actuate

You can’t see conversion problems when your website is on fire

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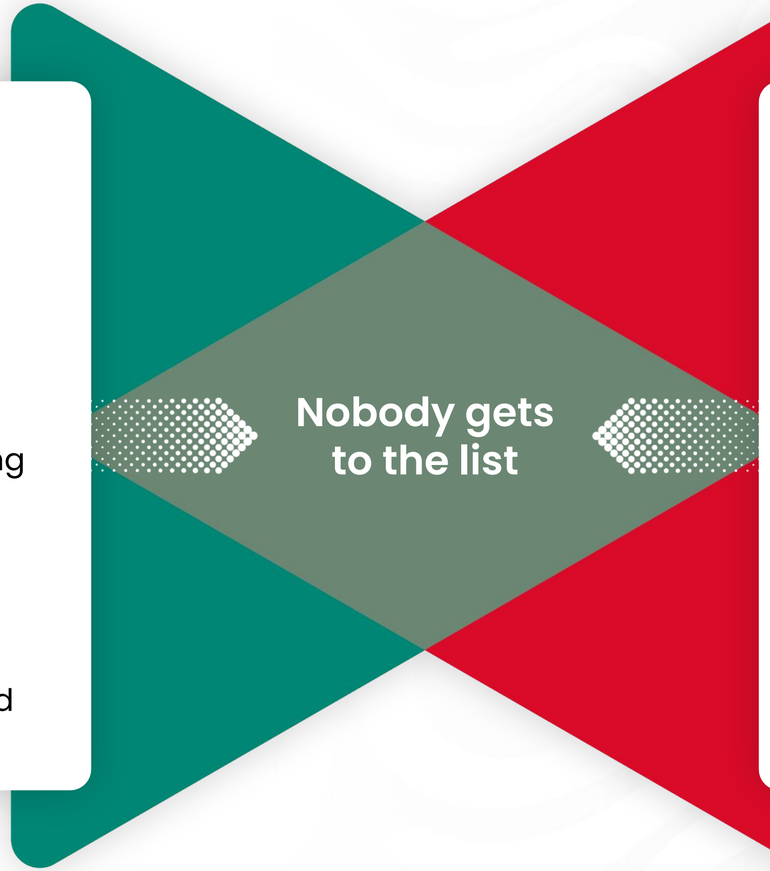
Where We're Starting

You have a list.

The List

The conversion work you've been meaning to get to...

- Rebuild the search - customers keep telling you it's rubbish
- Fix the mobile PDP
- Actually test the checkout
- Sort out the product filtering
- Look at why repeat purchase has flattened



This Week

Those unexpected issues that always seem to crop up...

- Stock feed fell over again
- Promo code isn't applying
- Tracking's under-reporting, nobody knows why
- Extension conflict after the last patch

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The Mechanic

Fires have three advantages over your list.

1

They’re loud

Someone is at your desk, or it's the third message in the channel.

2

They’re certain

You know exactly what a broken promo code costs today. Nobody can tell you what the mobile PDP costs.

3

They end

Putting a fire out feels like finishing something. Conversion work feels like starting something.

None of that means they matter more. It just means they win – every week, for years, until nobody remembers deciding.

STEAL THIS

Three questions that separate a symptom from a cause.

1	Has it come back?	Anything you've fixed twice will keep breaking until someone fixes what's causing it.
2	Does fixing it need someone senior?	If routine work needs your best developer, your system is the problem.
3	Would a new person hit it too?	If the answer is yes, it's a permanent tax on everyone you ever hire.

Two yeses and you're not looking at a job. You're looking at a symptom.

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Two Brands

Both told us the wrong problem.



Helmet City

Motorcycle helmets and gear. Five shops trading well.
Magento 2 on an off-the-peg theme.

“Our analytics tracking is broken.”



Willow & Hall

Made-to-order sofas and beds. Bespoke configurator.
Magento 1, end of the road.

“We've got an abandoned cart problem.”

Both reasonable diagnoses. Both wrong.

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The Pattern

Two brands. Two fires. Same blind spot.

What They Said

“Tracking's broken”

“We've got an abandoned cart problem”

What It Was

The site was slow, and using it was hard work

Speed and UX were on neither list.
You can't see a conversion problem while you're putting out fires.

Helmet City

A broken tracking code, and what was underneath it.

- Their previous agency had been trying to fix GA4 for months
- We fixed it. Small job. That's how the relationship started.
- But: months of decisions had been made on numbers nobody trusted
- Under the bonnet: an off-the-peg theme, dozens of bundled plugins, most unused and all still loading

What we did first

Patched it.

Stripped the plugins that weren't earning their place, fixed what could be fixed on the theme, bought them breathing room cheaply.

So we recommended a Hyvä rebuild on the Magento 2 they already had. Seven weeks to Black Friday.

Hold that thought. I want to show you the other one first.



Willow & Hall

An abandoned cart problem that wasn't one.

- People were configuring a sofa and walking away - so the cart looked like the problem
- It wasn't. There was friction at every step around the configurator.
- Behind it: stock eating hours a week, a Salesforce integration nobody trusted, promotions that felt like defusing a bomb
- Then Opayo support on Magento 1 ended, and they had a date they didn't pick.

What we did

Moved them off Magento 1 onto Magento 2, with a full redesign and a Hyvä frontend. Rebuilt the configurator journey while we were in there, step by step, around where discovery showed people giving up. Stock, Salesforce and promotions sorted underneath, so the new site wasn't sat on the old problems. Six months, start to finish.

Nobody was ever going to fund a configurator rebuild on its own. A payments deadline gave it focus.



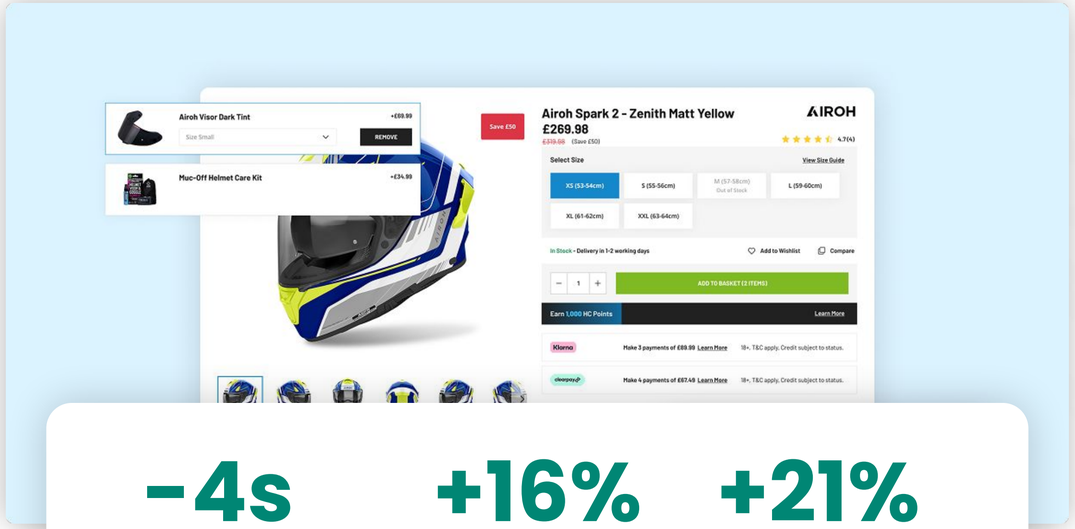
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What Happened

Both, so I can stop keeping you waiting.

Helmet City



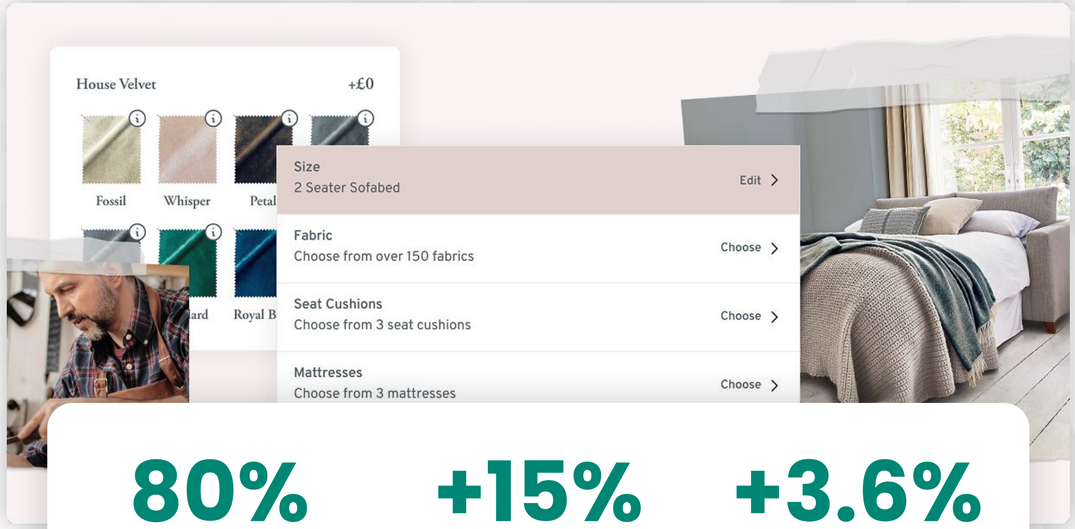
−4s Load Time

+16% CR

+21% Engagement

Seven weeks to build, four weeks after launch.
Same platform, same catalogue, same team.

Willow & Hall



80% Faster

+15% Sales

+3.6% CR

Considered purchase, long window.
On a £2k sofa, 3.6% is a different animal to 16% on a helmet.

You didn't come here to look at someone else's dashboard.
The interesting part is what happened next.

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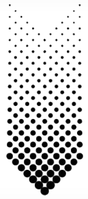
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STEAL THIS

Ask one question at your next agency call.

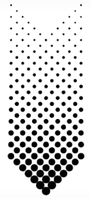
The first time we ran this on ourselves we didn't enjoy the answer either.

“Of last quarter's hours, how many kept it running and how many made it better?”



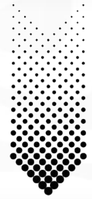
They can answer in a day

Good sign. They're already tracking it, which means someone is watching the ratio.



They need a fortnight

Nobody has ever asked. Ask anyway, the exercise is worth more to you than the answer.



Maintenance is over half

You're renting stability at growth prices.

What It Looked Like For Us

Same retainer, either side of a Hyvä rebuild.

Before

70%

Firefighting, Maintenance & Patches

30%

Pro-active work

After

30%

Maintenance & Patches

70%

Pro-active work & CRO

Not more money. The same money, buying different work –
because a modern frontend is cheaper to keep upright.

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What the Hours Bought

Two things that had been impossible for years.



The Search Rebuild

On Helmet City's list for years. It was never happening while the retainer went on patches.

+9% CR **+5% Turnover**

on its own, after the rebuild had landed

Product Enhancement

Willow & Hall's configurator hasn't stopped improving since it launched. Swatch ordering, faster steps, changes based on real usage data. None of that was feasible on the old build.

Weeks, not quarters

the same work on the old build was a six-month conversation

Neither was clever.
Both were only possible because the week had stopped disappearing.

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STEAL THIS

Time how long it would take you to change payment provider.

You don't have to actually do it. Just ask your team for the honest estimate, and listen to the answer.

“A few weeks”	“Six months, maybe”	“We couldn't”
Your checkout is where you can find it. You have options, and you can use them.	Your frontend is tangled in years of theme overrides. Payments is just where you noticed.	Then your provider chooses you.

It's the same three questions again.
A choice you can't make is a symptom, exactly like a bug you keep fixing.

STEAL THIS

Do the maths before anyone sells you anything.

Every talk today will hand you someone else's benchmark. Yours are better, and you already have them.

The Sum

(target CR ÷ current CR − 1) × annual revenue

Target CR is whatever your best-performing device or channel already does. You've proved it's reachable.

Worked Example

£6m a year. Desktop converts at 1.8%, mobile at 1.1%, and mobile is two thirds of your traffic.

Closing half that gap is worth roughly £1.05m a year.

Now put your fire log hours next to it. That's the real trade you're making every week.

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What We'd Argue

Site speed and frontend architecture are phase one of CRO.

Not the thing you sort out before you start. The first phase of it.

And neither of these brands left Magento to get it. That option didn't use to exist. It does now.

Every test you run	Every tool you buy	Every hour you spend
Runs on top of the architecture. A slow page caps the result before you start.	Search, recommendations, overlays - they all inherit the performance of what they sit on.	Goes on keeping it running or making it better. The architecture decides the split.

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The Five, In Order

All five fit in one Thursday afternoon.

1	Run the three questions	Over last month's tickets. Mark each one cause or symptom.
2	Start the fire log	Five columns, five days, whoever answers the phone.
3	Ask for the split	Last quarter's hours: keeping it running versus making it better.
4	Time the switch	How long to change payment provider? The estimate is the diagnosis.
5	Do the sum	Your device gap, your revenue. Put it next to the fire log hours.

You don't need permission, budget, or an agency for any of these five.

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You still have a list.

You'll never get to it while the website's on fire.

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Thanks for listening.

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Thanks to Helmet City and Willow & Hall for letting me talk about their fires in public, and to Hyvä and Mollie.

Want to talk Hyvä or payments? Hyvä are on stand F20, Mollie on E20.

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Scan to connect on LinkedIn

Want a copy?

The fire log sheet and the five slides, to anyone who wants them. No form, no follow-up sequence. Ask me here or drop me an email.