

Split Testing on Facebook

“If you can’t accept losing you can’t win.”

—Vince Lombardi

My First Crack Cocaine-Like Experience

I will never forget the day I discovered how easy it was to split test on Google AdWords. It was 2002 and after I was done creating an ad, the “create a new ad” button was still there. I clicked it and wrote a different ad.

“Is this going to do what I think it’s going to do?” I said to myself.

I went to Google, typed in my keyword and refreshed the page. Sure enough, it was flipping back and forth between “A” and “B.”

Sure enough, the next day, both ads had their own stats.

Oh my goodness, this is going to change the world! I thought. And I was right. It did. I discovered tiny changes made huge differences. For example:

<u>Popular Ethernet Terms</u>	<u>Popular Ethernet Terms</u>
3 Page Guide – Free PDF Download	Complex Words – Simple Definitions
Complex Words – Simple Definitions	3 Page Guide – Free PDF Download
www.bb-elec.com	www.bb-elec.com
2 Clicks – CTR 0.1%	39 Clicks – CTR 3.6%

Notice what happened: All I did was reverse two lines – and the clickthrough rate jumped from 0.1% to 3.6%!

I split tested landing pages and now I was multiplying my traffic. Any improvement in traffic then multiplied again in sales leads. Then we tested sales pages and got another multiplier. Ari Galper, founder of Unlock The Game, enrolled in our coaching course and grew his sales from \$5,000 per month to \$100,000 per month in ten months.

The results of this simple testing were like crack cocaine!

A/B and Split Testing Basics

The practice of pitting your ads against each other to determine the winner is called A/B or split testing. Without question, split testing is one of the most important tools in the direct marketer’s toolbox to best optimize advertisements, increase ROI and lower overall ad spend.

The concept of A/B split testing is quite simple – create two ads, offer them on the ballot of public opinion and let the voters decide which one is more effective.

All things being equal, both ads have in equal chance of winning – especially when they have the exact same audience targets and the exact same advertising budget.

In A/B testing, you allow the public decide who wins and who loses. Once you determine the winner - based on statistical significance - you dump the loser and scale the winner. You can then split testing other ad against the winner to determine your next winner.

Rinse and repeat.

Split testing has been around since the late 1800s – many years before the Internet. Direct mail marketers with mail flyers with different department numbers and phone number extensions in order to measure which direct mail piece converted the best workflow the most inbound phone calls. Split testing is nothing new, except that online, it's far easier and more elegant to do with the multiple tools we have available to us today.

Online, there are many ways in which to test landing pages, ad copy and many other useful data to determine your lowest cost per lead and lowest cost per sale ranging from complex split testing software to simple A/B testing on advertising platforms like Facebook.

So all you really need to do a simple split test is create your ad set, create two separate ads with two separate sets of copy, images and headlines and pit them against each other – the ultimate form of democracy by simply letting the voters decide which ad is the best one.

You'll then measure conversions, CTR, CPC, impressions, factor all those pieces of data into your analysis and then pick your winner.

Not so fast...

The problem is that if you create two ads within the same ad set, Facebook will never give your ads the exact amount of equal impressions. In fact they will favor one over the other – largely devoid of your influence. They *could* show your ads equally – but they simply choose not to.

Split Testing...Facebook Style

You want your best ads to be shown to the best audiences with the highest click through rates and the lowest cost per click.

All you need to do is let the voters decide in your campaign as to which ad they click, like and ultimately take action on. In the end, the votes are counted and the winner declared. Just like an election.

In Google Adwords, this is easy. But with Facebook, not so simple.

The problem is that the “political system” in Facebook is not a level playing field.

Seems simple enough when you “let the people decide” – after all, there are 1.3 billion active users in Facebook as of this writing, so why wouldn't this work?

It works in political elections, right?

Two candidates are placed on the ballot and the people go to the polls and vote to determine who wins and who loses. Our electoral system seems simple enough, but as we all know, there's far more to the political process than just individual voter ballot. And anyone who is familiar with the American electoral system knows that there are multiple other influences outside of the voting process that influences our outcomes on Election Day.

Political action committees, smear advertising campaigns, lobbyists, campaign contributions from wealthy individuals...the list goes on. On Election Day, it's not quite as clear as to the actual influence of the individual vote.

So when it comes to split testing, think of Facebook as the very large and powerful PAC or special interest group that seemingly influences every national election.

You as the individual advertiser like you as the individual voter, have very little control over this electoral process as Facebook decides which ad they like more instead of you allowing the public to decide on your behalf.

Facebook simply doesn't make it easy for you as the advertiser – because instead of equally dividing impressions for your advertisements, Facebook plays favorites.

So in order to be successful split testing ads in Facebook, you just need a strategy to get around this whole political process to level the playing field in order to get a clean election devoid of PACs, special interest groups, lobbyists and big-money private campaign contributors.

You can confuse Facebook even further by throwing in four or five ads and split test those against each other, doing an A/B/C/D/E test. This strategy unfortunately makes the situation even worse.

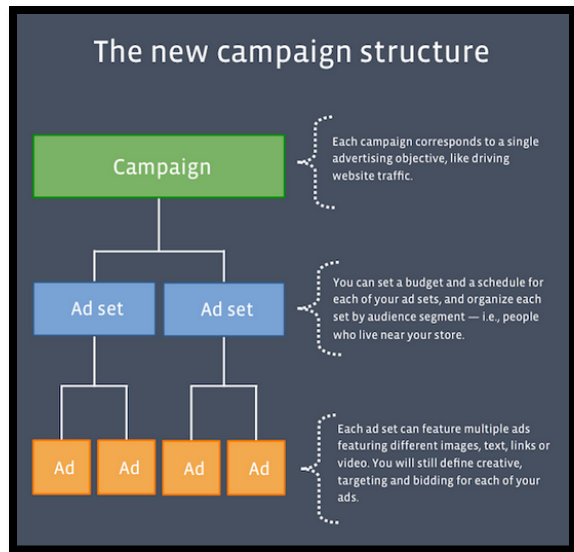
Multiple ad creation confuses Facebook so much that your entire campaign receives *fewer impressions overall*, largely because Facebook simply doesn't know what to do with your maniacal (although highly logical) five-way split test.

But now with the new structure within Facebook of campaign, as set and ads, you now have a split testing friend in the ad set.

The Best Way to Split Test in Facebook: The Ad Set

So, how do you know which ad works best in your campaigns? How do you get a clean election without the influence of big corporate money and PACs?

Your friend is the early 2014 release of the Ad Set in the new Facebook advertising structure:



The ad set, which up until recently did not exist is the Facebook split testers friend. In order to get a good split test prior to the invention of the ad set in Facebook, you would really need to create two separate campaigns and then create individual ads in each campaign. This solution, although workable, is a far too messy and makes your ad manager unwieldy and extremely inefficient.

Let's say you want to split test two separate ads with two distinct images in order to determine which will convert the best. You can also do this by many other types of data such as desktop news feed versus mobile news feed or any other of the myriad different data points to ideally optimize your ad.

You can try to do it the old way by creating two ads that compete against each other for impressions. Sometimes - depending on your targeting, this does work. However, the impressions for each ad will be different in 99% of cases, so you need an alternative strategy.

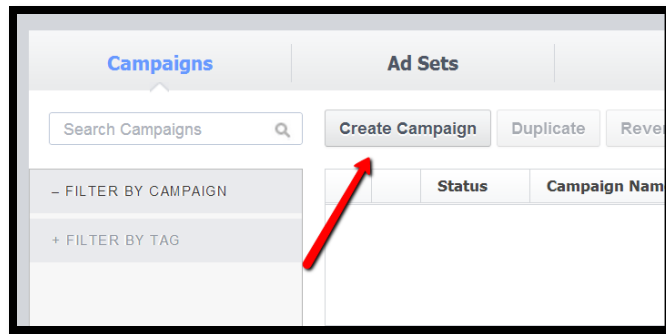
This is why utilizing the new ad set format is so effective.

Let's say you want to test the exact same audiences and interests but simply want to figure out which ad copy and image converters best.

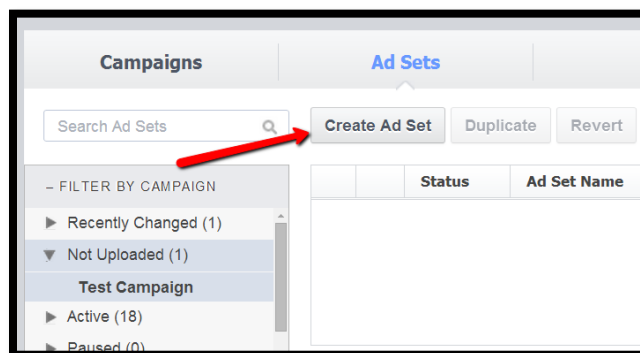
The new ad set will allow you to do this especially for newsfeed ads.

Here's the four-step process - most easily done inside the Power Editor:

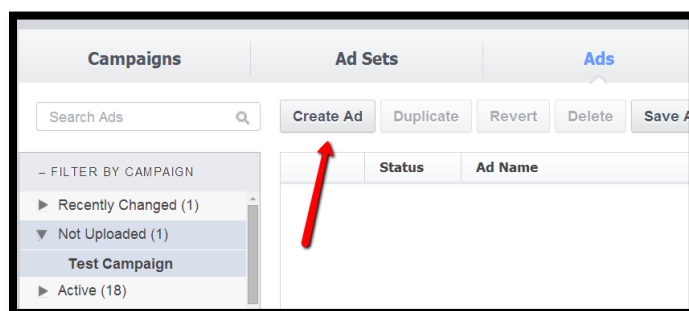
1. Create a campaign - if you have a campaign already - even better



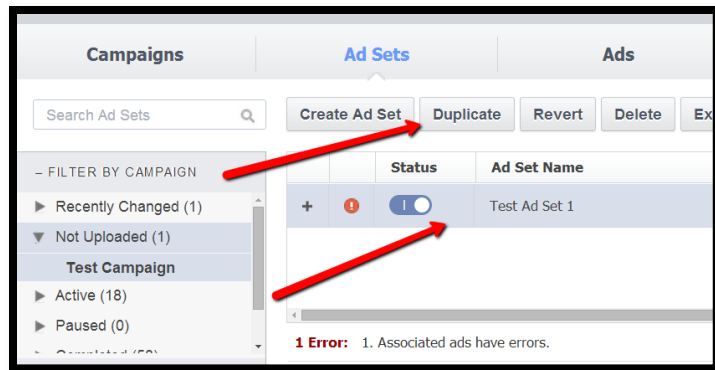
2. Create an ad set within that campaign - choose your targeting



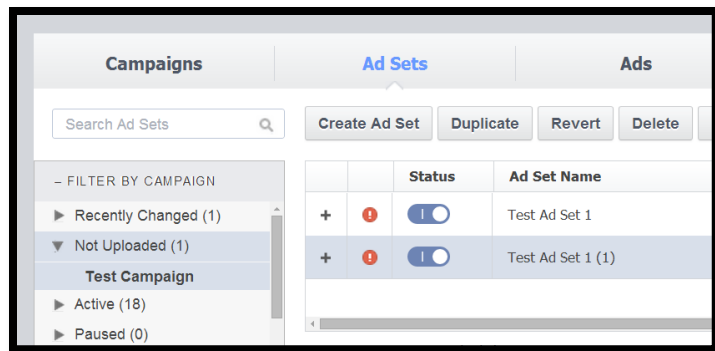
3. Create an ad within that ad set – this will be the “A” of your A/B split test



4. Create another ad set within that same campaign – this is most easily done by using the Facebook “Duplicate” button. This button then creates a new ad same targeting and the same copy.



Just rename this new ad set and the ad contained in it so you remember which is which.



You can now split test (so to speak), the two *ad sets* against each other with a singular ad to see which one wins.

This is about as close as you can get to a formal split test in Facebook.

You now have two copies of the exact same ad. In the second ad, make one thing different from the first ad. You could change the headline, the image, the capitalization, the punctuation, the body text, or even the destination URL. Having said all that, the image you choose is the biggest factor that sways your CTR, so we suggest you change the image first.


At some point Facebook may have the capability of doing proper split testing, but as of right now Facebook does not currently support automatic, formal split testing. But using the asset can get you around this issue, and it's far easier to manage than creating separate campaigns. Which is what we would previously do before the invention of the ad set.

As there is no indicator of statistical significance within this type of A/B testing, you need to use your best judgment as to which ad is the clear winner. If your budget permits, 4000 – 5000 impressions and 100 clicks should at least give you a good sample size although you would have to check with the mathematical wizards as to whether or not this is statistically significant.

If after 5,000 impressions, if you still don't have a clear-cut winner for conversions, CTR or lowest CPC, then simply pause one of those ads and create a new split test.

As with all true statistically significant split tests, the key is to not stop – if budget permits – before you get an ample sample size.

Here's an example of two ads we ran alongside each other in two separate ad sets we were testing the exact same ad and the differences between desktop versus mobile for conversions. After 7,000 impressions, there was an obvious and clear-cut winner:



The image shows a screenshot of a split test interface. It compares two versions of an advertisement: one for Desktop and one for Mobile. The Desktop version is marked as 'Active' and shows 19 conversions, a cost of \$15.23 per conversion, and 11,581 impressions. The Mobile version is marked as 'Inactive' and shows 0 conversions, a cost of -- per conversion, and 7,082 impressions. The ad text for both is 'MDC BB Seminar LA 6.8 California I Coaching BB SA I'.

Version	Status	Conversions	Cost Per Conversion	Impressions
Desktop	Active	19	\$15.23	11,581
Mobile	Inactive	0	--	7,082

Oftentimes however, the winner is not as apparent. This is when you need a tool that can determine if there is statistical significance. Brian Easley and Perry Marshall have an online split test algorithm that tells you how confident you can be in declaring your winner. Although this tool does not factor in conversions, it's very effective when measuring clicks and CTR.

The test is available at <http://splittester.com/>

Measure the Most Important Conversion In Your Split Test

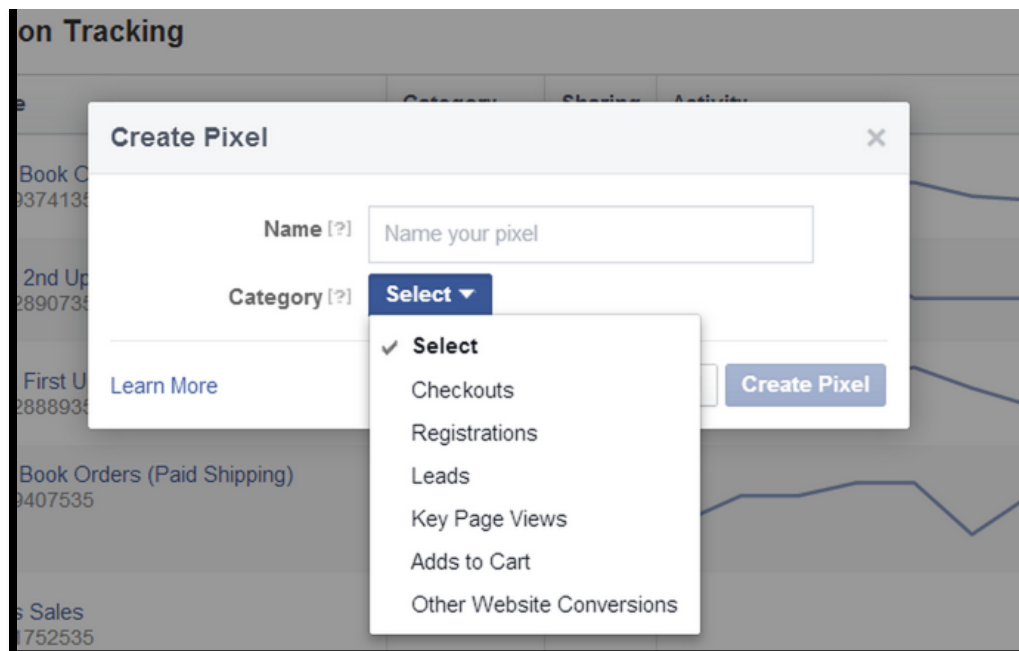
Provided you are using conversion pixels for your lead generation, sale of your product or whatever other type of metrics you are using to measure success, those numbers should be your ultimate determinant as to whether or not you have a winner.

Since your advertising cost is largely determined by CTR, this metric is an important one to look at and study but not nearly as important as a conversion. Yes, CTR matters – but not merely as much as lead acquisition and conversion.

And with the power editor giving you the ability to measure multiple conversion pixels in your advertising, you'll need to focus on which conversion pixels is making you the most money.

In the power editor, you can have multiple conversion pixels firing to show multiple conversions on a single ad.

Those conversion pixels can include:

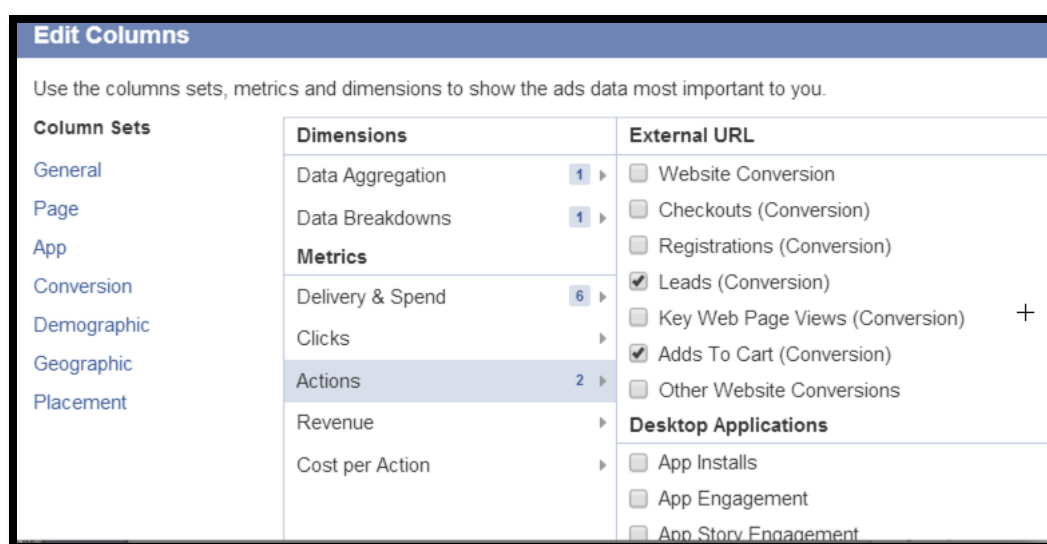


In many cases you may have far more leads generated in one ad but you may have fewer Checkouts or Add to Cart conversion pixels that are triggered when someone purchases your product or service. If you are split testing two separate ads and one is getting more leads but less sales, look carefully at these different conversion metrics to determine your ultimate split test winner.

To show this you can very easily look at the Reports section to determine which part of your sales funnel is converting the best per each ad.

Run your reports and check off the different conversions in your final to show which specific ad is converting on your ultimate advertising goal. In this case, we had multiple ads split testing against each other with many creating Registrations but the ultimate goal was the conversion on their Add to Cart pixel.

To show this, you set up your reports to show both:



The report will then show your winner. In this case we ran a two week test and after about 30,000 impressions, declared the winner. After the winner was chosen, we gave the winning ad more advertising budget while cutting back the ad budget on the loser.

Impressions ?	Clicks ?	Registrations (Conver	Adds To Cart (Conver	Spend
34,908	481	76	53	\$266.67
82,228	2,263	134	119	\$547.90

Oftentimes when you run your split test, it's not a zero-sum game, you may just reconfigure your budgeting to the ad that's doing better while still giving some impressions to the ad that's not doing quite as well. It all depends on the goal of your ad campaign or if you're managing ads for clients the goal of the client.

What Should You Split Test?

It can get a little overwhelming to try to figure out which part of your ad you should test. Do I test my description? Should I test my image? Do I test my headline?

It can get pretty overwhelming with so many choices in Facebook...

When split testing newsfeed link post ads, there are three most important factors to test first, listed here in order of importance

1. **Image:** Far and away the image you choose for your news feed ad is the biggest factor that affects CTR and ultimately conversions
2. **Headline(s):** The ad headline below your image as well as and the first line you use in your newsfeed link post ad are both extremely important to test
3. **Buttons:** Facebook started offering "button" choices in early 2014 and they have a half dozen choices depending on the goal of your advertisement



But to be complete, make a list of all the factors you may change for your split tests and work your way through the list, doing one at a time. In addition to the list above, you can also change the following during split tests:

- Offer
- Headline word choice
- Body text message
- Call to action
- URL
- Facebook destination page

The choices and variations are nearly endless but if you focus on the first list and concentrate on those three factors, you'll find a winner quickly.

Important tip: Always A/B test BIG ideas and big differences before you bother with small ones! Fear vs. desire is a big idea; upper case vs. lower case is a little idea. Bright colors vs. dark is a big idea. Font choice is a little idea.

Multivariate Split Testing

In our split testing above, we changed only one thing at a time. When you're first starting out, this is very smart to begin with - but as you and your advertising gets more and more sophisticated, you may want to start testing multiple variables called multivariate testing.

In most tests, testing one ad against another for differences in conversions for images or headlines will suffice in getting you to your goals. But in some cases, it may be appropriate to test both at the same time using multivariate testing. In Facebook, this is much harder to do - which is why we stick primarily with A/B testing first and then move on to multivariate testing later on.

For example, if you determine the clear winner in your split testing that favors one image over another, you can then start testing other factors at the same time using the same strategy as outlined above.

This can get complicated fast if you're comparing multiple ads from multiple ad sets. As soon as you start creating more ad sets inside a single campaign for the same exact audience, you may unwittingly get penalized by Facebook and start losing impressions overall. To counter that, you may need to create separate campaigns and not just separate ad sets.

In the last section, your goal was to determine one factor that affects your conversions. Nine times out of 10 that most important factor will be the image you choose for your newsfeed link post ad. So when you start to multivariate test, you are in essence fine tuning what is already working.

The issue is that by the time you finish all your tests, your ad may have run its course through your entire audience and you may be losing impressions because of ad fatigue.

Although many others advocate multivariate testing is the key to advertising success, with Facebook advertising its best to keep things simple with A/B tests – unless you are targeting very large audiences which are less prone to ad fatigue. We'll address ad fatigue shortly.

When All Else Fails, Manually Split Test

Everyone likes automation and “set it and forget it”, I know I do. But sometimes the manual way is simply the best way.

In most cases, it's far more efficient to dig a trench with one guy in a backhoe instead of ten guys digging that same trench with hand shovels. But sometimes the trench is more carefully and more precisely dug the manual way. Of course, this all depends on the skill of the backhoe operator as well as the collective skills of the trench diggers.

It's unfortunate but true that Facebook does not treat all ads in their platform equally. And if you split test ad sets against each other with a single ad in each ad set, Facebook may sabotage you by not giving you equal impressions. This doesn't always happen and depends on the audience you are targeting. When this happens, this is precisely the time when you need to go manual.

In some cases – and depending on the breadth and scope of your campaign – it may be easier to just set up multiple ads with multiple variations within one set, then manually swap them out as they start to gather more and more data.

Here's an example of an ad set where we did just that:

The screenshot displays two ad variations within a single ad set. The top ad, labeled 'Image 3', shows 54,166 clicks (highlighted in a red box) and 9 leads (also highlighted in a red box). The bottom ad, labeled 'Image 1', shows 44,849 clicks (highlighted in a red box) and 1 lead (also highlighted in a red box). Both ads are for 'Transform Your Running...' by Bobby McPhee, targeting a potential audience of 40,000 people. The ads are currently inactive.

Although sidebar ads are certainly not our favorite ads, they do have their place and can oftentimes be split test automatically within a singular ad set. In the case above, we had a clear-cut winner testing the same exact ad copy but with a different image.

In that ad set, there actually were four separate ads, which we manually changed every three – four days.

Status ?	Ad ?	Delivery ?	Results ?	Cost ?	Reach ?	Frequency ?	Clicks ?	Click-Through Rate ?	Spent Today	Total Spent ?	Max. Bid ?	Avg. Price ?
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BM 2.6 free-videos sidebar only new SA Triathlon US-25-54 blurry - Image 4	inactive	139 Website Clicks	\$0.43 Per Website Click	104,393	11.38	136	0.011%	\$0.00	\$60.96	\$0.05 CPM	\$0.05 CPM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BM 2.6 free-videos sidebar only new SA Triathlon US-25-54 blurry - Image 2	inactive	143 Website Clicks	\$0.37 Per Website Click	97,059	7.74	140	0.019%	\$0.00	\$54.12	\$0.13 CPM	\$0.07 CPM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BM 2.6 free-videos sidebar only new SA Triathlon US-25-54 blurry - Image 3	inactive	38 Website Clicks	\$0.59 Per Website Click	54,166	5.22	37	0.013%	\$0.00	\$22.56	\$0.13 CPM	\$0.08 CPM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	BM 2.6 free-videos sidebar only new SA Triathlon US-25-54 blurry - Image 1	inactive	16 Website Clicks	\$0.75 Per Website Click	44,849	5.22	16	0.007%	\$0.00	\$12.08	\$0.13 CPM	\$0.05 CPM

After about two weeks, two ads emerged as the clear winners. To finalize the test, we set the remaining two ads live within that ad set to face off against each other.

Remarkably, *Facebook gave each ad similar impressions.*

Why? Probably because they had pre-existing impressions and Facebook which gave them the knowledge that each ad was in-fact effective.

If we had started this ad set with all four ads running simultaneously, there would not have been enough impressions for each ad to determine a winner – Facebook would have given impression to one and not the rest.

What we found was that by manually testing multiple ads, each ad seemingly *gained Facebook's trust* and then we could split test the best two out of the four directly against each other.

Although this does create more work for you, manual split testing works extremely well - but does require manual effort initially.

How to Fight Ad Fatigue With Split Testing

As with any other advertising medium, ad fatigue occurs on Facebook as well. Ad fatigue is simply when the targets in your audience see your ad so much they tire of it. A worse scenario is called ‘banner blindness’ when the audience fails to notice the ad at all. CTR falls and ad costs soar in these cases, not an ideal scenario for an advertiser.



Ad fatigue not much of a problem in Google AdWords, for example, where your audience is usually a “passing parade.” Ad fatigue is worse on Facebook. Generally in Facebook you’re always in the business of coming up with something new; not so much to test as to keep things fresh and interesting for your audience.

You’ll have less trouble with ad fatigue when you have a very large targeted audience. The more impressions and more frequency you have with a particular ad to a specific audience, the more ad fatigue will likely occur.

Ad fatigue was a huge issue when Facebook only had sidebar ads largely because those ads were constantly shown as you scan your newsfeed. Ad fatigue in news feed ads is far less of an issue than in the sidebar, but it is something you want to be aware of.

In cases where your audience is very small and you have a healthy daily budget, ads will become less effective on your audience more quickly. Here’s an example of an ad with a very small audience which is probably nearing the end of its useful life - before it needs to be swapped with another:

Status ?	Ad ?	Delivery ?	Results ? ▼	Cost ?	Reach ?	Frequency ?	Clicks ?	Click-Through Rate ?
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2014-05-07 13	● Active	18 Website Clicks	\$0.60 Per Website Click	211	1.74	21	5.707%

Ad Preview  Perry Marshall Sponsored · 	Targeting Potential Audience for this ad: 320 people • Category: custom audience 2.perrymarshall.com/starprinciple/answers.php (Remarketing)
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To predict and then combat ad fatigue is a simple math problem To calculate ad fatigue, it's a simple formula:

$$\text{Potential Audience Size} / \text{Reach} \times \text{Frequency} = \text{CTR Decline} = \text{Ad Fatigue Factor (AFF)}$$

In the ad above, we have an audience size of 320 with a reach of 211 and the frequency of 1.74.

This means that 211 people saw our ad on average 1.74 times. Since our audience is 320 total, there's only about 109 people have not seen this ad as of yet.

Fortunately, the ad has been running a short period of time and the audience is not grown weary of it as of yet. How do we know? Because the ad has a relatively high CTR of 5.707% - which is Facebook is very healthy indeed.

That CTR will decline over time, probably within the next week it will be half if not one quarter of that 5.707%. At that point, we will then switch the ad manually per the instructions above.

Manual swapping and split testing is a common solution to the ad fatigue problem. The only difference with this audience targeting is that it is a website custom audience which is growing each day. Since the audience is growing each day, we may actually "outrun" the usefulness of this particular ad.

Regardless, ad fatigue will play a major role in this small campaign at some point, which is why we have eight other ads in that campaign we can choose from when the ad gets tired.

In some other cases, you may have a very large audience size and ad fatigue may be less of an issue. Regardless, you do need to switch out your ads on a regular basis to prevent this from occurring.

In the ad set below, our clicks to this ad has steadily decreased over the entire time it's been live – at this point, nearly four weeks. The reason the ad continues to perform well is because of the large audience size and the AFF mathematical formula outlined above.

Status ?	Ad ?	Delivery ?	Results ?	Cost ?	Reach ?	Frequency ?	Clicks ?	Click-Through Rate ?	Spent Today
	TR 7-free-videos SA Triathlon US 25-54 Red Hat Man CPM	Active	2,667 Website Clicks	\$0.28 Per Website Click	104,310	1.33	2,610	1.885%	\$9.42
Ad Preview					Targeting				
					Potential Audience for this ad: 260,000 people				

As you can see, there's an audience of 260,000 with 104,310 having seen the ad 1.33 times. The clicks are on the decline over the past four weeks but still the ad performs well having accrued 2,667 website clicks in that time.

So using AFF, we have more than half of our audience yet to see the ad, before it truly runs out of steam. At which point in time, the CTR will drop off considerably. Regardless, the ad's CTR has remained very consistent as shown by the image below. You can look for "CTR Trend" in the lower right-hand side in the ad manager, directly under your individual ad.



The bottom line is this: ad fatigue occurs regularly in Facebook, less so in the news feed. You should still switch your ads as much as possible, but balance this with your overall objective. For direct response marketers, this is lead generation and purchases of services or products. If you see these drop off, you are likely suffering from ad fatigue and need new ads to inject new life into your campaigns.

However, never change out an ad because you're *fearful* of ad fatigue. Only do it if you see your conversions dropping for your CTR declining and your ad costs increasing. If your CTR starts going south, your conversions will likely do the same - so it's something that you need to keep an eye on.