think this second definition works better? Because focusing on the final action—the conversion—is obviously important, but in reality, a lot happens *before* that point:

- Specific DRIVERS bring people to your website
- Specific BARRIERS make them leave
- Specific HOOKS persuade them to convert



When you're working to improve conversions, not every problem is quantifiable, backed by hard numbers, and with a clear-cut answer. Yes: sometimes, an obvious bug is blocking 80% of your users from doing something, and fixing that one bug will save your entire business; other times, your website functions perfectly and yet people still are not converting. When this happens, you'll need to dig deeper to understand the why beyond the data you have—you'll need, in other words, to focus on your users first. And that's what we at Hotjar think CRO is actually about.

How to calculate conversion rate (in case you didn't know)

Conversion rate is calculated by dividing the number of conversions (desired actions taken) by the total number of visitors and multiplying the result by 100 to get a percentage.

$$\text{CONVERSION RATE} = \frac{\text{NUMBER OF CONVERSIONS}}{\text{TOTAL NUMBER OF VISITORS}} \times 100$$

For example, if your website page had 18 sales and 450 visitors last month, your conversion rate is 18 divided by 450 (0.04), multiplied by 100 = 4%.

What is the average conversion rate?

Depending on what you read, the average conversion rate is anywhere between 1% and 4%.

But let us come out and say it: this figure is sort of meaningless, since:

- Conversion rates differ wildly depending on the conversion goal (ad clicks, checkout completions, newsletter signups, etc.)
- Every website, page, and audience is different
- Most people don't share their conversion data publicly anyway

Averages may be useful as starting points for benchmarking, but what do they really have to do with YOUR website?

There is no actual, ultimate industry figure you can rely on or compare yourself against with 100% confidence. Obsessing over an average percentage figure, and trying to squeeze as many conversions as possible just to stay in line with it, is not the best way to think about conversion rate optimization. Once again, you're better off focusing on developing an in-depth understanding of what actually matters to your users, so you can give it to them—and then, conversions will naturally follow.



In the world of digital marketing, a CRO best practice is a commonly-held belief that a particular optimization action will guarantee an increase in conversion rate, for example:

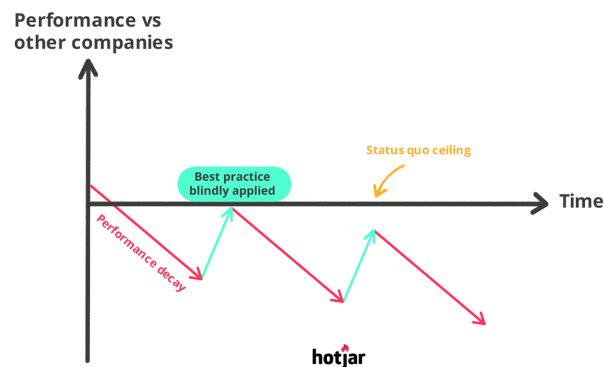
- Use a strong color for all [CTA](#) (call-to-action) buttons
- Place CTAs above the fold
- Use urgency (e.g., time-limited offers) to drive sales
- Always display testimonials
- Use fewer form fields on your forms

Are these best practices good for improving YOUR conversion rate? Debatable.

First of all, best practice is—by definition—past practice: it's something that worked in the past for someone else. You can't guarantee it's going to work today.

Second, just because it worked for someone else, doesn't mean it's going to work for you.

Blindly applying existing best practices puts companies in a perpetual state of playing catch-up—while more progressive and experimental businesses are busy improving and making the changes that will be recognized as 'best practices' in a few years.



THE PERFORMANCE DECAY (IN RED) OF A COMPANY BLINDLY FOLLOWING AND APPLYING BEST PRACTICES (IN BLUE)

Useful extra reading: [here is our philosophy about best practices](#), and how following them blindly can end up being counterproductive and hurt a business.

There is, however, **one core principle we can recommend as always valid: spend time understanding your users and customers**—or, as we like to say around here at Hotjar, [build a customer-centric culture](#) by *obsessing* over your users and customers. They are the people who matter to your business and have the answers you need to improve it. Fixate on their needs and desired outcomes, learn as much as you can about their concerns and hesitations, and then deliver solutions that address them.

In the long term, what leads to growth is not blindly applying best practices that you see on other blogs or hear from your boss(es). **The winning approach is investing in understanding and learning from your users and using the insight to build an optimization strategy that continuously improves your business.**



The best conversion optimization tools (are not what you think they are)

It may sound weird coming from a company who sells [a tool that helps people optimize websites](#)—but, as a principle, we believe that the best optimization tools are free.



THE BEST OPTIMIZATION TOOLS ARE FREE

Your brain, ears, eyes, and mouth are the primary tools you need to understand your customers, empathize with their experience, draw conclusions based on the data, and ultimately make the changes that improve your conversion rates.

(sidenote: here is a great example of what can happen when you don't use these tools, make assumptions about what people need, and [build something that nobody uses.](#))

How do you use these free tools?

- Listen to what your users have to say about your product/service
- Immerse yourself in the market
- Watch how people use your service
- Talk to whoever designed and built the product
- Speak to the staff that sell and support it
- Draw connections between different sources of feedback

All the other, traditional optimization tools are simply the means that help you do it. And they help in three ways:

Quantitative tools to uncover what is happening

Quantitative tools allow you to collect quantitative (numerical) data to track *what* is happening on your website. They include:

- [General analytics tools](#) that track website traffic (e.g., Google Analytics)
- [Website heat map tools](#) that aggregate the number of clicks, scrolls, and movement on a page
- [Funnel tools](#) that measure when visitors drop off from a sales funnel
- [Form analysis tools](#) that track form submissions
- [Customer Satisfaction \(CSAT\) tools](#) that [measure customer satisfaction](#) on a scale from 1 to 10
- Tools that use the [Net Promoter System](#) to measure the likelihood of people recommending your website/product to someone else on a scale from 0 to 10

Qualitative tools to uncover why things happen

Qualitative tools help you collect qualitative (non-numerical) data to learn *why* your website visitors behave in a certain way. They include:



- through your website
- **Usability testing tools** where a panel of potential or current customers can voice their thoughts and opinions on your website
 - **Online reviews** where you can read more about people's experience of your brand and product

Tools to test changes and measure improvements

After you've collected [quantitative and qualitative feedback](#) and developed a clear sense of what's happening on your website, testing tools allow you to make changes and/or report on them to see if your conversion optimization efforts are going in the right direction. They include:

- **A/B testing tools** that help you test different variations of a page to find the best performer (recommended for high-traffic sites, so you can be certain your results are statistically valid)
- **Website heat map + session recording tools** that allow you to compare different variations of a page and the behavior on it
- **Conversion-tracking analytics** tools that track and monitor conversions

Website feedback tools (like visual feedback widgets or NPS dashboards) that help you collect qualitative feedback *and* quantify it, so you can compare the before/after response to any change you made.

THE REMAINING CHAPTERS OF THIS GUIDE COVER:

A 3-step CRO program

A free, downloadable 3-step plan that helps you understand the drivers that bring people to your site, the barriers that stop them from converting, and the hooks that persuade them to stay.

Landing page CRO: a case study

A practical case study on how to use the 3-step CRO plan to optimize a landing page and drive conversions effectively.

25 expert CRO tips

25 expert CRO practitioners answer the question: What's the one thing you recommend to people working on improving their conversion rate?



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