



**AWA**

# **How to Ensure Your New E-Commerce Website is a Conversion Success**

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# Introduction

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“We need a better website” is often where it starts.

Switching to a new website, or migrating to a new e-commerce platform, is one of the biggest capital expenses any 21<sup>st</sup> century online business is likely to make. Typically, it's a huge investment of time, management resource and money.

Naturally, there are high expectations that all this effort and expense will be worth it, with improved efficiencies and sales.

All too often though, the reality is somewhat different. Problems abound, and the scope for things to go wrong is endless.

- So what are those problems?
- How do you present them happening and get the website you're hoping for?
- And if, despite your best efforts, the website fails to give you higher sales when you launch, what can you do to put it right?

Read on to find out the pitfalls of launching a new website, as well as practical advice on how to avoid them.

## **New website/platform problems**

What are the most troublesome issues encountered when moving to a new website or new platform?

To find out, we commissioned original research from people with first-hand experience.

The report – An Investigation into Problems of New Website Projects – is available upon request, but in summary, it revealed that the most common problems when launching a new e-commerce website are:

- Loss of sales/revenue
- Disgruntled visitors
- Management time wasted

These are not isolated incidents, but experienced by a significant number of our sample.

More than half (55%) of respondents experienced problems working on ‘new website and / or functionality’ projects.

Over a third (37%) reported that these problems resulted in ‘loss of revenue or sales’.

Loss of revenue had a number of root causes, including reduced sales, loss of customers through reduced traffic or simply by the new website being delivered late. Disgruntled customers also led to a loss of revenue as well as longer-term damage to the brand.

Respondents cited a number of reasons why these problems occurred, including inexperienced project team members, poor communication between the project team, a lack of foresight about requirements and poor project management.

So how do you avoid these problems, and ensure that your new e-commerce website delivers an improved ROI rather than a budget deficit?

There are five key stages you'll go through when you develop a new e-commerce website or migrate to a new platform.

Whether you have just got the business case signed off, need an independent audit of whether then new website is really going to deliver for you or you have just gone live and the new website's conversion rate has plummeted, we have ways of helping you.



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# The five stages of a new website

## The development of an e-commerce website comprises five key stages:

- 1 Strategy Stage: Thinking about whether you need a new website
- 2 Early Stage: Just starting to devise functional spec and/or identify suppliers to work with
- 3 Middle Stage: Design and development has started
- 4 Final Stage: The run up to launch
- 5 Live Stage: The website has launched

At each one of these stages decisions will be taken that could seriously harm sales when the new site is launched. But forewarned is forearmed.

By taking the right actions at each stage, you can protect your existing conversion rates and make sure the new site performs as well or better than the current one.

## Which stage are you at?

Read on to discover key actions to take at each stage to protect your conversion rate.

If you're at Strategy Stage – go to page 8

If you're at the Early Stage – go to page 13

If you're at the Middle Stage – go to page 17

If you're at the Final Stage – go to page 21

If you're at the Live Stage – go to page 24

# Strategy Stage Protection Measures

The first and most obvious way to protect the conversion rate of your existing website, is to fully consider whether you really need a new website at all.

Frequently, a new site or platform is seen as the only way to solve the problems of the existing site. Often there is an implicit belief that the new site will magically make all the limitations of the current site disappear as well as bringing untold additional new benefits.

Plus, it's all too easy for the idea to gain momentum, as it sounds like an exciting project to work on, so there's lots of enthusiasm from many different quarters.

However, whilst it's true that sometimes a new website is the only solution, quite often a much more profitable route is to optimise the existing site.

## **What happens at the Strategy Stage?**

You are aware that your website is becoming out of date whilst newer website platforms offer exciting features. You look at competitors' websites with envious eyes (of course, not knowing exactly how well their website is performing).

You may be beginning to weigh up the cost of updating and optimising your current website versus commissioning a new one – especially if updates are

currently slow and costly to make and/or there are no other companies that could take over the maintenance of the website.

Right now though this analysis is mostly in your head, and you are slowing beginning the mental process of deciding whether or not to replace your current website.

## Beliefs at the Strategy Stage

- Whilst the decision to replace your current website requires a good deal of thought you anticipate that your new website will convert visitors into customers at a much higher rate – why else would you be spending this much money?
- You are also expecting the new website build, if it happens, to be on time, within budget and deliver substantial ROI

## Pitfalls at the Strategy Stage

However, there are a number of pitfalls at this stage – many around the information you have to hand and assumptions you may be making.

- It is common at this stage for there to be little investigation into the cheaper (but less exciting) solution of optimising the current website, thus saving the need to replace it. Once you have mentally committed to a new website then any expenditure on the current one feels like ‘dead money’.
- Those around you can easily fall into ‘the grass is greener’ viewpoint and get excited about the possibilities of new website offers.
- Finally, despite all the nightmare stories you’ve heard about new website projects going horribly wrong, you are saying to yourself ‘this won’t happen to me’.

## Conversion Rate Protection at the Strategy Stage

In order to protect the conversion rate of your current site you need to be clear about the extent to which it can be optimised – and how much its conversion rate can be lifted – resulting in more sales and new customers.

Exactly how much money is being left on the table versus how much could be gained by building a new website is the key question. The simple fact is that you are unlikely to know the answer to this question.

To make a reasoned, commercial decision about a new website, you need to know the following:

- 1 How much extra sales can my current website generate if it was optimised to achieve its full potential?
- 2 How much will it cost to develop a new website
- 3 What extra revenue will a new website generate

If number 1 (optimising your current site) will bring in more sales than the new website (once the cost of developing it has been factored in) then it's worth sticking with your current website.

On the other hand, if the new website will generate significantly more sales than your current one ever could – enough to make the investment worthwhile – then a new website makes sound business sense.

In order to answer the first question – how much extra sales could my current website bring in – you need to evaluate the areas where your current website is under-performing, how to fix them, and estimate the likely sales uplift you'll see by fixing these conversion killers.

These are some of the tools and techniques used to do this kind of evaluation:

- 1 A conversion funnel to reliably show where visitors are dropping off
- 2 Heatmaps to understand exactly what your visitors click on and what they don't click on
- 3 Asking your website visitors and customers why they abandon/don't buy more from your website (either ask them personally, or use a survey).
- 4 Asking customers why they choose to buy from you and not your competitors?
- 5 Compiling a list of how you can strengthen your value propositions to your visitors and customers

### **Don't have time?**

Ask us to evaluate your website for you. We'll configure the funnel, put the tools on your site and conduct the research and analysis to give you a clear indication of the potential sales you will be missing out on if you move to a new website.

The process takes just 4 weeks and allows you to make a decision about your new website with absolute clarity.

We will provide an independent, objective view of the potential website. We are not a web development company and we have no interest in whether or no you decide to build a new website.

You'll receive a 20-page report which clearly sets out what your customer's needs are, and what the new website needs to deliver in order to meet them.

It's the most secure way to ensure your new website will generate higher ROI than your existing one. Having completed our New Website Strategy

Review you will sleep easy knowing that you have rooted your website plans on real knowledge of your visitors and customers, It's something few companies do and yet it always pays dividends.

### **What next?**

To get more information and pricing on a New Website Strategy Review call or email us.

Call +44 (0)20 7887 2695 or email  
[realresults@awa-digital.com](mailto:realresults@awa-digital.com)

# Early Stage Protection Measures

## What happens at the Early Stage?

This is the stage when the business case has been made for a new e-commerce website/platform and the investment has been agreed in principle. The functional specification is being written, web development partners are being appointed and budgets are being prepared for approval.

Although it may seem unthinkable at this point that sales might be lower than at present, it could happen. Here's how you can protect the conversion rate of your website at the Early Stage.

## Beliefs at the Early Stage

- It is tacitly expected that the new website will generate positive ROI and convert at a higher rate than the current one
- It is anticipated that the website will be delivered on time – as there are months to go before the specified delivery date
- Changes to the functional spec can easily be made. At this stage, it's just a document with little set in stone.

## Pitfalls at the Early Stage

These are some of the practices and assumptions we have seen first-hand, that can cause problems later on:

- You or your team are overly-influenced by competitors' websites that you believe give them an advance over you. However, this can be misleading. The way to stay ahead is to focus on what your business needs, not what others are doing.
- You may be basing the functional spec on industry 'best practice'. (There are many guides and resources offering this kind of advice). However, these 'one-size-fits-all' techniques may not be right for your website. Your visitors are unique to you and your business and you should tailor the site around their real needs.
- Your functional spec is based on what you and your colleagues believe your website visitors want, which may not be based on rigorous research. So often these hunches and opinions turn out to be simply wrong – or a best do okay, but not as well as a spec based on knowledge of what your real visitors are looking for.

## **Conversion Rate Protection at the Early Stage**

The key question to focus on at this stage is 'How can I be sure that the functional spec for the new website is based on the needs of my website users?'

In answering this central question, the following tools and approaches can be useful, as they will help you clearly state what needs to be fixed on your next website:

- 1 A conversion funnel to reliably show where visitors are dropping off
- 2 Heatmaps to understand exactly what your visitors click on and what they don't click on
- 3 Asking your website visitors and customers why they abandon/don't buy more from your website (either ask them personally, or use a survey).

- 4 Asking customers why they choose to buy from you and not your competitors?
- 5 Compiling a list of how you can strengthen your value propositions to your visitors and customers

### **Don't have time?**

Ask us for a Specification Review.

We'll configure the funnel, put the tools on your site and conduct the research and analysis to give you the answers to the above questions, as well as review the work you have already completed on your new website functional specification.

The process takes just 4 weeks and allows you to complete your functional specification with confidence and certainty.

You'll receive a 20-page report which clearly sets out what your customer's needs are, want what the new website needs to deliver in order to meet them. This way you'll produce a Functional Spec crammed full of features that visitors actually want to see, rather than wasting your money on improvements which no one cares about.

It's the most secure way to ensure your new website will generate higher ROI than your existing one. Having completed our Specification Review you will sleep easy knowing that you have rooted your website plans on real knowledge of your visitors and customers. It's something few companies do and yet it pays dividends.

## What next?

To get more information and pricing on a Specification Review call or email us.

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# Middle Stage Protection Measures

## What happens at the Middle Stage?

The Board has signed off the business case and the project is well underway. The functional spec has been written and approved and now design and development has started.

You will have seen early wireframes or possibly even have agreed them with the team, together with the look at feel of the template pages and the user flow through the checkout.

## Beliefs at the Middle Stage

- You feel you are now underway with an exciting new e-commerce project for a new website jam-packed with features and hooks that your visitors are going to love.
- It's great to see how different your new website will be to your current one, and the design is much more crisper and modern – all the ideas you have had now crystallised into one perfectly designed website.
- The new website will be launched in time for your peak season and you are sure to capitalise on its extra pulling power, turning visitors into customers at a far higher rate.

## Pitfalls at the Middle Stage

Our research shows that these are some of the common issues at this stage:

- Designers and developers are now running the show, and with a strict deadline, many decisions are being taken without much regard to the users of this new website. Making a website look good is not the same as building one that converts well
- Insufficient thought is being given to the hierarchy of the product categories and sub-categories. The assumption is that this hierarchy is easy to change
- Copy for products, categories and general static copy is being left until last – just words to fill up the space rather than integral to the customer journey
- Often little time is dedicated to clearly defining why a visitor, when they have many tabs open on their browser, would choose to buy from your shiny new website than your competitor's
- The project is now clearly in the delivery phase. The time to make large-scale changes has passed, so anything that was not properly thought through in the early stages can't be put right. Any attempt to do so will affect the launch date.

## **Conversion Rate Protection at the Middle Stages**

At this point the central question is 'How can I be sure that this website is going to deliver, without holding up the go-live date?'

In answering this central question, you should consider performing the following quick and easy checks:

- Get the wireframes and mocked up pages reviewed by actual users of your website. This is quick and inexpensive, but will give invaluable feedback. True, you may get one or two red warning lights – but if they are going to seriously affect conversion rate when the site goes live, it's much easier and cheaper to know now

- Make sure that the copy is professionally written, with the website visitor in mind (not search engine spiders)
- Review the value proposition of this new website. If you're changing it, is it really more compelling than the current one? Test it with your customers if you're not sure.
- Analyse the sales performance of categories and sub-categories to ensure that they are in the correct position within the new navigation
- Perform a look-to-book ratio analysis to see which products require more attention to make them as compelling as others

### **Don't have time?**

Ask us for a Mid-Launch Audit.

We can carry out all the key failsafe checks described above – quickly and without hassle. Where we discover danger signs, we'll suggest workable solutions. For example, we'll tell you exactly what changes you need to make to proposed designs, copy and navigation.

Within 3 weeks, you'll gain this peace of mind that the new website will perform as well as – or better than – your current one, without impacting your delivery date. That's because the Mid-Launch Audit is very tightly focused on what your designers and developers can change quickly and easily.

## What next?

To get more information and pricing on a Mid-Launch Audit call or email us.

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# Final Stage Protection Measures

## What happens at the Final Stage?

You are fast approaching the end of the project the website is soon to go live.

It seems light years away since the business case and functional spec were being written. Chances are it's taken longer than everyone expected – for a myriad of reasons that are nobody's fault. (We have yet to hear about a new website that launches on time).

With the live date quickly approaching relationships may be fraught, tensions running high and team members can't agree on the priorities.

## Beliefs at the Final Stage

- You are nearly there, and although you have had to make compromises on all sorts of things, it's just a matter of time before you can flick the switch
- Everyone is excited to see how the new website will perform. There is huge expectation that online sales are going to shoot through the roof in the very near future

## **Pitfalls at the Final Stage**

The main danger at this point is that compromises you have been forced to make have affected what the website offers to visitors in terms of frictionless usability and a persuasive experience.

Of course, some of those compromises were necessary so they could have jeopardised the whole project. But some may actually cause the new website to perform at far lower levels of conversion than before.

We have seen this many times over – the challenge of keeping to a deadline has meant that some companies have inadvertently thrown out the baby with the bathwater. Even worse, they are not really sure which was the baby and which was the bathwater.

## **Conversion Rate Protection at the Final Stage**

At this stage, there's no more time left to make changes for launch day. Your main focus now should be to set up some benchmarks in Google Analytics. Make sure it is configured correctly so you can make important comparisons between the current and new website.

Useful metrics to have benchmarks for include revenue per visitor, bounce rate for key landing pages, basket abandonment rate, add to basket ratios for your bestsellers, as well as conversion rate. It is a good idea to segment these metrics by new and returning visitors as well as your five most important traffic sources.

We very much hope your conversion will not drop when the new site goes live. But we've seen it happen many times. If you are unlucky enough that it happens to you, you'll be one step ahead, because you'll know exactly where your customers are dropping out compared with the old site.

It's also worth doing some usability testing with your website visitors. You won't be able to use their input to make changes to the new site, but it will mean you have a good idea of which elements of the new website are the

most important ones to fix, as soon as you go live – elements that matter to your website visitors, not you.

It's also a good idea to add a split test tool to the new site which can serve new variants of problem areas, without interfering with the main site. Do all this, and instead of being caught on the back foot and running to catch up you'll be all prepared and ready to start split testing, with some valuable ideas of what to test.

### **Don't have time?**

Ask us for a Pre-Flight Check.

The Pre-Flight Check is quick to conduct and gets straight to the point – we aim to complete this in less than 10 working days from starting work with you.

We will tell you exactly what to fix on the new website as soon after launch as possible. Your Google Analytics account will be correctly configured so that you'll get the crucial 'before and after' data you need. We also set you up with tools that let you carry on optimising the website as soon as it goes live.

### **What next?**

To get more information and pricing on the Pre-Flight Check call or email us.

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# Live Stage Protection Measures

## What happens at the Live Stage?

If conversion and sales are going up, there is jubilation. But if the numbers are all heading south, it's a real anti-climax. Everyone is disappointed that their months of work have not paid off and morale is low. The finance team may be looking at the money spent and wondering how it was justified for a website that is, seemingly, worse than the one it replaced

If this has happened to you, despite all your best efforts and smart planning, what can you do?

Sometimes the answer is obvious – the funnel tells you that everyone is dropping out at the checkout stage for example, or pages have not been indexed properly so your Google rankings have dropped.

At other times it's not clear. The site looks great and performs functionality, but visitors are just not buying like they used to.

## Beliefs at the Live Stage

- Given the plunging conversion rate, the requirement to do something to address the issue – and do it quickly
- Everyone is looking for leadership and a sensible course of action, that will attack the issue of its core – where is the problem and what we are going to do about it

- The time for guesswork has passed and everyone is expecting the way forward to be based on data and evidence

### **Pitfalls at the Live Stage**

- As with any crisis the biggest problem is likely to be the blame game, blind panic and grasping at straws
- Every minute needs to be focused on understanding the conversion problem and its root causes
- Google Analytics reports are all but useless at this point as the data merely illuminates the problem. Only by using voice-of-customer tools, like surveys and usability testing with real visitors, can you develop valid hypotheses to test to fix the problems

### **Conversion Rate Protection at the Live Stage**

The right approach at this stage is to have a plan – and stick to it.

That's why we developed the Conversion Disaster Recovery Programme. It's a simple, step-by-step guide to dealing with this issue sensibly and systematically.

We have created it with you in mind, so you can print it out and walk your team through the approach you are going to adopt to tackle the problem.

At the heart of the Programme are tools that allow you to both understand why the new website isn't converting well and split-testing tools that allow you to quickly test your new insight.

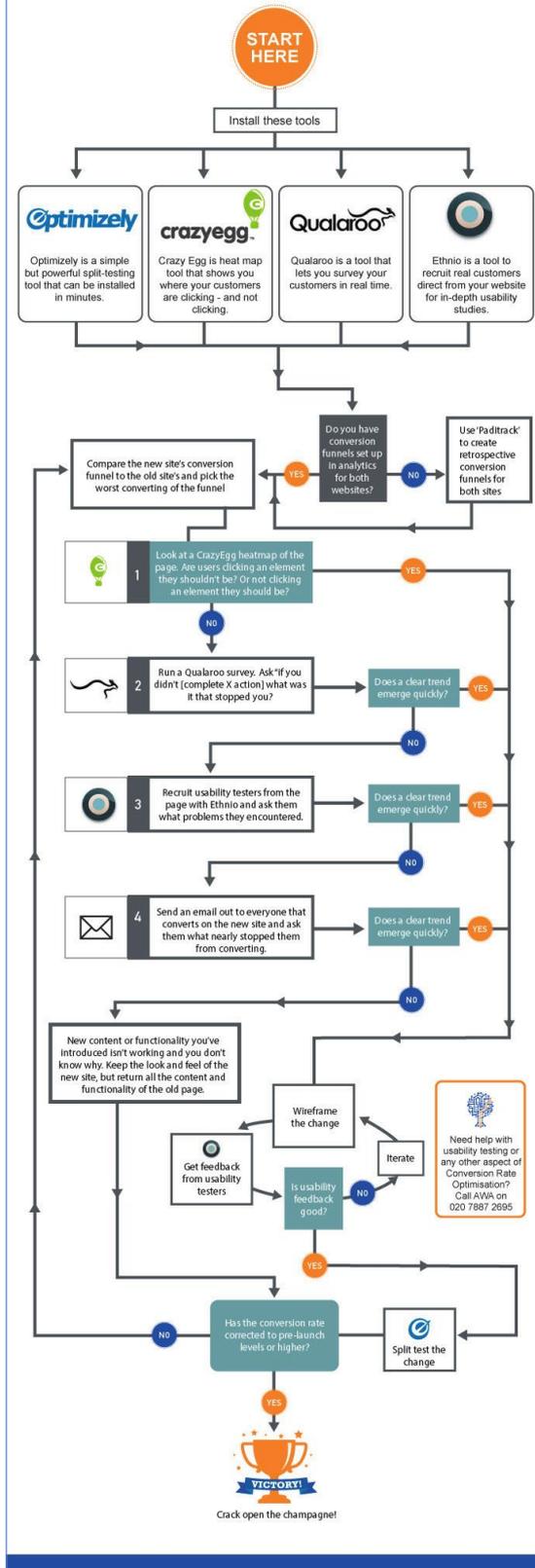
You'll need copywriters, designers and developers standing by to help you create these new variations to test.

This process is summarised in the flow chart on the next page.

# WEBSITE DISASTER RECOVERY

Just gone live with a new e-commerce platform and your conversion rate has fallen?

Use this Conversion Disaster Recovery Programme to get your new website performing. We've used this same programme to help businesses both big and small to identify the conversion killers on new e-commerce websites and address the problems quickly.



## Don't have time?

Don't worry about reading for help, we have helped lots of businesses who find themselves in this situation – and we can help you.

Ask us for our Conversion Disaster Recovery Programme. We are happy just to talk it through if anything is not clear or we can act like your in-house Conversion SWAT Team and we will do all the hard work – we have in-house copywriters, designers and developers experienced in working fast to deal with this type of disaster.

### What next?

To get more information and pricing on a Conversion Disaster Recovery Programme call or email us.

Call +44 (0)20 7887 2695 or email  
[realresults@awa-digital.com](mailto:realresults@awa-digital.com)

# Summary of Services

When	Strategy Stage	Early Stage	Middle Stage	Final Stage	Live Stage
AWA Service	New Website Strategy Review	Specification Review	Mid-Launch Audit	Pre-Flight Check	Conversion Disaster Recovery
What do you get?	An objective, evidence based assessment of the extra sales that could be generated from your current website, produced by e-commerce conversion rate experts	A 20-page review of what your website visitors actually need, cross-referenced against your Functional Specification	A 20-page audit of what changes you need to make to ensure your website is a conversion success	A 10-page review of your current website metrics that your new website needs to beat and what the usability issues are before it goes live	Deployment of our unique Conversion Disaster Recovery Programme (CDRP) or we can hold your hand and tell you what you need to do
How long does it take?	2-4 weeks	2-4 weeks	2-4 weeks	1-2 weeks	At least 2 weeks, depending on how much help you need
How does it help?	Our Strategy Review allows you to make the decision about whether to invest in a new website with clarity – knowing what the potential of the current website is	Our Specification Review shows exactly which parts of your new website are going to be loved by your website visitors and those that are a waste and can be safely dropped without costing you a penny in lost sales	Our Mid-Launch Audit will show you what changes you need to make to copy, design and layout before it becomes costly to change this – based on feedback from your website visitors	You don't want to delay the project one second so our approach is focused on showing you exactly where the conversion problems will be and equip you with the means to address these problems almost immediately after the website goes live	Using a range of listening and testing tools the CDRP will resolve the problems you have with your new website's poor conversion rate

# About the author

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World leading optimization expert and boardroom advisor, Dan delivers stirring talks on using CRO to build and grow any business, with first hand success stories from blue-chip companies from around the globe.

Drawing on his experience as CEO of the global website optimization agency AWA digital, Dan's engaging performances combine up-to-date knowledge and wisdom, with valuable insights and actionable takeaways that will have your delegates nodding and note making.

Dan is also co-author of the Amazon best seller 'E-Commerce Website Optimization: Why 95% of your website visitors don't buy – and what you can do about it', published by Kogan Page. Dan holds a MBA from Bath University and was made of Fellow of the Institute of Direct Marketing in 2004.

If you need any further help or advice, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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# Next steps

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Are you serious about implementing website improvements that deliver massive sales increases to the bottom line?

At AWA we're here to help companies like yours master all aspects of web optimisation. That's why we're offering a free consultation with one of our Lead Optimisers – to show you how to get up to speed with CRO.

Your free, no-obligation consultation is tailored to your business, to give you some of the most useful and practical advice you'll find anywhere. Delivered at a time to suit you, there's no limit on the number of people who can attend, so your whole team can benefit.

Lasting 30 minutes, you'll learn

- Exactly how to get an effective CRO programme running in your business (OR how to optimise your efforts, if you already have an in-house CRO programme)
- The top conversion mistakes most multichannel businesses make, and how to avoid them
- 5 personalised recommendations to implement now for fast results

Book your free no-obligation 30 minute CRO consultation now. Just follow the link on the next page and fill out the form so we can get it all set up for you.

## Free no-obligation 30 minute CRO consultation

Note: this is not a sales presentation. We aim to give you the best advice we can in 30 minutes to help you do CRO yourself.

[Get a free consultation](#)



AWA digital is one of the UK's leading conversion rate optimisation consultancies, helping multi-channel and online retailers increase sales, repeat business and visitor satisfaction.

Our experienced team of web analysts and ecommerce specialists use a range of tools – from in-depth website data analysis to usability testing – to show you how you can quickly boost conversion rates, repeat business and visitor satisfaction. Our pinpoint analysis of your online campaigns will show exactly what's working, what's not and what you need to change to get results that you are bound to make you smile.

We offer our services to both multi-channel and ecommerce retailers, as well as agencies who wish to extend their range of services to include conversion rate optimisation.

Our direct clients include Dunelm, Richer Sounds, Barbour, Interflora, Cotton Traders, Ironmongery Direct, Dune, Bettys and Taylors of Harrogate as well as a number of large and small B2B businesses.

## Get in touch

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