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by Brad Bortone, Associate Editor



Dear Readers:

The goal of a test is to get a learning, not a lift.

While putting together this issue of the MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal, the MarketingExperiments team also hosted our first-ever Optimization Summit. The event was sold out, and the crowd was extremely participative.

One point became especially clear: The key to building a thriving marketing organization is to foster a culture of continual learning.

While our labs work with real-world marketers that must realize ROI from their testing efforts, a lift is not the first goal we aim for. **Our goal is to devise tests that give us new knowledge** about the unique motivations of our Research Partners' audiences, a firm understanding of their true Value Proposition, and deeper insights into the anxiety their customers face while traveling through the Research Partners' sales and marketing funnels.

This is the business intelligence we need to help them gain a sustained competitive advantage, not just a lift on an individual test.

So as you read through the latest edition of our *MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal*, look for transferable principles that spark testing ideas for you, tests that will give you new business intelligence about your own audience. Here are a few of the discoveries that were most interesting to me:

- For every action you desire a visitor to make (a click in the case of PPC), **there must be an immediate promise of value that outweighs the cost of that action**. Like the Primary Value Proposition, this Sub-Value Proposition of a specific action can be measured by its appeal, exclusivity, and credibility. Both, the Primary Value Proposition and Sub-Value Proposition, must be communicated throughout the entire conversion process. By effectively crafting and then expressing the Value Proposition in a PPC ad, our researchers drove a 203% increase in projected profit in this PPC experiment. See **"Optimizing PPC Ads" on page [114](#)**.
- But how do you identify your Value Proposition? Value Propositions must be tested. Then, once identified, three marketing elements should be used to express a Value Proposition on a Web page. Learn more about those elements in **"Do You Have the Right Value Proposition?" on page [12](#)**.
- The objective of an email is to get a click. Therefore, your email message must engage the recipient with enough value to inspire them to click for more information. Read on to see how a properly focused email message increased conversion by 85% in **"Crafting an Engaging Email Message" on page [52](#)**.
- Optimization doesn't stop online. To ensure your optimization gains are not lost in the funnel, strategic steps must be taken to optimize a lead after it has been captured and prior to passing it to Sales. Learn how one company generated \$4.9 million in additional sales pipeline growth in only 8 months in **"Lead Optimization" on page [138](#)**.

We seek to continually optimize how we share what really works in digital marketing optimization with you. To that end, we will be creating a new, more intensive way to help you improve your company's performance.

We are currently working on focused multimedia reports, in which we compile our research and methodologies into a concentrated training that will help you optimize key components of your sales and marketing funnel. Future topics include Friction, Value Proposition, Copyrighting, and many more.

So be on the lookout for this new training framework in the next few months. In the meantime, feel free to share this issue of the MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal with your friends and colleagues.

Thank you for your trust,

Dr. Flint McLaughlin

Managing Director (CEO) of MECLABS

P.S. We want to hear from you. Please send your thoughts to the MarketingExperiments content team at Editor@MarketingExperiments.com or take three minutes to visit MarketingExperiments.com/Survey.

Creative Swipe Files

Here is a quick look at the creative executions for the experiments that you will find throughout this issue of the Research Journal. You can use this quick digest as a swipe file while you brainstorm new creatives for your marketing campaigns. And you can read about the full research behind these creative executions in the Major Experiment Briefings in this issue.

EXPERIMENT #1: Value Prop

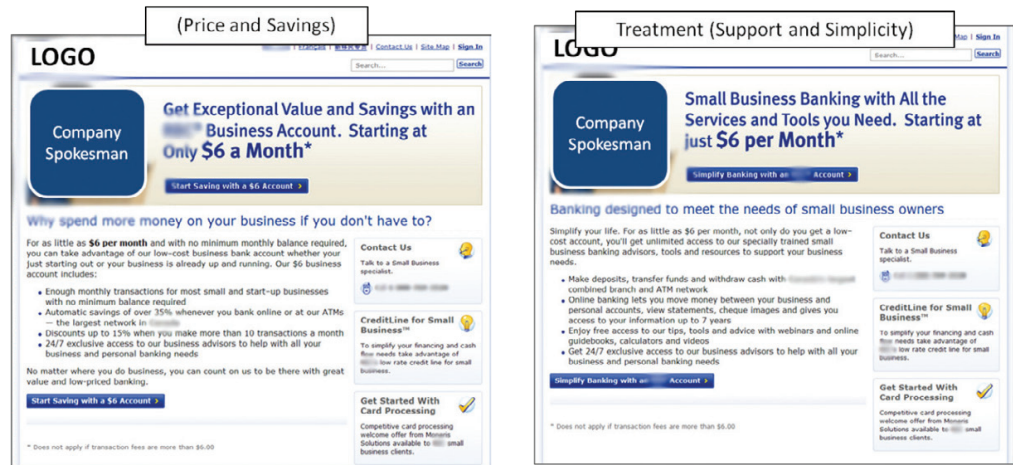
In this experiment we focused on breaking down PPC ads based on Value Proposition categories (Price, design, growth, etc). PPC is the best way to test your optimal Value Proposition.

[Read more on page 12](#)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>Price → Lowest Fee Business Acct.
Banking that starts at \$6 per mo.*
Great value, save up to 35%
[Name].com/GreatValueBanking</p> | <p>Savings → Businesses Save Up to 50%
[Name] Sm. Business bank accounts have the greatest savings & best value
[Name].com/SaveWith[Name]</p> |
| <p>Design → [Name] Biz Essentials Acct.
Designed to meet the needs of small businesses. Starting at \$6*
[Name].com/SmallBusiness</p> | <p>Support → Small Business Banking
24/7 access to specialized advisors And resource centre. Starts at \$6*
[Name].com/AdviceYouCanBankOn</p> |
| <p>Growth → Grow with [Name] Biz Banking
[Name] accounts starting at \$6/month
Overdraft protection & credit lines
[Name].com/GrowWith[Name]</p> | <p>Simplicity → Simplify Banking with [Name]
Small Business Banking Services & tools for as low as \$6 a month
[Name].com/GrowWith[Name]</p> |

In this experiment we tested different Value Propositions in two landing pages. The control focused on price and savings, while the treatment focused on the support tools offered and simplicity of use.

[Read more on page 12](#)



In this test we were trying to determine which value category would generate the most response from email recipients. The first treatment focused on overcoming challenges, while the second treatment focused on generating response.

[Read more on page 12](#)

Version A: Overcoming Challenges

Dear%%Contact%%,

To Help you make the most informed decisions and keep your operations moving forward, ████████ scientists and engineers are continuously researching to find solutions to the spectrum of monitoring and technology issues that you face. They ask the questions relevant to each issue.

- How can you intelligently adjust surface drilling parameters based on new [downhole data](#)?
- How can deepwater risk be reduced by combining emerging best practices, real-time remote monitoring and on-rig expert support?
- What are the newest, most intelligent insights and ideas around [stick-slip](#) mitigation?

[Get the answers](#)

If you're attending the ████████ in Amsterdam, don't miss the presentations that address these issues, and be sure to stop by the ████████ booth where our experts will be available to answer your questions. Even if you're unable to attend the conference in person, we invite you to read the paper abstracts at our ████████ Online Resource Center.

Version B: Generating Results

Dear%%Contact%%,

To Help you drill more safely, efficiently, and effectively, ████████ scientists and engineers continuously conduct in-depth field tests to leverage the latest technologies and measurement tools. Some of the recent results from this testing will be presented at the ████████ Conference and Exhibition in Amsterdam.

- Technology enabling real-time monitoring of downhole drilling conditions results in faster, more informed decision making, improved [penetration rates](#), and [higher quality wellbores](#).
- The Combination of managed-pressure drilling techniques and treated micronized barite drilling fluids can enhance wellbore security and reduce drilling risks in wells considered [hydraulically undrillable](#).
- New BHA designs deliver better directional control and penetration rates while outperforming conventional drilling BHAs by more than 350% in three eastern Siberia wells.
- A Closed-loop, automated system, performing real-time monitoring of drilling parameters and performance with automatic adjustment of WOB and RPM, resulted in [more than a 10% improvement in RCO](#) in several field studies.

[Find Out More](#)

If you're attending the ████████ Drilling Conference, don't miss the presentations that address these issues, and be sure to stop by the ████████ booth where our experts will be available to answer your questions. Even if you're unable to attend the conference in person, we invite you to read the paper abstracts at our 2011 ████████ Online Resource Center.

EXPERIMENT #2: Optimizing Email Copy

In this test, we tried to determine which email would generate the most clickthrough based on the copy.

[Read more on page 52](#)

Treatment #1

LOGO



Business Planning 2010:
The New Challenges

Put Your Business Plan To Work in 2010

In 2010, learn how your business plan can be the key to attracting new investors and financing, identifying unseen business opportunities, attracting more customers, and streamlining internal processes.

This Free Guide includes:

- › **Six fundamentals** every business plan needs to address
- › **Step-by-step Business Plan Checklist** for those seeking financing
- › **Expert commentary from industry experts** to update you on business planning changes in 2010
- › **How to involve outside advisors** in the business planning process for added insight

[Download Guide](#)

Privacy and Security

Treatment #2

LOGO



Business Planning 2010:
The New Challenges

Panasonic's 250-Year Business Plan

In 1932, Konosuke Matsushita, the founder of the company now known as Panasonic, famously created a 250-year corporate plan. That may seem ambitious, but well-run companies always take the long view.

Often, organizations put great effort into crafting their original plan — detailing their team, marketing, operations, finances, risks, etc. — only to file it away once it has achieved its initial purpose. However, the best business plans should be living documents.

In times of rapid change, ongoing planning is more important than ever. Revising a plan yearly and checking it every six months or so is reasonable. But there's no set schedule; you should always be thinking about how to improve your plan.

[Read more](#)

[View Full Article](#)

Privacy and Security

EXPERIMENT #3: Optimizing PPC Ads

We took a PPC ad and tried to optimize it by defining a clear a Value Proposition. We wanted to see whether the control or the new redesigns, which had focused Value Propositions, would generate the most clicks.

[Read more on page 114](#)

Original Ad

{Keyword} Business Software

Award-Winning Business Software.

Fully Integrated. Free Trial

www.NetSuite.com/Business

{Keyword} Business Solutions

Run Your Entire Business with One System.
Accounting + CRM. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/Business-Solutions

{Keyword} Business Software

Support the Entire Company with One
Low Cost Solution. NetSuite
www.NetSuite.com/Business-Solutions

Business Software Suite

#1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients
Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

#1 Business Software

6459+ Clients. On-Demand Access.
One System for the Entire Company.
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

Small Business Software

6459+ Clients Worldwide Free Trial
Software You Won't Outgrow
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

Small Business Software

Worlds #1 On-Demand Suite.
6459+ Clients. Free Trial Today.
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

Here we took the optimized PPC ad and saw how it complemented the rest of the process in the funnel, from the ad to the form page.
[Read more on page 114](#)

Business Software Suite
#1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients
Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware



MARKETING OPTIMIZATION



by Austin McCraw

Contributors
 Dr. Flint McGlaughlin
 Dustin Eichholt
 Daniel Burstein

March 17, 2011

Do You Have the Right Value Proposition? How to test, measure, and integrate your Value Proposition online.

Why should your ideal prospect buy from you rather than your competitors?

The answer you give this question is, in essence, your “Value Proposition,” and it is at the heart of all your online marketing campaigns. If there is one thing to really nail, it is this. However, too often marketers let intuition alone dictate this key piece of their marketing efforts, never testing this crucial element of their marketing strategy. They assume (or presume) it, essentially building an online marketing empire on sand.

But in reality, an effective Value Proposition cannot be dictated by internal company polls or guru gut feelings; rather, it must be discovered. You, the marketer, don’t determine the Value Proposition; no, the answer to this question must come directly from the actions of your customer. But...

- Can you definitively know what is most appealing to your customers?
- Can you actually discover the optimal message for moving your customer to action?
- Can you really be certain you have the right Value Proposition?

Yes, yes, and... yes.

The good news is that finding your optimal Value Proposition has never been more accessible in the history of marketing. The Internet has opened up the possibility for marketers to create real-world environments to test customer behavior in response to differences in the messaging of an offer. Simply put, it is now easy to test and know the optimal Value Proposition of an offer. And once this is known, all marketing becomes a downhill effort as you seek to get out of the way and just present the value clearly.

We have communicated the need for testing Value Propositions in the past, but have not provided a specific methodology for accomplishing this. So, this Research Article will present a never-before-published methodology for testing and discovering the optimal Value Proposition for an offer. This testing strategy comes straight from our own internal experiment designs as seen in the following test.

EXPERIMENT #1



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

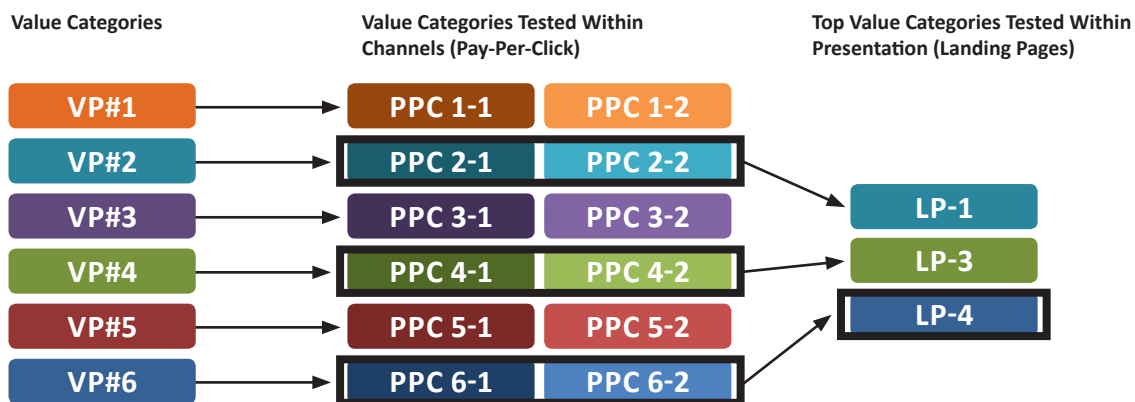
Test Protocol Number: TP3021, TP1351

Experiment Background and Design

So we will begin with a case study that illustrates the importance (and potential impact) of discovering the optimal Value Proposition for an offer. Lead by MECLABS Senior Optimization Manager, Adam Lapp, this experiment sought to identify the most effective expression of value for a small-business banking solution from one of the largest banks in North America.

Essentially, they were trying to identify what aspect of their offer was most appealing to the visitor. Was it a low price? Or was it a particular feature? They wanted to know what really moved their ideal prospects to action.

So our research analysts initiated the following testing process in order to identify the most effective Value Proposition for this offer.



We will dive into this testing process deeper in the article, but for now it will suffice to get a bird's-eye view of how the researchers moved from 1) identifying possible value categories for testing, to 2) running pay-per-click (PPC) ad campaigns, and then to 3) testing on the landing page itself.

Below are examples of the creative at each stage of the process.

Identifying Value Categories

To begin, value categories were identified. Essentially our researchers established the potential points of value that might appeal to the user. For this offer, the following categories were identified.

Price:

- Low price of the monthly fees (\$6 a month)

Savings:

- Estimated amount of savings (30%-50% compared to similar accounts)

Support:

- Expert support that is available (24/7 exclusive employee access settings)

Product Design:

- Uniquely designed for small businesses (custom employee access settings)

Benefits for Small Businesses:

- Potential growth (credit line of \$5,000; overdraft protection of \$5,000)
- Simplification of banking (pay bills, deposit, transfer and withdraw funds from 4,237 ATMs)
- Reduced work (services including payroll, overdraft protection and tax filing)

Many of our readers will be able to relate to the challenge faced by the marketers in this organization. It wasn't that they couldn't identify a Value Proposition, it was that they couldn't decide which aspect of their offer the user would find most valuable. Should they focus on the savings or the design? Or perhaps focus on the technical or business benefits for their primary target – the small businessperson. The only way to know for sure was to test, and that is what we did in the next two steps.

But before moving on, take a moment and test yourself, "Which of the about stated points of value do you think will be most appealing to this Research Partner's customers?" This is a good way to assess your own marketing intuition before we move on to the actual tests.

Testing the Value Proposition in the Channel

Once the categories were identified, our researchers then set out to carefully craft succinct expressions of those points of value within the 130-character limit of a PPC ad. There are many reasons (mentioned in detail below) why we start testing the channels – particularly PPC – before moving on to testing in the presentation. But for now, it should suffice to see some (not all) of the ads tested.

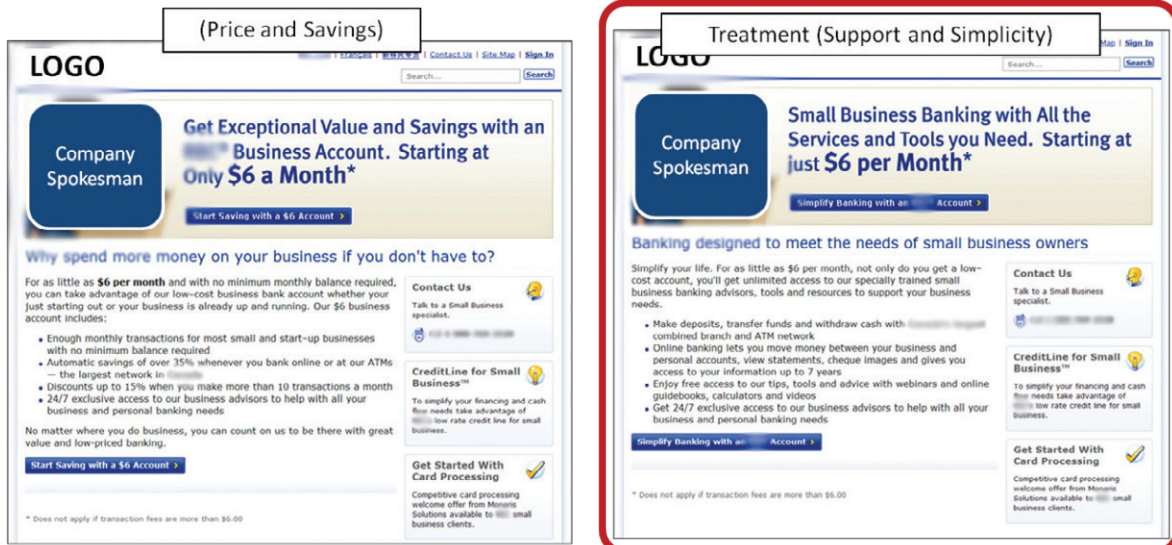
<p>Price → Lowest Fee Business Acct. Banking that starts at \$6 per mo.* Great value, save up to 35% [Name].com/GreatValueBanking</p>	<p>Savings → Businesses Save Up to 50% [Name] Sm. Business bank accounts have the greatest savings & best value [Name].com/SaveWith[Name]</p>
<p>Design → [Name] Biz Essentials Acct. Designed to meet the needs of small businesses. Starting at \$6* [Name].com/SmallBusiness</p>	<p>Support → Small Business Banking 24/7 access to specialized advisors And resource centre. Starts at \$6* [Name].com/AdviceYouCanBankOn</p>
<p>Growth → Grow with [Name] Biz Banking [Name] accounts starting at \$6/month Overdraft protection & credit lines [Name].com/GrowWith[Name]</p>	<p>Simplicity → Simplify Banking with [Name] Small Business Banking Services & tools for as low as \$6 a month [Name].com/GrowWith[Name]</p>
<p>Ease → Easier Business Banking Let [Name] Handle Your Small Business Needs - Starting at Just \$6/mo* [Name].com/BankingSolutions</p>	

Overall, these PPC ad tests were conducted in order to help identify the value categories that stand out from the rest in generating user response. In this case, we were able to narrow down the value categories from seven to four, with the winners highlighted in red above.

Testing the Value in the Presentation

In the next round of testing, we actually tested integrating the Value Proposition into the presentation of the offer pages themselves.

As you see in the example on the next page (blurred to protect partner identity), the design and layout remained the same, with the only change being the specific messaging of the offer. One combined the benefits of price and savings, while the other combined the benefits of support and simplicity.



The conclusion was that the Value Proposition emphasizing the support and simplicity carried the most appeal in the mind of the visitor, generating 10% higher conversion rate than the other points of value. That is not to say that the other points of value were not important to the visitor, but that support and simplicity were the most important in their assessing the offer's value.

Results:

At the end of all our testing, we were able to identify the key focus of the Value Proposition that would generate the most response from the visitor. Out of all the different Value Proposition possibilities, one consistently outperformed the others – the small business benefit of simplifying banking. The statement below then became the “kernel” for all of the online marketing efforts.

Value Proposition Focus:

“The [Name] Business Essential Account simplifies small business banking by providing all the tools and resources you need for success”

Essential Proof Points:

- 24/7 phone access to our dedicated small business advisors
- Designed exclusively to meet the needs of small business
- Starting at \$6, it's an exceptional value compared to similar accounts

Also note that we supported this Value Proposition with what we call “proof points.” This test also helped the researchers identify the most effective specific/quantifiable facts that brought credibility to the core Value Proposition statement. These proof points are another key strategy for expressing your Value Proposition online that we will discuss further in the rest of this Research Article.

Conclusions

What you need to understand is that a Value Proposition is not something that you dictate; it is something that you discover. No matter how intuitive your marketing senses, or how many other teammates agree with you, a Value Proposition cannot be solely a declaration of Marketing. In the end, it must be tested.



Key

Principle: In the end, a Value Propositions must be tested.

Therefore, a testing methodology must be established in order to find a Value Proposition. Much like in the case study above, we need a systematic approach for finding what aspect of our offer will generate the most response.

What is a Value Proposition?

To do that, we must first define what we mean by the phrase “Value Proposition.” There are many words out there that describe similar elements in the marketing process, so it is essential that you understand clearly how we are using this term.

Essentially, your Value Proposition is the answer to a single question in the mind of every visitor that lands on your website: If I am your ideal prospect, why should I buy from you rather than your competitors?

This definition of Value Proposition forces you into the first person. You must get into the mind of your visitors. This is how effective marketers generate results. It is not through becoming gurus of email, landing pages, persuasion, etc. that marketers become great. Marketers become great as they study the visitor. Optimization does not occur on the Web page, it occurs in the mind, and therefore you must strive to get into the mind of your ideal prospect when considering your Value Proposition.

Three other important factors to remember when understanding the nature of a Value Proposition are:

1. A Value Proposition is not usually dictated, it is discovered. It grows out of need. We must avoid a sales-driven approach to product development. You should develop products for the market.
2. Refine your Value Proposition until you can articulate it in a single, instantly credible sentence. The more concise, the more effective.
3. And as we mentioned before, in the end, you must test your Value Proposition

Keeping this fundamental understanding of a Value Proposition in mind, we can now walk through a five-step process for actually testing your Value Proposition online.

Testing your Value Proposition in Five Steps

Testing your Value Proposition in Five Steps

This is the same five-step experimentation process that the researchers at MECLABS use when testing a Value Proposition internally, and is patterned after a decade of Value Proposition research.

STEP #1: Review Data

Design of Experimentation: Value Proposition Testing

STEP 1: Review Data

STEP 2: Compose Drafts

STEP 3: Measure Force

STEP 4: Conduct Test

STEP 5: Analyze Results



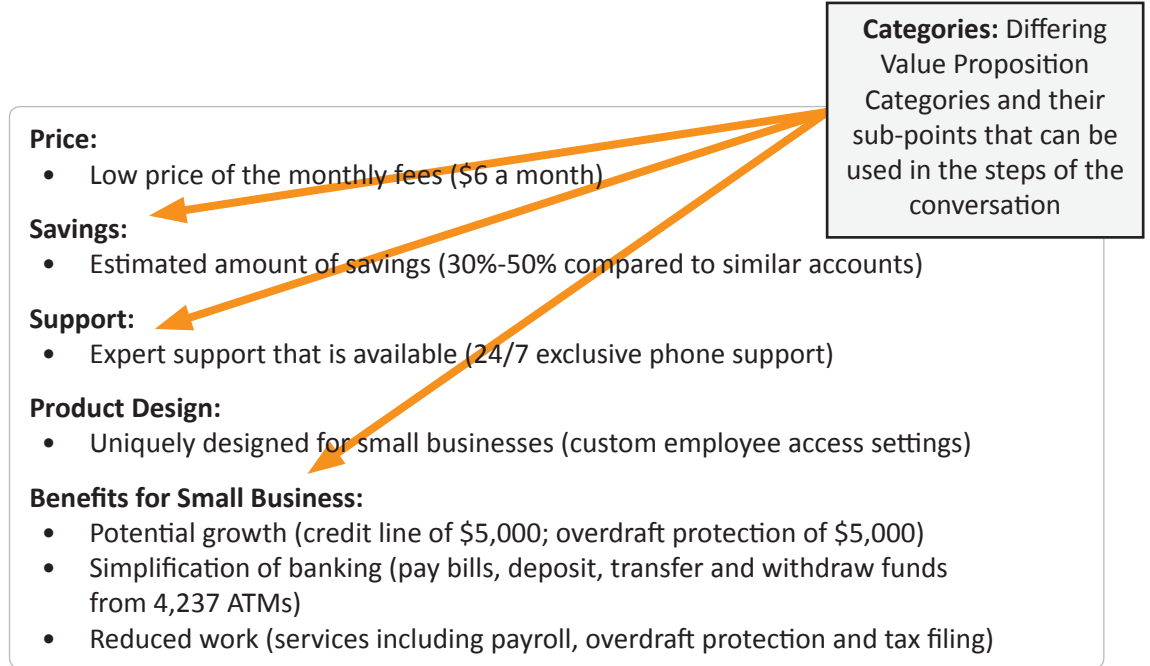
In this first step, you are seeking to establish context. As mentioned above, a Value Proposition is predicated upon external factors (customer motivations, competitive offers, etc.) and therefore must be developed within the context of these factors. There are three data points our researchers use to establishing this context.

1. *Current metrics* – What can your current metrics tell you about your website visitors? What pages, messages, products are generating the most response? Where are your visitors coming from? Where are they clicking? Often this kind of data can give you insights into the motivations your customers?
2. *Previous campaigns* – What campaigns have been successful in the past? Which ones have not? This doesn't necessary have to be online campaigns. Anything that can give you insight into your customer's motivation is an acceptable data point. If you don't already, keep a thorough record of every campaign and test conducted for review and analysis.
3. *Competitive analysis* – What do your competitors have that you don't? What makes you different? What are the claims they are making? How do you compare? Before conducting any test, researchers at MECLABS conduct a "Summary Competitive Analysis" in which 3-5 of the closest competitors are reviewed. You must understand how you stack up against your competitors.

These three pieces of information form the background for the next step in testing a Value Proposition.

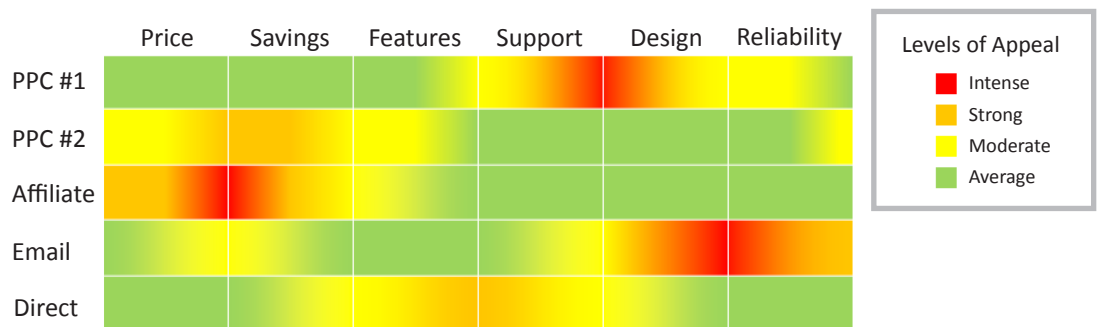
STEP #2: Compose Drafts

Once you have reviewed the data thoroughly, you can begin to compose drafts of possible Value Propositions for your offer. You are striving to craft 5-10 possible points of value based of the information gathered from the metrics in Step #1. For instance, you can see the potential Value Propositions identified in the case study from the beginning of this research article.



This can be done alone, as a group, or even in competitive teams. This is where marketing intuition plays a part, and where you can even get democratic. However, keep in mind, you can start out democratic, but then you have to get autocratic. If you stay democratic, often you will end up with a hodge-podge of opinions melded together in a compromised expression of value. Eventually, you will have to test.

Also, your Value Proposition may take different shapes as it is affected by customer profiles. Different visitors will often times have different levels of appeal for the different points of value you identify. As you draft comps, you should strive to identify and match the Value Proposition closely associated with each unique customer profile (as seen below).



STEP #3: Measure Force

Once you have identified the potential points (or categories) of the Value Proposition, you must begin to measure and refine their expression to be as strong as possible before testing. You do this by measuring the triangulation of three essential elements:

APPEAL: For appeal, essentially you are assessing the degree to which the Value Proposition is desired by the ideal prospect.

EXCLUSIVITY: For exclusivity, you are assessing the degree to which the ideal prospect can get this value elsewhere. Are you the only place where this offer is available? How unique is it? What sets it apart?

CREDIBILITY: For credibility, you are assessing the believability of your claim. If you had the exclusive rights to a legitimate cure for male-pattern baldness, your challenge wouldn't be appeal or exclusivity, it would be credibility. Your Value Proposition must be stated in such a way that it is instantly credible.

Let's look at a few examples, to see how you might rank the expression of the Value Proposition as well as refine it in order to ensure you are testing the Value Proposition statement with the most potential force.

Not This

[Earn Degree Online](#)
 Interested in Earning Your Degree Online? Inquire Now About Capella.
www.Capella.edu

	APPEAL
	EXCLUSIVITY
	CREDIBILITY

The first is of a PPC ad that expresses the Value Proposition with little-to-no force. There might be an interest in earning a degree online, but there is no exclusivity and/or credibility provided to back up the offer claims, so the force of this PPC ad is very weak.

Once assessing, you could craft and/or refine a PPC ad to look something like the following:

But This

[Accredited Online Degrees](#)
 Students all ages - 18 to 75
 Est.. in 1902, over 11k classmates
Franklin.edu/Online-Education

	APPEAL
	EXCLUSIVITY
	CREDIBILITY

Here you have increased the appeal with words like “accredited” and “all ages.” You have a claim that is more exclusive with details about the size and age of the degree programs. And then, finally, you have credibility with the specific quantifiable statements like “all ages – 18 to 75”, “EST. in 1902”, “11k classmates.” All of these factors improve the force of the Value Proposition significantly.

Here is an example of how you might refine the expression of the Value Proposition before testing it in the envelope fields of an email campaign.

Not This

From: Sales (sales@example.com)
Subject: Save on Memory

Category	Score (1-5)
APPEAL	1
EXCLUSIVITY	1
CREDIBILITY	1

The expression of value in this example has little to no appeal, no exclusivity, and no credibility. This is a real example we have seen used on the Web, and if “savings on memory” was the essence of a Value Proposition, you might increase the force with the following expression:

But This

From: Brian Johnson - Technical Support Manager
Subject: Speed Up Your Dell Latitude D620 - Free Memory Tool

Category	Score (1-5)
APPEAL	4
EXCLUSIVITY	3
CREDIBILITY	4

Notice how the appeal is increased with relevance as the new subject line mentions the specific computer model owned by the recipient. Also an additional “free memory tool” is offered. The exclusivity is increased by the reference to the specific model number; however, this could be strengthened further. Finally, credibility came from the name of the sender. In the original version, the sender was “Sales,” but in the refined version the sender is a specific person from “technical support.” Receiving an email from a real person (with “technical” credentials) lowers the guard and increases the trust.

Overall, these are just two examples to illustrate how analyzing the force of the Value Proposition can help marketers craft more forceful expressions of value. The goal is to have the most forceful presentation of each point of value before testing.

STEP #4: Conduct Test

In the fourth step, you actually begin testing your Value Proposition by utilizing your channels (PPC ads, emails, banner ads, etc.) and presentation (landing pages, product pages, etc.). First you test in your channels in order to narrow down the contending points of value. So you may start with six potential points of value (as seen below), but through the channel, you eliminate as many of the options as possible.

Price →	<p>Lowest Fee Business Acct. Banking that starts at \$6 per mo.* Great value, save up to 35% [Name].com/GreatValueBanking</p>	Savings →	<p>Businesses Save Up to 50% [Name] Sm. Business bank accounts have the greatest savings & best value [Name].com/SaveWith[Name]</p>
Design →	<p>[Name] Biz Essentials Acct. Designed to meet the needs of small businesses. Starting at \$6* [Name].com/SmallBusiness</p>	Support →	<p>Small Business Banking 24/7 access to specialized advisors And resource centre. Starts at \$6* [Name].com/AdviceYouCanBankOn</p>
Growth →	<p>Grow with [Name] Biz Banking [Name] accounts starting at \$6/month Overdraft protection & credit lines [Name].com/GrowWith[Name]</p>	Simplicity →	<p>Simplify Banking with [Name] Small Business Banking Services & tools for as low as \$6 a month [Name].com/GrowWith[Name]</p>

The reason you start testing in the channel is because the cost is often low and the traffic levels are often higher. For instance, you will most likely have many more PPC impressions than product page impressions in your conversion process. Therefore, when testing five or more test versions of the Value Proposition, channels enable you to get statistically significant tests with much less investment.

PPC, in particular, is an effective means for testing the Value Proposition for more reasons than cost and traffic. It is almost as if search marketing was almost designed for the testing of Value Propositions for three unique reasons:

1. **Value is isolated** – First, in a PPC ad you are primarily testing statements of value. Friction is not an issue you can control, nor are there significant sources of Anxiety at this stage in the process. At the bottom of it all, it's how you craft a statement of value that determines the effectiveness of a PPC ad.
2. **Succinctness is forced** – Next, due to the constraints on the amount of characters per line, marketers are forced to tightly craft their statements of value. Remember, as mentioned above, the most effective Value Propositions are the ones that can be stated succinctly. PPC ads force you to do this.
3. **Competition is present** – And finally with PPC, your competition is always a few pixels away, meaning that when running a campaign, you are directly testing your claims of value against your competitors'. Why should your ideal prospect buy from you rather than your competitors? Well, PPC enables your customers to vote directly.

With that said, PPC is not the only channel that can be used when testing the Value Proposition; in fact the following is a recent experiment in which our researchers tested the Value Proposition of an offer using the body of an email.

EXPERIMENT #2



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP2067

Test Background and Design:

The company we were working with provides technology and product supplies to the oil and gas industry. For this experiment, we were focused on an email message sent to inform a specific segment of their opt-in list (drilling engineers) of an upcoming conference. The goal was to determine the optimal Value Proposition for this segment, and thus we conducted an A/B split test of two different emails with differing value categories:

Email #1 (Overcoming Challenges): The first email was focused on how this conference can help drilling engineers overcome challenges. As you can see below, it listed the specific challenges that it will help them overcome with statements like:

- “...researching to find solutions to the monitoring and technology issues you face...”
- “How can deepwater risk be reduced?”
- “How can you adjust parameters based on new downhole data?”
- “What are the newest insights around stick-slip mitigation?”

Version A: Overcoming Challenges

Dear%%Contact%%,

To Help you make the most informed decisions and keep your operations moving forward, ██████████ scientists and engineers are continuously researching to find solutions to the spectrum of monitoring and technology issues that you face. They ask the questions relevant to each issue.

- How can you intelligently adjust surface drilling parameters based on new downhole data?
- How can deepwater risk be reduced by combining emerging best practices, real-time remote monitoring and on-rig expert support?
- What are the newest, most intelligent insights and ideas around stick-slip mitigation?

[Get the answers](#)

If you're attending the ██████████ in Amsterdam, don't miss the presentations that address these issues, and be sure to stop by the ██████████ booth where our experts will be available to answer your questions. Even if you're unable to attend the conference in person, we invite you to read the paper abstracts at our ██████████ Online Resource Center.

Email #2 (Generating Results): The second email was focused on how this conference can help drilling engineers generate results. As you can see below, this email is full of data points illustrating the potential results that could be generated by attending this conference.

- “conduct in-depth field tests to leverage the latest technology... recent results will be presented”
- “...improved penetration rates and higher quality wellbores..”
- “..outperforming conventional drilling BHA’s by more than 350%...”
- “..10% improvement on ROP...”

Version B: Generating Results

Dear%%Contact%%,

To Help you drill more safely, efficiently, and effectively, ████████ scientists and engineers continuously conduct in-depth field tests to leverage the latest technologies and measurement tools. Some of the recent results from this testing will be presented at the ████████ Conference and Exhibition in Amsterdam.

- Technology enabling real-time monitoring of downhole drilling conditions results in faster, more informed decision making, improved penetration rates, and higher quality wellbores.
- The Combination of managed-pressure drilling techniques and treated micronized barite drilling fluids can enhance wellbore security and reduce drilling risks in wells considered hydraulically undrillable.
- New BHA designs deliver better directional control and penetration rates while outperforming conventional drilling BHAs by more than 350% in three eastern Siberia wells.
- A Closed-loop, automated system, performing real-time monitoring of drilling parameters and performance with automatic adjustment of WOB and RPM, resulted in more than a 10% improvement in RCO in several field studies.

Find Out More

If you’re attending the ████████ Drilling Conference, don’t miss the presentations that address these issues, and be sure to stop by the ████████ booth where our experts will be available to answer your questions. Even if you’re unable to attend the conference in person, we invite you to read the paper abstracts at our 2011 ████████ Online Resource Center.

Results:



17% Increase in Clickthrough Rate

Version A generated a 17.05% higher clickthrough rate than Version B

Subscription Path	CTR	Relative diff v. control
Version A (Overcoming Challenges)	20.93%	17.05%
Version B (Generating Results)	17.88%	-

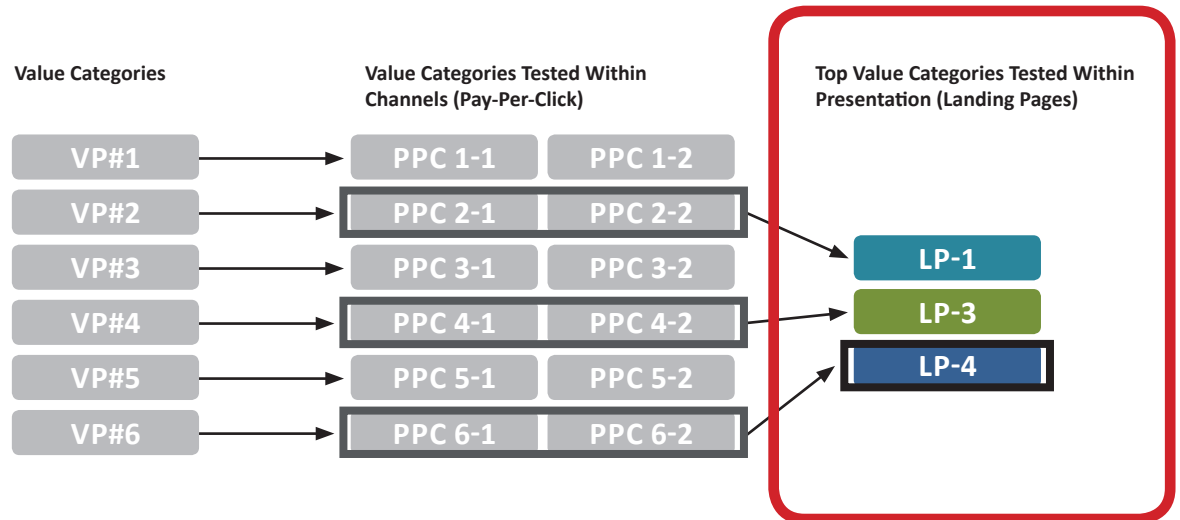
According to the results, focusing on overcoming challenges taps into the motivations of drilling engineers more than focusing on the results. Both were well-crafted Value Propositions, but one worked 17% better than the other. By running a simple A/B split test, we were able to determine which Value Proposition was optimal for this segment.



What you need to understand: The email message that focused on overcoming challenges outperformed the email focused on results, leading us to conclude that for this segment there is more value in obtaining the solution to problems.

This insight has far-reaching implications. The identified optimal Value Proposition can now be utilized not only in future emails, but in the messaging for this particular segment throughout the entire conversion funnel.

Since we only had two Value Propositions to test, we could have gone straight to testing in the presentation. However, due to internal constraints and small segment size, email was the optimal solution. In most cases, however, it is good to test in the presentation (landing pages, product pages, etc.) you intend to be using once you have narrowed down your potential Value Proposition contenders to a few (as seen in the image below).



This allows you to fully express a Value Proposition to the prospects. Essentially, the “presentation” is your strongest communication of the Value Propositions, so the results should be quite representative of what your visitors find most appealing.

As you are designing your Value Proposition treatments for this round of testing, keep in mind the three elements of force discussed in Step #3: Appeal, Exclusivity, and Credibility. As when testing within channels, here you want to refine your expression of each Value Proposition category with as much force as possible.

STEP 5: Analyze Results

The last and final step is to analyze results and interpret the insights applicable to your live marketing campaigns. Mostly, you will be identifying the most effective expression of value and then integrating throughout your conversion processes (something we will talk about next). But one thing to point out here before moving on is that while you can be confident that the highest performing Value Proposition can be rolled out across you online marketing campaigns, you must keep in mind that the appeal of your Value Proposition will change with time. That is why it is essential that you record the insights learned from the results of the testing and begin planning for future testing. As the market evolves and your competitors change, you will want to occasionally reevaluate your Value Proposition. This Step #5 will lead into the original Step #1 of this process in the near future.

Integrating Your Value Proposition Online

So now that we have covered a step-by-step process of discovering your optimal Value Proposition, where to next? What do we do once we have identified the optimal Value Proposition for an offer? Well, as mentioned in Step #5, you begin integrating it throughout you website.

This process will take many shapes and forms depending on the elements on your own Web pages, however, our research suggest there are three common marketing elements that integrate a Value Proposition into a conversion process most effectively:

1. Proof points
2. Supporting stories
3. Illustrative images

We will look at examples of these one by one.



Key Principle:

Once a Value Proposition is identified, three marketing elements should be used to express it on a Web page: Proof points, Supporting stories, and Illustrative images

Proof Points

The first of the three elements are what we call “proof points.” Essentially, these are codified text bytes that support the claim of value. They are evidential, providing support for the claims of value you are making on you Web page.

Once you have identified your core Value Proposition, you will want to identify at least three key proof points that can be used in your copy. As seen below, these usually take the form of bullet points and include specific and quantifiable language supporting the value.

All the examples below have been taken from highly successful tests in which proof points were utilized to integrate the value on a Web page.

- Over **122,264** articles.
- An updated **world atlas**, thousands of images and videos.
- An **online dictionary** and thesaurus, and **thousands** of articles from **403** respected magazines and journals.
- An **advertising-free** environment!
- **10% discount** at the Britannica Store for members only.
- Used by over **4755 Universities** worldwide including Oxford, Yale, and Harvard.

- ✔ The **Industry Standard** for **15+ years**
- ✔ Installed and running in **15 minutes**
- ✔ Most user-friendly version ever

+ **247 Technical and Customer Support**

+ **Highest Level of Global Accreditations**

+ **99.9% Uptime Guarantee**

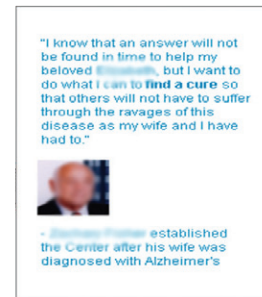
- ✔ **Simple** – Get started quickly!
- ✔ **Inexpensive** – Unlimited emails starting at \$10 per month.
- ✔ **Professional** – Choose from over 450 email templates.
- ✔ **Free StartUp! Service** – We will tailor your first email template to your business for free (a \$99 value)

- ▶ **600 full-time researchers** dedicated to building, verifying, and updating your data
- ▶ Our tele-research associates make over **80,000 calls** a day to **phone verify** your data
- ▶ **100% money-back guarantee** on every single lead

Supporting Stories

The next element that should be used to integrate your Value Proposition online is “story.” The objective here is to identify supporting stories that substantiate the claims of value. Value Proposition is best expressed (and most under utilized) in the form of story.

So once you have identified what aspect of your offer is most valuable to your audience, communicate to your audience how that aspect came about through the story of your organization. If you offer unique beers on a monthly basis (as seen below), talk about how you came to appreciate unique beers and/or how you go about selecting them. If you are raising money to find a cure for Alzheimer’s (as seen below), tell the story of why. Stories build trust, they build brand, and most of all, they are engaging.



Illustrative Images

Images are the third element that can be used to integrate value online. The goal here is to find meaningful graphics that illustrate the claim of value. Often however, the graphics marketers choose look like brochure fodder, and have little to no connection to the Value Proposition at all.

However, once you have identified the value category that is most appealing to your ideal prospect, then you must find images that bring relevance and reality to this value. For instance, if your value is the 32-volume set of encyclopedias you can get access to online, don't just show an image of a boy smiling in front of a computer. What does that mean? Rather, use an image (like below) that shows the 32 volumes you are gaining access to through the computer.

That is just one example from the many heavy-lifting images below.



There are many other ways to integrate your Value Proposition online, and in reality, every element of your page should be stating or supporting the Value Proposition in some way. However, these three (proof points, supporting stories, and illustrative images), are the most impactful ways to integrate your Value Proposition online.



The Bottom Line

Value Propositions are one of the most fundamental aspects of your online marketing efforts, and therefore must be built on something stronger than internal company polls or gut feelings. Further, marketers cannot dictate what can only be discovered. For, it is the customer who determines the Value Proposition ultimately, not the marketer.

So as we have made a case for in this article, testing a Value Proposition is one of the most strategic steps a marketer can take in online marketing. As laid out in detail above, testing Value Propositions can be accomplished in five simple steps:

- STEP 1: Review Data
- STEP 2: Compose Drafts
- STEP 3: Measure Force
- STEP 4: Conduct Test
- STEP 5: Analyze Results

Once marketers have identified the aspect of their offer that is most appealing to their ideal prospect, they must begin integrating it online through the use of proof points, supportive stories, and illustrative images.

In conclusion, testing your Value Proposition process might seem like an extra new step that you don't have time for, but in reality it can be done relatively quickly with the process outlined in this Research Article. Further, when you realize how much time marketers waste swinging the dull blade of an unappealing Value Proposition, you might find it worthwhile to spend the extra hour doing a little sharpening.



Online Marketing Tests: How do you know you're really learning anything?



by Daniel Burstein,
Director of Editorial
Content

March 4st, 2011

I am alive today. Even though my Mom never used one of those “fancy” car seats.

In today's blog post, I'll discuss what we can learn from debates about child safety technology to help you make sure you are really learning from your online testing. I'll specifically cover some crucial but oft-misunderstood topics – statistical significance and validity.

In doing so, I hope to help you understand what you can really get from your online test results.

I've been thinking about the topic more lately, as I've been asked to speak about validity at our upcoming [Optimization Summit](#) (do you have a case study you'd like to present? We've just opened our [call for speakers](#)). While it's become quite easy to simply plop two pages into [Google Website Optimizer](#) or [Adobe Test&Target](#), it has become just as easy to jump to erroneous conclusions based on those tests that can give you unjustified confidence in what you think you've learned.

Don't believe your own eyes

If you're sandwiched between a set of parents and a child or two, you've likely heard something along the lines of, “Well, when you were a kid we never did X [some sort of safety-related endeavor] and you turned out fine.”

This is a very hard statement to argue with, because it contains all true facts. But let's break it down for a moment as it relates to actually learning from online testing and car seats. Here are the two problems with your parents' statement:



- They are basing their knowledge on just one observation or perhaps two, three, or four if you have siblings (in other words, they don't have a statistically significant sample size – this can be difficult to determine, even with a testing platform)
- They are not exploring the alternative (for online marketing tests, this would mean conducting double-blind, randomized tests to compare different approaches – the easy part with testing platforms)

I believe this is one major area where the general public has a hard time understanding scientific research, because you must essentially trust a bunch of smarty-pants scientists more than your own common sense. Or as Chico Marx put it in *Duck Soup*, “Well, who you gonna believe, me or your own eyes?”

Strength in numbers

Don't be so sure about your own eyes. Because experimental scientists who've “been around the block” know how dangerous it is to draw general conclusions using special cases—in this case, the experience of one household.

That's why they base their knowledge on significantly more observations. In [one example](#) study of car seat safety, "Complete interview data were obtained on 7,151 children in 6,591 crashes representing an estimated 120,646 children in 116,503 crashes in the study population."

What the scientists are trying to do is study a large enough sample size to ensure with a high probability that the knowledge they are gaining in their subset of all possible real-world instances truly reflects the most likely outcome in all real-world instances.

In other words, they are fighting random chance. When you have only the small amount of observations you can see with your own eyes, there is a much greater probability the you've simply observed a quirk like, say, flipping a quarter and getting four "tails" in a row. Your observations don't negate the fact that the quarter has another side.

Marketing lesson

"What scientists do is learn a set of specialized principles, consisting of *procedures, math* and *logic*, then apply and adapt them to whatever they study," said Bob Kemper, the Senior Director of Sciences here at MECLABS. "The procedures make sure they get good data. The math makes sure they get the right answer(s). The logic makes sure they turn the right answers into the right actions."

As Bob says, a [sound methodology](#) is very important. But you've got to get the math right, too.

That's why it's not enough to "see" which tests of landing pages or emails perform best in a test, you must ensure that you have achieved statistical significance. In other words, don't just trust your "horse sense." Make sure your test is statistically valid before basing your decision on it.

And that takes far more than just looking for a set of green bars on a testing platform, due to these possible validity threats:

- **History Effects:** The effect on a test variable by an extraneous variable associated with the passage of time.
- **Instrumentation Effects:** The effect on the test variable, caused by a variable external to an experiment, which is associated with a change in the measurement instrument.
- **Selection Effects:** The effect on a test variable, by an extraneous variable associated with different types of subjects not being evenly distributed between experimental treatments.
- **Sampling Distortion Effects:** The effect on the test outcome caused by failing to collect a sufficient number of observations.

I don't mean to dissuade you from optimization testing. It is certainly a powerful way to dramatically improve results in a short period of time.

But, I do want you to be able to figure out if you are gaining a true understanding of what is really going on with your audience.

As Albert Einstein said, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing. So is a lot." Basing vital business decisions on a few casual observations, or on a heap of data you can't make sense of, is just as risky as taking a random guess.

In fact, it's more so because, while you know full-well when you're making a "SWAG" based purely on intuition, collecting "data"—even a tiny bit—can embolden you to take much bigger risks, even when they are unwarranted.

"Scientists use mathematical principles developed and refined over more than 200 years to 'grow up' from a child-like 'Yes/No' picture of things—like 'Car Seats=worthless, waste of money' or 'Car Seats=the final answer to child safety'—to a more mature (and practical) 'Better / By-how-much' one that weighs the risks and the costs," Kemper said.



Which leads to our next blog post – a topic that goes hand in hand with statistical significance and validity – probability. Please join us Monday right here on the MarketingExperiments blog.

Related resources

[FREE subscription to more than \\$10 million in marketing research](#)

[The Fundamentals of Online Testing – online training and certification course](#)

[Determining if a Data Sample is Statistically Valid](#)

[Optimization Testing Tested: Validity Threats Beyond Sample Size](#)

Photo attribution: [Dan4th](#)



Online Marketing Tests: How could you be so sure?

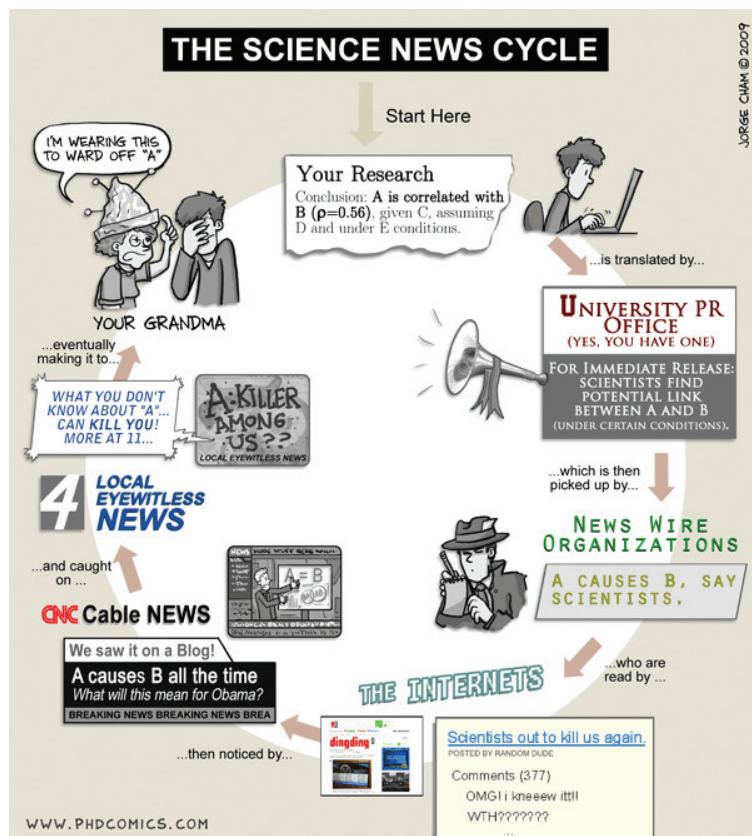
“Is this test statistically significant?”

“Yes.”

That one word answer, “yes,” can be highly misleading. In Friday’s MarketingExperiments blog post, I discussed [statistical significance and validity](#) and why it is so important to getting the most from online testing. And while it is reassuring to know that a test is valid, what exactly does that “yes” answer mean? To find out, let’s take another look at why I’m alive, even though my mother never put me in a “fancy, new fangled car seat,” Helicobacter pylori, and the importance of understanding probability in marketing tests.

Probability: Something in a shade of gray

By human nature, we like to see things as black or white. Something either is or it isn’t. And that’s why the way science is reported in the modern media drives us so crazy. “Wait a minute, cheese is going to kill us? Five years ago scientists said cheese cured heart attacks.”



Why the disconnect?

In Jorge Cham’s cartoon [“The Science News Cycle”](#) (from “Piled Higher and Deeper”) I think he illustrates the problem perfectly. Scientists understand the inherent limitations on their work as they constantly strive to discover what is really going on in the world around us. But that doesn’t necessarily make a good headline, nor is it necessarily understood by the general population by the time the scientific discoveries reach them at the end of a complex game of “telephone.”

So I recently asked my sister-in-law, Dr. Danielle Dube, her perspective on



by Daniel Burstein,
Director of
Editorial Content
March 7th, 2011

this. She's an Assistant Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Bowdoin College and is currently researching the bacterial pathogen *Helicobacter pylori*. She said, "When I speak to my colleagues, we talk about our observations from laboratory experiments, what the results suggest, and possible conclusions to draw from the work. But when the research reaches a wider audience, those nuances tend to get lost as we try to communicate our efforts in a compelling way."

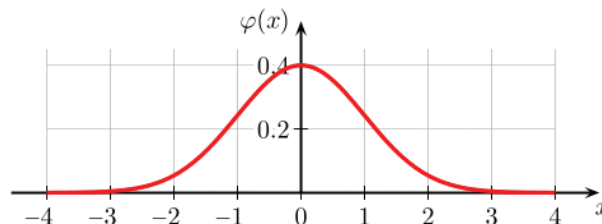
Now, you might be testing on landing pages and email rather than *Helicobacter pylori*, but notice how cautiously Dr. Dube speaks about her research findings, understanding the inherent limitations in trying to discover new knowledge... "results suggest"... "possible conclusions"...

Jumping to conclusions

As I said at the beginning of this blog post, that "yes" answer to the statistical validity question may not be as definitive as it sounds. It simply means that you've reached a certain pre-established level of probability in a test.

At MECLABS, we normally aim for a 95% level of statistical confidence for our tests ($p=0.05$).

For those statistics fans out there, it means that there's a 95% probability that the real (but unknown) answer falls within roughly two standard deviations of the sample mean – the point at the center of that really fat chunk of the normal distribution, or Gaussian (bell) curve – i.e., there is still a 5% chance that the real answer lies within one of the long tails.



But wait, there's more...

What that p-value is really telling you is not the chance that your landing page treatment is – better than- the control (statistics, like justice, is blind), but only that it's *-different from-* the control.

Again, for the statistic fans, you've simply found that there is sufficient evidence—per the standards you set—that the null hypothesis (i.e., that "the control and treatment are the same") should be rejected.

"So, if you find that you must reject the hypothesis that the two are the same, you are basically accepting that they are 'different' from one another—different, in particular, in the characteristic on which you compared them; be it conversion rate, click-through rate or whatever," said [Bob Kemper](#), the Senior Director of Sciences here at MECLABS. "The value judgment of whether that difference is 'better' or 'worse' is one that you assign based upon your research or optimization goals," he added.

“ Effectiveness of Child Safety Seats vs Seat Belts in Reducing Risk for Death in Children in Passenger Vehicle Crashes

Compared with seat belts, child restraints, when not seriously misused (e.g., unattached restraint, child restraint system harness not used, 2 children restrained with 1 seat belt) were associated with a 28% reduction in risk for death (relative risk, 0.72; 95% confidence interval, 0.54-0.97) in children aged 2 through 6 years after adjusting for seating position, vehicle type, model year, driver and passenger ages, and driver survival status. When including cases of serious misuse, the effectiveness estimate was slightly lower (21%) (relative risk, 0.79; 95% confidence interval, 0.59-1.05).

– Michael R. Elliott, PhD; Michael J. Kallan, MS; Dennis R. Durbin, MD, MSCE; Flaura K. Winston, MD, PhD

On auto and marketing test safety

Which is why scientists report their findings in such a cautious fashion. To go back to the car seats for a moment, no scientist reported, “Have your kid in a car seat or they will die.” The scientists basically said, “That kid has a lot better chance of surviving a car crash if he’s in a car seat.” Or to hear it straight from the source...

This is why you cannot rely on just one test to solve all of your problems. I’d love to be able to offer you “ten quick and easy secrets to overnight success”, but truly benefiting from online marketing tests requires that you:

- **Create a culture of testing that leverages the testing-optimization cycle** – Test. Improve. Test again. The more you test, the more you begin to discover valuable patterns in your customers’ behavior and preferences, and the more you can advance all of your marketing efforts over time.
- **Embrace doubt** – Even if you find something to be true today, will it change? If you are selling tours of the pyramids in Egypt and have tested and optimized your messages, how long do you think they will remain optimal? Might your potential customers significantly change in their perceptions and priorities over time? Might changes in the world economy or unfolding news about natural disasters or political unrest affect their motivations and concerns, and so their response to different messages?

Our world and cultures, our perceptions and behaviors are changing at an unprecedented and yet ever-increasing rate—enabled by, and mirroring the pace of advances in technology and communication. Marketers who, in recognition of this, embrace a healthy doubt and continue to adapt using those same technologies, will succeed and outperform the rest.

- **Be humble** – It’s not often you hear a really, really smart guy trumpeting the horn of humility, but here’s what Bob Kemper told me. “My own observations have led me to believe that the greatest single predictor of failure among marketing executives is hubris—the belief that they have their industry and their customers all figured out, and already know what will work best,” Kemper said.

What makes the skilled evidence-based marketer so enduringly successful is that she makes her decisions based on facts, not opinion—i.e., using data, not just intuition.

“This stems, I believe, from a healthy humility—the acceptance that she doesn’t (and can’t) have absolutely certainty, but the commitment to getting as close as she possibly can,” Kemper said. “So, what separates the skilled evidence-based marketer from the rest is the ability to turn sound data into sound decisions—ones that strike the optimum balance of risk and reward. This is achieved not just by using the right tools, but by using those tools right. Put the same chisel in the hands of a toddler and in those of a sculptor and observe what a difference this can make.”

Related resources

[Optimization Summit 2011 – June 1 -3](#)

[Online Marketing Tests: How do you know you’re really learning anything?](#)

[Testing Madness: What the odds of picking a perfect NCAA Tournament bracket can teach us about running valid tests](#)

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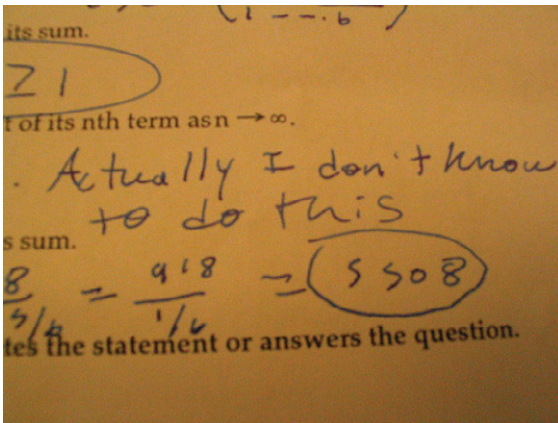
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Online Testing and Optimization: ROI

your test results by considering effect size

One of the biggest problems our audience tends to struggle with understanding is – what do their tests actually mean? And sometimes, frankly, they see a result, any result, and are overly confident about what they've learned from it.

So recently, here on the MarketingExperiments blog, we discussed [statistical significant and validity](#) as well as [confidence and probability](#).



When he read those posts, MECLABS Data Analyst, Phillip Porter made a good point, “Significance just tells us if there’s a difference, not if it’s important.”

Since Phillip dives into data like Greg Louganis off a springboard, I wanted to find out more... and learned a lot from him in the process (Phillip, not Greg Louganis). Let’s begin by backing up a bit...

How to ensure you gain business intelligence from your tests

Determining if you can learn something from your tests isn’t as simple as dropping the results into an online testing platform’s statistical blender and asking, “Does it validate?” You must ensure you understand these four elements for your tests:

- **Reliability** – you get the same answer every time
- **Validity** – you get a right answer (i.e., the answer you get accurately reflects reality)
- **Statistical Significance** – that answer is different from the other possible answers
- **Effect Size** – that answer is different by enough to be worth investing in its implementation

So, once you’ve got the first three down cold, you know you’ve actually learned something. But is it worth acting upon...

Effect size

Effect size is a relatively emerging practice in statistics (since the 1980s or so), particularly in social science research, but is starting to become the standard. *The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th edition, refers to research that doesn’t report effect sizes as “inferior.” Phillip’s background is in education research, so he is particularly enamored with the topic. But how does it affect your business? He explains it this way...

“In terms of size, what does a 0.2% difference mean? For Amazon.com, that lift might mean an extra 2,000 sales and be worth a \$100,000 investment,” Phillip said. “For a mom-and-pop Yahoo! store, that increase might just equate to an extra two sales and not be worth a \$100 investment.”

“Of course,” Phillip went on to say, “Those two sales might be worth a few million dollars each to a B2B site.”

In other words, degree matters. As I said in those previous posts, you simply can’t be looking for a yes/no answer. You must understand not only what the result is,



by Daniel Burstein,
Director of
Editorial Content
March 16th, 2011

but how it will impact your business to understand if it is worth making an investment based on your test.

Traffic matters

But traffic matters, too....

“Effect size becomes more important when we are dealing with tests that have unusually low or high power (in our usage these would be tests with low traffic or high traffic),” Phillip said. “Low traffic tests won’t validate, even with a large enough effect size to be worthwhile. High traffic tests can validate even when the effect size is so small as to be useless.”

“Every test will reach significance if we let it run long enough, this is one of the reasons for the [sample size calculation](#), it gives us the minimum sample size at which we can expect to see significance, if we get to that point and keep running the test, we increase our chances of finding significance, but decrease the value of that finding.”

So, while accurate testing relies on mathematics, successful testing needs some help from the business realm as well. Statistics will eventually give you an answer, but is it an answer that will help your bottom line?

How to use effect size to affect your bottom line

Even if you can’t get all the complex math down right, a basic understanding of effect size can help guide you as you try to profit from your tests.

Essentially, you must make sure the additional revenue justifies any additional costs. Sounds pretty obvious, right? But it’s all too easy for a company to chase the revenue gain and lose sight of the overall ROI when they see a successful test.

Our researchers think about effect size before the test is even run. For example, in the MECLABS Test Protocol, they must

answer the question, “What is the minimum difference you’re willing to accept?” By having to answer this question, they are forced to factor in the ROI of any potential optimization changes. Again, this is a business decision, not something your data analysts should answer for you.

So, no copying off the math whiz. This is homework that only you can complete.

Related resources

[Online Marketing Tests: How do you know you’re really learning anything?](#)

[Online Marketing Tests: How could you be so sure?](#)

[Why use Effect Sizes instead of Significance Testing in Program Evaluation?](#)

[Testing Madness: What the odds of picking a perfect NCAA Tournament bracket can teach us about running valid tests](#)

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Social Media Marketing: To tweet or to convert, that is the question

Having worked both in the Landing Page Optimization (a.k.a., Conversion Optimization) and Social Media sides of marketing, I am amazed how quickly the latter stole our hearts and minds, while the former continues to be a mystery for most marketers.

When I set out to write the LPO Benchmark Survey for MarketingSherpa this January (publication date: May 4), I naturally—and erroneously—assumed that just like all the past research partners I worked with at MarketingExperiments, and our workshop attendees, and our webinar audiences, the marketers that hear about our survey would be at least accustomed to LPO as a category.

The survey is out now (*Editor's note: the survey closed on Mar 1*), but what has surprised me is the response rate, compared to the response rate to the Social Media Marketing benchmark survey, which was fielded only a month earlier.



One simple metric

I will not go too deep into the data we are gathering on survey response and completion patterns, but one simple metric (and I know, nothing in analytics is ever “simple,” but let’s pretend) is the bounce rate. On the LPO survey, it’s a steady 20% higher than it was on the Social Media one among MarketingSherpa’s subscribers.

Drop-off at the first substantive question (once the respondent gets past the initial “demographic” questions) is also higher. All this indicates that at least as a category, LPO is still not as hip and cool as Social, even though—unlike Social—it has some [spectacular successes to boast](#), backed with concrete ROI figures.

Triple-digit conversion rate improvements

Since the initial printing of the Landing Page Optimization (LPO) Handbook by MarketingSherpa in 2002, LPO has steadily gained momentum as an opportunity for marketers to improve the performance not only of their Web pages, but also of related marketing activities that drive traffic: from search and email to social media.

Growing sophistication and decreased cost of measurement (Web analytics and CRM) tools, availability of primary research from LPO thought leaders, and emerging testing expertise, have increasingly allowed marketers to justify their investment into LPO.

Triple-digit conversion rate improvements are still not infrequent in LPO, even a decade after optimization practices have started being applied systematically. As in other areas of marketing, demonstrating ROI has been the overriding concern, which LPO-savvy marketers have consistently met, numbers in hand.



by Boris Grinkot,
Associate Director
of Product
Development

February 25th, 2011

Beyond the hype

Yet social media leads in one key area – the hype. This in no means is intended to suggest that the hype is not warranted: the nature of social media marketing is that it builds its own momentum. Perhaps if there were LPO platforms that created the world's youngest billionaire out of a college dropout, we would see fawning coverage of bottom-line metrics on the cover of *Time* magazine.

In lieu of that, how can you combine the potential of social media with the proven ability of LPO to generate measurable profits for your organization? Here's what I have observed in my past research (and look forward to learning more in my current research):

- **Social media as channel:** If you ultimately want customers to do something on your website, look at social media as a traffic driver, not as an island in your marketing strategy
- **Measurement matters:** Track visitors from different social media platforms, and from each social media link separately, just as you would for email/PPC/and other traditional channels of traffic
- **Go with what works:** Apply LPO principles of [relevance](#), continuity, [friction](#), and [Value Proposition](#) to social media landing pages

Of course, we're learning more every day...

LPO has also met unique challenges. In the survey, I ask marketers to share and weigh theirs.

I hope you fill out the survey and share yours, but on this blog I want to ask this question differently. Drawing not just on your own experience, but on your *perception* of the experiences of your colleagues at other companies, things you've read, and just general buzz (hey, Twitter *is* handy!), **what do you see as everyone's top challenges about getting into, or getting to success with LPO?** Let's see if your predictions here will be borne out in the survey data!

Related resources

[Landing Page Optimization Survey](#)

[Social Marketing Architecture: Building a case for landing page optimization in social media](#)

[Social Media Marketing Optimization: Start small and test](#)

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Photo by: [Marco Bellucci](#)

The Last Blog Post: How to succeed in an era of Transparent Marketing

So, here's the premise. If you had one last blog post to send out to the marketing world, what would you say? I'm sure you see where the original idea comes from – [The Last Lecture by Randy Pausch](#).

In case you're not familiar, there is a tradition in academia of getting a bunch of professors together and asking them to give a hypothetical final talk. Pausch's is most notable since he was actually dying at the time (if you're a social media marketer, all you need to know is that he's a guy that got more than 12 million views on YouTube).

You can see what others have to say by following the Twitter hashtag [#LastBlog](#).

Transparent Marketing

We write about marketing every day on the MarketingExperiments and MarketingSherpa blogs. But if it came down to one final blog post...one final lesson to impart to the world...for me, it comes down to what I've learned from others. And, paramount among that, is [Transparent Marketing](#).

Transparent Marketing was written in 2004 by Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, the Managing Director (CEO) of MECLABS, and, full disclosure, my boss. What I like about it is that, as accurate as it was at the time, it is even more prescient in the age of social media. No longer can a marketer with a big media spend dominate the conversation. Now, everyone is (as Blogger says) a push-button publisher.

This tidal wave has convinced one of the biggest marketers in the world to forgo Super Bowl advertising in favor of cause marketing (see: [Pepsi Refresh](#)), convinced one of the world's biggest brands to un-rebrand (see: The Gap) and toppled some of the least transparent regimes in the world



(see: Tunisia and Egypt). (In fact, perhaps the only non-transparent campaign I've seen lately is Taco Bell's reaction to a lawsuit about whether they sell beef or "beef." The ad claims the non-beef parts are mostly natural-sounding Mexican spices and flavors. Of course, [the list of "other ingredients" came out on YouTube](#) shortly thereafter.)

So, with the help of quotes from a few people smarter than me, here is what I've learned about Transparent Marketing. Let's begin with a direct quote from Dr. McGlaughlin himself:

"Transparent Marketing is about values, not sentence alchemy. It asks that we treat the customer with the same integrity that we would expect to be treated." – Dr. Flint McGlaughlin

Lesson Learned: As a writer, persuasion is important to me. I'm trying to convince you of something, with this blog post, and with everything I write. But, there is a fine line between persuasion and manipulation. Where is that line?

You have to ask yourself, what would I expect if I were on the other side of this landing page, or TV ad, or direct mail piece? Putting yourself in the shoes of your customers is the best way to tap into their motivations and understand how to create and market a product or



by Daniel Burstein,
Director of
Editorial Content
February 8th, 2011

service that can serve them, as well as how you can build a sustainable (and believable) relationship with those customers.

Because, if they don't believe you, they'll just move on to your competitors.

"Truth Well Told" – McCann-Erickson slogan

Lesson Learned: You can be persuasive (hence the "well" in the above quote), but at the very least, be truthful. Because if the truth doesn't come out in your marketing material, it will on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube...

"The consumer isn't an idiot, she's your wife." – David Ogilvy

Lesson Learned: You're not going to get very far by underestimating your customer. Yeah, you might be able to trick them once or twice. After all, I'm sure you're pretty clever.

But if you plan on staying in business or having a job more than a few months, start with the premise that you can learn from your customers so you can serve them best. That has become even easier of late with social media monitoring.

But, don't forget human interaction. And people who complain to customer service. They're your true gold mine of business intelligence and are likely bravely stating why thousands more potential customers are shunning your product in favor of the competition.

"IT managers don't read white papers, people do." – Jeri Dube

Lesson Learned: Starting in B2B marketing was extremely challenging to me coming from a consumer marketing background. B2B is so... complex.

Jeri took me under her wing and taught me this very valuable lesson. You have to connect with your audience. And underneath it all, that audience is just as human as you are.

If you're going to be successful in marketing, you have to be a bit of a psychologist. You really have to want to figure out people. What makes them tick. And not just you, but people very different from you as well. After all, you are not often (perhaps rarely) your target audience.

"People don't read advertising. They read what interests them. Sometimes, it's an ad." – Howard Gossage

Lesson Learned: This is a corollary to the two quotes above. No matter how big of a budget you have to spend on media, if you don't create marketing that matters and resonates with people, then all you've done is increase the likelihood you'll get a few nice gifts from media reps over the holidays.

It should also be noted, that the famous copywriter said this well before buzzwords like content marketing and inbound marketing were all the rage.

"Good writers are great readers." – Elaine Wagner

Lesson Learned: This comes from one of my favorite college professors. And I think it applies to more than just writers, because all marketers must be able to talk fluently in the language of their target audience.

I read Jet, Redbook, Motorboating, Latina, and Tennis, just to name a few. And none of those publications are aimed at my interests. It's one of the ways I try to figure out what makes different audiences tick.

"We don't want them to ever have to even pick up the pencil." – Mike Morgan

Lesson Learned: Mike was my first boss and worked in the "Mad Men" days with some legends like Bill Westbrook and Harry Jacobs. His point was about quality. As you can see from all the quotes above, marketing is hard work.

Before you're done with anything and plan to show it to someone – from a marketing campaign to a blog post – beat the heck out of it. While you want as much input from as many people as possible, when it's time for the decision maker to see it, you just want her to review it and say, "Yep. Go for it." If she whips out that pencil to begin to make even one change, it's all downhill from there.

Only show your best work. And make sure all of your work is your best work.

"I want to help build better people, not just better marketers." – Mary Wells

Lesson Learned: Mary was one of my favorite marketing executives to work for. But not just her, her entire team was awesome.

I believe that's because her focus was never only on the task at hand, but the people behind those tasks. While she was continually trying to optimize her marketing campaigns and processes, she was trying to grow her people as well.

As you can see from the above, in my estimation it takes a pretty well-rounded person to be able to succeed in the era of Transparent Marketing. You need to have a firm understanding of your industry, the macro-economic situation, your potential audience (who may be very different from you), and your competition. And then you need to craft communications that are both compelling as well as believable to a very skeptical audience. And, you need to do it in a forthright manner to avoid any backlash from customers who might have felt hoodwinked.

Before I make the job of being a successful marketer in the age of Transparent Marketing an impossible task, let me add a few final words of wisdom...

"It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat."

– Theodore Roosevelt

Lesson Learned: In the end, do something. And do it now. You're never going to be perfect, but the imperfect campaign executed is far better than the perfect campaign that's always in the works.

I'm sure you've seen the failure of many projects – new websites, software platforms, books, campaigns, etc – that just never got done because they were constantly being worked on.

Don't be intimidated by Transparent Marketing. Yes, there has been a tectonic shift of power to your audience.

But as Bill Maher, David Meerman Scott, and Twitter all agree, we live in a real-time world. First and foremost, get it out the door! From there, constantly optimize using the wisdom above, feedback from your audience and customers as you continue to try to improve their experience, and using your own constantly growing knowledge to make the next effort better each time.

If you truly serve your audience and customers, they won't expect you to be perfect. But they do expect you to be transparent.

Now that I've bared my marketing soul, I'm turning to you. If you had one last blog post, what would you say? Feel free to write your own and begin the title with "The Last Blog Post:" Or one last tweet? Share it using [#Last Blog](#).



Related resources

[The Last Blog Post: Marketers must embrace change](#)

[The Last Blog Post: It all begins with trust](#)

[The Last Blog Post: 5 lessons I'd leave behind](#)

[The Last Blog Post: The 4 metrics that matter](#)

[The Last Blog Post \(And The Most Recent Ego Trap\) #LastBlog](#)

[The Last Blog Post](#)

[The Last Blog Post: Speak Loudly My #MRX Friends #LastBlog](#)

[My Last Blog Post](#)

[The Last Blog Post: What Marketers can learn from The Last Lecture](#)

[The Last Blog Post](#)

[The Last Blog Post: Secrets of Successful Lead Generation](#)

[The Last Blog Post by Guy Kawasaki](#)

Social Media Marketing Optimization:

Start small and test

In Dr. Flint McGlaughlin's MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011 session, our Managing Director (CEO) presented our well known and researched Email Messaging Optimization Index. I enjoyed the [tweets](#) that included the heuristic, $eme = rv(of + i) - (f + a)$.

In a session on day three, Boris Grinkot, Associate Director of Product Development, MECLABS, moderated a panel — "Case Study: How to Track ROI for Social Media Campaigns" —where he announced that he is beginning to conduct research with [Radian6](#) that will eventually serve as the basis for a social media marketing optimization methodology similar to the Email Messaging Optimization Index.

An early social media optimization experiment

While we're clearly not ready to share that research yet, Boris and his panel did share an early look at some of the social media optimization research they are conducting. One of Boris's first research subjects was our very own social media experts, and panelist Justin Bridegan, Marketing Manager MECLABS Primary Research, who shared his involvement in this research project.

Justin's case study covered how MarketingSherpa used social media to drive Email Summit 2011 traffic. Justin based his efforts on MarketingSherpa's heavily researched social marketing strategy, the ROAD Map.

Here are some of the highlights:

- Three social media campaigns were launched to help drive Summit traffic using all the social media channels that were applicable
- Viral messages, incentive promotions, and affiliate contests were all part of a social marketing push to drive Summit engagement
- Results include over 170 tweets, 60% increase in Summit tickets sales and 116 additional trending activities (blogs, posts, etc.) by affiliates (everyone included)

Justin said, "One of the most difficult parts of social media marketing is creating a lasting methodology that works. **Time** and **resources** continue to be two of the most difficult challenges social marketers face."

Two Summit attendees expressed these thoughts:

- *I just don't have the time to keep up with all the new social marketing strategies, too many things are on my plate right now*
- *Where am I going to find the resources, we are a small company and keeping up with social media marketing is a big task?*



by David Kirkpatrick,
Reporter

January 28th, 2011

The ROAD Map

MarketingSherpa's ROAD Map breaks down to:

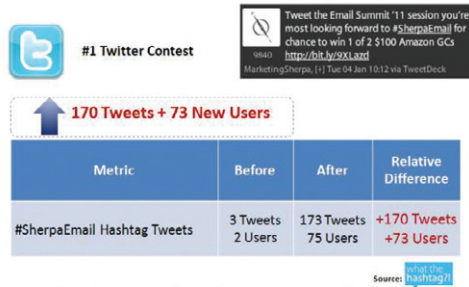
- Research
- Objectives
- Actions
- Devices

Using MarketingSherpa's proven social marketing strategy (ROAD Map), Justin was able to analyze what resources he needed and save time so he could refine his process instead of looking for a strategy that actually works.

Here are the three social media campaigns run by MarketingSherpa to promote Email Summit 2011:



Campaign #1 - Results



#SherpaEMAIL marketingsherpa email summit 2011

Campaign #2 - Results



#SherpaEMAIL marketingsherpa email summit 2011

Campaign #3 - Results



#SherpaEMAIL marketingsherpa email summit 2011

Justin's key takeaways:

1. Start small and test – "You don't know what you don't know"
2. Having a solid social marketing methodology in place (ROAD Map) will allow you to focus on real obtainable goals.
3. Determine the most effective offers for your campaigns including: Contests, incentives and promotions
4. Weigh Quality vs. Quantity with your offers, and remember the need for balance in your engagement
5. Successful campaigns don't always equate to revenue, but can be one of many contributing components

Participate in our research

If you would like to participate in our research with Radian6 to create a social media marketing optimization methodology, let us know. We were, essentially, one of our own first Research Partners, and are currently looking for future Research Partners.

Please share your insights on social media marketing by taking our third annual [Social Marketing Benchmark Survey](#). This survey is being fielded now and will only remain open through Sunday, February 6, 2011.

Related resources

[Free Inbound Marketing Newsletter – Case Studies and How To articles about social media, SEO, and content marketing](#)

[New Chart: Social Marketing Maturity and the Social Marketing ROAD Map](#)

[Social Media Marketing Research: Rolling up my sleeves and getting social](#)

[Maximizing Email List Growth: How the New York Public Library drove a 52.8% lift in newsletter subscriptions](#)

[Most-Tweeted Blog Posts of 2010: Facebook case study, social media marketing human factor, antisocial media, and more](#)



Social Marketing Architecture: Building a case for landing page optimization in social media



by Sergio Balegno
Director of Research

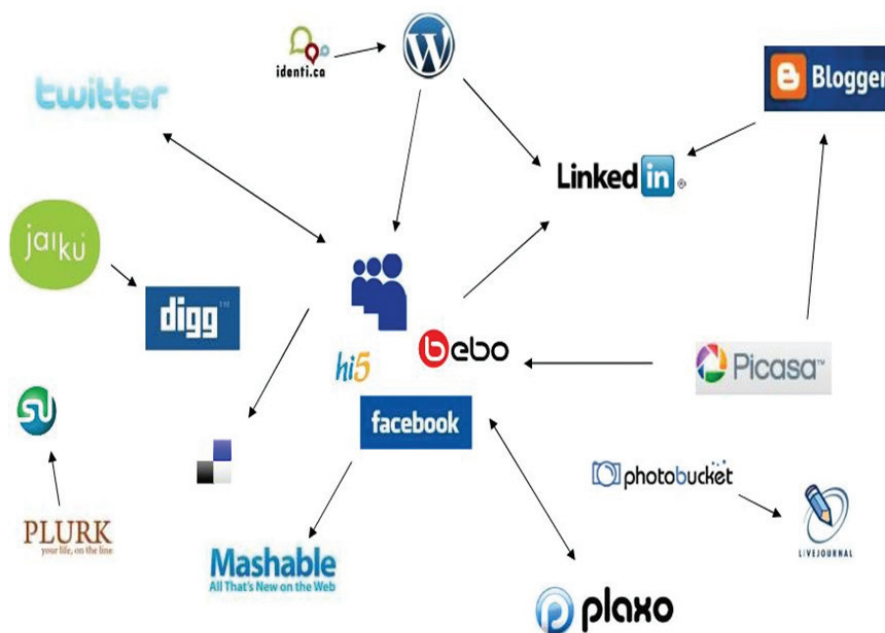
January 31st, 2011

This week marks the fielding of MarketingSherpa's [third annual Social Marketing Benchmark Survey](#). Looking back, I am fascinated at how far our practices have advanced in this channel in the past three years.

One of the most significant advances has been the materialization of the social marketing architecture. This systematic redesign of how social media sites individually contribute to overall marketing performance, has also brought attention to the significant need to incorporate landing page optimization as an important element of a social marketing strategy.

Random acts of social marketing

If we step back in time three years, we see early adopters of social marketing setting up blogs, social networks, multimedia sharing and other social media sites without a plan or a purpose. The result was a conglomeration of disparate, disconnected social sites that, at best, produced random acts of social marketing and looked something like this:



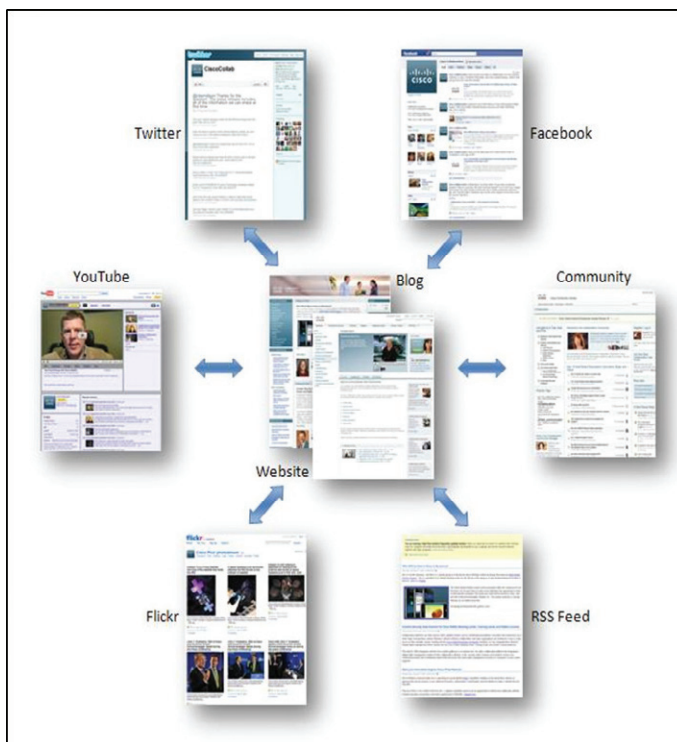
In last year's survey, we found that one quarter of organizations had reached the Strategic Phase of social marketing maturity. Organizations in this phase are distinguished as having a formal social marketing process with thorough guidelines they routinely perform. In other words, they have a plan and a purpose behind everything they do in this channel. And one of the things they have a plan and a purpose for is their social marketing architecture.

Why build an architecture with a hub and spoke framework?

As part of our research, we dissected a number of very successful social marketing programs and found that many of them have one thing in common – an architecture of social sites built around a framework that resembles a hub and spoke system. A social marketing architecture using a hub and spoke framework looks something like this:

At the center of the framework is the hub which, in most cases, consists of a website and a blog. Websites have become the hub of most marketing strategies and the primary point of conversion. And if websites have become the hub of the overall marketing strategy, blogs have become the hub of the social marketing strategy. In many cases, these two platforms are designed to work as one.

Surrounding the hub are spoke sites for building communities, engaging members, storing multimedia content, etc. As the arrows indicate, spoke sites direct the flow of traffic into the hub – the primary conversion point. The number of spoke sites is not important. What is important is that each spoke site utilized has a specific plan and manageable purpose in the architecture.



Having several spoke sites working together, with the same purpose, can drive a significant increase in traffic to the hub's landing page conversion points. This significant increase in traffic to your primary conversion points will make a valid business case for increasing your focus on landing page optimization in 2011.

Please share your insights on social media marketing by taking our [third annual Social Marketing Benchmark Survey](#). This survey is being fielded now and will only remain open through Sunday, February 6, 2011.

Related Resources

[Developing a Social Media Strategy: 6 Lessons from Kodak](#)

[Facebook Marketing in Six Steps: How to successfully manage your fan page](#)

[Social Media Marketing: How enterprise-level social media managers handle negative sentiment](#)

[Improve Your Facebook Profile to Increase Consumer Interaction: 4 Tactics — MarketingSherpa Members' Library](#)

Marketing Optimization: How to create a test that gets results you can use



by Jon Powell ,
Senior Research
Manager

February 2nd, 2011

It's the same problem, every time...

Someone new to online testing, excited to get started, eager to begin crunching numbers and reporting amazing results:

- They decide on a few things that they instinctively think will raise conversions
- They make all the changes on one page, maybe two
- Setup all sorts of tracking that they're not sure what to do with
- And push the start button thinking that their one page will see a major increase
- Rarely does a test actually perform the way we expect it to, though. We believe that one set of pages will completely outperform another, when the reality is that some performance is all over the place.

When the test is complete, what will you report upstream? That the test was a wash? Or did you learn something that will bring you closer to the key insights that will have an effect on your bottom line?

Most beginners run into a test without being able to tell you what they are really testing.

They typically say, "I'm testing to see if this page increases conversions!" The problem with this statement is that it doesn't do anything for you if the page, well, doesn't.

In addition, if it does raise conversion, you don't really have the slightest idea why. Instead, you get a false sense of confidence about what works on your site and what doesn't. Then you get yourself into much deeper trouble, making assumptions for other parts of the site or customer segments that end up costing you revenue in the long term.



So how do you create tests that get you results, regardless of the test outcome?

The answer: strategic test planning. What's strategic test planning?

It's like following the phrase "think before you speak." So often, we see people who are very quick to talk about something (out of their excitement) but then realize that what they've just said was completely wrong for that time and place. They spend most of their time making up for their mistakes instead of avoiding them altogether.

To me, strategic planning is the following:

- Taking the time to write down what you think is the problem and how exactly you're trying to solve it
- Deciding ahead of time how you're going to measure success and how that connects to the bottom line
- Making your test easy to understand for someone looking in from the outside

Learn from your tests to optimize all of your marketing efforts

Here are steps you can take to help each test have results you can use not just on your site, but also in your other marketing initiatives:

1. Determine the problem you're going to solve
 - a. Why am I even going to test on this particular page or process?
 - b. Does the data implicate that there is a problem to solve (like high bounce rate)?
 - c. What, according to the conversion index, appears to be wrong?
2. Create a hypothesis
 - a. I believe visitors respond this way because of these issues...
 - b. These visitors are making these actions because of this content/layout
3. Decide on how you're going to test this hypothesis
 - a. If the problem is the layout (or eyepath), I am going to test a new layout that appears to work better
 - b. If the problem is the copy, then I am going to test new copy
 - c. If the problem is the offer, then I'll test this new offer
4. Decide on how you're going to measure it
 - a. Am I looking for more leads overall or better quality of leads?
 - b. How can I measure lead quality? Do I need to connect my treatments to my CRM?
 - c. Am I looking for more sales or more revenue per sale? Can I connect treatment performance to my transactional database?
 - d. How does what I'm measuring connect to the bottom line? If I see an increase here, what does that mean for the business?
5. Decide on when you're going to run it and how long
 - a. Am I testing holiday traffic or everyday traffic?
 - b. Do I want to see if there is a difference in behavior around certain times?
 - c. How long will it take me to get statistical significance (so I can prove that a change wasn't due to random chance)?
6. Write everything down
 - a. For the control:
 - i. I believe this is the problem (hypothesis)...
 - ii. These are the possible solutions...
 - b. For each treatment:
 - i. This is exactly what I'm testing with this page...
 - ii. This is what I'm going to learn with a positive and negative result...
 - c. For test execution
 - i. This is what I'm using to measure success and why...
 - ii. This is how long it's probably going to take for statistical significance...
 - iii. This is when I'm going to test it and why...
7. Review it with a friend or colleague?
 - a. Does this make sense?
 - b. Am I trying too hard?



In my years of testing, I've discovered that all optimization is relative to the visitor. Certain techniques work with some people and don't work with others. The only way you'll discover what really works for your visitors, for your customers, is when you spell out what you're trying ahead of time and then see your plan through to completion.

By doing this, **the treatment that “tanks” becomes the treatment that teaches you something about your audience.** The more tests you run like this, the fewer chances of failure you'll have for the future and the more opportunities you'll have to serve your visitors and customers better.

Related Resources

[Marketing Testing and Optimization: How to begin testing and drive towards triple-digit ROI gains](#)

[Online Testing and Optimization: A quick guide to LiveBall](#) – Plus links to seven more online testing quick guides

[Dances with Science: Are you better off not A/B testing?](#)

[Multivariate Testing: Can you radically improve marketing ROI by increasing variables you test?](#)

[Fundamentals of Online Testing paid training and certification course](#)

photo by: [A200Wells](#)



EMAIL MARKETING

Crafting an Engaging Email Message: How a properly focused email message can increase conversion by 85%

A huge challenge many marketers face is creating emails that their ideal prospects won't send directly to the "Trash" folder. After all, those receiving the emails are likely to spend only a few seconds reviewing them, if that, before determining whether to continue reading or clicking the "delete" button. And while it may be difficult to stand out from the countless other emails your prospects probably already receive, and do so within a limited amount of time, it is possible... and profitable.

The biggest mistake you're probably still making

But there's something that could be getting in the way of engaging the recipient with your email message, besides poorly executed design or copy. The biggest hurdle marketers face is losing sight of the objective of the email. MECLABS Managing Director (CEO), Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, describes this as "the single most pervasive mistake on the Internet when it comes to email design."

In most cases, the objective is not to sell a product, sell a service, register someone for an event, or generate a lead. Marketers must focus on the real goal of an email, which is to get a click. As Dr. McGlaughlin explains, the email's main focus should be to provide just enough information to your prospects to get them to go where you want them to go, such as a landing page.

While other Research Articles offer extended analysis and transferable principles about complex topics such as Value Proposition and converting leads to sales, this abbreviated Research Article is intended to offer high-level help on just this one very specific, yet costly, challenge marketers face, and help you identify the red flags in an email message that lacks this focus. By avoiding these common mistakes, marketers can begin to craft the most effective emails for their ideal prospects.

Now, let's take a look at a recent experiment from our labs that illustrates how to identify and overcome an improperly focused email, and the results that await when you do.

PUTTING EMAIL TO THE TEST

EXPERIMENT #1



Experiment ID: *(Protected)*

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP2063

Research Notes:

Background: A financial organization offering a quarterly newsletter for business leaders. These emails often feature a single whitepaper download.

Goal: To increase clickthrough while not hurting whitepaper downloads.

Primary research question: Which email design will produce the most clickthrough?

Approach: A/B email split test (variable cluster)



by Joelle Parra

Contributors

Dr. Flint McGlaughlin

Jon Powell

Adam Lapp

Austin McCraw

Daniel Burstein

February 2011

15.84%

31.25%

97.27%

For this experiment, we were working with a large financial organization, offering a quarterly newsletter for business leaders. In this newsletter, this Research Partner would often feature a free downloadable whitepaper. This company was hoping to build strong relationships with some of their best clients, while providing valuable content that would serve their subscribers. Our goal in this experiment was to increase the clickthrough rate (opens-to-clicks) of the email without hurting the conversion rate (clicks-to-downloads).

Normally, our research team has an original email to test a new treatment against, but in this case there was no control. Instead, they started from the ground up and crafted two unique versions of an email with the offering. So, we set up a simple A/B split test that featured the two emails (the samples have been anonymized to protect the identity of the company).

Treatment #1



Treatment #1 featured a detailed description of what the free downloadable guide contained. This email message was also more focused on presenting the features of the offer. It has a headline, intro paragraph and four key points explaining the value of the whitepaper. The copy in the control was presented in a very scannable layout. It contained easy-to-read descriptive bullet/arrow points and some bolded copy allowing key points to stick out to the recipient, without having to read all the copy. This layout created a very natural eye-path for the recipient. The email message then concluded with one noticeable call-to-action that prompted reader to “Download Guide.”


Treatment #2



The approach of Treatment #2 was more copy-rich. But the copy in this case was not a description of features in the free whitepaper; it was the actual first few paragraphs of the whitepaper. In this case, the researchers decided not to use any descriptive copy, instead they crafted an email that provided a peek at the offer. It quickly allowed readers to see exactly what they were getting. The call-to-action also enticed the reader to continue reading by clicking to “View Full Article.”

Treatment #1 was more scannable and had a natural eye-path, while Treatment #2 focused on showing the actual offer. So, which email was the most engaging and actually helped improved clickthrough rate without hurting conversion?

Results

 **85% More Downloads**
Treatment #2 had a 29% higher rate of Clickthrough

Test Designs	Email CTR	Relative Difference	Download Rate	Relative Difference	Stat. Conf
Treatment #1	8.4%	-	18.2%	-	-
Treatment #2	10.8%	28.6%	33.6%	84.6%	95%

Treatment #2 produced 85 percent more downloads and had a 29 percent higher clickthrough rate. The principle question marketers must answer and understand is what made Treatment #2 so much stronger than Treatment #1?



What you need to understand: Upon first glance, Treatment #1 looks better than Treatment #2. It has a clear eye-path and looks more scannable. But, when you pay closer attention, the copy in Treatment #1 has more of a sales pitch to it. It is basically selling you the free whitepaper download in the email. It is too focused on trying to convince you that this is something you want. Meanwhile, Treatment #2 is focused on piquing interest just enough to get a click in the email.

How did Treatment #2 do this? In this case, the email featured the first three paragraphs of the free downloadable whitepaper and a simple call-to-action in the bottom right corner. This approach is in sync with the recipient's natural thought sequence.

As Dr. McGlaughlin often says, "you do not optimize email or Web pages, you optimize thought sequences." Treatment #2 allowed the recipient to visualize what they were going to get and that, in turn, piqued the interest. This treatment didn't list why the whitepaper was valuable; it actually let the recipient see the value of the whitepaper. That draws the reader in, especially if they are highly motivated. It doesn't make them second guess whether they should click or not, because they actually can see what they're getting. You should never promote an offering that you don't enable your prospects to visualize clearly.

As stated before, this is an abbreviated Research Article. In this article, we only aim to communicate one simple, yet powerful, principle; the goal of an email is get a click. If you try to sell to the recipient before expressing the value of your offer, he will likely send your message to the "Trash" folder.



Key Principle:

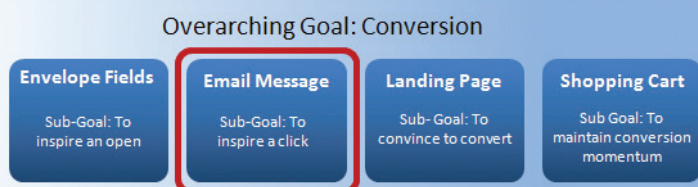
The objective of an email is to get a click. Therefore, your email message must engage the recipient with just enough value to inspire them to click for more information.

Conflating the purpose of an email with the purpose of a landing page

An email is not the place to make a sales pitch; it's a tool that should be used to express value and peak interest. You want it to inspire the recipient to click on the link that will eventually lead them to the landing page. The landing page is where you can more effectively present your offer and actually sell it.

Unfortunately, we've discovered that often marketers hurt conversion by treating an email like a landing page. In order to turn a click into a conversion, there is a path you must take. There are sub-goals you must reach, that will smoothly move the recipient from point A to point B without overselling (as you can see in the graphic below).

Email Conversion Path:



An email conversion path is similar to that. The main goal is to get a conversion but here are sub-goals in the Email Conversion Path you must first reach:

- Envelope Fields – Inspire an open
- Email Message – Inspire a click
- Landing page – Convince to convert
- Shopping Cart – Maintain conversion momentum

This path is similar to one a baby would take learning how to walk. A child does not simply start walking as soon as it is born. The baby has a step-by-step process to reach that milestone. First he must learn to sit up, then he has to learn to crawl, he cruises a bit and then finally the baby can start taking steps freely. You can't expect a baby to learn to sit up and walk at the same time. As much as you would want the baby to start running around, it can't do that without those first fundamental steps.

This natural process is the same with conversion. Each step takes you closer to reaching that overarching goal. That's why each step must have a defined purpose and be treated accordingly. Email is where you pique interest and that's why you must sell the click there, not the product. You should use the landing page to sell instead. Trying to accomplish several goals at once will only make your email conflated and ultimately overwhelm the recipient. Here a list of indicators that can show you whether you might be conflating the goals of your email and landing page:

- Your email says exactly what's on the landing page.
- Your email takes more than 30 seconds to read from beginning to end.
- Your email looks and feels just like a Web page.
- Your email has more than one central call-to-action.



The Bottom Line

In the end, you have to remember that email is a form of communication. You are speaking to that recipient, and they're not going to be responsive to sales-driven, hype-laden messages. You need to first create some interest that in turn drives the recipient to the landing page. That's where you present the information in a more detailed and effective way. With email, you only have a few seconds before your message gets either tossed or read. In order for the latter to happen, you must have a properly focused message with a clear expression of value.

By following this key principle, our researchers have been able to dramatically increase the effectiveness of email marketing from a range of organizations (including in Experiment #1 in this article:

The objective of an email is to get a click. Therefore, your email message must engage the recipient with just enough value to inspire them to click for more information.

By optimizing your email with this important point in mind, you can avoid common pitfalls in the design and copy of your email, thus improving clickthrough and conversion rates.

To see real-world examples of these principles in action, you can watch MECLABS Managing Director (CEO), Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, Senior Optimization Manager, Adam Lapp and Senior Research Manager, Jon Powell optimize examples from our audience in this [Web clinic replay](#).

Email Subject Lines: Longer subject increases opens 8.2%

Before I get started, please allow me to reiterate something we've expressed around here for years: The objective of an email is to get a click. However, while this goal seems clear, your prospective customers aren't looking for a reason to click your email – they're looking for a reason to delete it.

In order to capture the interest of someone navigating a cluttered inbox, your subject line message must be clear enough to garner attention and express value. The subject line is really just the first part of an ongoing conversation you're trying to establish with a prospective customer. These conversations need to operate just as if they were happening in real life.

Think about it. When you begin an in-person conversation, you don't speak in vague terms and hope someone is listening. Instead, you more than likely introduce your story with a quick, but valuable statement intended to get the audience's attention, hoping they'll focus on you and listen to the more elaborate details that follow.

If you succeed, not only do you get to tell your hilarious/heart-wrenching/life-altering story, but you also open the door for further relevant conversation. This practice also needs to be employed in email dialogue, as seen in the experiment below.

Experiment Background

Our Research Partner (anonymized to protect company's competitive advantage) is a leading international oil field services provider. They develop products, services and solutions that aim to optimize customer performance in a safe and environmentally sound manner. When the company agreed to sponsor a major

conference for the International Association of Drilling Contractors (IADC), they developed an email to promote this partnership and help draw interest in the new drilling products and online resource center they were set to unveil at the conference.

Treatment #1 vs. Treatment #2: Shorter isn't always sweeter

In developing this email (which I'll cover in more detail in a later blog post) the company was compelled to put as much information as possible into the body copy, effectively negating the value of the subsequent landing page. However, their approach to the email's subject line was considerably more minimalist:

“ First Look at New Products, Technology, and More

At first glance, this seems like a simple, effective subject line. The topic is clear enough, and the words “First Look” and “New” all imply a level of exclusivity. However, unless you've memorized every email address that graces your inbox each day, there remains some huge questions:

- Who is this from?
- Why are they emailing me?

...and most importantly...

- Exactly what in the blue [heck] is this about?

In a perfect world, recipients of this email would click through to find the information they seek. But as we know, it's not a perfect world, and this subject line is too vague and generic to capture the requisite interest for opening the email link.



by Brad Bortone,
Associate Editor

March 21st, 2011

Our research team decided to test the original subject line against a longer, yet more focused alternative:

“ IADC 2011 – Exclusive First Look at New Products, Technology and More

Results

The treatment subject line generated an 8.2% higher open rate than the control.

While the first subject line may seemingly appeal to a broader range of recipients, the treatment does a much better job of beginning the all-important *conversation* with potential customers. By opening the subject line with the name of the conference (IADC 2011), the recipient immediately knows what the email content is about (and likely, who it's from), making the supporting terms “First Look,” “New Products” and “Technology” all the more relevant.

A positive boost came from the term “Exclusive,” which was inserted to add strength to the value statements that followed. While “First Look” lent an air of immediacy to the first subject line, adding “Exclusive” to the treatment created an *incentive* for the user to take action.

Remember, your subject line needs to open the dialogue and encourage further interaction. Because you have a matter of microseconds to garner enough interest for an open, relevance trumps brevity, no matter what the subject line gurus tell you each day. Though they should be as brief as possible, do not sacrifice relevance to your audience, just to save a few characters.

Related Resources

[Crafting an Engaging Email Message](#) (Web Clinic replay)

[Internet Marketing for Beginners: Email marketing optimization 101](#)

[MarketingExperiments Email Marketing Course](#)

[Live optimization with Dr. Flint McGlaughlin at Email Summit 2011](#) (blog post recap)

Guest article from our sister company, MarketingSherpa

Email Optimization: Improve response with 5 insights from 10,000 tests

SUMMARY

Email tactics may shift over time, but the psychology of email remains. Email optimization goes beyond best practices and addresses the psychological reasons why some subscribers respond to marketing emails, while others delete them.

Find out which factors help your email marketing, which hurt it, and how you can focus your messages to improve results. This article is based on advice from Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, Managing Director (CEO) of MECLABS.

Dr. Flint McGlaughlin has overseen more than 10,000 optimization tests on landing pages and emails. More than one billion emails have been sent. *(Full disclosure: MECLABS is the parent company of MarketingSherpa.)*

Throughout, Dr. McGlaughlin and his colleagues have identified patterns in the results. They've used the patterns to develop methodologies for optimizing emails, based on the recipients' motivations rather than a set of best practices.

"We do not believe in optimizing emails," Dr. McGlaughlin says. "We optimize thought sequences."

We've pulled five insights from Dr. McGlaughlin's presentations on email optimization at the MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Summit 2011 and the MarketingExperiments Web clinic, "Crafting an Engaging Email Message." Read on to see how a few changes can improve your results.

Insight #1. Emails should sell clicks, not products

In most cases, the goal of a marketing email should not be to sell a product, register attendees or encourage downloads. Instead,

its goal is to get a click. The email has to convince readers to click through to a custom landing page where the real selling takes place.

Too often, Dr. McGlaughlin says, marketers try to sell their products directly through email. The number of distractions in an email browser, and the limited design capabilities of the format make email ill-equipped for this role.

Signs that you are doing too much selling in your email include:

- Email says exactly what's on the landing page
- Email takes more than 30 seconds to read
- Email looks and feels like a Web page or a print ad
- Email has more than one central call-to-action

To the last point, Dr. McGlaughlin says that marketing email should have one goal and one central call-to-action.

"The more you multiply the options, the more you will slow down the conversion process. There is an inverse relationship between the number of options and the speed to decision. And the speed to decision has a lot to do with the conversion rate."

Insight #2. Improve internal and external relevance

"Relevance" is a buzzword that gets tossed around like a football. Depending on who you ask, it could have any number of definitions. However, nearly all marketers agree that improving the relevance of your email to each subscriber can improve results.

Dr. McGlaughlin defines relevance as "the compatibility of the email message to the



by Adam T. Sutton,
Senior Reporter

Feb 01, 2011

recipient's motivations." An email's relevance can be based on two types of factors -- internal and external.

Internal factors are based on the motivations of the recipient, such as:

- Demographics
- Shopping habits/history
- Personal interests
- Level of engagement

Tactics for incorporating internal relevance include:

- Personal first-name greeting -- "Hello Janet,"
- Reference purchase history -- "Thank you for being a Silver account holder."

External factors are based on events surrounding recipient, such as:

- Seasonality
- News events
- Special discounts
- Limited time offers

Tactics for incorporating external relevance include:

- Incorporate seasonal events -- "Tax season is just around the corner,"
- Limited time offers -- "This offer will expire in three more days."

Insight #3. Provide valuable offers and incentives

When it comes to email marketing, there are positive factors that contribute to a message's performance and negative factors that detract from it. Relevance is a positive factor. Two others are the *offer* and the *incentive*.

- *Offer* -- the value you promise in exchange for a click

Remember that your emails sell clicks, not products. You are offering additional information in exchange for a click. You must make a good offer that provides obvious value.

For example, if you're trying to get readers to download a whitepaper, show part of the whitepaper in the email to pique their interest. This shows readers the value they could receive. Then, encourage them to click to download the full document. Your offer is that they can "download the whitepaper now" in exchange for their click.

If you're selling a product or service, look to the core reason why customers should make the purchase. If the product will save them money, say that. Tell them to "click to start saving money today." This offers the chance to save money in exchange for their click.

If you were to encourage them to "click to read more about [Product X]," you would be offering to make them work (by reading) in exchange for their click. They will decline your offer by deleting your message.

- *Incentive* -- an appealing element intended to incite the click

Your email should offer an incentive that adds value to your offer and helps outweigh *friction* and *anxiety* (discussed below). An incentive can be a discount, contest entry, a free download, or another motivating factor.

Subscribers' responses to incentives are not always logical, which is why it's important to test them. For example, one of Dr. McGlaughlin's former email training students witnessed the following A/B test for incentives on an email landing page:

- Group A was offered entry into a drawing for one of 20 \$25 gift cards if they purchased
- Group B was offered entry into a drawing for one of 10 \$50 dollar gift cards if they purchased

Even though both incentives totaled \$500 in value, Group B had 31.4% more conversions.

Insight #4. Minimize friction and anxiety

These two negative factors are present in every marketing email. They push readers toward ignoring or deleting a message instead of clicking through.

- *Friction* is the psychological resistance to elements in the email

Friction is caused by forcing subscribers to think or act. Longer copy takes longer to read and therefore increases friction. Using several calls-to-action (instead of one) increases friction by forcing subscribers to weigh several options.

Every email has friction (subscribers have to read and click on *something*), but it must be minimized. An email with too much friction will be deleted.

Common causes of “friction overload” in emails include:

- Multiple images that compete for attention
- Non-linear eye path in the layout
- Multiple calls-to-action from which to choose
- Long or confusing copy

Excessive friction is also generated by emails that do not follow the typical subscriber’s thought process. For example, the call-to-action should not be presented until the subscriber understands why they’ve received the message and why they should respond to the offer. Otherwise, the email is calling them to act before they see a clear benefit.

- *Anxiety* is concern caused by something in an email

Your customers have a heightened sense of anxiety when going through their inboxes. They receive emails every day, some of which are malicious. You have to put them at ease

and convince them that you are offering a good, safe deal.

“The best marketing emails do not look like magazine ads or read like sales copy,” Dr. McGlaughlin says. According to him, the best emails instill trust and read like simple, personal letters. Emails should personally address recipients, quickly explain why they’ve been sent, and provide a relevant offer and incentive.

“One thing we miss about email is very obvious: It’s mail. It’s a message. It’s communication,” Dr. McGlaughlin says. “In most cases, it will produce much better for you if you stop treating it as just an ad.”

- Leave no concern unanswered

If your customers are concerned with a price or quality issue, be sure to emphasize your warranty or money-back guarantee program(s). Go the extra mile to put their worries to rest.

“You should reduce friction as much as possible, but anxiety needs to be over-corrected,” Dr. McGlaughlin says.

Insight #5. Test radically different emails

Email marketing is likely a safe bet for your team. Many companies tweak their emails and incrementally improve results over time. They test subject lines, images, copy, layouts and offers to gradually increase performance.

The trouble with this approach, Dr. McGlaughlin says, is that many marketing teams are building on poor foundations. Their programs are adequate, but they should test completely different designs in hopes of dramatically improving results.

“One problem we have in marketing is that adequacy is the enemy of excellence. In many cases, we’re losing the most money by using campaigns that are working but are not working well enough,” Dr. McGlaughlin says.

“What we don’t understand is that, even though we think a campaign is successful, it can underperform.”

Dr. Flint McGlaughlin will be a keynote speaker at the upcoming [MarketingSherpa Optimization Summit 2011](#)

Useful links related to this article

[Web Clinic Replay: Crafting an engaging email message](#)

[MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Summit: 7 takeaways to improve results](#)

[Live Optimization with Dr. Flint McGlaughlin at Email Summit 2011](#)

[Email Subject Lines: Longer subject increases opens 8.2%](#)

[Email Marketing: How your peers create an effective email message](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Identifying friction to increase conversion and win a Nobel Prize](#)

Members Library -- [Email Makeover: 7 email optimization tactics to boost revenue](#)

Email marketing: Improve conversions with better landing pages

Email marketing is not limited to email. There are several factors that create an effective campaign — not least of which is the email's landing page.

Too many marketers design fantastic emails only to link them to generic pages, such as product pages.

Our research has shown that email-to-landing page continuity is vital to conversion. If you don't answer [three key questions in the first seven seconds](#), your visitor is likely to bounce.

Yet, according to Kelly Lorenz, Email Marketing Strategist, [Bronto](#), many marketers are skipping this important step. "In my experience, I would say 95% of online marketers who use email don't use custom landing pages."

Experiment after experiment has shown that it is essential to [increase relevance](#) between the landing page and the subscriber's motivations for clicking the email. If a subscriber clicks an email to learn more about a sale and the landing page does not emphasize that sale, then the subscriber is leaving — quickly.

The best way to maximize email conversions is to create a dedicated, optimized landing page for each campaign. As Lorenz noted: "Email is not the destination. It's how you get there." However, not every marketer has the resources to create new pages for each effort.

Test a consistent message

In 2009, David Kaplan had a suspicion that his team's email marketing suffered from ineffective landing pages. Unfortunately, creating new pages was not an option.

"We're a medium-sized retailer, so we don't have a huge IT infrastructure. A couple of years ago, a landing page for us was either the homepage or just a product-category page."

As VP of Marketing at [Tafford Uniforms](#), a medical apparel retailer, he knew that dedicated landing pages would be ideal. His team just didn't have the resources.

Instead, he wanted to test altering Tafford's current landing pages to make them more relevant to arriving email subscribers. This would require less work than creating completely new pages for each campaign, and the team could test if the concept improved conversion rates.



by Adam T. Sutton,
Senior Reporter

March 2nd, 2011

For each email campaign, the team would create a text-based banner ad that highlighted the offer. Subscribers who clicked an email would arrive at a landing page and see a banner that reinforced the offer.

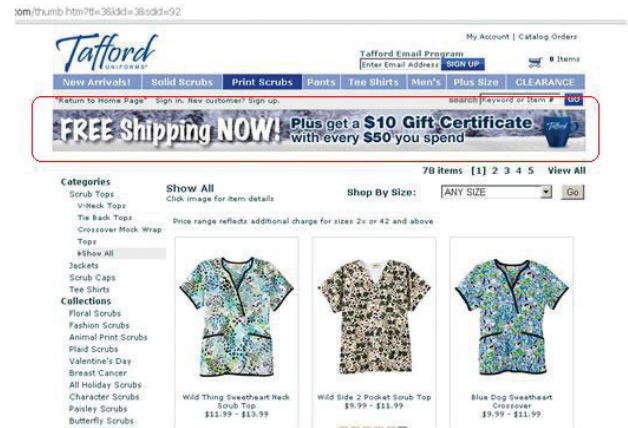
“To test, we split the traffic 50-50 and half of them saw that (banner) and half of them didn’t. We saw a lift in sales just by repeating the message in text,” Kaplan says.

The test achieved a 5% increase in revenue over the control. The team started using the system for each email campaign.

Improve the consistent message

Kaplan knew there was room for improvement. The team’s system restricted the banner’s design to a blue background with white text (as featured above). This design did not always match the emails and undermined the connection between them.

This winter, Kaplan’s team tested using the same strategy with a stronger visual connection between the email and the banner. As you can see below, they have the same background, font and offer.



Furthermore, the email itself had only one call to action and did not include secondary options as in the first message. Our research has shown that [focusing on a single call to action](#) is an effective way to increase conversion rates.

Results

This approach pushed revenue per campaign more than 10% higher, more than doubling the increase of the previous test. The team has since incorporated the tactic into its email strategy.

The results of the tests illustrate that focusing your emails and connecting their designs to your landing pages can improve your conversion rates. Even if your team does not have the resources to create unique landing pages for every campaign, there are steps you can take to improve the connection.

Related resources

[Webinar Replay: Increase the strategic value of your email marketing programs](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Value-focused revamp leads to 188% lead gen boost, increase in personal interaction](#)

[Email Marketing: Merging German and American tactics](#)

[Web Page Optimization: Consider this post the help desk for free trial landing pages](#)

[Monetate](#) — vendor the team used to test personalized pages

Guest article from our sister company, MarketingSherpa

Email Marketing Summit 2011:

7 takeaways to improve results

SUMMARY

That's it for this year -- we're capping off another great Email Marketing Summit and passing on some of our favorite insights from 45 presenters to our readers.

Check out these seven takeaways pulled from the hundreds presented last week. Here's a good recap for attendees and some helpful insights for those who couldn't make it.

We're back from Las Vegas, and although we did not strike it rich on the blackjack tables, our pockets are busting with new and proven email marketing tactics.

More than 750 marketers heard the industry's top experts, as well as case studies from client-side marketers for three days at MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011 in Caesar's Palace Hotel and Casino.

Trips to Sin City are often shrouded in silence -- but Daniel Burstein, Director, Editorial Content, MECLABS, made it clear in his day-two introduction that sharing knowledge is what makes the Email Summit great.

"What happens in Vegas does not have to stay in Vegas," he said.

In the spirit of Burstein's quip, we are sharing seven of the best takeaways from three days of inspiring sessions.

Takeaway #1. Relevance is king

We've all heard that content is king -- but content means nothing if it's in front of the wrong audience. Marketers showed us again and again last week that improving relevance improved results.

The word "relevance" has been tossed around email marketing for years -- but its definition continues to evolve. Ten years ago, it meant sending subscribers the information they asked for. Today, relevance is increased with:

- Triggered messages based on subscribers' actions
- Database segmentation and targeted messaging
- Detailed subscriber preference centers
- And other tactics

The many examples ranged from the simple -- such as adding only the most relevant social-sharing buttons to your emails -- to the complex -- such as the real-time "dynamic content on steroids" system used by Ben Day, Group Marketing Manager, Microsoft Corporation.

Takeaway #2. Internal challenges can hobble performance

During an expert panel, Jeff Rohrs, VP, Marketing, ExactTarget, quickly categorized into three groups the top challenges to improving email marketing performance listed in the MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Report:

- Technology-based challenges
- Content-based
- Interpersonal-based

He asked the audience for a show of hands on which category was the biggest roadblock. Interpersonal challenges -- those that stem from the relationships and needs of a company's team -- was the clear winner.



by Adam T. Sutton,
Senior Reporter

Feb 01, 2011

"We have a challenge with the people we work with that rarely gets discussed," Rohrs said. "We haven't done a good enough job trumpeting email's success."

- Combat with ROI calculations

One way to shift your email marketing from "office zero" to "office hero" is to calculate its ROI and show it to your team. The numbers often reflect that marketing to a house-list is remarkably efficient.

Jeanne Jennings, Independent Consultant and MarketingSherpa Trainer, Email Marketing Strategy, provided a wealth of proven tactics in a range of areas -- including on ROI calculations. Even rough estimates of net-revenue divided by cost, or net-revenue divided by the number of emails sent, will help she said.

"It's great to get absolute, but as long as you can compare in an apples-to-apples fashion, that's enough to get started."

- The executives will care

Philippe Dore, Senior Director, Digital Marketing, ATP World Tour, described his team's email strategy to sell tickets to professional tennis events. The overall email campaign generated about \$1.5 million in revenue. Suddenly, ATP's executives were interested.

"We have our CMO talking about email marketing and subject lines," Dore said.

Takeaway #3. Emails should sell clicks, not products

Marketing emails should have one goal: to capture clicks, said Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, Managing Director (CEO), MECLABS, in his session.

"It is important to distinguish the difference between the product offer and the clickthrough offer. In many cases, we conflate the two."

Landing pages sell products, Dr. McGlaughlin explained. Emails capture clicks that bring people to landing pages. Emails get clicks by clearly explaining offers, offering incentives, and reducing friction and anxiety.

- Conversations before offers

Putting an email's call-to-action above the fold is like a man walking up to a woman in a bar and kissing her on the lips, Dr. McGlaughlin said. The intended audience is not ready. A cheesy pickup such as "kiss me, offer expires soon!" won't work either.

"He has to get her in a conversation," Dr. McGlaughlin said. "From that conversation, a relationship develops...The pickup-line's job is not to get the kiss -- the pickup-line's job is to start a conversation."

In email marketing -- "a pickup-line is a headline."

Takeaway #4. 'Social email' is more than 'share this' buttons

Many email marketers have integrated social sharing buttons in hopes of getting subscribers to share messages with contacts -- but a relative few have realized strong results.

Sergio Balegno, Director, Research, MarketingSherpa and Jeff Rice, Research Analyst, MarketingSherpa, presented research showing that most social marketers find "social sharing" to be only "somewhat effective" at achieving email marketing goals so far.

- Engagement via email

Several marketers underlined the point throughout the event, including Matthew Caldwell, Sr. Creative Director, Infogroup Interactive, that "the ability to engage in social media is not as easy as putting the buttons on. It has to be a more combined effort to engage the users," Caldwell said.

Caldwell noted Overstock.com's effort last Mother's Day that asked Twitter followers to

tweet their moms' best advice. Overstock later incorporated the tweets in an email to engage its house list.

- Recruit a fresh set of eyes

Liz Ryan, Manager, Email Marketing, Threadless, mentioned that engaging Threadless' email audience in 'social media' requires a balanced approach that incorporates elements from both channels. To find that balance, she sometimes seeks advice.

"I've been writing subject lines for ten years and I always default to [Threadless Editor-in-Chief Colleen Wilson], who knows how to connect with our audience."

Takeaway #5. Deliverability, performance and relevance are interrelated

Gmail's Priority Inbox and Facebook's Messages had marketers talking last week. One key theme emerged: your emails' performance will be increasingly used to help determine their placements.

Email service providers' spam filters are getting more sophisticated -- and are likely to continue doing so. Marketers who create relevant emails that subscribers consistently open and click will be more likely to avoid the junk box in the future.

Several sessions dealt with the nuts-and-bolts tactics of improving attendees' deliverability. Here is one of the many insights we heard:

- List hygiene matters

Jack Hogan, CTO, Lifescript Inc, and his team found at least 500 different misspellings for "@yahoo.com" email addresses in their database -- such as "@yahoodotcom" and "@yaho.ocom".

Sending emails to mistyped and false addresses (such as notsharing@email.com) hurt the team's email deliverability. Also, subscribers who did not realize they had mistyped their email addresses could have

been irritated by never receiving Lifescript's emails.

The team's comprehensive plan repaired mistyped addresses, deleted false addresses and incorporated other tactics that cleaned up Lifescript's list and dramatically improved deliverability.

Takeaway #6. Mobile email is on the rise

Several sessions noted that U.S. smartphone adoption is on the rise and reading email is one of the top mobile activities. Email marketers need to understand how their messages look on handheld devices to avoid being left in the dust by competitors.

Karen Rubin, Project Owner, Hubspot, showed some scary examples of what marketing emails can look like on popular mobile platforms. She also provided quick advice for getting your messages ready for an on-the-go audience:

- Avoid large images
- Avoid tables and columns
- Shorter messages are better
- Use formatted text

On the last tip, Rubin emphasized that, for mobile audiences, marketers should use formatted text for calls-to-action instead of image-based buttons.

"If I can't see the call-to-action because the button has not downloaded, that's not a great experience," she noted.

Takeaway #7. Real-time marketing for big-time results

Keynote speaker David Meerman Scott, Author, Real-Time Marketing and PR, challenged many commonly-held marketing beliefs in his keynote session -- particularly those around planning and scheduling. Rather than always setting one-month, six-week or six-month schedules -- marketers should test adding the power of "real-time" to their marketing.

Scott cited marketing automation software provider Eloqua, whose competitor had recently been acquired by Oracle, a larger business software and hardware provider.

Oracle released a brief and impersonal statement about the acquisition, Scott said. Eloqua's marketers quickly crafted a blog post "Welcoming Oracle to the Party" and noting that this was a positive development for the industry.

Eloqua quickly emailed the blog post to subscribers and promoted it through other channels. The result: much of the press coverage mentioning Oracle's acquisition also mentioned Eloqua's real-time response. The announcement also brought some Eloqua subscribers into its sales process.

"If you can get that information out literally in hours you can beat the competition and beat their pants off," Scott said.

Useful links related to this article

[MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011 One-on-One Case Study](#)

[Live Optimization with Dr. Flint McGlaughlin at Email Summit 2011](#)

[Email Summit 2011: Your peers' top takeaways about email content, enhancing deliverability and optimizing swag](#)

[Email Summit Case Study: National Education Association's Member Benefits Corporation](#)

[Real-Time Marketing: David Meerman Scott at MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011](#)

[Email Plus Facebook Marketing: Fresh ideas from FreshPair](#)

[Email Marketing: A customer-focused mindset at ATP World Tour](#)

[Social Media Marketing: Turning social media engagement into action at Threadless](#)

[Maximizing Email List Growth: How the New York Public Library drove a 52.8% lift in newsletter subscriptions](#)

[Social Media Marketing Optimization: Start small and test](#)

Members Library -- [How and When to Use Content in the B2B Sales Process](#)

[MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Essentials Workshop Training](#) -- Taught by Jeanne Jennings

[Jeanne Jennings](#)

[ExactTarget](#)

[Hubspot](#)

[David Meerman Scott](#)

[ATP World Tour](#)

[Threadless](#)

[Microsoft Corp.](#)

[Infogroup](#)

[Lifescript](#)

Live optimization with Dr. Flint McGlaughlin at Email Summit 2011



by David Kirkpatrick, Reporter

January 24th, 2011

Dr. McGlaughlin’s immediate comment is that the information isn’t being presented at the right time in the right way, the mail doesn’t look like a typical email newsletter so there could be confusion on the part of the recipient, and the mail does not have a clear Value Proposition.

The submitter commented, “We’re trying to deliver the best coupons for that particular week.”

One attendee commented, the best value of the mail — the 30% off offer, etc. — is the hardest to find and read.

Dr. McGlaughlin’s additional comments were that the mail has no eyepath, enormous friction with seven calls to action and there’s no way to tell the difference between brands and button.

Earlier today at the MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011, in front of 700 marketers at Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas, Dr. Flint McGlaughlin worked without a net and engaged in live optimization with actual examples provided by Summit attendees.

Live Optimization #1: Email newsletter



How to guide the visitor’s eyepath

His suggestions were to create a clear headline, a couple of lines of text explaining the value prop, and a design that creates an eyepath.

Dr. McGlaughlin added controlling the eyes is important to controlling the thought sequence, and eyepath is controlled five ways:

- Size
- Color
- Shape
- Motion
- Position

The first was an email from Savings.com. The objective of the mail was to drive clicks and the mail itself is Savings.com’s email newsletter, so the mail went out to the entire newsletter subscriber base.

Flint made the submitter an offer to go to the MarketingExperiments optimization booth, work up a new treatment and put that

treatment to a real-world test.



Live Optimization #2: Reactivation campaign

The second example is a reactivation campaign from FarmVille to get players back into a game that had been dead for a month. The mail was part of a multi-variate test and the submitter wanted Dr. McGlaughlin’s input, but wouldn’t tell the audience whether the mail was a winner or loser in the test.

The submitter mentioned that although the mail looked like a single piece of graphics, it actually combined graphics and HTML text.

Here are some attendee comments:

- White copy on lime green background is hard to read
- In subject line, “only” in front of the number 20 makes the number look small
- “What do you have to do to get it (the offer)?”
- The mail is sent to previous players of the game, but nothing in the mail connects to that fact
- Dr. McGlaughlin’s suggestion is to consider a radical redesign, even thinking about the mail in a different category. Flint suggested using the mail content as a landing page and create a new mail that serves to drive

clicks to that landing page.

Related resources

[Maximizing Email List Growth: How the New York Public Library drove a 52.8% lift in newsletter subscriptions](#)

[Email Marketing Optimization: Email messaging 101](#)

[Internet Marketing for Beginners: Email marketing optimization 101](#)

[Email Makeover: 7 Email Optimization Tactics to Boost Revenue \(Members’ library\)](#)

(Photo credit: Summit attendee Mark Walter)

MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011 One-on-One Case Study

For MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011, we brought a few of our analysts along, set them up in the MECLABS booth, and let them loose live optimizing attendee emails and landing pages. Here is one example that we thought might be helpful for you as you optimize your own pages ...

St. Stephen's University (*full disclosure: our Managing Director, Flint McLaughlin, sits on the Board of Directors for St. Stephen's University*) has been driving traffic to landing page from a [Facebook ad](#) to collect leads on potential students. The problem is that a majority of leads aren't converting to actual applications to the school.

Here is the [landing page](#), and here is the lead capture form from the page:

Fill in the form below, and we will send you more information on how you can travel the world with SSU!

All students travel and study in:

- France
- Italy
- Germany
- Spain
- England
- Hong Kong
- Thailand
- Philippines
- Malaysia
- to name a few!!

SSU is a member of:

CHEC
Christian Higher Education Canada

Form fields:

- First Name
- Last Name
- Email
- Address
- City
- State/Province
- Country
- Zip/Postal Code

After the user fills out the form they are redirected to a ["thank you" page](#) where they have the option to apply to the university at no cost. The school wants applicants, and not leads, and found through this campaign potential students who didn't initially apply from the thank you page did not convert to applicants once the lead was transferred to an email follow-up campaign.

Question every step in your process

At the MarketingSherpa Email Summit, marketer Billy English sat down with Adam Lapp, Senior Optimization Manager MarketingExperiments, for a one-on-one optimization session. Adam offered some immediate suggestions — the key being turning the landing page from a lead collector into the actual application, taking an entire step out of the campaign.

Billy says, "Adam suggested to replace the lead capture form on the current landing page with a full application. We weren't getting the immediate application because they weren't getting enough info to make an informed decision, so Adam suggested that we add more content to the landing page and put the full application there in place of the lead capture form."

Adam's other advice included adding additional content to provide visitors more information about the school, and suggest working with the eyepath to guide the visitor through the page. Another suggestion was to add a Facebook widget to allow potential leads to ask their friends what they think about the university, a move that will stretch the PPC spend even further.

Billy is planning on acting on Adam's suggestions immediately because he is in the midst of the hot season for university applications and wants to take advantage of these optimization ideas.

"I've attended a number of [MarketingExperiments webinars](#) and tried to glean and apply as much as I could from



by David Kirkpatrick, Reporter

January 26th, 2011



those sessions, but I realized there was a lot of stuff still lacking (on the landing page) — stuff like friction, and the fact that the eyepath wasn't clear," Billy explains. "I've seen what Flint (McGlaughlin) can do and what the MarketingExperiments team can do, and I was little bit blind looking at my own stuff. It's easy to look at somebody's else's landing page and offer some optimization tips based on what I've learned from the webinars and MarketingExperiments case studies."

Related resources

Billy's website, OnlineConsultants.ca

[St. Stephen's University website](#)

[Internet Marketing: Optimizing form fields to maximize conversions](#)

[How to Test Your Value Proposition Using a PPC Ad](#)

[PPC Ad Optimization: Testing, unique landing pages, and honesty](#)

Maximizing Email List Growth: How to succeed in an era of transparent marketing

At the end of this month, a who's who of email marketers will descend on Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas for [MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011](#). Flint McGlaughlin, the Managing Director (CEO) of MECLABS will teach a two-hour email optimization training session and your peers will be presenting 21 email marketing case studies.

One such case study that I thought would be of particular interest to readers of the MarketingExperiments blog is entitled, "Leveraging Transactional Messages to Boost Email Newsletter Opt-Ins," and will be presented by Johannes Neuer, eCommunications Manager, [The New York Public Library](#).

If you are attending the Email Summit, Johannes will be presenting in Breakout Session #1 on Wednesday (Day 3), just before the networking lunch and sponsor exposition. His full case study has about as much helpful information and educational data as you'll find on a trip between the lions. Here is a quick look at what Johannes will be speaking about...

First off, why is The New York Public Library using email? How is it similar to and different from traditional email marketers?

Johannes Neuer: The New York Public Library is using email as an effective way to stay in touch with a growing number of patrons and supporters. Similar to traditional email marketers, we have a suite of corporate eCommunications vehicles, which include NYPL News, our monthly newsletter, NYPL Programs, featuring events and programs for adults, and NYPL Family Programs, which provides content and event listings for families with children.



What's different is that all of our services are free. Therefore, our newsletters are mainly focused on marketing Library content and services aiming at driving traffic to our website and increasing engagement with NYPL through the use of our collections and through physical visits to our 91 locations. In addition to that, our Development Department is using email for fundraising.

You're passionate about email list growth. Why? What is the value of a large email list in an age of ascendant social media?

JN: When patrons subscribe, there is a [value exchange](#). They give NYPL their email address and we provide content that they requested – thus allowing us access to their much coveted inbox.

This kind of relationship requires more trust than hitting the "Like" button on Facebook. We have noticed that this trust relationship that we nurture over time pays off when the Library needs to rally support.

While we were very successful in using social media and video creatively to get



by Daniel Burstein,
Director of
Editorial Content

February 8th, 2011

the word out during NYPL's advocacy campaign last summer (the campaign was inducted into [MarketingSherpa's 2010 Viral and Social Marketing Hall of Fame](#)), our large list of email subscribers has shown much greater engagement than the social media channels in terms of completed online actions, such as writing letters to legislator or making donations.

That's why we are still focusing on continuing to grow our email list.

One thing I like about your case study is that, to maximize list growth, you conducted landing page optimization through A/B testing. Expecting an increase in traffic, you ran an A/B split test using Google Website Optimizer to optimize the opt-in.

Control

The control landing page features the NYPL logo and navigation menu at the top. Below the navigation, there is a sidebar with links for 'Tell A Friend', 'ONLINE SERVICES', and 'THE LIBRARIES'. The main content area is titled 'Subscribe to NYPL Newsletters' and includes a form for entering contact information (Name and Email) and a section for selecting newsletters to receive. The 'Sign Up' button is highlighted.

Control

MY ACCOUNT

New York Public Library

Home
Using the Library
Locations and Hours
Find Books, DVDs & More

Classes, Programs & Exhibitions
Blogs, Videos & Publications
Support the Library
Ask NYPL

Tell A Friend

ONLINE SERVICES:
Search Catalog
Search Databases
Free Wireless Access
Audio & Video
NYPL Digital
eNYPL
Smallbiz.nypl.org
NYPL Express
Homeworknyc.org
Ask Librarians Online
Shop

THE LIBRARIES:
Locations & Hours

Subscribe to NYPL Newsletters

Please enter your contact information below:

* Name: First Last

* Email:

Please select the newsletters you wish to receive:

The New York Public Library News

LIVE from the NYPL

The Library Shop

The Schomburg Center Programs

[Sign Up](#)

The New York Public Library is committed to protecting your privacy. To learn more about how the Library uses information you provide, please read our [privacy policy](#).

About NYPL | E-Newsletters | Media Center | Connect with NYPL | The Library Shop | Careers at NYPL | Space Rental | Español

Treatment

The treatment landing page features the NYPL logo and navigation menu at the top. Below the navigation, there is a sidebar with links for 'Tell A Friend', 'ONLINE SERVICES', and 'THE LIBRARIES'. The main content area is titled 'Stay up-to-date with NYPL News' and includes a form for entering an email address and a 'Sign Up' button. A callout box highlights the benefits of signing up, such as library news, service updates, and special announcements. A 'view sample' link is provided below the form.

Treatment

MY ACCOUNT

New York Public Library

Home
Using the Library
Locations and Hours
Find Books, DVDs & More

Classes, Programs & Exhibitions
Blogs, Videos & Publications
Support the Library
Ask NYPL

Tell A Friend

ONLINE SERVICES:
Search Catalog
Search Databases
Free Wireless Access
Audio & Video
NYPL Digital
eNYPL
Smallbiz.nypl.org
NYPL Express
Homeworknyc.org
Ask Librarians Online
Shop

THE LIBRARIES:
Locations & Hours

Stay up-to-date with NYPL News

Please enter your email address below:

Email address: [Sign Up](#)

We are committed to protecting your [privacy](#).

[view sample](#)

What you'll get:

- Library news
- Service updates
- Latest programs and events
- Sneak previews
- Special announcements

[view sample](#)

About NYPL | E-Newsletters | Media Center | Connect with NYPL | The Library Shop | Careers at NYPL | Space Rental | Español
Privacy Policy | Rules and Regulations | Using the Internet | Website Terms and Conditions © The New York Public Library, 2010

What lessons did you learn from that testing that your fellow marketing VPs and directors can use on their own sites?

JN: The biggest lesson we learned from this test is that you need a lot of traffic to get meaningful results in a short period of time, and that you need to be willing to make radical changes to the landing page. The test mentioned in the case study was actually the second one that we conducted because the first one did not yield a clear winner.

The combination of more substantial changes to the landing page and the addition of transactional messages as a new source of traffic helped identify the optimized form – with a 52.8% lift in NYPL newsletter subscriptions – as the winner.

In this case, a good opt-in form consisted of just the email field and the submit button, which are supported by a benefit-oriented headline, a list of things subscribers can expect from the newsletter, and a sample newsletter preview. We continue to use this form on dedicated NYPL newsletter sign-up pages.

Your conversion rate actually went down, but that didn't bother you. Why not?

JN: When doing any kind of testing it is important to focus on the outcome – the goal of the exercise. Our key performance indicator was the absolute number of subscribers gained during a given month.

By adding a new traffic source and optimizing the form, NYPL doubled the number of opt-ins but our conversion rate went down by a little less than one percentage point. We were pretty content with this outcome, which doesn't mean one can't still try to nudge the needle on the conversion rate through further experiments.

One of the key ways you say to make transaction messages work is to test promotional copy and landing page combinations for each channel. What have you learned from testing by channel, as opposed to testing the audience you are trying to convert to email subscriptions as one giant group?

JN: Testing by channel allows us to tailor the promotional copy in messaging and on the landing page for best results. We have set up dedicated sign-up pages with different copy for all NYPL newsletters because the expectations of patrons coming from a sign-up link that promotes our family newsletter are going to be different than the ones looking for the general newsletter.

During the last month, the conversion rate on the dedicated forms separated by channel is over 9% higher than the conversion rate on the catch-all sign-up form that lists all newsletter options.

Related resources

[Email Optimization: How to improve ROI from capture to conversion](#)

[Email Capture: Two Simple Scripts for New Pop-Up Windows that Maximize Email Capture and Minimize Annoyance](#)

[Free MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Newsletter](#) – Case studies and How To articles

photo by [Melanzane1013](#)



SITE OPTIMIZATION

Landing Page Optimization: Minimizing bounce rate with clarity



by Boris Grinkot,
Associate Director of
Product Development
March 11th, 2011

After several months' hiatus, I was motivated to write an "LPO analysis" blog post by my initial impression of RealGoodsSolar's landing page. It greeted me with a large photo of solar panels and a worker installing them.

No children in a blooming meadow playing with balloons, no college students posing as they take on global ills, no grandparents with a pensive gaze—all implying the broader point about the importance of environmental awareness and concern about our common future. Instead, this page told me immediately what it was about in a single image and clearly visible and instantly readable headline: Install Solar Panels & Save.

A landing page is not a magazine ad

If I came across as cynical about protecting the environment, that couldn't be further from the truth. And not just because I've helped out Sierra Club with expressing their [Value Proposition](#) to drive membership or because I drive a gasoline-electric hybrid (can't wait for the Leaf!).

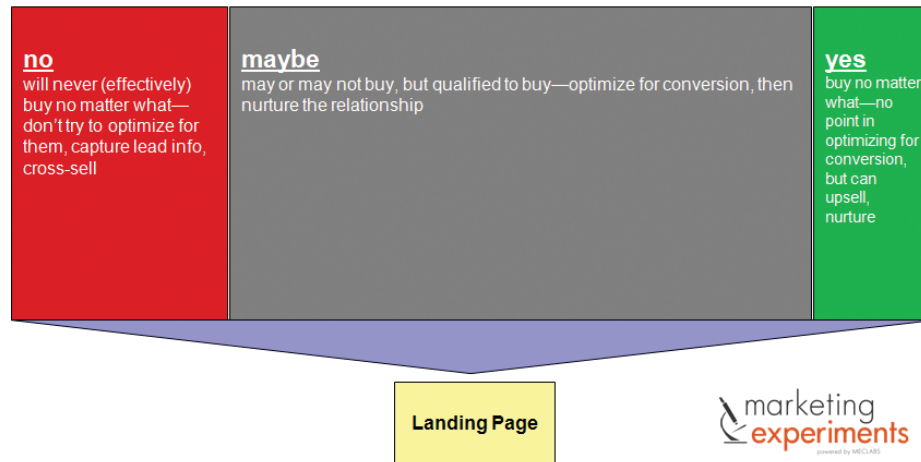
My point is simply that visitors landing on this page had not clicked on a paid ad to meditate on the idea of saving the planet. If they had, they ended up in the wrong place (for a detailed of my Conversion Opportunity Framework diagram, see [Maximizing Optimization Opportunities: 3 Simple Visitor Types](#)).

Qualified visitors to this page were looking for solar panels for their homes or commercial properties, and that's exactly **what the page instantly confirmed in their minds and provided a clear way to take the next step.**

We are accustomed to magazine ads that are meant to inspire later action or to build brand (inspire even later action)—but landing pages like this one are viewed by motivated visitors who are deciding whether to take action *immediately*. It behooves marketers to assist their visitors with that decision.

Conversion Opportunity Framework

Traffic quality and corresponding optimization objectives



Where bounce rate comes from

Why do some visitors take absolutely no action? Some degree of mismatch between content and motivation is inevitable. For example, someone may be just researching news on the topic, rather than considering a purchase.

However, the most frequent disconnect that has been proven through testing is due to [lack of clarity on the landing page](#). The busy consumer, with a specific motivation in mind, ends up on **a page that doesn't instantly answer that motivation.**

Ever find yourself wandering around a big box hardware store or a similar customer disservice monstrosity, not sure whether they have what you need? The difference is that with a bricks and mortar store, you're already there and you can't switch to a different store with a click of a button. Instead, you endure the incompetence of the store's floor managers for some time. Online, you click "x" a lot sooner.

So, if your page doesn't get helpful instantly, answering ["Where am I?"](#) and ["What can I do here?"](#) then little prevents the visitor from hitting that "x" button. **Being relevant is not enough. Relevance must be delivered with clarity.**

Related resources

[Optimization Summit 2011 - June 1-3](#)

[Maximizing Optimization Opportunities: 3 Simple Visitor Types](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Value-focused revamp leads to 188% lead gen boost, increase in personal interaction](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: What cyclical products can learn from CBS Sports](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: How an engaging headline and revamped layout led to a 26% conversion rate gain](#)

Visitor motivation: Optimizing landing pages for social networking site ads vs. paid search



by Boris Grinkot,
Associate Director of
Product Development
March 11th, 2011

Relevance is not born on your landing page. Relevance starts with the ad that the visitor clicked. With [SES New York](#) right around the corner (hope to see you there!), I wanted to discuss how your ads effectively shape your site visitors' motivation. When you understand *motivation*, you can build ad-page pairs that maximize relevance, and consequently conversion.

Recently, I discussed [how clarity helped RealGoodsSolar landing page](#) keep visitors on the page. Today, I wanted to take a closer look at the different motivations that their landing page meets from paid Facebook, LinkedIn and AdWords traffic.

Different ads are different reasons for getting to your landing page

Facebook and LinkedIn ads likely do not compete side-by-side with similar offers, and therefore the visitors are on average not as highly motivated as those performing a deliberate search (a more explicit indicator of motivation). With paid search, ads likely show up alongside competitors, so you must compete more for the click, but as a reward you can expect higher motivation levels.

In both cases, the visitor did not just magically end up on the landing page. **The content of the ad is what caused the visit**, and therefore we can use it as a resource to create relevance.

This often means that you need **different landing pages for different types and levels of motivation**. While you can—as this landing page does—offer different calls to action (e.g., request for a sales call vs. request for a newsletter) to appeal to different visitor motivations on the *same page*, *competing calls to action* will increase confusion.

The screenshot shows the RealGoodsSolar website. The header includes the logo 'REALGOODS | SOLAR' and a call to action 'Call Toll Free (888) 96-SOLAR'. Navigation links include Home, Residential, Commercial, About, and Local Offices. The main banner features a video of a man installing solar panels with the text 'Install Solar Panels & Save' and 'Why Spend \$100,000 on Electricity?'. Below the banner is a 'Request a FREE Solar Consultation' button. A testimonial video is also present. The right sidebar contains a contact form with fields for Name, Email, and Phone, and a 'Request a Free Consultation' button. The footer includes 'Installations Portfolio' and 'Testimonials'.

Test for relevance to minimize competing objectives

Since your ads are under your control, test landing page content and calls to action to assess the motivation of visitors from each ad. Conversely, the ads can be written and tested to drive a specific behavior on the landing page.

For instance, an extensive ad that details an offer with a price tag likely will deliver highly qualified visitors, but will sacrifice traffic volume because potential visitors will self-disqualify and never click.

On the other hand, our research has shown that selling through an ad is not as effective as selling on a landing page, and [using your ad to get a click \(as opposed to a decision to buy\) may be a better strategy](#). This will deliver relatively lower-quality traffic, but significantly higher volume, including visitors that can be entered into a nurturing program.

To test properly, you will need to create a financial model that takes into account your CPC (cost per click), cost of nurturing (a.k.a. “total cost per acquisition” or “cost of sales”) and the average order size (or, if possible, customer lifetime value)—not just the *immediate* conversions.

Related resources

[How to optimize your banner ad performance while complying with new privacy regulations](#)
— Webinar, Thursday, March 31, 2011, 1-2 PM.

[Optimization Summit 2011](#) - June 1-3

[Landing Page Optimization: Minimizing bounce rate with clarity](#)

[Maximizing Optimization Opportunities: 3 Simple Visitor Types](#)



E-commerce: Using multivariate testing to increase sales 83.79%



by Jon Powell ,
Senior Research
Manager

March 14th, 2011

Whenever I work with a Research Partner that is involved in e-commerce, I always come across problems with the *product details page*. A potential customer’s experience here should not be much different from the moment you pick up an item at a store and look at it. Imagine it:

- You’re browsing the aisles of your favorite store, going from category to category
- Finally, you see something that gets your interest
- The price doesn’t stop you from picking it up – you could buy it today, or come back next week when you get your paycheck

This is it...

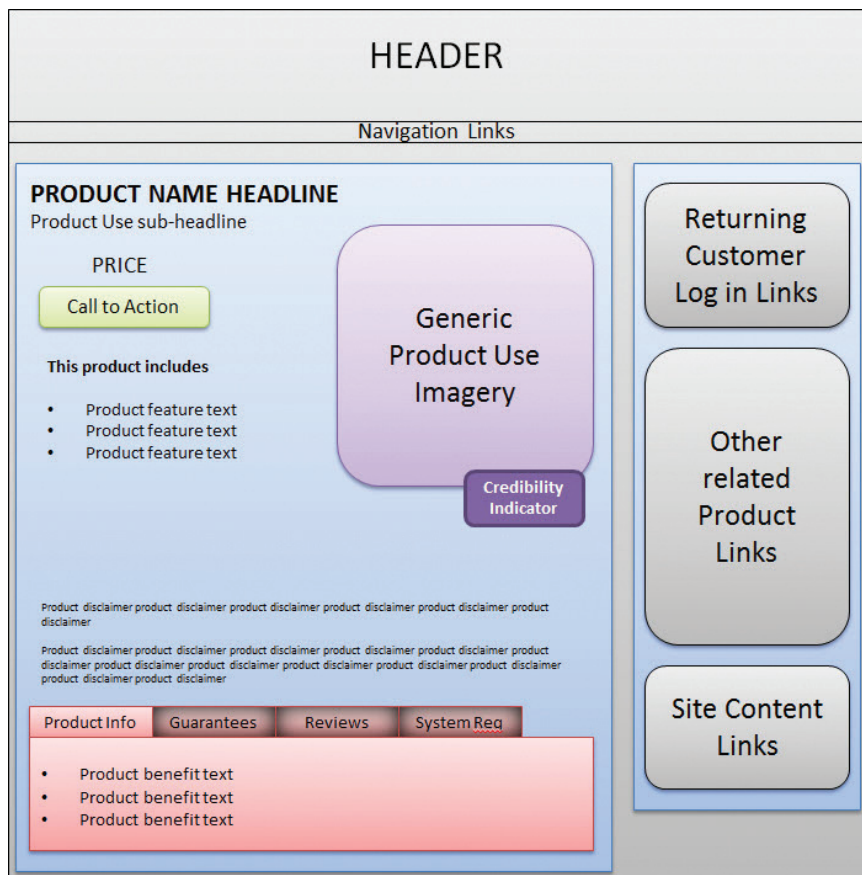
- Do you put it in your cart or put it back?
- If you put it back, why? Does the price now start to look expensive seeing what you actually get compared to what you’d pay?
- Do you put it down and pick up a competing brand? Or do you look at both at the same time?
- Or do you decide it’s worth the money? Do you see yourself using it, feeling good about the purchase?

This happens on e-commerce sites just as much as it happens in stores. The only difference online is that the website is usually the one responsible for the final packaging/presentation of a product, whereas in a retail store they are mostly just responsible for placing the already packaged product on a shelf.

The challenge with e-commerce product template pages

We discovered this was an area of opportunity with one of our well-known e-commerce research partners last year. You could easily add one of their many products to the cart without having to understand all its details, but a number of visitors were actually visiting the product detail pages and then NOT converting.

Here’s what their product details page looked like: *(to protect their privacy, I’ve re-created the page in*



wireframe format)

Major areas for testing

$$C = 4m + 3v = 2(i-f) - 2a \text{ ©}$$

Wherein:

C = Probability of conversion

m = Motivation of user (when)

v = Clarity of the Value Proposition (why)

i = Incentive to take action

f = Friction elements of process

a = Anxiety about entering information

I used the MarketingExperiments Conversion Index to determine what to test:

Here is what I determined:

- Headline only contained the product name and nothing else (-v)
- The call to action comes before the product value (-v)
- Credibility indicators are out of the proximity of the call-to-action (+a, -v)
- Primary product benefits, guarantees and testimonials are trapped in tabs out of the primary eye path that require an extra click (-v, +f)
- Product imagery is generic and does little to add /support its value (-v)
- Page tone was very technical and not conversational (-v)

The preliminary research question

Was the product no longer worth the price once they looked at its value? Or **were visitors simply not able to see all the true value of the product BECAUSE of the Web page?**

The test was designed to answer these questions. Since these particular products were part of our Research Partner's signature line, we wanted to be sure that the product didn't need optimization before the presentation. This was our way of finding out.

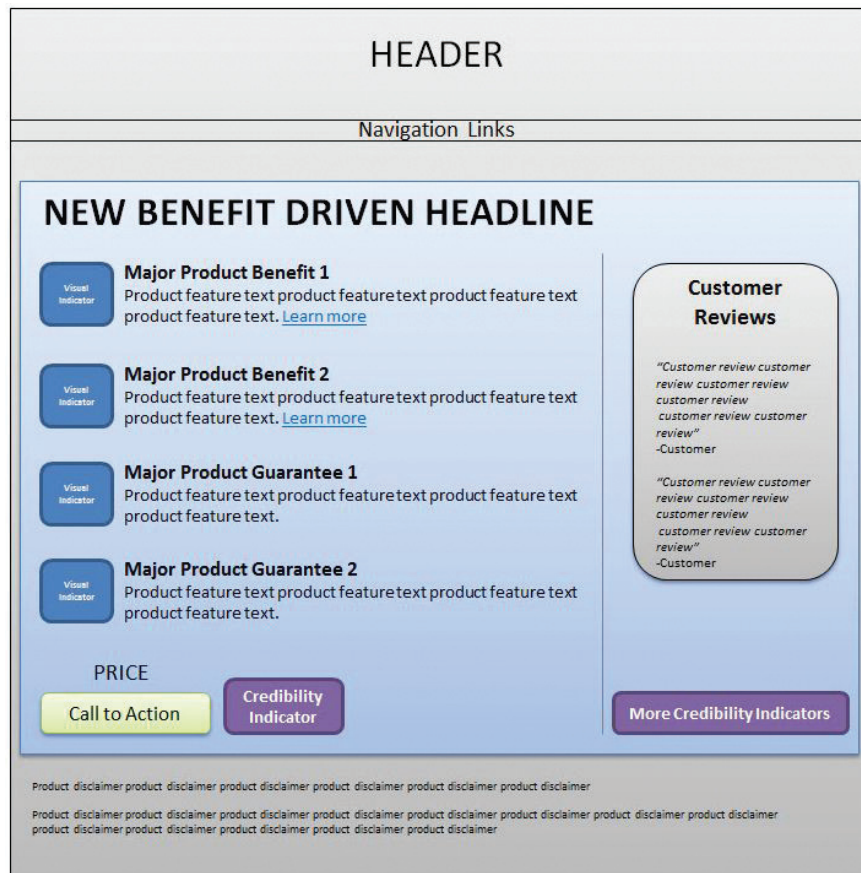
Will a radical, clear presentation of existing product value result in an increase in sales?

A new presentation approach

I remember brainstorming with our lead designer, Charlie Moore (to whom I owe much of my success), on this one. How could we take the existing product value and represent it so that potential customers don't have to search and click to figure out if they want to make the purchase?

It wasn't just the value itself that wasn't being presented properly; it was the tone of the page as well. We had to take what looked like a very technical page and turn it into a product presentation that an everyday consumer could connect with emotionally.

This is what we came up with: (to protect their privacy, I've re-created the page in wireframe format)



Major changes:

- Used the primary product benefit in combination with product name for the headline (+v)
- We moved ALL the product benefit, guarantee and feature copy to the primary eye-path (+v, -f)
- All un-related links were moved to the header/footer area (-f)
- Supporting content found in the tabs were moved into the supporting column (+v)
 - We used visual indicators to support value for visitors that like to quickly scan and improve the tone
 - We focused each header on a primary benefit and supported with feature specific copy
- The call to action and product price was moved after the product value (+v)
- Credibility indicators were placed in closer proximity to the call to action (-a, +v)

Note: The only content we substituted in this treatment was visual indicators (for the generic imagery) and page colors. The rest of the content was available in some form or fashion on the control.

Promising Results

It only took us ten days to discover that there was a difference between these two pages statistically. The treatment outperformed both the control **and** double control **with an 83.79% increase in product sales** (not just add to carts). A double control is a technique high-traffic,

high-converting use (essentially splitting traffic to two identical control pages as well as a set of treatments) to determine normal variance as well as defend against [validity threats](#), such as instrumentation effect.

Details Page	Conversion Rate
Control	8.27%
Double Control	9.93%
Treatment	18.25%
Relative Difference:	83.79%

I wanted to run some follow-up tests to try and understand exactly which elements had the most impact on these particular consumers (was it the visual indicators, the testimonials, etc.?) but ultimately I learned that the combination of these elements, all related to quick, clear product presentation, resulted in more sales – sometimes the most important things you can learn from a multivariate test.

Just like in re-creating that perfect cup of coffee, I desire to try and re-create the experience by understanding just how much cream, sugar and black coffee (at what concentration) goes into that perfect, addicting taste with further testing. But at this point, we had driven a significant sales gain, and the battle was won for the day.

Are you paying attention to your product pages?

If you're in e-commerce, pay attention – ***The product details page template often times has the most influence on the product purchase decision.***

While customer demographics, interests and motivations will vary, what remains constant is that customers must be able to quickly and clearly judge if your product is worth the price you put on it. The more roadblocks you place in their way to making this decision, the more likely they will run away from your product prematurely.

Related Resources

[What Else Can I Test...On My E-commerce Or Lead Generation Website?](#)

[E-commerce Shopping Carts: How a redesigned checkout process led to 13% increase in conversion rate](#)

[Homepage Optimization: Creating the best design to quickly meet multiple visitors' needs](#)

[What Else Can I Test to Reduce Shopping Cart Abandonment Rate?](#)



Landing Page Design: Eye path vs. Thought sequence



by Boris Grinkot,
Associate Director of
Product Development

March 23rd, 2011

I was [impressed](#) by the clarity of the headline and imaging of RealGoodsSolar's landing page and later provided [suggestions for testing](#) their various sources of traffic to build dedicated landing pages for distinct levels of motivation.

Today, I wanted to add one last piece of analysis: the thought sequence effected by the page. "Eye path" is a concept often invoked by usability and user interface (UI) specialists. However, "**eye path**" is **passive**. What we want to optimize is the thought sequences in the mind of page visitors to lead them to the desired action, and to do that **we must deliberately position content** in the clearest and easiest-to-absorb sequence.

The rest of this post is presented in the general order of the expected thought sequence of a visitor to RealGoodsSolar's Web page.

Headline and introduction

As it does, the headline should provide a succinct reason to read on, reflecting a key aspect of value: "Why spend \$100,000 on electricity?" Exact copy can be refined further, but the key suggestion of savings is instantly powerful.

Next, a short introductory paragraph elaborates on the bold statement above and, again, provides a reason to read on. However, the form in the right column now competes for attention: is the visitor to continue reading, or has all the requisite information been provided already?

A highly motivated visitor may be ready to complete the form, while a more apathetic visitor may be pushed away. A good solution is to **provide a call-to-action button for the highly motivated visitors**, while using most



of the real estate at the top of the page to continue expressing and supporting the Value Proposition.

Clearly, visitors with low motivation are addressed on this page: there is much more Value Proposition and supporting copy at the bottom. However, this sequence contradicts the logic of the page, as the visitor would be done with the form before seeing that content.

Primary and supporting expressions of value

Testimonials are a powerful way to support your Value Proposition. However, they

rarely *replace* stating your Value Proposition explicitly. We consider testimonials and endorsements “supporting” content, which should be positioned on the page secondary to primary content.

Relying on video to communicate value to a new visitor is risky. Video is a powerful medium, but when you are dealing with short attention spans, you could be communicating much more in a fraction of a second using text than with a minute of video. While video content may be more effective, your visitor may have bounced before the video would take effect (or even without ever playing it).

Action

RealGoodsSolar provides not only a clear next step, but also an explanation of subsequent steps. This tactic produces a low-friction and low-anxiety way for the visitor to engage. However, getting to the form is counter-intuitive. Paraphrasing Donald A. Norman in *The Design of Everyday Things*, **design that requires instructions is bad design.**

The arrow pointing to the form reveals the design flaw here: the layout of the page doesn't correspond to the proper thought sequence. The headline gets initial interest and leads the visitor to primary content that expresses value. The expressions of value should lead the visitor to *want* to act.

Testimonials have been shown to increase conversion when used in close proximity to the value-exchange elements on the page—the form, in this case. Moving testimonials immediately below or next to the form, and moving the form altogether to the bottom of the page, while allowing primary content to occupy the top would produce a logical sequence of thought in the mind of the visitor and maximize conversion.

Related resources

[Optimization Summit 2011](#) - June 1-3

[Visitor motivation: Optimizing landing pages for social networking site ads vs. paid search](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Minimizing bounce rate with clarity](#)

[Free subscription to MarketingExperiments optimization research](#)



Homepage Optimization: How sharing ideas can lead to more diverse radical redesigns



by Joelle Parra,
Multimedia Specialist
April 29th, 2011

It was time to get radical at Senior Optimization Manager, [Adam Lapp's](#) optimization class, and once again I was there to document it all for your reading pleasure. Because I care, naturally.

Since my last post, the student body has grown, and we now have five new research analysts eager to learn. Due to our uneven number, Adam decided to pit all of the analysts against each other for his optimization competition, instead of taking the usual team approach. This time around, their challenge was to create the most effective radical redesign for the Arbor Day Foundation homepage (which was submitted for live optimization during our [Homepage Web clinic](#)).

But before I show you the original page, I'd like to add that this lesson not only sharpened our optimization skills, but also proved that great minds don't always think alike. And, believe it or not that can be a really [good thing](#).

Diagnosing the homepage

Now, let's get to down the "nitty gritty"...here's the audience submission:



Before being given the task to create radical wireframes for the original homepage, Adam and the class discussed the page’s main issues. Here is their analysis the key problems visitors might face:

- The logo is too small. It gets lost in the page and also doesn’t help the visitor know exactly where they are
- There’s not a clear focus on the page
 - It has a confusing top navigation
 - It has three equally weighted columns (Trees, Programs, Lend Your Support)
 - It also has confusing objectives (Where do I click, what can I do on this page?)
 - What is the difference between a membership, a donation and buying a tree?
- Unclear call-to-action
 - The first and largest call-to-action a visitor sees is “Visit the tree nursery”
 - Makes the visitor ask, “What is a tree nursery? Is this a place to buy trees or a clever metaphor for a type of product or page?”
 - Visitors have unclear expectations of what the next page will be and are a little lost at this point.

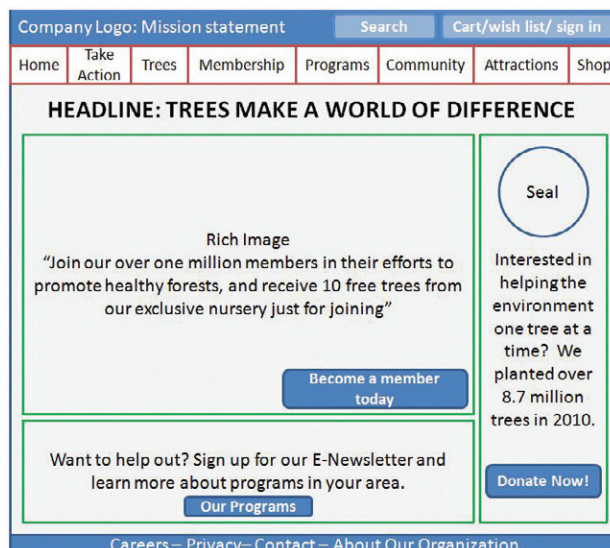
Radical Solutions

After pointing out these issues, the analysts had to figure out how to tie in all these objectives together into one goal. And when it was time to present their radical wireframes, each analyst came up with a completely different design and goal in mind (remember the original page had several objectives).

Each submitted wireframe focused on one of the following goals:

-Directly pushing a membership

- The headline is action oriented, specific and includes a membership incentive
- It drives the visitor’s attention to a primary call-to-action (become a member)



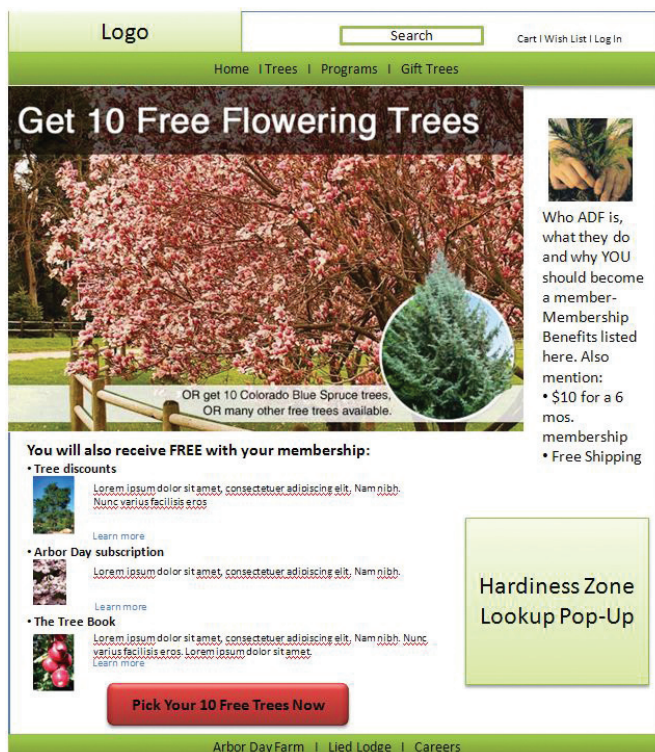
-Getting visitors to donate and help the Arbor Day Foundation's mission

- Headline immediately says where you are
- The options on left let visitors know what to do on the page (donate/help)



- Giving the gift of a tree or allowing visitors to pick 10 trees for themselves now

- Page objective is simplified and the incentive of 10 free gifts with donation is emphasized
- De-emphasized supporting column with core information about the foundation



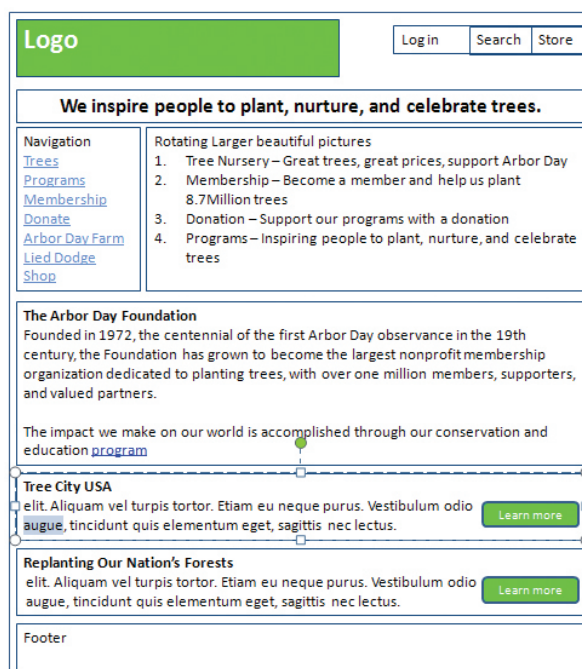
-Engaging visitors with an interactive game

- Headline tells visitors exactly where they are
- Focuses on letting visitors interact and become familiar with the product through question game



-Pushing all objectives in a new navigation-focused design

- Visitor can quickly choose a path from the easy to see, simple, and short left navigation on the top portion.
- Has a rotating banner will draw the eye path to the four most important objectives, then presents four core values in a controllable (and testable) sequence



Five heads are better than one

These five separate takes on one Web page got us thinking about the brainstorming process and how important it is for marketers to create a blissful marriage between individual ideas and teamwork.

In a marketing team, not everyone is going to think the same way, but this doesn't mean that these differing thoughts can't turn into a great collaborative effort.

This reminds me of the weekly peer review meetings we have at our lab, where the research team gets together and reviews Web pages as a team. Usually, one person starts off the conversation and then another person bounces off an idea about that topic, sometimes agreeing or challenging the previous comment. The idea here is to brainstorm in the correct way, by being open to different ideas and avoiding groupthink. Of course, [not every idea is a good idea](#), which is why you have to test.

This is exactly what happened during Adam's class. Each analyst initially came in with a different idea for the homepage and after everyone's thoughts were put on the table, each individual thought grew into one improved and cohesive approach to developing treatments.

"If one person in charge of this page only relied on their own ideas, we may not [be] able to achieve the highest level of success," Adam said. Of course, this hypothetical collaborative effort would have to be [tested](#) to make sure it's actually effective.

"There's no such thing as expert marketers, only expert testers," Adam said. "AND the best way to get diverse test ideas is to leverage other people with other ideas."

Lesson learned

In the end, even though it started as a free-for-all competition, with the right guidance and frame of mind, it turned out to be a great team effort.

Now that we've learned that lesson, I would love to start a collaborative effort with the audience, and ask you to share your ideas to optimize this homepage. Feel free to use the comments section to get this brainstorming session rolling.

Related Resources

[Homepage Optimization: Radical redesign ideas for multivariable testing](#)

[Homepage Optimization: Creating the best design to quickly meet multiple visitors' needs](#)

[Informed Dissent: The best marketing campaigns come from the best ideas](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: What cyclical products can learn from CBS Sports](#)

E-commerce Shopping Carts: How a redesigned checkout process led to 13% increase in conversion rate

As an avid online shopper, I often wonder why the checkout process is so markedly different and bare-bones when compared to the rest of the shopping experience. Sure, during this process customers aren't shopping, they're making the purchase.

But for someone like me – someone who often loses confidence in the final steps of the buying process – a little more resemblance to the look, feel and even emotion (the elements that likely brought me to checkout in the first place) would go a long way toward making that fateful, final click to buy.

Recently, I wrote a blog post covering a seemingly minor revamp of an online landing page that led to more notable results than initially expected. In writing this, I wanted to highlight another test we performed on the same British travel broker site to see if similar tweaks can improve its checkout process.

Background

This experiment involves a United Kingdom-based online ticket broker offering residents a series of exclusive vacation packages for Florida theme parks, tours and attractions. The page tested here is the final steps in the checkout process for purchasing a vacation package via the site.

The goal of the test was to see:

1. Which Checkout process leads to a larger conversion rate?
2. Which Checkout process will lead to higher revenue?

In doing this experiment, the team added images, headline copy, made subtle design changes to the color scheme and layout, while also including more information links.

Control: A functional, if flat, checkout experience

The control (creative samples anonymized to protect Research Partner's competitive advantage) seemingly contained many aspects of a competent checkout page. There was a design element that, while somewhat unadorned, was consistent with the pages leading to checkout. Likewise, the color scheme was also consistent with earlier pages and contained clearly delineated page sections.

Top of page

LOGO

Home Contact Us About Us Customer Services Shopping basket (1 item, \$177.00)

Attractions Tips & Tours Dinner & Shows Plan your holiday

Choose an Attraction

Apocalypse
Branch Gardens
Discovery Cove
Galleonland
Halloween Horror Nights
Kennedy Space Center
Madabout Lanes
Orlando Howlitz
Richard Petty Driving
Seaworld
Universal Orlando Resort
Walt Disney World Resort

Checkmate
Mickey Mouse
Mickey Mouse

City of Angels

Universal Orlando Tickets - Tickets for Universal tickets at low prices Universal Orlando Resort offers 14 consecutive days of fully loaded fun, here you will discover 2 great theme parks.

Shopping Basket

Your basket contains:

Ticket Description	Date	Adults	Children	Total	Remove
Dinner: 14 days for the price of 7 days	11: 8:40 2010	3	0	4972.00	Remove
				Subt total: \$1777.00	

Do you have a voucher code? [APPLY VOUCHER CODE](#)

Select a delivery method

Special Delivery	Your tickets are guaranteed to be delivered within 2 working days - great if you need your tickets as soon as possible. More info	£ 25.00
Standard Delivery	Your tickets will be delivered within 7 working days.	£ 0.00

Protect your tickets:

Cancellation Protection	Protect your tickets against cancellation fees More info	£ 20.00
No Protection	I do not require ticket protection.	£ 0.00

Why buy from us?

- No credit card fees
- Real tickets, not vouchers
- Low prices, guaranteed
- Free delivery within 7 working days, guaranteed



by Brad Bortone,
Associate Editor

February 21st, 2011

The left-hand navigation also remained from previous pages, which would help reduce anxiety and reassure customers that they aren't leaving a trusted site for a third-party payment source.

However, let's look at this page through a broader lens. For starters, once a user clicks to this page, there is no welcoming copy or continued expression of value from the site. There is also no encouragement to shop further, perhaps via additional information links or "add-ons" for the vacation package. This is not only inconsistent with the pages previously viewed by the user, but could also be a potential revenue-killer.

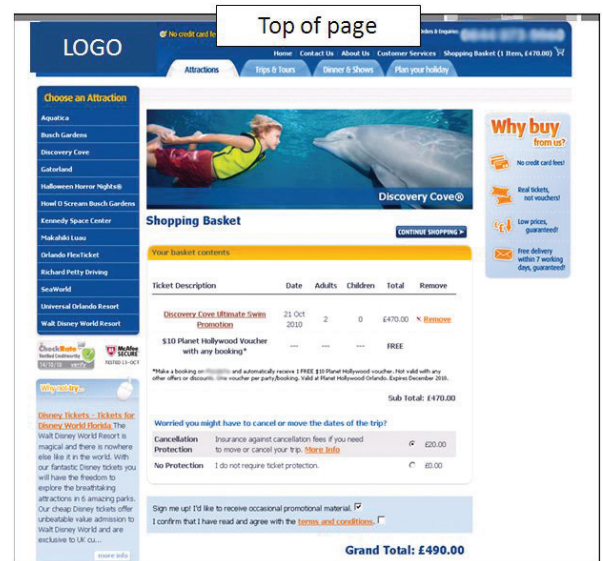
More importantly, at the most critical point in this online buying process, none of the imagery or emotional connection between user and process exists. In other words, none of the factors that helped the user commit – and ultimately convert – are present during the final step. This inconsistency could potentially cause undue anxiety, and possible cart abandonment.

Treatment: Continue selling the experience

Our research team added copy to the final cart page to reinforce the buyer's decision to shop at this site. The simple headline copy, as well as the visually appealing links to additional package options, continues the buyer's connection to the potential purchase – and potential additions to that purchase.

Though no one will confuse theme park add-ons with "impulse buys," once users are in the buying mind-set, links such as these could encourage them to maximize their purchase for the best possible experience.

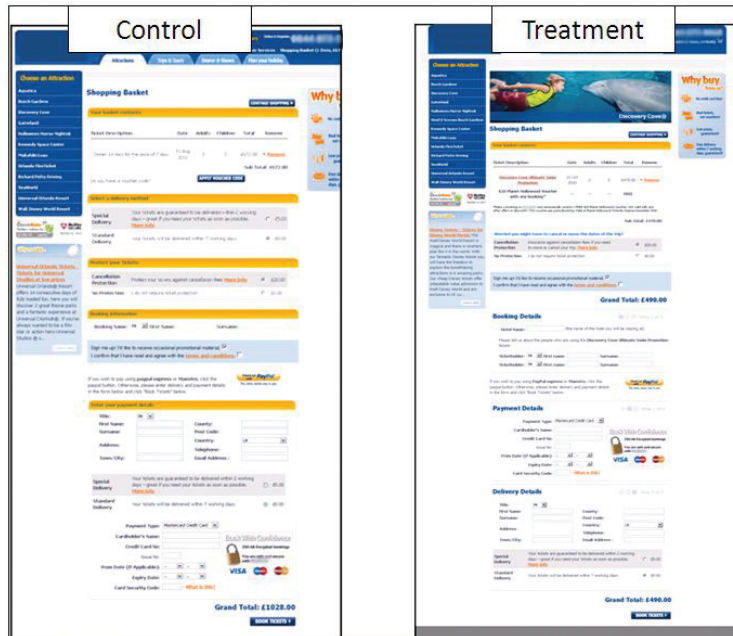
Our team immediately added a banner/hero image atop the shopping cart contents section. This not only continues the look and feel expressed on previous pages, but also serves to assure buyers that their purchase(s) will deliver an inviting and enjoyable experience, eliminating any last-minute anxiety that could come for such a significant online purchase.



The team also chose to subtly lighten the color scheme and font color treatment, making the page easier to read and scan. Also, the "Why buy...?" box in the right-hand column was slightly shrunk, so as not to create visual conflict with the hero image.

In the cart contents section, there is now a line of content underneath the buyer's selection that confirms a free bonus offer. Though the user would receive this bonus regardless, having it appear in the cart contents, accompanied by the word "FREE," increases the appearance of value, subsequently increasing the likelihood of conversion, as well.





Results

During our five-day test duration, the treatment page went on to produce a 13.83% boost in conversions. Though there is a wealth of variables to consider, it seems that these adjustments went a long way toward making the user feel more confident when purchasing.

When comparing the checkout pages side-by-side, the reduction in use of bold colors alongside the inclusion of a strong, emotional image atop the treatment page created a final step that was more akin to the pages users visit prior to conversion.

As a regular Web shopper, I find that often a site will remove the “experience” from the user experience, when logic would dictate that the user should be more confident and secure during this critical step. Though a five-day test may not provide be-all, end-all evidence to support this point, a 13% boost in that period of time, along with [similar findings consistent with this hypothesis](#) during years of experimentation in our labs, indicates that this idea is worth testing on your site.

After all, when making an online purchase as significant as a family vacation package, a little extra comfort and confidence could mean the difference between the user hitting the “buy” button, or hitting that equally comforting “X” in the upper-right hand corner.

Related Resources

[What Else Can I Test...On My E-commerce Or Lead Generation Website?](#)

[Shopping Cart Abandonment: How not being annoying can get you 67% more cart completions](#)

[Online Marketing Research: The MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal, Q3 2010](#)



Landing Page Optimization: What cyclical products can learn from CBS Sports



by Joelle Parra,
Multimedia Specialist
February 18th, 2011

Recently, I sat in on what I like to call a “meeting of the minds” – where the research team in our lab sits down to discuss their ongoing research in online marketing, and optimizes pages together. Here in the labs, we call this a Peer Review Session. So, I took notes to share their advice with you and make you feel as if you were right there with us.

While there was a lot of helpful content being discussed, I decided to share their optimization suggestions for a landing page that I got to present to them, thanks to the help of the Director of Editorial Content, [Daniel Burstein](#). The page was from the CBS Sports Web site, and it had to do with their Fantasy Football league (I play in the ESPN league, by the way). Yea, yea. I know, the 2010 NFL season ended a couple of weeks ago, but this advice will last forever (was that too much?)

Because, while CBS Sports submitted this page for live optimization during a [Web clinic about homepage optimization](#) several months ago while football was actually in season, we thought it might be more interesting to provide optimization suggestions for what they do in the off season.

After all, many marketers have a product that has an on and off cycle. I wondered what optimization and testing ideas our researchers would have for an off-cycle product page.

Here’s the page they reviewed:

THE GOOD

Before I go on and show you what the team (pun intended) felt this page was doing wrong, let me tell you what they did think it did right.

This page is making a push for the upcoming fantasy football season, even though the 2011 NFL season is months away ([and may not even happen because of a potential lockout](#)). When we looked at their competitors’ respective fantasy football league pages, they were either static or had no option to start planning next season’s registration early (even my beloved, ESPN league was guilty of this...Tisk, tisk).

Research Manager, [Jon Powell](#), noted that at least CBS Sports had

The screenshot shows the CBS Sports website's Fantasy Football Commissioner landing page. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links for Fantasy, NFL, MLB, NBA, NHL, College FB, College BK, Golf, High School, and More Sports. Below this is a search bar and a 'Sign Up Now' button. The main content area is titled 'FOOTBALL COMMISSIONER' and features a prominent sign-up form for email notifications. The form asks for an email address and date of birth, with a 'SIGN UP NOW' button. Below the form, there's a section titled 'LAUNCH YOUR LEAGUE AND START A FREE TRIAL TODAY*' which lists features of the 'Premier Commissioner League' service, such as customizable rules, scoring, defenses, and a 14-day free trial. A price tag of \$179.99 is shown, along with a '14 Day Free Trial Included' badge. At the bottom, there's a comparison table with three columns: 'FREE', 'PREMIUM', and 'MOCK DRAFTS'. Each column lists features and includes a 'LEARN MORE' link. The page footer contains copyright information and a 'Select Site' dropdown menu.

an interactive page and was giving potential players a reason to get engaged early and maybe even play ball (another very intended pun). The fact that they're starting a conversation could give them a slight edge over competitors who are probably waiting for the season to get closer before making a move.

So ask yourself, if you have an off cycle product, what landing page is currently awaiting your off-cycle traffic? Are you just showing them that the last event closed? Or offering up a reason to join you for the next, future event.

THE BAD

And now, what you've been waiting for, the bad.

This page is a bit confusing. The problem is, it has no focus. It has two calls-to-action, making the page "conflated," according to Jon.

On one section it's asking you to put in your email address to get notified about next season's launch, meanwhile, in the other it's asking you to start a free trial. Another thing Research Analyst, [Dustin Eichholt](#), pointed out was that the calls-to-action were flip flopped. "Why are they asking for an email and then selling you the product?"

Exactly! A person is not going to just put in their email address all wily nilly, especially if they don't understand what they're being offered in the first place.

THE SOLUTION (WHICH ISN'T UGLY AT ALL)

Step 1: Focus on one main objective

So, in a unanimous decision, everyone agreed that the page needed to be focused on one main objective. The research team's suggestion was to get rid of the section that asked you to start a free trial and remove pricing all together.

But wait! You might be asking yourself, "isn't the objective to sell a product?" Yes! But, you

can't sell something without [first starting a conversation](#) with the visitor and showing them why it's valuable to them. The objective here should be to start up an email nurturing campaign. Especially, considering this page is trying to pre-sell.

So, CBS Sports has more than enough time to get the potential gamer interested by showing them over time why they're the best fantasy football option for them. You show them price in the emails. But, I won't go into depth with that, because we're still trying to optimize the landing page and get people interested. Email campaign stuff comes after engaging the visitor.

Step 2: Find the differentiator

So, now that we have a clear objective, what's the next step? Senior Director of Sciences, [Bob Kemper](#), said they needed to express their Value Proposition, which is essential in online marketing. Clearly show the audience the value of the product through a quantifiable statement.

Your [Value Proposition](#) should be your conversation starter and show the visitor what makes your product their best option. This is especially important for CBS Sports' fantasy football league, the only online fantasy football league that isn't free (according to our limited research of visiting three sites)!

So, they need to really express the "differentiator" as Bob said during the meeting. Senior Optimization Manager, [Adam Lapp](#), (who happens to play fantasy football using CBS Sports) mentioned they had some great features, which they had buried all the way at the bottom of the page – where the free trial section is. He suggested they move those up to show visitors the product quality. Those features can support your Value Proposition and make your product more enticing. But remember, you're not selling the product just yet, you're getting the visitor pumped about your league and getting them interested.



Step 3: Capture the email address

So, you've focused your page objective, have expressed your value prop and got the visitor a little interested in your product. How do you drive in for the touchdown and get that email address?

Time to optimize that form field! People get anxious when it comes to putting in their email address, because they think you're going to spam them 'til they go crazy. So, as our Managing Director/CEO, Dr. Flint McGlaughlin says, you need to show the visitor that the offer is worth the risk of putting in their email address.

How do you do that? Simple, offer something. You don't want to come off as if you're just trying to get their email address. In this case our research team had a few incentives CBS Sports could try.

- A free preview guide for the upcoming season for all those potential commissioners who sign up early to get information about the league. Trust me, fantasy football players love that stuff!
- An exclusive top players draft list for the potential commissioners, (the first year I started playing fantasy football, I probably would have given up my first born for that list. I kid, I kid. I don't even have a child, but yea, I definitely would have been interested in that list of top prospects.)
- Another nice incentive that Adam suggested was offering those potential commissioners an exclusive 20% discount just for signing up early and reserving their spot. That discount could be used if they finally do decide to register for the league that season.

The next way to optimize that form field is changing the look a bit. One thing Adam suggested was changing the birth date section to a pre-selected "Yes, I am 18 years or older" line. It takes away the hassle of having to type in your date of birth to confirm you are the appropriate age to use that product. Remember, you want to make the process as smooth as possible for the visitor.

My two cents on that form field would be changing the call to action from the current, "sign up now," to something like, "Get in the game now," "Reserve your spot now," or "Get an early start." Obviously it would have to be a phrase that complements the incentive. I think that would get me more pumped about signing up than what's currently there.

Well that's it for my notes! I hope these tips helped you. I will make sure to take notes at my next infiltration of a "MECLABS meeting of the minds" and bring you some more insight.

Related Resources

[Landing Page Optimization: Identifying friction to increase conversion and get a Nobel Prize](#)

[Landing Page Testing: Designing and prioritizing experiments](#)

[Internet Marketing: Optimizing form fields to maximize conversions](#)

[MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal, Q3 2010](#)

Landing Page Optimization: How an engaging headline and revamped layout led to a 26% conversion rate gain increase in conversion rate

While we endure a winter that harkens back to our parents' most impassioned tales of school commutes ("It actually snowed for six minutes in Jacksonville." – [D. Burstein](#), 2011) you'd think that a website offering discounted Florida vacations wouldn't struggle with conversion rates. When you factor in that the website in question is based in the not-quite-sun-soaked United Kingdom, you'd probably think a text-only, free blog page would be more than enough to sell sunny getaways.

Of course, I'm exaggerating (though, as a MECLABS employee, I'm also intrigued by these testing possibilities). Still, as the following experiment shows, even a highly targeted Web page, offering deals exclusive to local residents, can benefit from seemingly minor alterations.

Background

This experiment involves a United Kingdom-based online ticket broker offering residents a series of exclusive vacation packages for Florida theme parks, tours and attractions. The page tested here is for the Universal Studios theme park in Orlando.

The goal of the test was to see:

1. Which Universal Studios page leads to more booked vacations?
2. Which Universal Studios page leads to a larger order size?
3. Which Universal Studios page leads to greater clickthroughs/engagement?

The test involved adding strong headline copy – which reinforces the idea that Universal Studios theme park is a highly-rated choice among the site's customers (complete with a real-time, five-star rating widget). Additionally, the team made notable design changes, such as adding a photo viewer image gallery and

giving more prominent placement to the site's customer reviews.

In doing this experiment, the team measured both clickthrough and conversion rates for the control and optimized pages.

Control: A text-heavy design



The original page was a text-heavy design with only moderate photo/image use – a somewhat small, static box to the right of the dense copy. The photo box was not active, and only featured stock graphics and logos used within the theme park. At no point did users see the



by Brad Bortone, Associate Editor

February 16th, 2011

type of engaging images that would help them picture what this vacation would be like.

Without an intriguing headline to capture visitor interest, viewers were forced to search for vacation package details in the five to six paragraphs of body copy. Though there was ample use of bold text, without prominent images to break up the copy into more easily scanned sections, it was difficult to browse the page for important information.

Additionally, this layout immediately presented users with two links – one external – before they could begin to read the information below. Likewise, user reviews and comments were located at the bottom of the page, well below the fold and beneath another series of links that encouraged users to leave the page.

The page design also placed heavy emphasis on the shopping cart box, which sat alone in the right hand column, atop an abundance of unused white space.

Treatment: Sell the sizzle

As the old saying goes, you don't sell the steak, you sell the sizzle.

The optimized page immediately enticed readers with its action-oriented headline, "Enjoy 14 Days of Unlimited Access to both Universal Studios® and Universal Islands of Adventure®." The headline is accompanied by a real-time, five-star rating widget, which gives the viewer an immediate testimonial for the product offered on the page.

The image box was redesigned to cover the entire width of the center column, and was updated to a more active rotating photo viewer, with images that change by a user's mouse-over movements. Additional static images are placed below the photo viewer, further breaking up the extensive amount of text.

The shopping cart still sits atop the right-hand column, but customer testimonials were moved into the formerly white space, employing an appealing "voice balloon" graphic treatment. These testimonials are now easily seen while scanning the page, further reinforcing the package value.

The images are now more representative of the customer experience, showing actual photos of visitors enjoying themselves at various park attractions.

Results

The optimized page outperformed the original by 24% during the initial test period. After the page was switched over completely from the original, the conversion rate remained at a 26% gain above what was observed in the preliminary control test.

We can assume by this series of tests that the additions of stronger, more active images, an intriguing headline, and overall improved page flow not only contributed to customers reaching the checkout page more often, but converting, as well.



And when you step back for a moment and think about these results, they make sense. Try to get into the minds of a potential vacation purchases. Their motivation likely hinges largely on having an enjoyable time with their family. Yet the Control page did very little to help them picture what that vacation would be like.

It's winter. You're in the UK. It's cold. Sure, Spiderman is cool, but what's in it for me.

Adding visuals of families enjoying their vacation likely helped potential customers envision exactly what they were purchasing, and tapped into their motivations.

Related Resources

[Sign up for the MarketingExperiments newsletter](#)

[Internet Marketing: Optimizing form fields to maximize conversions](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Identifying friction to increase conversion and win a Nobel Prize](#)

[Landing Page Testing: Designing and prioritizing experiments](#)

[Online Marketing Research: The MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal, Q3 2010](#)



Internet Marketing: Optimizing form fields to maximize conversions



by Dustin Eichholt,
Research Analyst

January 21st, 2011

Some people might think that optimizing a payment form page is a waste of time. But, [I would have to disagree](#). In fact, I would argue it's one of the most important places to test. And when it comes to a form, the same elements of optimizing a landing page apply. If your analytics are telling you that you're losing traffic in the form fields, that's like if a person was standing in line at the grocery store, ready to check out, and then suddenly they drop their groceries and run to the car. You're losing out on what otherwise could have been a sale.

$$C = 4m + 3v = 2(i-f) - 2a \text{ ©}$$

Wherein:

C = Probability of conversion

m = Motivation of user (when)

v = Clarity of the Value Proposition (why)

i = Incentive to take action

f = Friction elements of process

a = Anxiety about entering information

In the case of our next example, UNICEF, you would be losing out on a donation that could help children worldwide. We're going to be taking a look at UNICEF's monthly pledge payment page. As always, we're going to structure our thought process around the MarketingExperiment's Conversion Heuristic, our thought model for conversions, and highlight how we can use some of those elements to achieve our objective – more monthly pledges for UNICEF.

Don't assume these suggestions only apply to non-profits or NGO's; many of the elements are exactly the same regardless of industry or business.

Clarity of the Value Statement

This page does a good job clearly giving a value statement and answering every visitor's first three questions: Where am I? What can I do here? Why should I do it? It's communicated in the headline, subheadline and image. "Give monthly to end the preventable deaths of children," as well as the bullet points underneath describing what my donation will be used for, strikes a solid chord with their visitors. The image of the girl, eyes planted to the camera, drives the value statement home.

There is one area I see needs improvement: the button. "Process" seems pretty dry and well...boring. Given the push to donate on the top of the form, the button text seems to fall short. I suggest mirroring the powerful

word choice in the top portion below in the button. A short sentence before the button would also help reemphasize the value statement as well.

Friction

[Friction](#) deals with length or difficulty of the page or form in the mind of the visitor. This is an area where this page falls short. The good news though, is it can be an easy fix. Friction is an area that when identified and improved, especially in form fields, can lead to a big increase in conversions. Having form fields in the neighborhood of 25-30 is not optimal. Let's see if we can reduce friction a bit, here are my suggestions:

1. Decide what fields are unnecessary (company name and phone number – if you're not going to use it, don't ask for it)
2. Have some fields side by side: Title, First Name, Last Name ; Spouse First Name, Last Name ; Street 1, Street 2 ; City, State, Zip. This would reduce the overall length of the page and make it look less daunting.
3. Billing information is the most important, so start with that. Have a selector box to use that information as contact information as well.
4. With the monthly gift amount, have some pre-selected options with the option of putting "other." Carry the suggestion from the above text to the form fields.

Anxiety

Recall that anxiety is present in the mind of the visitor as a concern. At first, look UNICEF is doing a pretty good job accounting for anxiety. The site is on a secure server (https ://) and the VeriSign logo is placed near the button. A visitor would feel confident, given these elements as well as UNICEF's long history, that the information provided is safe. However another element of anxiety is not accounted for, and in fact subtly outlined in the small text at the bottom:

1. You give your email in the form, but you're NOT able to opt out of emails from UNICEF.
2. They do not define how many emails you will be getting

This can lead to 2 problems:

1. Loss of that conversion entirely
2. Visitors enter a bogus or unused email and that email capture is useless anyway

I'm well aware of the good work UNICEF does around the world and the nature of non-profits. That said, not being able to opt-out of emails seems like spam waiting to happen, or at least a concern over possible spam. It's the *concern* that we're trying to mitigate. UNICEF may just send out two emails a year, the problem is that the concern goes unaccounted for, and this can hurt conversions. A suggestion would be to allow opt-out by clicking a box, but have the box pre-checked when the visitor enters the form. This is a common practice around the web and I think losing a few emails is favorable to losing a few conversions (especially visitors that have already entered in ALL their information).

Overall I think UNICEF is doing a good job with their form page and a higher conversion rate is just around the corner of a few suggestions and some testing.

Related Resources:

[Landing Page Optimization: Identifying friction to increase conversion and win a Nobel Prize](#)

[Internet Marketing: Landing page optimization for beginners](#)

[Simple Registration Form Changes to Lift Conversions: 5 ideas to test](#) – MarketingSherpa's Members' Library



Landing Page Testing: Designing and prioritizing experiments



by Adam T. Sutton,
Senior Reporter

January 7th, 2011

Marketers are very creative people. There is an art to designing messaging, copy, ads, websites and a long list of other assets — and pulling them into a cohesive strategy.

And that strategy must achieve more than aesthetic appeal. Something might look nice or read well, but it's a waste of time if it does not help achieve business results.

This is why marketers need to add science to their art. Through experimentation, marketers uncover the best designs and strategies to improve response rates.

For example, marketers using an inbound marketing strategy must test their landing pages to improve the conversion rates of incoming traffic (check out MarketingSherpa's first [InBound Marketing newsletter](#), launched yesterday). Ignoring experiments will waste traffic and resources.

Choose the Best Test

Back in elementary science, we all learned about the [Scientific Method](#) — the process used to answer questions with experiments and observations. You remember: Ask a question, form a hypothesis, test the hypothesis, etc.

Example:



One thing they didn't teach us in school is that marketers need to prioritize their experiments to efficiently use their resources and achieve the best possible results.

Let me explain:

In science, very precise experiments measure the results of changes to a single variable while holding all other factors constant. This is a great way to discover that single variable's role.

In marketing — and in landing page optimization specifically — a single variable can be a very specific detail, such as a button's shape. Take a look at these two buttons:

An A/B landing page test comparing these buttons would actually change more than six variables. A button is a group of variables, or a *variable cluster*, which includes the button's:

- Color
- Size
- Shape
- Copy
- Font
- Placement
- Etc.

Bigger Tests for Better Results

Variable clusters are treated as single variables for the purpose of experiments. Some marketers believe their tests change a single variable when in fact they're really clusters.

But this is OK!

"Testing multiple variables is more likely to increase the size of the results variation," said Bob Kemper, Senior Director of Sciences, MECLABS, during a recent [MarketingExperiments Web clinic](#). "Testing individual variables or smaller clusters is more likely to increase the precision of the test."

Most marketers do not have the resources to isolate and test every variable on a landing page — there are far too many. Instead, they test larger changes, which are more likely to substantially alter their results — because time and money are a factor.

"Testing larger variable clusters... requires fewer treatments which in turn reduces the test duration and can substantially boost the return on your investment in time and energy," Kemper said.

So while marketers should use science and experiments to improve performance — prioritization is the key. The goal is not to identify every perfect detail. The goal is to efficiently increase performance. Then, if you want, you can test isolated variables to learn more about your audience. And of course you will do it with an artistic touch.

Related resources

[Inbound Marketing: How to pull in customers without pushing ads](#)

[Double the Value of Your Online Testing](#)

[This Just Tested: Do images or copy generate more user response?](#)



Landing Page Optimization: Identifying friction to increase conversion and win a Nobel Prize



by Daniel Burstein,
Director of Editorial
Content

January 10th, 2011

The 2010 Nobel Prize in Economics was awarded to Peter Diamond, Dale Mortensen and Christopher Pissarides for their research trying to explain why unemployment remains so high in the U.S. and other advanced economies. More specifically, they won for their analysis of markets with [search frictions](#) – any factors that keep markets from operating efficiently.

Being the amateur economist I am (CV: 11th grade with Mr. Lamar, I've read several issues of The Economist), I was elated to hear about this selection. Theoretical economics is sometimes too, well, theoretical. Supply A meets Demand B and they live happily ever after.

With the notable exception of [Dan Ariely](#), I often wonder if these economists live in the real world or just a magical Shangri-la where everyone always behaves rationally, and mere trifles like [food and energy](#) aren't important aspects in the average family budget (I believe this Eden is called Princeton).

The world I live in doesn't work that way. Which gets us to your landing page...

But what do economic studies in unemployment have to do with my landing page?

Your landing page is not an economic utopia where Supply A and Demand B neatly meet to deliver all the conversions you should rationally achieve, based on the [true value of your product or service](#). Like Messrs. Diamond, Mortensen and Pissarides, MarketingExperiments research has found that one of the major impediments to conversion on a Web page is friction.

$$C = 4m + 3v = 2(i + f) - 2a \text{ ©}$$

Wherein:

C = Probability of conversion

m = Motivation of user (when)

v = Clarity of the Value Proposition (why)

i = Incentive to take action

f = Friction elements of process

a = Anxiety about entering information

Think about it for a second. How many Web pages have you arrived at that you just couldn't figure out what you were supposed to do and bounced? Or perhaps you started off on the merry trek into their funnel but just didn't have the patience to wade through each and every step or complete every form field?

Hold on, Mr. Fancy-Pants Economist, my site's Web pages are ridiculously simple

Yeah, we get that a lot. And here's why. If you're a dedicated online marketer, you have likely put a lot of time and effort into every aspect of your website – landing pages, conversion paths, every single radio button and form field.

But, your potential customer has not. Mr. Short-Attention Span, let's call him, is willing to invest mere seconds (sometimes more, sometimes less...motivation plays a huge factor as you can see in the MarketingExperiments conversion heuristic referenced earlier) in trying to figure out your conversion process. And, unlike you, he hasn't invested a majority of his day understanding the minutia of your site. This might be his first-time visit (and his last if you don't clean up your act, buddy).

And there's the rub. You can't reduce friction if you don't even realize it's there. As noted psychologist (and current senator), Stuart Smalley, is fond of saying, "denial ain't just a river in Egypt!"

So how can I identify friction to get more sales and leads?

In our [Landing Page Optimization course](#), we use a simple heuristic to help teach marketers how to identify (and manage) friction:

$$f_{sc} = L_t + d_t \text{ ©}$$

Wherein:

f_{sc} = Friction of sales conversion

L_t = Length (time)

d_t = Difficulty

In our course, we dedicate an entire 55-slide session to friction, so I can't possibly walk you through every consideration in a simple blog post. However, what I think you might find most helpful is a quick look at some design elements that can cause friction.

Examples of design elements that can cause length-oriented friction:

- Length of pages
- Field Number
- Field Layout
- Steps in a process

Examples of design elements that can cause difficulty-oriented friction:

- Eye-path
- Options Selection
- Button Design
- Organization
- Flash Video

Review your conversion process with these elements in mind. Better yet, have someone that isn't familiar with your website – a secretary, your grandmother, the mailman – review your landing pages with these elements in mind. When you look at your site with fresh eyes and the proper focus, you might be shocked at what you (and Nana) discover.

Related resources

[Friction: Are you rubbing customers the wrong way?](#)

[Internet Marketing: Landing page optimization for beginners](#)

[Landing Page Optimization on-demand training and certification course](#)

[The MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal, Q3 2010](#)

Mobile Marketing 101, Part 1:

Should you make the leap to a custom mobile site?



by Tony Doty,
Research Manager
January 12th, 2011

When they asked me to write a blog post on mobile websites I thought they were crazy. I mean, when was the last time I actually developed a mobile app or website? Oh yeah, never.

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I've spent so much time on my phone, I am actually very well informed and can help you and your company start off on the right foot in the mobile space. (*EDITOR'S NOTE: Tony is a humble guy. He is one of our top optimization research analysts, working with The New York Times among other Research Partners.*)

And, I'm sure many marketers may be attracted to the idea of going mobile. Especially since, according to the Nielsen Company, [smartphone users are projected to account for more than 50 percent of U.S. wireless subscribers by the end of the year.](#)

So, if you're one of those marketers thinking about creating a dedicated mobile site, this is my beginner's take on what it takes to create a successful one before you take the leap...

Step #1: See how your current page looks on mobile platforms

I'm sure you or someone you know has an iPhone, Android, Blackberry, etc. If you don't have each of these devices handy, there are some really cool tools that you can use to see how your website would actually look and behave on just about any mobile device.

Both Firefox and Safari offer easy ways to change your user agent and see what your site would look like through other browsers. For Firefox, download [Chris Pederick's User Agent Switcher](#). You can find more mobile browsers in the [comments section](#).



For Safari, just enable Developer Mode (Preferences, Advanced, check the "Show Develop" box) and select your user agent from the Develop menu. While this isn't a perfect representation of your site, once you shrink your browser window to the size of your mobile device it'll be very close impersonation and plenty to get you started.

This is really going to help us answer some common questions you encounter while going mobile such as:

- Is the website too cluttered?
- Is it easy to use?
- Are the buttons clickable with my big fingers?
- Is it easy to find the best and most relevant content?
- In the end...is it good? Heck, is it even adequate?

I'm going to assume that here, for most of you, what's going to happen is that you'll realize it's not really optimized for a mobile platform. This is to be expected. You've spent a lot of time optimizing your site over the past few years and you're just now looking towards mobile, right?

Step #2: (Really) understand your target audience

This includes **who** they are, and **what** they come to look at. Some of the key statistics you'll want to pay close attention to include:

- How many visitors come from a mobile device?
- What is the mobile device of choice?
- What pages do they most frequently visit?
- What is the top content overall, and top content immediately preceding a successful call to action?

These questions will be integral when you actually begin planning out your mobile site. You'll want to have an internal discussion with Sales and Customer Service about your target audience. You'll also want to use your analytics to determine what people currently use your site for.

There are plenty of tools out there that can give you these statistics, but the tool of choice for many companies is Google Analytics because it's a free tool with relatively quick implementation, a robust support network, and [the ability to collect a plethora of great data](#). A properly set-up Google Analytics account can get you most of the information you desire for free, you just need to know where to look.

Step #3: Assemble a mock-up mobile page that meets your visitors' expectations

This is the step where you'll be happy you looked at the most highly viewed content in the site and what visitors do immediately preceding the call to action. This will be your most relevant content, and content you want to ensure you include while making it easy to find.

On a personal note, please be sure to give people an easy-to-find button where they can be switched to the desktop version of the site. Nothing is more frustrating than when you want to see the desktop version of a site but keep getting automatically redirected to the mobile site.

I personally run into that problem quite often. I play a lot of Fantasy Sports, and when I wrote this it was football season. I use ESPN and when I get redirected to the mobile version of

the site I can easily see my team and league, but can't easily get to a lot of the research and analysis that I'm trying to find. You know, all that nitty gritty stuff you're looking through on Sunday morning, while you're setting your final lineup. I always had to hunt for a way into the desktop version of the site to get what I really needed and it was remarkably frustrating. Sorry, just needed to vent for a minute.

Step #4: Decide if the benefits outweigh the costs of development

Now that you've taken these simple steps, you need to decide how, or even if, you should make a mobile version of your website. There is no one right answer; it comes down to a cost/benefit analysis that takes into account your overall business strategy.

Don't just jump into creating a mobile site because it's the next hot thing — or because the CEO just got an iPhone and loves playing with his new toy. You must determine if the benefits of building a mobile site, or redesigning your current site, outweigh the expenditure to truly get results.

Now that you've made the decision whether or not to proceed with a mobile site, what should it look like? My time is up, so we'll have to cover that next time in part two.

Related resources

[Testing Mobile Pages – Simpler Than Thought](#)

[Mobile Marketing and Commerce in Japan](#)

[Get Started in Mobile Marketing: 4 insights to guide your strategy](#) – MarketingSherpa Members' Library

[Mobile Website Advice from Taco Bell: 5 considerations to reach more mobile devices](#) – MarketingSherpa Members' Library

[Page Tests Cut Mobile Bounces 22%: 3 steps to improve experience for mobile visitors](#) – MarketingSherpa Members' Library

photo by [Sabrina's Stash](#)



Mobile Marketing 101, Part 2:

Ease of use and quality of content are key



by **Tony Doty**,
Research Manager
January 14th, 2011

So, you've done all of this, right?

1. Made sure you understand what your current site looks like through a variety of mobile operating systems. Is it good? Is it even adequate? (User Agents)
2. Understand what people use your current site for? What is the top content overall, and top content immediately preceding a successful call to action. (Analytics)
3. Understand your target audience? (Internal discussions)
4. Lastly, determined if the benefits of building a mobile site or redesigning your current site outweigh the expenditure.

If not, [refer back to page 102](#), but now we're moving on to actual mobile website design recommendations.

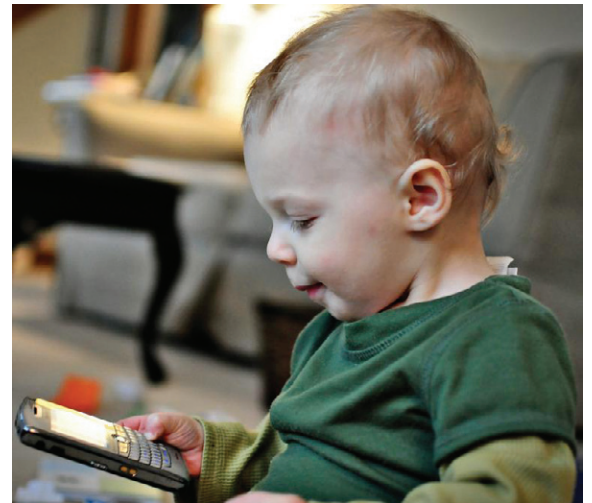
Now let's say you've made the decision to create a website specifically for mobile devices. The main thing you need to understand about mobile devices is the difference in usability:

- They have much less real estate
- Buttons are harder to click
- People will be zooming in to see any small features
- When a potential customer clicks on a box to enter text a good portion of the screen is covered by the keyboard

So, you need to make your page as easy to use as possible. I can't stress that enough! While there may be TONS of great content on your site, you need to keep your mobile site as easy to use as possible.

Usability is key

A big part of that is avoiding the urge to overload the mobile version of your website with too much information. There are lots of great technologies, such as sliding drop-downs, that give you different ways to lay out your top navigation without cluttering the entire page. Remember, you want to make it as easy to use as possible, and minimize the number of steps it takes a user to reach their primary objective.



Now, that's tricky since you won't always know what that objective might be for unique visitors. You just need to ensure that all the high-level detail, and top relevant content from your desktop version is available on mobile. Again, this is where all that research you did in [part 1](#) pays off.

Understand how people use mobile devices

When someone is using a mobile platform they're not usually looking for the full user experience they find on the desktop. Typically

people are looking for very specific pieces of information on their phones, for example local movie times or restaurants in the area. Historically, a very deep, in-depth sales process is not effective through a mobile platform, but that is always changing with updates to technology. As phones continue to become more advanced, people are becoming more and more likely to want to jump directly to the desktop version of the page.

Ecommerce is something unique, but most product- and service – based companies really want to view the mobile site more as a starting point for the visitor. You're going to want to make sure you're driving traffic back to your fully featured website, since that's where all the details and highly specific content will stay. Give them a teaser, and then encourage them to go back to the desktop version where they can set up their profile or do other activities.

It's really hard on a mobile device to punch in your email, password, user name and change your preferences and settings; all of that stuff is more easily done with keyboard and mouse for the majority of users. You really want your mobile site to be a jumping off point – this is what we do, what we offer, this is the top-level stuff – but not get into nitty gritty on mobile. Drive that to desktop. As we covered earlier, make it easy and obvious to view the desktop version on your mobile device.

Segment by operating system

Using metrics you can also segment mobile visitors by OS. If your traffic is 90 percent iPhone, you obviously want to ensure your site works on iPhone before you move onto other devices, right?

You can also eventually offer different content and pages based on the individual user's OS system, but you first want to focus on getting a page that just works.

So, to sum up, most people are using mobile devices to hunt and find specific information, unlike a typical desktop experience where you may be browsing with no real goal in mind or for the sake of entertainment. In this case, just ensure that:

- Your content is easy to find, access and read
- It's the **right** content

By doing so, you should be set to keep the visitors on your site or drive them to your preferred call to action.

Related Resources

[Mobile Marketing 101: Should you make the leap to a custom mobile site?](#)

[Testing Mobile Pages – Simpler Than Thought](#)

[Mobile Website Advice from Taco Bell: 5 considerations to reach more mobile devices](#) – MarketingSherpa Members' Library

[Page Tests Cut Mobile Bounces 22%: 3 steps to improve experience for mobile visitors](#) – MarketingSherpa Members' Library

photo by [bengrey](#)



SEARCH MARKETING

Optimizing PPC Ads: How to leverage the full potential of 130 characters by clarifying the Value Proposition

Since Gutenberg invented a platform for the mass production of flyers and brochures, marketers have been competing for customer's attention. In the past, traditional media outlets such as radio, television and print were the primary focal points for advertisers. Today, no battleground is more fiercely fought over than online paid search. As reported by our sister company, MarketingSherpa, in the [2011 Search Marketing Benchmark Report – PPC Edition](#), this year spending for online search advertisements alone will exceed \$25 billion.

However, money alone is not enough to gain customer attention. Despite the still-struggling economy, you will never be the only one spending money to speak to your customers – especially in the case of pay-per-click (PPC) advertising.

Our research suggests that the biggest pitfall for the average PPC campaign is the lack of a clearly stated [Value Proposition](#). If you can improve this area, you will be better prepared to gain a decisive advantage over your competitors.

In this Research Article, we will help you address this challenge, and explore that number one contributing factor to the success (or failure) of a PPC campaign, highlighting how a clearly stated and consistent Value Proposition can be a highly effective way to generate more qualified clicks, and help you create effective Value Propositions for your company and everything it produces.

In the following experiment, our researchers helped NetSuite improve its lead generation by more effectively expressing a specific product's value in a PPC ad, and carrying this messaging throughout the form completion process.

EXPERIMENT #1



Experiment ID: *(Protected)*

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1214

Research Notes:

Background: NetSuite, a B2B marketer, wanted to optimize its entire lead generation funnel

Goal: To increase total leads captured

Primary research question: Which ad will generate the most leads?

Approach: Radical redesign of the complete lead-generation process focusing on strengthening the communication of the Value Proposition

From this experiment, you'll learn why the expression of value is not only important for the ad, but throughout the entire form submission process, from clickthrough to landing page to conversion.

This was an 18-week experiment that tested 16 different versions of the control ad below. The Research Partner was NetSuite, a leading vendor of cloud computing business management software suites.



by Brad Bortone

Contributors

Dr. Flint McGlaughlin

Jon Powell

Tony Doty

Austin McCraw

Daniel Burstein

January 2011

15.84%

31.25%

97.27%

Control

Original Ad

{Keyword} Business Software

Award-Winning Business Software.
Fully Integrated. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/Business

The original ad was very direct in its initial Value Proposition, in that it was clear that this link would lead to “award-winning” software related to the relevant keyword. Likewise, it offers additional value by presenting a free trial offer. However, our researchers identified a number of areas where improvements were possible.

Inherently, “award-winning” is a phrase that should add value. However, there is no indication of what award(s) this software received, or from what entities. Similarly, though the keyword should provide context, the words “fully integrated” do little to add value in the limited space in a PPC ad, since there is no further detail. As such, this ad would likely only appeal to users who are familiar with the product and/or company, and feel comfortable clicking through to learn more about this software.

On a separate, but no less important note, with the limited ad space, it is crucial to maximize the value of every word. By following up the link header “{Keyword} Business Software” with “Award-Winning Business Software,” the company has effectively wasted this space with redundancy – space that could be used to better support the Value Proposition.

Treatments

{Keyword} Business Solutions

Run Your Entire Business with One System.
Accounting + CRM. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/Business-Solutions

{Keyword} Business Software

Support the Entire Company with One
Low Cost Solution. NetSuite
www.NetSuite.com/Business-Solutions

Business Software Suite

#1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients
Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

#1 Business Software

6459+ Clients. On-Demand Access.
One System for the Entire Company.
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

Small Business Software

6459+ Clients Worldwide Free Trial
Software You Won't Outgrow
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

Small Business Software

Worlds #1 On-Demand Suite.
6459+ Clients. Free Trial Today.
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

The above are six of 16 total treatments tested for this experiment. The red box outlines what our research team found to be the most successful of the treatments. All of the above make better use of the space by providing significant supporting content for the Value Proposition.

In comparing the control with these treatments, you can immediately see how value is increased by the addition of statistics (e.g. “6459+ Clients”), scope (e.g. “Worldwide”) and in two cases, an appealing solution to a common problem (e.g. “Support the Entire Company with One Low Cost Solution”).

However, as you can see, there is variation among the supporting words used. Our research analysts were not able to instantly determine which supporting words would most resonate with the audience. You cannot simply guess; the only way to determine that is to test.

We’ll delve more deeply into why these treatments performed better later in this Research Article. But first, let’s see the changes our researchers made and what results they achieved.

Results



21% Increase in Clickthrough
The new ad generated 20.9% more clicks than the original

Original Ad

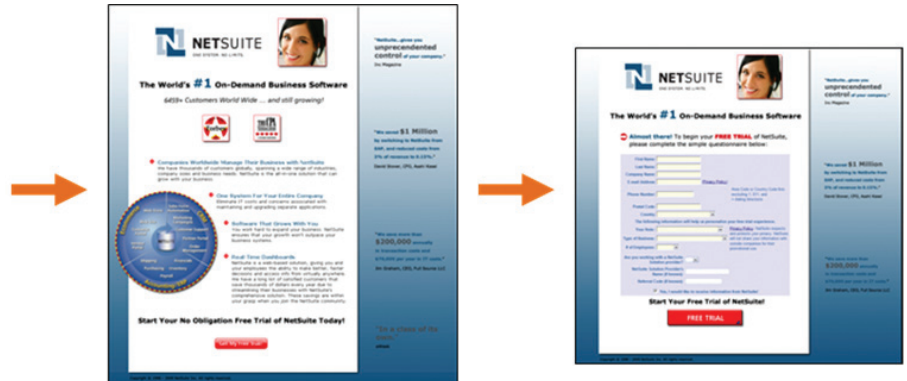
{Keyword} Business Software
 Award-Winning Business Software.
 Fully Integrated. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/Business

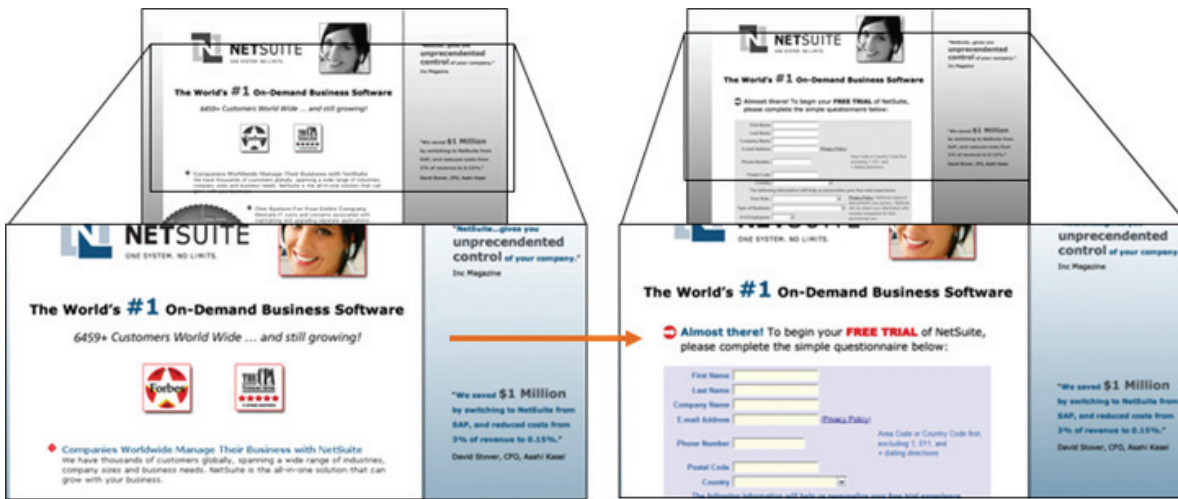
Best Performing Ad

Business Software Suite
 #1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients
 Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware

The highest-performing treatment produced a 21% increase in clicks over the control. While we focused on Value Proposition in the PPC ad in this analysis of the experiment, it is important to note that the PPC test was but one test in the overall [testing-optimization cycle](#). Here is a quick look at other elements in the funnel:

Business Software Suite
 #1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients
 Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial
www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware





272% Increase in Overall Conversion

The Optimized Path's conversion rate increased by 272.2%

Metric	Control	Treatment	Relative Difference
PPC Advertisement	0.89%	1.08	20.9%
Landing Page Clickthrough	7.17%	11.06%	54.26%
Form Completion	15.84%	31.25%	97.27%
Impression-to-lead Conversion	.009%	.033%	272.2%



What you need to understand: The Value Propositions in the highest-performing PPC ad most closely matched the motivations of the viewers of those ads, resulting in more clicks. While our research analysts were able to identify key elements of information that were missing from the control ads, elements that undercut the force of the Value Proposition, they are not able to guess which precious few words would produce the most effective ads.

Once identified, they didn't stop at using that highly effective Value Proposition only in the search ads. The ad closely matched the Value Propositions expressed on the corresponding landing page and form submission page. By keeping this copy consistent, the user is greeted with the same powerful messaging and Value Proposition throughout the process. And, as such, users experienced less [Friction and Anxiety](#) on the path to conversion.

In this experiment, a 272% increase in conversion led to 268% more projected revenue and, when combined with the corresponding 66% reduction in cost-per-acquisition, the optimized path produced more than four times the monthly profit (302% increase).

Primary Value Proposition

Define Your Value Proposition

We must first define what a Value Proposition should be. A Value Proposition is at the foundation of all of your marketing efforts, and is the primary reason why your ideal prospect should buy from you, rather than your competitors.



What you need to understand: Crafting a Value Proposition requires thorough understanding of what is unique about your products and services.

- You must differentiate your offer from your competitors' offers.
- You need to excel in at least one element of value.
- You need to express why you are the best choice for your optimum customer.
- There is a difference between the Value Proposition for your company and your product. You must address both.

But in addition to an overall Value Proposition for your company, brand, and products, every action you request a prospect to take, every open, every click, every form fill, should have a sub-Value Proposition.

Note that there is a difference between the Value Proposition for your company or product, your primary Value Proposition, and the Value Proposition for an individual action. In a PPC ad, you are not selling your company – you are selling a click. The value expressed in this ad must be strong enough to motivate a user to pursue more information about your product or service. Though strong brand identification can certainly help the performance of a PPC ad, it is considerably more important to appeal to what a user wants by offering answers, solutions or results.

Due to the constraints on the amount of characters allowed per line, marketers are forced to tightly craft their PPC value statements. The most effective Value Propositions are the ones that can be stated in ten words or less; PPC ads force you to write in this manner.

Another benefit of expressing value in a PPC ad is that your competition is located near (or directly next to) your ad, meaning that you are effectively testing your claims against those of your competitors. Customers are forced to choose from a wealth of options, and only those with strong statements of value will garner the majority of clicks.

Crafting an effective Value Proposition in a PPC ad comes down to answering this core question, “If you had just ten words to explain why your ideal customer should buy from your company instead of your competitors, what would you communicate?”

I’m sure you’ve heard of the elevator pitch. Well, what if you had less time than an elevator ride? What if you just had the back of a napkin? Picture your website visitor sitting in a busy restaurant. Highly distracted. You have mere moments to assess his motivations, jot down your Value Proposition with very few words, and then send those few words of relevant messaging in his direction.

This is, of course, an exaggeration. First of all, your primary Value Proposition is usually not the literal statement you will put in front of your audience, more of a guiding principle to the value you intend to communicate through every aspect of your business – from the images used on your landing page to the response of your customer service team to, in this case, how you craft your PPC ad.

Also, you have plenty of time to brainstorm, write, rewrite, and test your Value Proposition. But it needs to be so automatic that, when put on the spot with that ideal customer in front of you; you are ready to deploy it at a moment's notice.

So, how do you create that effective primary Value Proposition? After all, Value Proposition is probably the most crucial element in crafting a good PPC ad. Well, let us first caution you that this is no easy task. After all, this statement is core to your business. You will likely refine and optimize this statement as you (hopefully) continue to revise and optimize your very business.

However, our research has identified a few key elements that can help guide your thinking as you craft your primary Value Proposition. When operating in a highly competitive and crowded market, you must excel in at least one element of value in order to achieve success.

The earlier-referenced experiment illustrates the power, and difficulty, in defining an effective Value Proposition. The success of the optimized PPC ad over the original can be traced back to the systematic approach our researchers took in optimizing for the two types of Value Propositions every marketer must master:

Here are is a quick look at a few principles to help you optimize the value prop you use to craft PPC ads.



Key

Principle:

The force of a Value Proposition can be measured by three essential elements: Appeal, Exclusivity and Credibility.

ELEMENT #1: Appeal

The **appeal** of a Value Proposition is dependent upon the relevance of the message – in other words, how directly the Value Proposition relates to the user's motivations. Marketers can add appeal by offering a benefit within the ad that drives the user to click your offering as opposed to a competitor's.

For example, if three companies offer seemingly identical services, the offer of a free trial or satisfaction guarantee may be enough to drive clicks, as they not only show confidence in the service, but also tell the visitor that this would be their easiest, most hassle-free choice in solving a problem.

The appeal of a Value Proposition is dependent upon the relevance that this message has to the user's motivations. Your Value Proposition has to appeal to the specific motivations of your prospects. And the way you do that is with relevant messaging to your prospects.



This image provides a simple way to think about appeal. Craft appealing Value Propositions by connecting the Value Proposition to specific visitor motivations. Ultimately, it takes relevant messaging to make that connection.

ELEMENT #2: Exclusivity

Exclusivity is a key differentiator, and a primary reason for PPC ad success. If your company is offering a product or service that is either unique within the target market, or is proven to perform better than others in the target market, you can achieve exclusivity by expressing proof of this in your ad.

In short, if you are in a crowded marketplace, your product or service must express at least one aspect of value that separates you from the competition.

ELEMENT #3: Credibility

To consistently generate clicks you need **credibility**. This is based on how believable your claims – and your clients – are, in terms of supporting your value. You may be able to claim that your product or service is the best for your target market, but these words ring empty if not supported by data or proven testimonial. By adding supporting data and quantitative information, you will increase the credibility of your Value Proposition.

Establishing credibility in a PPC ad can be tricky without the benefit of space, as this element is largely generated through fleshed-out proof points, such as professional testimonials or customer commentary. In order to maximize credibility within the limited space of a PPC ad, it is important to substitute general, qualitative product or service descriptions with short, but efficient, quantitative facts that help your ad stand out from the rest.

To offer an example, commonly used PPC terms such as “biggest” mean nothing out of context. Instead of wasting ad space with unsubstantiated generalities, choose to tell the user, “106,000+ new users in 2010.” Don’t tell the user that something offers “fastest downloads” when it is more effective to say, “Download time is X seconds.” Such superlatives offer the user no information that would encourage a clickthrough.

A product or service that offers guaranteed, proven results will likely generate more interest to a target audience than one without such evidence of success.

Sub-Value Propositions

While that primary Value Proposition should serve as an overall guiding force for all of your company’s marketing, for each of its divisions, brands, and products, it should not be the only Value Proposition your company has. Every marketing action should have its own Value Proposition. We call this a sub-Value Proposition.

(Editor’s Note: The prefix “sub” can be used to connote many things – a lesser degree, an inferior rank, a lower position, etc. In this case, we’re using it to highlight the fact that, much like a subhead’s relationship to a headline, it must support and extend the primary Value Proposition. While it may physically reside in a lower position, if you were to create an org chart of your company’s marketing efforts, there is certainly nothing less important or inferior about a sub-value prop.)

Why must every action have a sub-Value Proposition? Because, in essence, an action necessitates a value exchange. You are asking something of value and must provide value in response. So for every action you desire a visitor to make (for example, a click in the case of a PPC ad), there must be an immediate promise of value that outweighs the cost of that action.

Likewise, having a powerful sub-Value Proposition is not enough; it must be communicated effectively to achieve optimal results. As was established earlier, you need to refine your sub-value prop until you can articulate it in a single, instantly credible sentence.

When this is accomplished, you can then optimize your pages to express and support the sub-Value Proposition using congruence – having every element of your ad or page either state or support the statement you are trying to make.

Business Software Suite
 #1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients
 Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial
www.Netsuite.com/BusinessSoftware

- Key value is communicated in each step of the process, keeping the user motivated

Below, we refer back to the original paid search ad from Experiment #1, prior to optimization. How strong is the appeal? The exclusivity? Credibility? Using a scale of 1-5, please judge for yourself:

Appeal _____

Exclusivity _____

Credibility _____

OVERALL _____

(Editor’s note: Please note that judging on this scale is not meant to offer conclusive, scientific proof to which Value Proposition will perform best. We merely seek to provide a teaching tool to help you learn about, and craft your own, effective Value Propositions).

Original PPC Ad

{Keyword} Business Software

Award-Winning Business Software.

Fully Integrated. Free Trial

www.NetSuite.com/Business

For the original ad, there is only a small amount of appeal, in that it offers users an “award-winning” product and is supported by a free trial. However, just as quickly as the user feels more confident, questions abound. What awards did it win? The product is “Fully integrated” into what? How long is the free trial? Quickly, the appeal dwindles.

Likewise, little in this ad differentiates the offer from the wealth of other business software suites available today, especially those which offer free trials, as well.

Lastly, there is questionable credibility displayed in the original ad. The language is qualitative, and offers no concrete evidence or proof of this product’s superiority over the competition. The user is left wondering – not about the product, but rather what the company possibly isn’t saying.

The following is the best-performing ad treatment. Please assess for the same three elements:

Appeal _____
 Exclusivity _____
 Credibility _____
 OVERALL _____

Optimized PPC Ad

Business Software Suite

#1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients

Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial

www.NetSuite.com/BusinessSoftware


This treatment has considerably more appeal than the control. First, the term “Business Software Suite” gives users the sense they will receive a larger, more complete product than simply a singular piece of software. When coupled with the improved exclusivity and credibility, the idea of a free trial becomes much more appealing, as the overall product seems more valuable.

In terms of exclusivity, the term “#1 On-Demand” immediately establishes that this product is atop its category, while “6459+ World Clients” supports this with the idea that this product is exclusive by having a broad scope of users.

Let's take a look at an example in another industry. This time you can just sit back and read. We'll do all the grading for you:

Not This

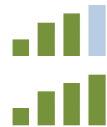
[Qwest® Data Services](#)
 Customized data center for medium to large business.
www.Qwest.com/Business



APPEAL
EXCLUSIVITY
CREDIBILITY

But This

[Next-Gen Data Center](#)
 100% Uptime, SAS 70 Audited
 Greenfield Data Center. Tour Online
www.DataFoundry.com



APPEAL
EXCLUSIVITY
CREDIBILITY

Much like the ad from Experiment #1, the first ad in this example, “Data Services,” fails to utilize the available space to convey its value. Though the company in question has a name that carries significant weight in this market, the URL below the ad clearly shows where the link originated. Though the appeal is moderate based on name recognition, the remainder of the ad does little to build upon this and add value.

The next two lines of copy are also vague, offering the user no evidence of a competitive advantage over other ads on the page. No supporting data or testimonial is provided, and there are no details of how this product/service can provide a solution for the user.

The second ad, “Next-Gen Data Center,” was displayed as a result of the same keyword search, and immediately offers more appeal to the user through the use of the term “Next-Gen.” This term implies advanced technology, efficiency, and a more “future-proof” solution. Though the first line would likely generate enough appeal to garner a click, it is further supported by the offer of an online tour, which entices the user by teasing further value upon clicking.

The second ad’s exclusivity and credibility both benefit from the second line of text, which provides a quantitative element (100% Uptime) and a testimonial to the product’s legitimacy and competitive advantage (SAS 70 Audited).

Appeal	4
Exclusivity	4
Credibility	5
OVERALL	5



One final example, this from a search for “online learning:”

Not This

[Earn Degree Online](#)

Interested in Earning Your Degree Online? Inquire Now About Capella.
www.Capella.edu



But This

[Accredited Online Degrees](#)

Students all ages - 18 to 75
 Est.. in 1902, over 11k classmates
Franklin.edu/Online-Education



In our analysis, the first ad ranked very low in all three areas, as its redundancy effectively wastes most of the ad space. “Earn Degree Online” does not read as proper English, nor does it offer any differentiators from the literally thousands of other online degree ads that populate the Internet. The ad follows this with “Interested in Earning Your Degree Online?” – a question that likely didn’t need to be asked, based on the fact that the user arrived here as the result of a targeted search. In addition, there are no supporting statements or testimonials to build value.

The second ad establishes credibility from the outset with the use of the term “Accredited,” which is a concern among those looking for a legitimate online learning program. Because this particular industry is known for somewhat unscrupulous advertising methods, it is all the more important for this particular outlet to establish credibility.

Credibility is further supported by the final line of copy, which lets the user know that this is not a fly-by-night operation, but rather a well-known, nearly 100-year old institution, currently serving more than 11,000 students.

The strongest factor of this ad is its exclusivity, established – ironically enough – by the fact that this school serves students aged 18-75. Though this is a wide range of potential users to target, this creates exclusivity by likely being one of few online learning outlets to serve such a broad population.

If we had to grade the above ad, the numbers would look something like this...

Appeal	<u>4</u>
Exclusivity	<u>5</u>
Credibility	<u>4</u>
OVERALL	<u>4</u>



The Bottom Line

In order to establish and convey your Value Proposition with a PPC ad, you must remember that the goal of this ad is not to sell products. Simply put, the ad's goal is to get your ideal prospects to click. Likewise, you are not exclusively competing against the products/companies on your search results page, but competing for the user's action...one of main factors you must overcome is inertia. If your only focus is to make a better ad than your competition, you may focus on a point of value that matters little to anyone expect you and the marketing director at your competition.

This is why it is so important to move beyond simply promising that you have a better product, but rather tap into your prospects' motivations, point them in a direction that will truly serve their individual needs, and encourage them to find out if your product or service is the right one for them.

You tap into that motivation by conveying a sub-Value Proposition that supports and extends your company's primary Value Proposition while delivering an appealing, exclusive, and credible message. You should create Value Propositions based on those three elements, but you cannot do it in a vacuum.

Think about where the person is at in the buying process, and what they see from the competition when they perform a search. Then test your sub-Value Propositions in your PPC ads to see which perform best. What can you learn from the best performing ads? Apply these lessons not just to the ads themselves, but throughout the subsequent landing page and form submission page so your customers experience one consistent Value Proposition throughout the entire funnel.

In the end, remember that marketers do not optimize online ads or Web pages. They optimize thought sequences. By keeping abreast of users and your competition, you will be better prepared to use PPC ads to convey strong Value Propositions that resonate with your audience.

Online Advertising: The 3 obstacles you must overcome to create an effective banner ad



by Jon Powell ,
Senior Research
Manager

March 25th, 2011

We've been asked this question a number of times: how do you create an effective online banner ad that stands apart from the hundreds of thousands of others out there?

I would like to help answer that question by giving you the three major obstacles *all banner ads face* and options that you can use to overcome them.

OBSTACLE #1: GETTING VISITOR ATTENTION

Overcome this obstacle by asking yourself: how has your attention been diverted in the past *when you were already doing something*?

- If you listen to a radio station with ads while driving to work, which ads did you actually pay attention to?
- When you are watching TV and your show cuts to commercial, which kind of commercial stopped you long enough to keep you from changing the channel (or looking at your phone)?

In the online world, there are six elements that can help capture attention:

- Color (think bright and bold)
- Size (ad size, font size, image size relative to what's around it)
- Shape (rectangle verses square)
- Motion (animation)
- Position (beginning, end, middle of competing content)
- Text (content and style)

Use the bullets above as an attention checklist. In order to get a visitor's attention, you must make something that stands out beyond the *content* and *other ads* that it's competing with.



Visitors are already doing something. You need to *get an idea of what they're already doing and looking at* so you can be bold enough to stand apart.

OBSTACLE #2: CAPTURING VISITOR INTEREST

We've seen ads that know how to get attention. Only about 10 percent of those ads though can keep it long enough to have a chance at a click.

This is the hard part. To genuinely get a visitor's interest you *must meet one of their existing needs*.

You're not stupid. You advertise on a site because you know there are real potential customers there. Not only have you matched up demographics, but you've also thought about values and lifestyle.

So take that information a step deeper by doing this in your ad:

1. *Identify ONE major need or intense desire that already exists* in these visitors (that your offer meets on some level).
2. *Establish relevance* (my ad/product is worth your time because...)
3. *Intensify it* (make them feel the burn)

Remember, you're trying to interrupt someone. Your message has to be immediately understandable. You might not have time to state the problem, *so experiment with an implied problem statement* (a statement that implies a problem that you have a solution to).

OBSTACLE #3: GETTING A VISITOR TO ACTUALLY CLICK

An online ad without a call-to-action is ineffective if you want a click. Visitors understand that they can click your banner. Your job is to *intensify their need to click*:

- Offer something
 - Free this or that
 - Discount or promo code on click
 - Get this or that (download, info, etc.)
- Make a portion of your ad *look* clickable (this is about formatting)
 - Button with bold coloring
 - Blue Underlined text (even though it's not a text link)
- Try leaving key pieces out (and draw attention to it)
 - It's like leaving a short message on the phone to a friend
 - "Jon, can you call me back? I need to talk to you. Bye" implies that there is something important that needs to be talked about and requires me to respond to uncover the subject
 - The same technique has been used to generate response in ads on subjects that are interesting to visitors

AND THAT'S NOT ALL

Robert McKee defined creativity in writing for the screen as "creative choices of inclusion and exclusion." Just like a screen writer, you've got a whole world of value and you're limited to some sort of box or space in time to talk about it. Every online banner ad that wants to get a click must get past these three obstacles. *Be creative in beating these obstacles by making strategic decisions on what to include and exclude.*

While these ideas are enough to get you started, they certainly aren't the end all be all for creating banner ads. *How have you beat these obstacles in your banner ad testing?*

Related resources

[How to optimize your banner ad performance while complying with new privacy regulations](#)
— Webinar, Thursday, March 31, 2011, 1-2 PM.

[This Just Tested: PPC vs. banner ads?](#)

[Sherpa 101: Online Display Ads, Part II – Copywriting, Design Tips & Ad Networks + How to Counter 'Banner Blindness'](#)

[Optimization Summit 2011](#) - June 1-3

Photo by [FindYourSearch](#)

Banner Blindness: Optimize your online display advertising to stick out (or blend in)



by Daniel Burstein,
Director of Editorial
Content

March 28th, 2011

To understand online advertising, you must understand women's haircuts. To wit, have you ever heard this line: "How do you like my new haircut?"

Gentlemen, you've probably been in this same boat before (and ladies on the other end of it). Your wife gets a new haircut. You don't notice. Consequences ensue.

But as a man, I can attest that we only notice huge changes in things that vastly interest us. She had hair before. She has it now. What's the difference?

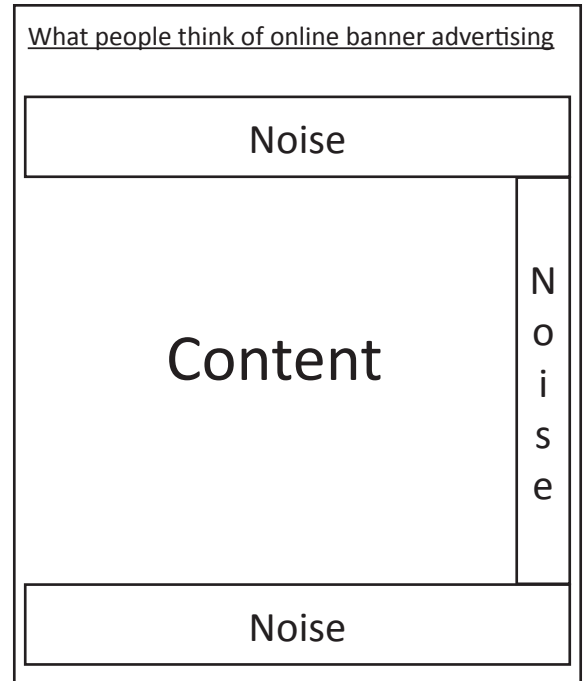
However, if the wide receiver you're starting on your fantasy team has even the slightest limp, you'll instantly notice. Because you're just that interested.

And I have news for you – your online advertising is not something that your audience is hugely interested in. "Visitors view Web pages as content in the middle with noise all around it. That noise is banner ads," says [Dustin Eichholt](#), Research Analyst, MECLABS.

So, how do you stick out among that noise and grab attention? Do you always want to? I had a discussion about that with our researchers at one of our recent Content Meetings (These are fun and educational meetings. A chance for the editorial team to pick our analysts' brains. Think "Real Time with Bill Maher" meets "Science Friday with Ira Flatow.") Here's what they had to say...

How to overcome banner blindness

Perhaps the most successful part of this meeting for me is that it inspired [Jon Powell](#), Research Manager, MECLABS, to write a blog



post about the [three obstacles you must overcome to create an effective banner ad](#). In it, he discusses the six elements that can help your ad capture attention and, essentially, overcome banner blindness. It's a much better blog post than the one you're reading now, so click that link and give it a few moments. I'll wait. I'm not going anywhere.


...Read it? OK, let's move on.

I'll give you an example from our own work of how we put those principles into practice. On our [Optimization Summit landing page](#), we had a "call for speakers" link. At first, when it was not an important objective, that link was just plain text, like the "view sponsorship opportunities" link above it.

your needs, practical to implement and proven in the real world.

Here are just 7 reasons to attend the first-ever Optimization Summit:

- 10 Years of Optimization Laboratory Research**
MarketingSherpa and MarketingExperiments have more than 10 years of scientific research spanning 1,300 plus experiments, including more than 1 billion emails and 10,000 landing pages. At the Summit you'll learn from the world's largest library of case studies and research available, designed to help you measure what matters, test your

[7 Reasons to Attend PDF](#)
[View sponsorship opportunities](#)
 **Want to be a speaker?**
[Click HERE to submit an application](#)

However, when it became a more important objective, we emphasized that link by using three of the six elements – color, size, and shape.

One element we always had working for us was position. We placed it right at the beginning of a bulleted list, a natural breaking point. As Jon says, “When you have control over placement, you should put the banner ad by natural exit points – the end, after the first paragraph, at the beginning of a break in format, or by the most boring parts of the article.”

But be careful. You can go overboard. As Dustin says, “Some banner ads are just a desperate attempt to get a click.” Those words bring to mind the horrible flashing ads that seem like the Vegas strip on steroids...annoyance marketing at its finest.

When you want banner blindness

Sometimes, perhaps counter-intuitively, you want banner blindness. Like a zebra, you’d prefer to get lost in the herd. “If you’re paying for clicks, you don’t necessarily want to draw attention to your ad,” according to Phillip Porter, Data Analyst, MECLABS. In other words, you don’t want curiosity clicks because you have an interesting ad. You want people that were so motivated, they hunted through the pack, found your specific ad, and just need to know more.

STEP 2: Compose Drafts

Be as Channel-Specific as Possible
Your Value Proposition is also affected by the source of traffic. Differing visitors will have different levels of appeal for the value categories. You will want to match your Value Proposition as close as possible to the specific motivations of your channels.

	Price	Savings	Features	Support	Design	Reliability
PPC #1	Average	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Intense	Moderate
PPC #2	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Average	Average	Moderate
Affiliate	Intense	Strong	Moderate	Average	Average	Average
Email	Moderate	Moderate	Average	Average	Intense	Strong
Direct	Average	Moderate	Moderate	Strong	Moderate	Average

Levels of Appeal

- Intense
- Strong
- Moderate
- Average



Another example is when you have complementary information that you want people to be able to find if they're really looking for it, but you don't want to distract from the main message. An example is the [MarketingExperiments Web clinic](#) slides.

We put the Twitter hashtag #webclinic in the lower left of every slide of the presentation, slightly deemphasized. While we love the lively interaction we get on Twitter during every Web clinic, we don't want to distract from the main messages of the presentation. In this case, banner blindness is helpful. People who forgot the hashtag and are really looking for it will hopefully find it. Others, we hope, won't be distracted.

Banners? Where we're going, we don't need banners.

Of course, the future of marketing is all about [inbound marketing](#), right? Sometimes, as we often learn in our experimentation, you don't want to optimize the marketing tactic, you want to try an entirely new approach.

"The most effective banner may be no banner at all," says [Adam Lapp](#), Senior Optimization Manager, MECLABS. "Write a blog post or an article about the product instead."

Related Resources

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[Online Advertising: The 3 obstacles you must overcome to create an effective banner ad](#)

[This Just Tested: PPC vs. banner ads?](#)

[Sherpa 101: Online Display Ads, Part II – Copywriting, Design Tips & Ad Networks + How to Counter 'Banner Blindness'](#)

Search Engine Marketing: Finding appeal for your PPC Ads

After being involved in our [recent Web clinic on PPC ads](#), I feel it's important to talk about one of the most misunderstood elements involved in effectively writing a PPC ad. This is the element of appeal. Let me take a step back for a moment. MarketingExperiments has done extensive research ([here's one example](#)) about the elements of an effective Value Proposition in the hopes of creating a repeatable process that marketers can use to optimize their own value props. In an effort to help simplify this process, we have created a breakdown of what makes a Value Proposition truly forceful:

- **Appeal** – How much is this offer desired?
- **Exclusivity** – Is this offer available elsewhere?
- **Credibility** – How believable are your claims?

Exclusivity

Most of the time, finding the [exclusivity](#) of your product or company is a fairly straightforward process. But, it largely hinges on knowing your competition: What is it that you can offer your customers that your competitors cannot?



Credibility

Credibility is not so bad either. Do you keep a good track record of your successes? Any smart business would. So tell the world about them, like you would in a report you're preparing for business leaders (numbers, testimonials, etc). They (your potential customers, hopefully not your business leaders) might not believe a word you say, but if it's backed up by data, or if it came directly from a customer, then it starts to mean something, right? (funny how that works)

Appeal

Appeal is an entirely different animal to me, though. There are a lot of business owners out there who think appeal is simply about finding the very best incentive or value to talk about. They think, "let's throw in a drawing for a free iPad, that's good appeal!"

And, it might be for those wanting a free iPad. But how can you be sure that those people are really interested in what you normally offer day in and day out?

In the context of PPC ads, marketers often mistake appeal for the best sounding "thing" that they can pack into all the other "things" they want to say. Free Assessment! Free Trial! Free this, free that. Ask yourself, though:

- Are these potential customers really interested in an "assessment," or would they rather have a "consultation?"
- Do these potential customers really want to take all that time to do your free trial, or would they rather just have a quick, clear product tour?
- Does your PPC ad connect at all with what the visitor searched for?



by Jon Powell,
Senior Research
Manager

February 11th, 2011

These are the type of things I am testing all the time. Why? Because I've discovered this important principle regarding appeal:

Determining appeal is less about offering attractive things and more about figuring out exactly what someone is looking for.

So what does this mean for your PPC ads? It means answering questions like this when you're writing it:

- When a visitor searches for this [keyword], what exactly are they looking for?
- What keyword phrases would a customer type in if they were looking for a product/offering just like mine?
- According to my analytics and AdWords, what keywords are visitors clicking on the most?
- What are my best converting keywords for the site? Where did customers go and what did they read/see that helped them connect?
- What are my site's top inbound keywords?

What all of these questions have in common is that they force you to focus on the mindset of the visitor. Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, the Managing Director (CEO) of MECLABS, has said it over and over again. Say this to yourself, and then say it again with your own Dr. McGlaughlin academic accent: "We're not optimizing web pages, we are optimizing people's thought sequences."

What makes appeal harder than any of the other elements is that the answer is rarely clear and easily accessible. This means that you're going to have to discover it through testing and focus groups.

For your PPC ads, you should try writing ads that purely differentiate on appeal (and match on other elements) and seeing which ones get the most clicks in every keyword.

What if I have a ton of keywords? No problem – test strategically formed ad groups that center on specific appeals. I'll discuss more about testing ad groups, as well as provide optimization suggestions for an audience-submitted PPC ad to give you a real-world example of discovering appeal, on Monday on the MarketingExperiments blog.

Related Resources

[How to Test Your Value Proposition Using a PPC Ad](#)

[PPC Ad Optimization: Testing, unique landing pages, and honesty](#)

[Powerful Value Propositions: How to Optimize this Critical Marketing Element – and Lift Your Results](#)

[This Just Tested: How PPC specificity drove 21% more clicks and cut costs 66%](#)

cartoon by: [madaise](#)

Search Engine Marketing: Three questions to help you think like your potential customers

[Finding appeal](#) for your PPC ads is never easy. But if you **take the time to think like the searcher and then offer them what you truly believe they are looking for**, you are one clear step closer to finding the key that unlocks the door to a significant increase in conversions for that segment.

Let's see what the process of finding appeal might actually look like as I quickly apply it to one of our audience-submitted PPC ads from our previous [Web clinic on PPC](#).

Headline: Taste of Home Magazine
Line 1: Only \$10 per Year! Exclusive Offer
Line 2: from Official Site. Order Now

I wasn't provided a list of keywords, so I'll answer the questions that I can:

Question 1: What keyword or keyword phrases would a customer type in if they were looking for a product/offering just like mine?

According to their site, this is the #1 cooking magazine in the world. But why? Maybe because:

- The amount of recipes,
- The quality of the recipes, and
- The fact that many of them are easy-to-fix.

Many visitors will definitely search with brand-based keywords (if they are indeed #1). They might also search for [magazines with recipes], or [cheap magazines with good recipes], or all sorts of variations of that.

Bottom line: I'm guessing that visitors probably want a magazine that has one or a combination of the above things mentioned at a good or discounted price (price must ALWAYS be considered in appeal).



Question 2: According to Google Analytics and AdWords, what keywords are visitors clicking the most?

I don't have access to their data, but after using the AdWords keyword tool and the Google Wonder Wheel, here are a few sample keywords that pop up and seem to fit:

- food magazine recipes
- gourmet magazine recipes
- food magazines
- cooking magazines
- simple magazine recipes
- everyday food magazine recipe
- health magazine recipe
- Taste of Home
- Taste of Home Magazine

The specific ad we are optimizing now is actually found in **brand-based keyword** searches.



by Jon Powell,
Senior Research
Manager

February 14th, 2011

Question 3: When a visitor searches for this keyword [Taste of Home] or [Taste of Home Magazine], what might they be looking for?

- Reviews of the magazine
- Information about the magazine
- Actual Recipes
- Discounts
- More...

And NOW the fun part...

Let me show you two examples. One positive example, and one that could use some testing and optimization help. Let's start with the positive example...

In this ad, the keyword is **magazine food recipes**.

Taste of Home Magazine

100+ Easy **Recipes**, Tips & More
Only \$20 for 2 Years. Order Now!
tasteofhome.com

First, I see that this is an ad for a magazine. Great! I want a magazine if I typed in **magazine food recipes**. Next, it tells me that they have **easy recipes** (I like easy). And they don't just have *some*, they have *100+*. Maybe I'll never need to buy a cookbook again! I'm interested enough to click (though I'm not sure yet how I feel about the price).

Now there are a few things they can do to optimize this ad further, but it actually has a great start.

So what about the ad we looked at first?

I found this ad when I searched for the keywords **Taste of Home** and **Taste of Home Magazine**.

Taste of Home Magazine

Only \$10 per Year! Exclusive Offer
from Official Site. Order Now
tasteofhome.com

This ad assumes the searcher is looking for certain things:

- Product price
- A special offer or a discount
- They want to order

But **WHAT IF** they just want a review? Or information? Or want to know what in the world *Taste of Home magazine* is? (see *Question 3*)

Selling is not always a one-step process. Sometimes a person actually has to like and believe in the product before they purchase it.

If searchers specifically want a discount, they would type in [Taste of Home Magazine Discount] or [Taste of Home Magazine Offer]. So, why is this ad *completely* focused on the discount when discount is not part of the search?

Ads I would test for this keyword group (Taste of Home or Taste of Home Magazine)

On Line 1: I would talk about the **number of popular recipes per issue**.

On Line 2: I would talk about its **rating** (what others think) and then close on **offer**.

So, it would look like this:

Taste of Home Magazine

100+ popular recipes per issue
#1 Rated by YYYY. 50% off store cost
tasteofhome.com/ExclusiveOffer

Or, another variation

Taste of Home Magazine

100+ easy-to-fix recipes per issue
#1 Rate. 50% off in-store price
tasteofhome.com/ExclusiveOffer

These examples address more than just price

By including the number of recipes PER ISSUE, we help answer the “question of what” (an issue of appeal) and establish some exclusivity as well. Also, when mentioning “#1 rated,” we address another issue of appeal (product reviews) by setting up the expectation that we will address that rating when you click.

Finally, we don’t leave the issue of price out because these particular questions are always looming: Can I get a price break from Taste of Home if I go directly to them?

We’ll discover what searchers are really looking for

By testing these new ads against the old one, we’ll discover just how many visitors are actually looking for common answers concerning the product as well as special pricing. So, **if my ads tank, at least I’ll learn** (see my post on [strategic test planning](#)) **what visitors are looking for in this [particular ad group](#).**

How to organize your keywords into ad groups:

With hundreds of possible keywords, it’s nearly impossible to try and create a set of ads to test for every possible one. Instead, you must **organize your keywords into clusters, or groups, where appeal is the commonality (what it is you think the searcher are looking for)**. Keywords can also be organized by product and then also by the amount of traffic exposure.

Using this approach, you can test ads on a near-keyword level and with specificity. This is the kind of campaign organization strategy that [we teach in our certification courses](#), and it has helped our research partners **achieve a significant decrease in CPC while seeing a significant increase in traffic.**

Related resources

[Search Engine Marketing: Finding appeal for your PPC ads](#)

[Search Marketing: Tips on mastering the latest innovations in this mature category](#)

[How to Test Your Value Proposition Using a PPC Ad](#)

[MarketingExperiments Fundamentals of Online Testing on-demand training and certification course](#)

photo by: [cameronparkins](#)



B2B MARKETING



by Brad Bortone &
Brian Carroll

Contributors
Daniel Burstein
Joelle Parra

January 2011

Lead Optimization: How one company generated \$4.9 million in additional sales pipeline growth in only eight months

Why do so many organizations struggle with the lead generation process? When 594 participants of a recent [Web clinic](#) were asked which step of the lead management process was their biggest challenge, a combined 82 percent said generating, qualifying or nurturing leads. The remaining 18 percent chose the processes involving Sales.

Many of these problems stem from perception and communication issues between Marketing and Sales. In particular, the often confusing definition of what constitutes a genuine “sales-ready” lead.

As we’ve discussed at length in previous Research Journals and on the [MarketingExperiments blog](#), getting both departments on the same page is the foundation for optimizing the lead generation process. What’s often overlooked is that generating more leads – even high-quality leads – is not the sole answer. Marketing and Sales need to jointly use qualification and nurturing tactics to optimize the leads that are already in the pipeline.

The lead nurturing process also suffers from perception and communication issues, not only between marketers and salespeople, but with prospects and customers. After all, doing business today isn’t just about hitting targets and sales goals; it’s about people. In turn, nurturing is really about building trust and relationships, especially where complex sales are concerned.

Customers (even B2B customers) can tell the difference.

In the aforementioned Web clinic, Brian Carroll, Executive Director, Applied Research, MECLABS, discussed how optimizing these processes can produce major ROI gains, when using a strategic “playbook” for lead management.

Applying the lead management playbook

For the following case study, we partnered with a mid-sized technology services company to help stop their loss of leads and sales opportunities. With \$80 million in annual revenue, the company had a strong foundation, yet it faced several familiar lead management issues.

The amount of leads was growing rapidly, but conversions to sales were not increasing at a similar pace. Marketing felt that the leads passed on to Sales disappeared into a “black hole” of sorts. The lead-to-sale pipeline conversion rate was less than 2 per cent. Salespeople often provided little or no feedback on leads.

All of these factors contributed to a situation where the company was unable to consistently measure ROI from lead generation efforts. The lead management playbook was used as a tool to identify, evaluate and address the underlying issues, including how:

- Marketing’s effectiveness was being hampered by a lack of consensus on a universal definition of a qualified lead.
- Promising leads were disappearing because they weren’t qualified and prioritized, while early-stage leads weren’t being nurtured into viable sales opportunities.
- The lack of consensus and follow-through meant that the sales team didn’t pursue the majority of leads.
- Because there was no clear hand-off process or accountability connecting the sales and marketing teams, communication between the two had deteriorated.

We’ll explain the playbook by showing how we applied it to one particular company’s needs, through a case study that shows how the company generated \$4.9 million of additional sales pipeline in just eight months. These five steps are the foundation of the playbook:

1. Refine universal lead definition of “sales-ready”
2. Qualify leads based on universal lead definition
3. Nurture early leads until “sales-ready”
4. Define hand-off process from Marketing to Sales
5. Close the loop via Sales and Marketing “huddles”

To understand the process of moving from effective thinking about leads to effective implementation, let’s examine the essential elements of each step.

CASE STUDY



Experiment ID: *(Protected)*

Location: InTouch Research Library

Research Notes:

Background: Client simplifies IT management of desktops, servers; offers real-time change management capabilities

- \$80 million annual revenue
- 100 channel partners
- 27 salespeople, 10 marketers

Often, marketers have done the heavy work necessary to capture a lead, but don’t know how to bridge the gap between the lead’s current state and the ideal thought sequence that turns the lead into a sales-ready opportunity.

Again, our partner is a B2B company. Our team focused on B2B because there are often more people involved in the buying process, while also having an elongated, more complex sales process. To B2C marketers with a complex sale and a long buying cycle, the same principles apply.

Our partner was facing significant challenges:

- Marketing efforts were generating more activity, but overall sales results had stagnated
- Felt that leads they generated went into “black hole”
- Less than 2% lead-to-sale pipeline conversion rate
- Sales did not close the loop on every lead
- Unable to consistently measure ROI

The company was actually generating more activity, but overall sales results remained flat. The company found they felt that these leads were disappearing for unknown reason. Our team studied the leaks in their funnel, and determined how they could optimize the process – and the leads – in hopes that there would be an increase in the 2 percent conversion the company showed at the time.

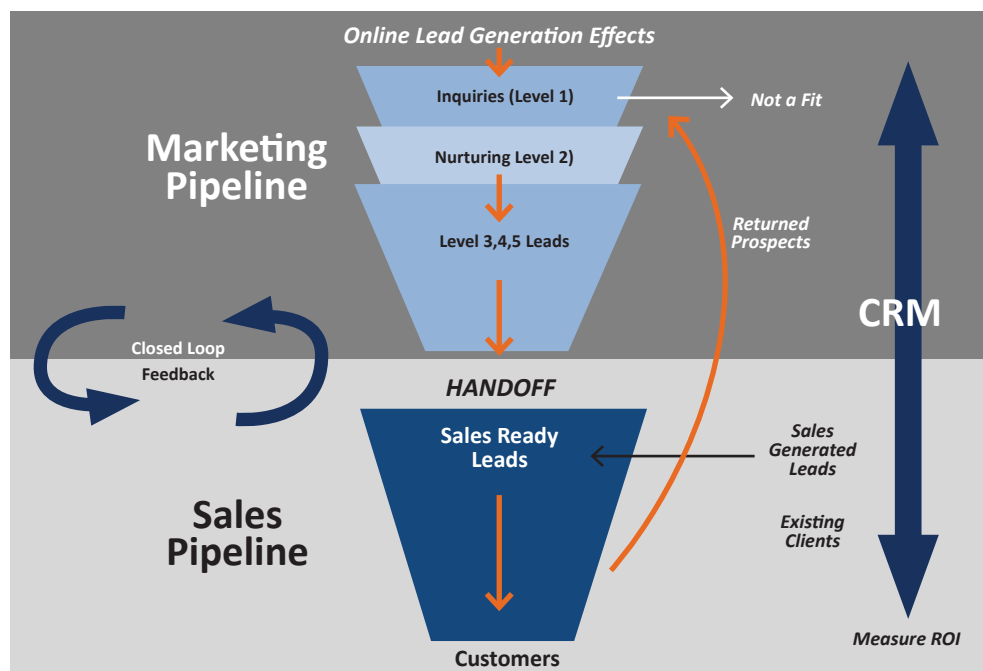
We addressed specific issues:

- Marketing’s effectiveness was being hampered by a lack of consensus on a universal definition of a qualified lead.
- Promising leads were disappearing because they weren’t qualified and prioritized, while early stage leads weren’t being nurtured into viable sales opportunities.
- The lack of consensus and follow through meant that the sales team didn’t pursue the majority of leads.
- Because there was no clear hand-off process or accountability connecting the sales and marketing teams, communication between the two had deteriorated.

Therefore, we turned to the playbook. Our partner didn’t even have a consensus on what the word “lead” meant within their Marketing and Sales departments, and as such, their leads weren’t properly qualified. Ultimately, they weren’t prioritizing the best opportunities.

As seen in Figure #1, marketers can optimize the lead process to build a marketing pipeline that can be run similarly to a sales pipeline, helping to create cohesion between the departments. By following this process, the teams will be more likely to close the loop on all sales-ready leads, more actively nurture early-stage leads and improve lead-to-sales opportunity rates.

Figure #1: The Lead Optimization Process



Our partner company had a marketing pipeline in which most leads that grew were immediately handed off to Sales. However, they had no nurturing process in place, which became evident when the team discovered that these escalating leads often resulted in nothing.

The new nurturing process helped to optimize leads so they were sales-ready, and it proved to drive considerable results – a 375 percent increase in sales-ready leads. But, through this process the company was also able to drive 200 percent more opportunity in the sales pipeline, allowing them to close the loop on every sales lead.

STEP 1: REFINE the universal lead definition of “sales-ready”

If you’re trying to measure lead generation without a universal lead definition (ULD), you may not be capitalizing on all your opportunities. A universal lead definition can be a valuable aid to clarify the qualification status of new leads. The more qualification information you can provide salespeople, the more you’ll be able to increase your sales pursuit.

Marketers need to combat poor lead management at the beginning of the cycle by focusing on increased communication between Sales and Marketing to:

- Jointly establish the definition of a qualified lead; and
- Clarify accountability and the process for nurturing qualified leads.

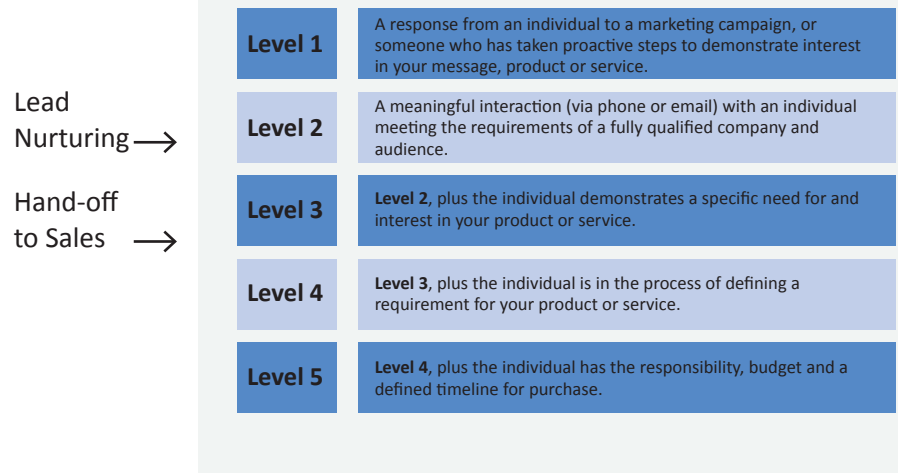
Figure #2 explains how to identify the precise qualities of a “sales-ready” lead, as well as how to create a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Sales and Marketing to get everyone on the same page with a specific definition for each lead stage.

While the definition of a sales-ready lead will vary by organization, having a ULD will help develop the profile of the ideal customer to pinpoint qualified leads, and help identify the best possible (i.e. most valuable) opportunities rather than those that are simply fastest to close. When generating leads, it’s imperative that you’re clear about when a lead is ready for sales engagement. If you are doing it online, when should you offer pricing information? If you are doing it offline, at what points do you engage your field sales team or channel partners to make the call?

Figure #2: The Spectrum of Sales Readiness

In this process, we utilized the following spectrum of sales readiness (Figure #2). To summarize this rubric, a lead at Level 1 is someone who demonstrated initial interest (“raised their hand”). Obviously, the goal is to move them to levels 3, 4 and 5 – the stages in which they indicate that they are ready to move forward toward purchase. But much of the crucial work lies in Level 2, where lead nurturing occurs.

Spectrum of Sales Readiness



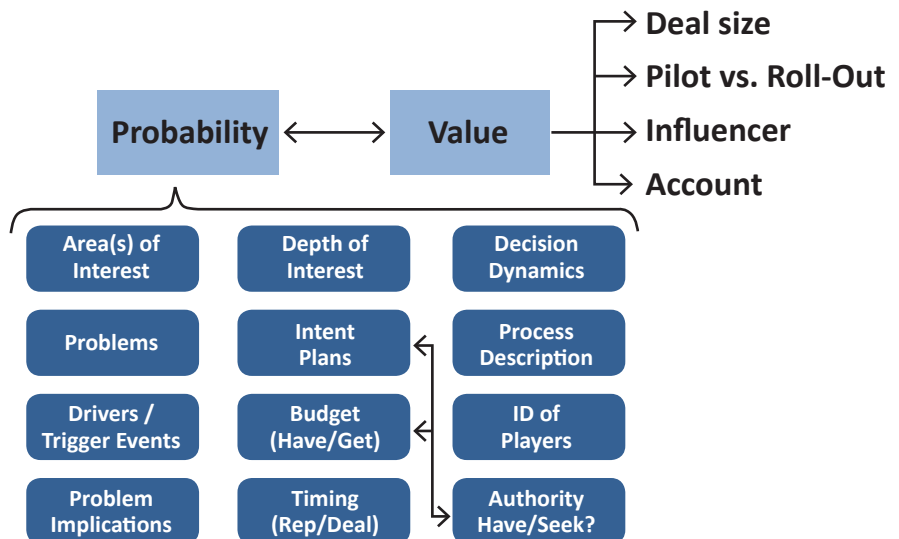
Proper, effective lead nurturing is conducted on Level 2 leads, but naturally, meaningful interaction is a tactic that is applicable for optimizing leads throughout the whole process. In the case of this partner, we worked with the company’s Sales and Marketing teams to develop a ULD based on criteria in which the lead:

- Meets the ideal customer profile
- Demonstrates a clear business need for a product/service
- Plans to evaluate purchase in three months or less
- Will make a purchase decision within six months
- Will be ready to speak with a sales rep within two weeks

Leads that fit these criteria were considered sales-ready, while those that did not were held back for additional nurturing.

Figure #3 – A Lead’s Probability of Purchase

The spectrum in Figure #2 seems easy enough to understand on paper, but how do you actually apply it to the process? The following chart – Figure #3 – demonstrates the probability that a lead is going to purchase, and the potential corresponding value of the purchase, taking into account a variety of factors.



How big is the sale? Is this a pilot or a rollout? Are you speaking with an influencer or a decision maker? Likewise, other elements can increase your probability, like depth of interest or potential triggers such as budget, timing and channel that was used to inquire.

Some key points to remember:

- When you have a complex sale, if you can get more qualification information to salespeople, it increases the likelihood that they are going to act on leads. This drives you to a ULD.
- Higher standards on qualifying inquiries to actual leads positively impacts conversion with lead-to-pipeline and lead-to-sale.
- If you have a telesales or field sales team, set up a service-level agreement (SLA) between Sales and Marketing based around the ULD.

STEP 2: QUALIFY leads based on universal lead definition

Following the development of a ULD, it's crucial to make language and concepts the central part of your lead qualification process. Leads qualified against a ULD have a higher lead-to-opportunity conversion rate – and as such, are more likely to be considered “true” sales opportunities than leads based solely on an inquiry or form submission.

Qualification using a ULD allows you to:

- Call and qualify prospective leads
- Determine a clear hand-off procedure for every lead
- Measure Sales pursuit on every lead

One significant part of lead qualification through a ULD is its potential to help you identify “early leads” – clients with whom you need to develop a relationship, alongside “slow-growing” leads – clients whose needs or awareness of their needs don't yet match your services, but, in time, could be an ideal fit.

Figure #4 – Lead qualification, with and without ULD

Partner's Lead to Sales Pipeline	Opportunity Rate
Before: No Lead qualification or ULD	4%
After: Lead qualification with ULD	12%

For this particular case study, we looked at our partner company's opportunity rate, both before they implemented a universal lead definition as well as after, when they qualified against it. In looking at how many leads went to their pipeline, we see a jump from 4 percent to 12 percent – a 200% relative difference.

One significant way to qualify a lead through a ULD is via rules-based qualification. This allows users to capture more information from online forms and Web visits to enhance data and help segment the list. Then, users can apply lead scoring to determine both explicit information – the things people have entered in a form – as well as implicit information – information determined by analyzing what things people have engaged. For example, did they click on a link? Where are they are on our website? Etc.



What you need to understand: Leads qualified against a universal lead definition had a 200% higher lead-to-opportunity conversion rate.

STEP 3: NURTURE early stage leads until “sales-ready”

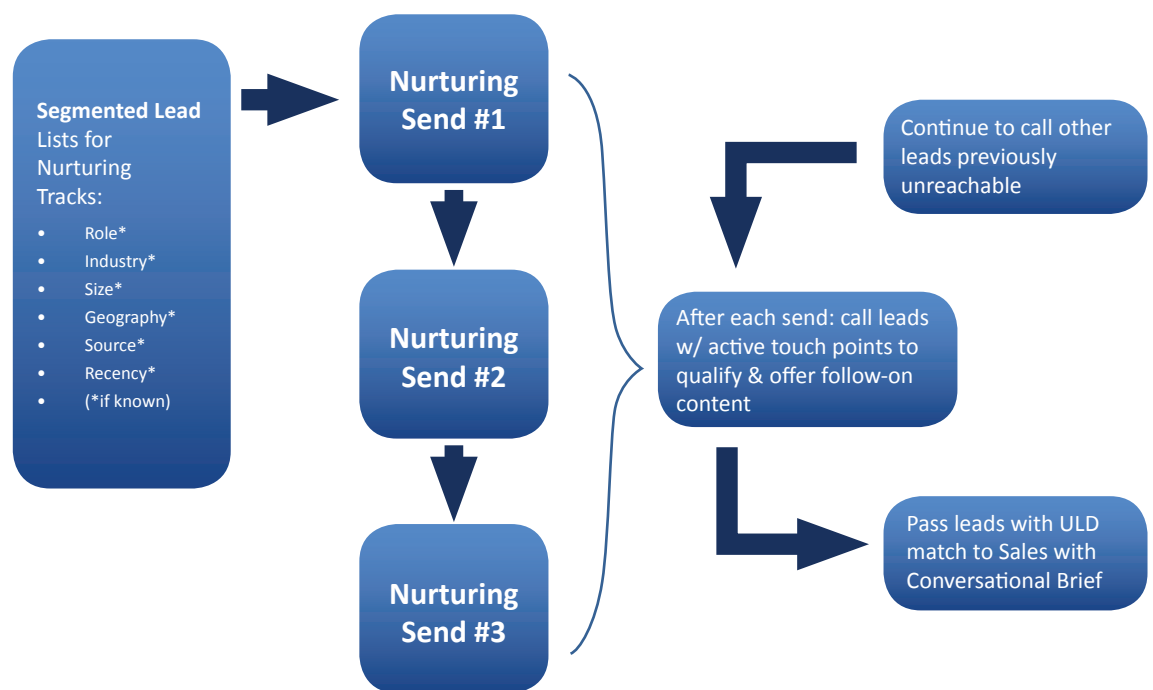
Thus far, we’ve discussed two steps: Establish clarity on the universal lead definition; and then qualify your leads against it. But, what about the leads that aren’t quite sales-ready? Our research partner had the same concerns, to which our team explained a lead nurturing process for them to build marketing pipelines and nurture early-stage leads until they were sales-ready.

But, what exactly is lead nurturing? One definition is that lead nurturing is the creation of a relevant, consistent dialogue with viable potential customers, regardless of their timing to buy. Because adhering to a ULD encourages the consolidation of information about leads, companies can approach relationship-building with a lower risk of redundant touches (email, phone, etc.) that would undercut sales and the company’s brand image.

While most salespeople need to focus on qualified leads, marketers should also broaden the lead management process to incorporate the nurturing of early-stage leads. Although there are a variety of tools and approaches that help with nurturing leads, there is a fundamental principle that can be easily forgotten in the pressure to hit sales goals – nurturing involves both individuals and organizations.

In a complex sale, end-users and even decision-makers are not the only players. Any number of different influencers might be involved in the ultimate purchase decision, so it’s not unusual for early-stage leads to require three or more touches to become sales-ready.

Figure #5 – Early-stage lead nurturing process

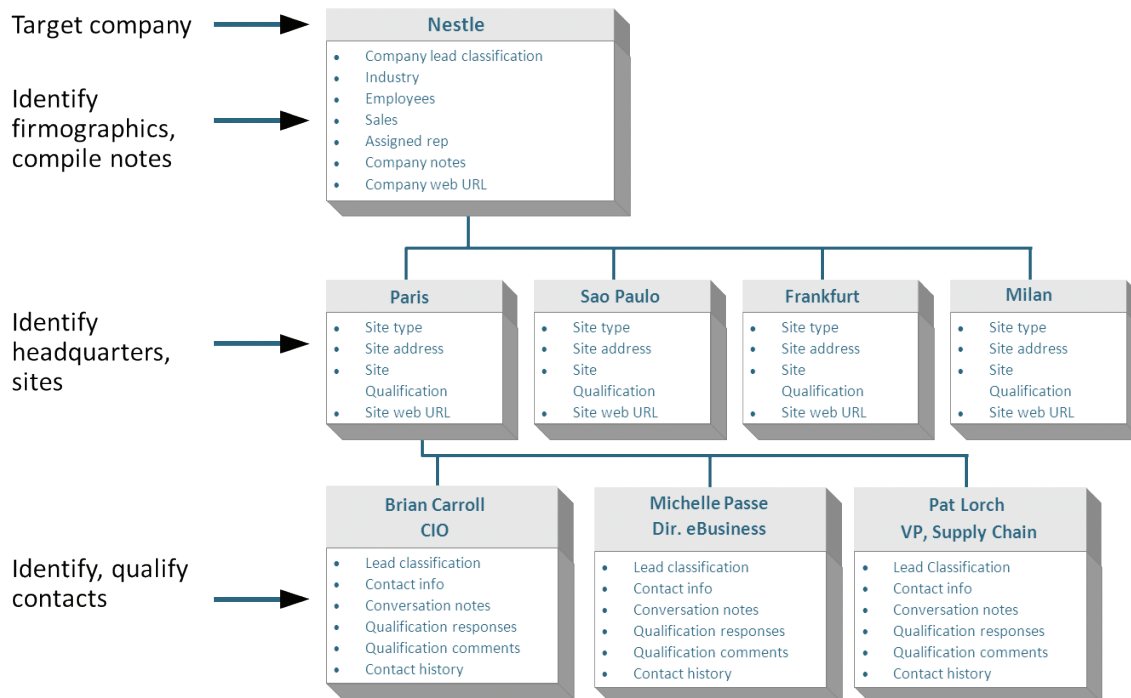


It's not about building a big list with few messages, but rather building the most relevant list where your team can pursue more complex sales deeper within these opportunities. Remember, the largest database is rarely the most productive or profitable one. Many large databases are filled with redundant, obsolete, or incorrect information that does nothing more than waste your sales team's time and stifle your ability to segment and target.

Your database is only as good as the quality of information that resides within it. So, it is the nurtured database that contains relevant, active contacts developed through time and trust that allows a company to stay ahead of its sales cycle instead of scrambling to meet monthly or quarterly targets.

Figure #6 demonstrates the simple process flow used for our partner company. Our team segmented the lead list for nurturing tracks, and then looked at that person's role, industry, etc. They then looked at the size of the company and created structured email communications that relied on email and the phone to drive the conversion. In short, it was a straightforward process that enabled at least one monthly touch.

Figure #6 – Lead nurturing timeline



Additionally, as shown in Figure #7, the team documented each touch within the nurturing process.

Figure #7 – Monthly lead nurturing summary

(Client Plan for Q1 Audience 3 Contacts Deep)

CIO	Q1
Month 1	Free executive report via direct mail with follow-up call
Month 2	Invitation to executive roundtable via e-mail with follow-up call
Month 3	Link to relevant webinar via e-mail with follow-up voicemail
Director of IT	Q1
Month 1	3rd party article via e-mail and voice mail
Month 2	3rd party article via e-mail with follow-up
Month 3	Link to relevant webinar via e-mail with follow up call
IT Manager	Q1
Month 1	Relevant white paper via e-mail with voice mail
Month 2	Direct mail piece
Month 3	Invitation to webcast via e-mail with follow-up call

When our partner implemented the lead nurturing process, and began passing along only the sales-ready leads, the sales-to-pipeline rate improved swiftly and dramatically – a 375% boost in lead volume – as seen in the chart below:

Figure #8 – Case study results (nurtured vs. non-nurtured leads)

No Nurturing vs. With Nurturing

Converted to Sales Ready Leads	Monthly Lead Vol.
Before: No lead nurturing (1 touch)	16
After: With nurturing (3+ touches)	76
Relative Difference:	375%



What you need to understand: Holding leads back and nurturing them with relevant communication and multiple touches increased conversion to sales ready leads by 375% in eight months.

STEP 4: DEFINE hand-off process from Marketing to Sales

Lead-to-opportunity conversion rate is a key metric. It helps you understand how well your sales team accepts and pursues leads, and ultimately shows not only if your leads are truly helping your sales force, but also how much of a positive contribution you are making to their pipeline. However, an effective hand-off from Marketing to Sales is more than simply passing along a lead. First, Marketing must provide Sales with enough information to allow Sales to act effectively. Basically, is the lead sales-ready? Questions that will help you ensure that your leads are sales-ready include:

- Do they fit in your established Universal Lead Definition?
- Did they confirm that they want to speak with a sales rep?
- Do you have the qualification information?

Then, both sides must agree on a process for transfer of ownership of the lead, so no party “drops the baton.” When both sides are clear during the process, there is no confusion about what stages leads are in, and what is happening.

Finally, Marketing and Sales must establish a definite method and time to receive feedback on leads. Timing is everything. Through testing, you can find that, sometimes, 24 hours isn’t fast enough, while in other situations, there could be an effective window of 48 hours or more. Regardless of circumstance, both sides need to agree on what that process is. To confirm that the leads you’re handing off are sales-ready, set firm deadlines for salespeople to provide feedback, such as within 24 hours. Also, document the hand-off process so you can measure the lead-to-opportunity conversion rate, as seen in our partner’s process chart in Figure #9:

Figure #9 – Lead management process chart

Step	Status	Description
M-0	Raw Inquiry	New inquiry awaiting qualification
M-1	Qualifying	Actively qualifying inquiry to determine if “sales ready” or nurture
M-2	Nurturing	Nurturing is in progress
M-3	Sales Ready Lead	Lead qualified by phone as “sales ready” and sent to sales to be pursued
S-1	Sales Ready Lead	Sales Rep calls and determines if lead is actually a viable opportunity
S-2	Opportunity	Viable opportunity sales rep actively pursuing
S-3	Profiled	Completed written proposal profile and review opportunity assessment
S-4	Proposed	Proposal delivered and reviewed with potential customer via phoned or in person
S-5	Committed	Potential customer verbally agreed and gave “yes” to proposal - agreement sent
S-6	Active Contract	Agreement is approved and signed with start-up retainer invoice sent
S-0	Reengage	Was Prospect and dropped out of the sales pipeline and starting over
M-0	Follow-up	Sent to marketing for qualification, rescheduling or continued lead nurturing
M-0	Returned	This clearly wasn’t a lead - returned back to marketing / teleprospecting team

STEP 4: DEFINE hand-off process from Marketing to Sales

Getting live feedback on leads from salespeople is vital to making sure they are acting on leads. It also yields better lead refinement. However, huddles can meet with resistance from team members and be a challenge to organize or facilitate. Still, the reward for this extra effort is improvements in all aspects of the Sales and Marketing partnership, as well as greater results.

For feedback huddles to be effective, they must be structured around the open discussion of all attendees. The objective of the huddle is to review results, correct problems and collaborate for future opportunities. But more importantly, this is the time for Marketing and Sales to get together.

Initial meetings can encourage communication by asking Sales and Marketing teams to respond to a few prepared questions, such as:

- Have you been satisfied with the quantity of leads that has been generated?
- Is there anything unique about the leads that went into the sales pipeline or were closed?
- Do database notes contain enough information to prepare for the next steps?
- What other questions would help us better prepare for the next action?

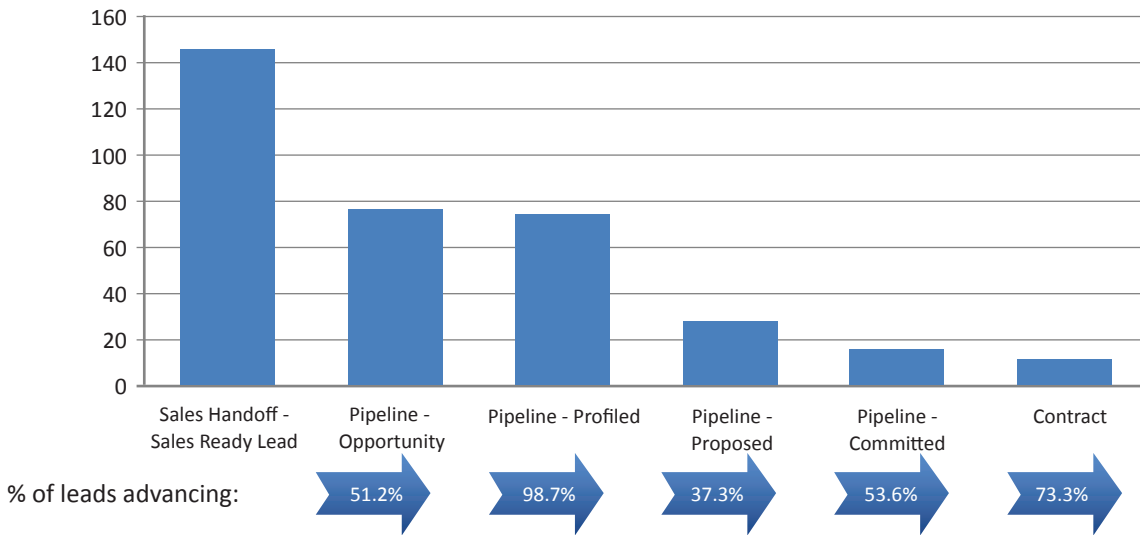
The ultimate goal is to analyze your conversion points and document your funnel from Marketing to Sales. If you have a small team this could be as simple as holding a regular meeting. However, with the growth of remote employee hiring – increasingly common for large companies – it may require more logistical planning, such as conference calls and even Web-based video meetings. Elements that should be discussed during huddles include:

- Timing – Huddles should be consistently held, at least once a month. With our partner, we started with a weekly huddle to get the system rolling, and then shifted to biweekly as the system took root.
- Status – Where are the leads currently in the sales process? Which leads have been incorrectly qualified and need further follow-up? Which leads need to be handed back to Marketing for additional nurturing?
- Review – What's working with the current process? What still needs to be improved? What wins can be celebrated with both teams?

Figure #10 is a data report that represents the type of data to be discussed in a huddle, including:

- The percentage of sales-ready leads in play
- How many converted opportunities went to the sales pipeline
- How many of those committed

Figure #10 – Measurement of leads advancing through pipeline



To help you understand Figure #10, in this example a company had 146 unique leads handed off to Sales. Of these, 76 leads (52.1 percent) were identified as good opportunities and advanced to the next step of nurturing. Of these leads, 75 (98.7 percent) were profiled and assessed. Though this is a considerable number, please note that of these 75 leads, only 28 (37.3 percent) received a sales proposal from our team.

More than half (53.6 percent) of the leads that received proposals made an initial commitment to purchase, with a final tally of 11 leads making a contract commitment. These eleven conversions comprise 7.5 percent of the initial 146 leads, but also represent a notable 73.3 percent of the leads that were nurtured through the commitment step.

Additionally, there are three key performance indicators (KPIs) you should track (as an example, see Figure #11):

- What’s your percentage of leads that move forward into your sales process?
- How many of those have you provided with pricing information?
- What’s the conversion of those that actually moved to revenue?

Figure #11 – Key performance indicator chart

Lead Generation KPIs	
Lead to Opportunity Rate	52.1%
Lead to Proposal Rate	19%
Lead to Win Rate	7.5%

Finally, as shown in Figure #12, it helps to measure the activity/source of the leads' progression through the pipeline. If you have established a universal lead definition, this type of measurement ties together touch points for prospects that come from email, Webinars, website inquiries, etc.

From here, you can more accurately measure how many of those were sales-ready and how many those moved into your pipeline. Coupled with your ULD, you can learn what channels you should be applying throughout the process.

Figure #12 -- Activity measurement (example)

Activity / Initial Source	Inquiries or MQLs	Sales-ready Leads	Active Sales Pipeline
1 - Tele-prospecting (push)		10	5
2 - Email (push)	20	2	1
3 - Webcast (pull)	101	5	3
4 - Tradeshow (pull)	100	8	4
5 - E-Newsletter (push)	500	5	3
6 - PR/Media (pull)	11	1	0
7 - E-book (pull)	100	2	1
8 - Website Inquiries (pull)	20	4	2
9 - Customer Referral (push)	17	9	4
Total	869	46	23

STEP 4: DEFINE hand-off process from Marketing to Sales

We worked with our partner to implement the five strategies over eight months. The company's average sales were \$100,000. They took money that was being spent to generate new leads and applied 25 percent of it to further establish the leads they already had. In other words, they didn't spend any additional money, but rather used the money they had already invested in a different way, and drove 375% growth in sales-ready leads, 200% growth in their lead-to-sell pipeline rates, and they saw \$4.9 million in additional sales pipeline growth in just eight months.

The partner's average figures:

- Average sale: \$100,000
- Cost per opportunity: \$4,611
- Cost per sales ready lead: \$665

Improvements from the playbook approach:

- 375% growth in sales-ready leads
- 200% growth in lead-to-sale pipeline rate
- Now closing the loop on every sales-ready lead
- Majority of early stage leads actively nurtured (grew from 0% to 60%)
- Improved lead-to-sales opportunity rate (grew from 4% to 12%)
- Results achieved without significant budget increase

Results



375% Increase in sales ready leads

The changes in the lead-gen process increased sales-ready-leads by 375%



The Bottom Line

To summarize, much value can be had by establishing a universal lead definition. Be sure to meet with your sales team to start documenting and applying the methodologies. Once you have defined your leads, nurture them until they are sales-ready, have a clear hand-off process, and close the loop to bring the pieces together.

Additionally:

1. To capitalize on more opportunities, you must qualify leads against the universal lead definition.
2. Lead nurturing is about maintaining a relevant, consistent dialogue with viable potential customers, regardless of their timing to purchase.
3. Lead-to-opportunity conversion rate is an important metric that shows how well the leads are contributing to sales.

Landing Page Optimization: Value-focused revamp leads to 188% lead gen boost, increase in personal interaction



by Brad Bortone,
Associate Editor
February 16th, 2011

Let me start this post off by asking a question (somewhere, an English teacher is crying).

When is a Value Proposition not a Value Proposition?

The answer? When it's hidden beneath lesser Value Propositions.

In this case, an Australian telecom company utilized a page design that effectively undervalued the company's premier offerings, through an uninviting layout and a distinct lack of focus on its most powerful value statement.

To create a parallel, imagine McDonald's dedicating its total ad budget to promote a new salad, or Robert DeNiro accepting a lifetime achievement award for "Meet the Fockers." Yes, theoretically, both situations are possible, but neither would properly support the top Value Propositions offered by these entities.

Background

Our research partner is an Australian telecom company offering dedicated server and hosting solutions. The company has been decorated with numerous accolades for its services and customer care, and remains the most accredited hosting company in the country.

The PPC landing page in question offers visitors the opportunity to obtain a no-obligation free estimate for dedicated business server solutions.

The goal of the test was to see:

1. Which dedicated server PPC landing page will yield the greatest number of sales leads?
2. Which dedicated server PPC landing page will yield the greatest number of telephone sales leads?

In creating a treatment, our researchers needed to test a number of variables from the existing page, including headline, layout/eye-path, Value Proposition points, image selection and location, format of the questionnaire, presence of a testimonial, location of the company's logo, location/size of the contact information, and body text copy, size and location.

Control: Don't bury your value "down under"

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Service Required: Deployment Time?

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Database: Yes No
Backup & Recovery: Yes No
Enterprise SAN Storage: Yes No

Professional Hosting Services:

Intrusion Protection: Yes No
Managed Security Services: Yes No
Risk Management: Yes No
Managed Database Services: Yes No
Custom Optimisation & Builds: Yes No
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Additional information that you can provide that will help us tailor a more detailed solution (type or paste into box):

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The control page led with a large image of a wall of server cabinets captioned on the extreme right with a comparatively small block of text intended to summarize the primary Value Proposition highlights (Creative samples have been anonymized to protect Research Partner competitive advantage).

The image, though full-color, contained largely shades of gray and was not easily recognizable as computer servers (one colleague believed them to be window shutters upon first glance.)

Though the term, “Dedicated Servers” was used above and below the image, as well as in the blue text box to the right, none of the three instances employed any distinct font treatment or attention-getting design. As a result, the most visually arresting page element was the indistinct gray image.

The user’s eye was then drawn to the blue text box to the right of the image. The text was centered in the box and was not bulleted or given any type of call out. Our researchers found there was potential for significant “[banner blindness](#)” as a result.

The next section below the image consisted mainly of a short paragraph of gray-on-white text with no visual cues, such as bolding, underlining, etc. to guide attention. With the added visual distractions to the right of this copy, the eye-path was cluttered and difficult for a user to navigate.

The copy itself was subdued, with little emphasis on the company’s differentiators. The writers instead focused on terms such as “secure,” “reliable” and “cost-effective” – all terms that support value, but also do little to make this company stand out from the competition.

The remainder of the page consisted of two forms – one with a somewhat contradictory invitation that offered, “For immediate advice – Call 1-800-XXX-XXXX,” only to then request personal information. The other form was a fairly lengthy questionnaire (with optional text entry box, to boot) followed by a “Request a Quotation” button at the bottom. The call-to-action was located at the end of the page, left-justified, with a graphical treatment that did nothing to make it stand out from the row of well-recognized logos beneath it.

In short, while there was no confusion about what this page offered, it took more work than could realistically be expected of a user to

scan around and find it. It almost seemed as if the company was “being coy” and purposely diminishing its upfront value in order to get users to fill out the forms and request more information.

Treatment: Leave no doubt about your company’s stature and Value Propositions

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- Most Trusted Hosting Company

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OR

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Name

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The treatment was designed to test two primary hypotheses about the control page:

1. The expression of the Value Proposition could be improved
2. The control page caused user [friction](#) due to poor eye-path, the amount of information requested, and visual difficulty in locating the call-to-action.

With the treatment page, our research team attempted to test both of the above hypotheses by addressing the Value Proposition and friction issues. Beginning with the value prop, a large two-part headline – “Australia’s Most Trusted & Accredited Business Hosting Company” – was added at top-left to establish that the visitor had

arrived at a trusted destination. Added visual emphasis was placed on the term “Business Hosting Company” to establish further user confidence.

Below the two one-sentence paragraphs of text that provide an overview of the company’s services, the top Value Proposition points are emphasized by positioning them symmetrically on either side of a centered image. The image itself was much more easily recognizable as a computer server than that of the control.

Perhaps the most distracting and confusing element of the control page – the lengthy “needs” questionnaire – was eliminated for this treatment, with the revised page design focused on clearly directing the viewers’ eye-path toward the primary call-to-action – the invitation to call or contact a company rep online.

Further value (and user confidence) is established by the image-supported testimonial placed beside a capture form. By placing the testimonial here, our researchers felt that users would experience less anxiety when submitting personal contact information.

Results

The treatment outperformed the control by a relative difference of 188.46%. More than half of the leads generated by the treatment were inbound calls to the telephone number listed on the page. For the control, all of the leads came from contact information entered in the capture form.

While conversion rate increase is big in and of itself, keep in mind that this is a B2B marketer, and like many B2B marketers these leads have a high lifetime value since leads that convert often result in accounts that span several years.

What you need to understand

The 188% relative increase in conversion-to-lead from the Treatment page design suggests

that the one or both of the hypotheses have merit.

To maximize the value of this test to achieve the greatest long-term value in the shortest period of time, the research team chose to use a multi-factorial test. And as with any multivariable test, it’s difficult to determine an exact reason for such a lead gen boost without further testing. However, it’s evident from the results that more prospects were inspired to take action after seeing the treatment page. And our past research indicates that this is likely due to reduced friction and subsequent reduction in potential user anxiety.

However, it must be noted that while there were no phone calls from the control page during the test period, there were calls that stemmed from the treatment. This is strong indication that making the phone number more prominent and eliminating the ambiguity in the contact capture section was an effective approach.

Moving forward...

While the clarity of the Value Proposition and the level of friction seem to be much improved with the treatment design, there remains the fact that technology (and business) changes at a breakneck pace. Testing a variety of newer and more unique value statements in the center image could significantly increase user confidence, and ultimately conversion.

Still, the 188% boost might as well be qualified in layman’s terms as “night and day improvement.” Yes, it was a limited test. But in that time, the revamped page not only garnered more leads, but brought about a huge bump in person-to-person interaction. And today, when just about everything we do can be anonymized and faceless, this increased level of user confidence cannot be ignored.

(Now, if we could only ignore “Meet the Fockers” ...)

Related Resources

[Do You Have the Right Value Proposition? How to test, measure, and integrate your Value Proposition online](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: What cyclical products can learn from CBS Sports](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: How an engaging headline and revamped layout led to a 26% conversion rate gain](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Identifying friction to increase conversion and win a Nobel Prize](#)

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The screenshot shows the top portion of an email newsletter. At the top right, there are links for "View with Images" and "View Mobile Version". The logo for "marketingexperiments" is prominently displayed, with "powered by MECLABS" underneath. A dark navigation bar contains links for "Free Subscription", "Research Journal", "Methodology", "Research Directory", and "Training". The main content area begins with a welcome message: "Welcome to the MarketingExperiments Journal email for March 17, 2011. Every three weeks we send this high-level update of our research to 98,000 marketers. Today you'll find:" followed by a bulleted list of three items: an on-demand replay of a video, an invitation to a web clinic, and an opportunity to share optimization discoveries at a summit. Below this is a bio for Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content at MECLABS. A "Resource #1" section highlights the article "Do You Have the Right Value Proposition? How to test, measure, and integrate your Value Proposition online". On the right side, there is a "Connect with us:" section with social media links for the blog, website, Twitter, LinkedIn, and a "Forward to a colleague" link. Below that is a "Latest on our blog:" section with three article teasers: "Online Testing and Optimization: ROI your test results by considering effect size", "E-commerce: Using multivariate testing to increase sales 83.79%", and "Landing Page Optimization: Minimizing bounce rate with clarity".

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