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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank all the Research Partners who have teamed up with us to conduct these experiments. For more information about Research Partnerships, please visit [MarketingExperiments.com/Partners](http://MarketingExperiments.com/Partners).

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Dear Readers:

We have conducted over 10 years of sales and marketing research, including more than 1 billion emails and 10,000 landing pages, to help leaders optimize the financial performance of their sales and marketing programs.

Yet, due to rapid changes in the macroeconomic condition, the Internet, and B2B and B2C customers themselves, we are constantly making discoveries.

In this issue of the *MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal*, we share the latest additions to our research directory – the largest library of case studies in our field.

Our findings were sometimes counterintuitive...

- By treating a homepage as a channel instead of a billboard, our research analysts found a 59% increase in conversion. See **“Homepages Optimized”** on page [101](#).
- Our researchers reaffirmed our years of research into the Offer/Response-Optimization process. We do not merely optimize words or images on a page. Rather, we are optimizing sequences of thought. We are engaging in a conversation that is going on in the visitor’s mind and then leading it to an exchange of value. This means that the value of every action you desire to lead your visitor to make must outweigh the cost in their mind’s perception. Our researchers discovered four principles to shaping offers that were key to driving a 189% lift. See **“Optimizing Landing Pages”** on page [121](#).
- The impact of a single test is greater when it is part of a holistic testing strategy. Properly applied, the compounding effect of individual, but strategically connected conversion gains creates a significant ROI potential. Our researchers helped one company take a small gain and multiply it tenfold by leveraging this testing-optimization cycle and focusing on knowledge gained instead of individual test results. See **“The Compounding ROI of Sequential Conversion Increases”** on page [6](#).

These are just a few of the insights in the four never-before-published research articles featuring six experiments in this quarter’s issue. You’ll also find 27 “how-to” articles culled from the MarketingExperiments blog along with email marketing and search guidance from MarketingSherpa.

Thank you for taking the time to read this issue. While you may have received a complimentary copy of this *Journal*, it represents a significant research investment. If you find it useful, please pass along this research to colleagues to help us build a community of evidence-based marketers that we can share ideas with as well as learn from.

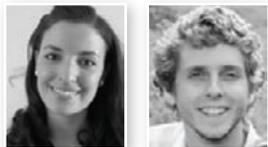
Sincerely,

Dr. Flint McGlaughlin

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](mailto:Editor@MarketingExperiments.com) or take three minutes to visit [MarketingExperiments.com/Survey](http://MarketingExperiments.com/Survey).*

# **MARKETING OPTIMIZATION**



By Daniel Burstein and Austin McCraw

Contributors  
Jimmy Ellis, Pamela Markey, Flint McGlaughlin, Jon Powell

July 8, 2010

# The Compounding ROI of Sequential Conversion Increases: How one company took a small gain and multiplied it tenfold

As a marketer, the impact of a single successful test can be very fulfilling. But how valuable is it to run one triumphant test? Or even several tests that are not connected to each other in any meaningful way?

Serious ROI gains can only be found by using the [testing-optimization cycle](#). Running a valid test with a hypothesis, learning from that test, optimizing based on that new knowledge, testing again, and then continuously repeating.

But how do you create a strategy to ensure that you not only learn from each test, but run tests that will build on and benefit each other? In other words, how do you get the most out of each test?

The impact of a single test is even greater when it is part of a holistic testing strategy. Properly applied, the compounding effect of individual but strategically connected conversion gains creates a significant ROI potential.

In this research article, we will take a look at how you can conduct holistic experimentation in your company. Let's begin by taking exploring an experiment – in this case we're actually talking about a series of tests that sought to optimize an entire sales funnel – and see what our research analysts discovered...

## HOLISTIC EXPERIMENTATION



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)  
**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library  
**Test Protocol Number:** TP1214

### Research Notes:

- Background:** A leading software provider
- Goal:** To increase total leads captured
- Primary research question:** Which process will generate the most leads?
- Approach:** Radical redesign of the complete lead-generation process focusing on strengthening the communication of the value proposition

## Experiment #1: Before and After

Original	Optimized
<p>{Keyword} Business Software Award-Winning Business Software. Fully Integrated. Free Trial. <a href="http://www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business">www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business</a></p>	<p>Business Software Suite #1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients Award Winning Solution. Free Trial <a href="http://www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business">www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business</a></p>

The first experiment simply focused on optimizing a pay-per-click (PPC) advertisement. The original ad used only vague qualitative statements like “Award-Winning” and “Fully integrated.”

The optimized ad used specific quantitative statements like “#1 On-Demand” and “6459+ World Clients” to communicate the value.

## Results:



**21% Increase in Overall Conversion**

*The optimized PPC ad obtained 21% more clicks.*

Every marketer already knows that she must ensure her ads sticks out from competitors. Yet so many PPC ads offer only vague qualitative statements that often aren’t very different from what a competitor is stating...perhaps right next to your ad!

Use specificity to differentiate your offering and communicate your value proposition.

But the PPC ad is only one part of the sales funnel, so let’s look at the next experiment in this series...

## Experiment #2: Landing Page

### Original landing page

The PPC ad drove traffic to a landing page. So after optimizing the PPC ad, our research analysts focus on optimizing that landing page...



After analyzing this page our researchers identified a few areas that were ripe for experimentation. Much like the PPC ad, this page uses vague language to communicate the value, yet it is not connected to the messaging in the PPC ad which may confuse visitors who have an expectation based on the PPC ad that they click on.

There are three objectives competing for the visitor’s attention, plus many navigation links leading off the page. The long paragraphs are difficult to scan in the [first seven seconds](#) the visitor spends on this page. In addition, the main calls to action are in the right-hand column out of the [visitor’s main eye path](#). Is it clear to the visitor where he or she is expected to click?



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David Stever, CFO, Ashli Kool

"We save more than \$200,000 annually in transaction costs and \$75,000 per year in IT costs."  
Jim Graham, CEO, Full Source LLC

"In a class of its own."  
eWeek

Optimized landing page

The optimized version uses quantitative language similar to the optimized PPC ad. Awards are shown prominently with testimonials. Paragraphs are broken up and more digestible. Distracting navigation has been removed. Three calls to action have been reduced to one and put in the main column.

Results:

**54% Greater click-through rate**  
The optimized PPC ad obtained 54% more clicks.

The optimized landing page generated a **54% greater click-through rate**. So by optimizing the PPC ad, first we drove more traffic to the landing page. Then by optimizing the landing page, we converted a greater number of that traffic (with no additional media spend). But, our research analysts did not stop there...

Experiment #3: Form Page

Home | Corporate Center | Free Trial

Get Your Free Trial of NetSuite Now  
Experience for yourself how NetSuite can help you run better.

Fill out the form below. A NetSuite representative will respond promptly to get you access to your trial.

Fields marked with an \* are required.

First name\*  
Last name\*  
E-mail address\*  
Phone number\*  
Country\*  
Company name\*  
Zip/Postal Code\*  
Contact Role\*  
Number of employees\*  
Type of business\*  
How did you hear about us?

Are you working with a NetSuite Solution Provider?  
What is the Solution Provider's name? (if known)  
Referral code (if known)

Yes, I would like to receive information from NetSuite.

Get Free Trial Now

Privacy Assurance: NetSuite respects and protects your privacy. We do not share your information with outside companies for their promotional use. To view our complete privacy policy, [click here.](#)

Original form

Our Research Analysts then optimized the form page that the previous landing page drove traffic to...

This page is emphasizing the free trial aspect of the offer, however, any value other than that is gone. The Research Partner had stopped trying to sell and just assumed that the customer is convinced.

Also, there is little connection to either the landing page or the PPC ad.

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First Name [ ]  
Last Name [ ]  
Company Name [ ]  
E-mail Address [ ] (Privacy Policy)  
Phone Number [ ]  
Postal Code [ ]  
Country [ ]

Area Code or Country Code first, excluding 1, 011, and + dialing directions

The following information will help us personalize your free trial experience.

Your Name [ ]  
Type of Business [ ]  
Industry [ ]

Are you working with a Solution provider? [ ]  
Solution Provider's Name (if known) [ ]  
Referral Code (if known) [ ]

Yes, I would like to receive information from [Software]

**Start Your Free Trial of [Software]**

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"[Software]... gives you **unprecedented control** of your company."  
— [Testimonial]

"We saved **\$1 Million** by switching to [Software] from [Previous Software], and reduced costs from **3% of revenue to 0.15%.**"  
— [Testimonial]

"We save more than **\$200,000** annually in transaction costs and **\$70,000** per year in IT costs."  
— [Testimonial]

## Optimized form

The free trial is emphasized, but is not the only value being communicated. The optimized page continues to communicate the value using quantitative language from the PPC ad and landing page. Testimonials have also been added and the privacy policy has been moved closer to the area of concern.

## Results:



**97% Increase in Overall Conversion**

*The optimized form page generated 97% more submissions*

The optimized form page generated **97% more submissions** by continuing to communicate the overall value proposition from the optimized PPC ad and landing page.

The original page was emphasizing the free trial value of this offer, but any value outside of that was lost. They had stopped trying to sell and just assumed that the customer was convinced by this point in the sales process. Essentially, the value proposition was no longer communicated when you landed on the form page.

This is a very common mistake. Many of us heavily communicate the value proposition on the landing page, but you must communicate the value proposition all the way through, every step in the buy path, every step of the process, and then even remind them of it on the confirmation page.

Our Jacksonville Beach headquarters is just a few blocks from the ocean so perhaps surf fishing is a fitting analogy. First you put your bait on, then cast into the surf, wait to feel the fish on the line, and then set the hook in the fish's mouth.

Once you set the hook, you don't put the pole down in the sand, walk up the beach, sit in your chair, and just wait for a red bass to swim in. You have to keep pinching on the line or else the fish will escape. And you keep that fish on the line all the way through the process until the fish is beached.

For this form page, the tension was off the line, there was slack in the link, and therefore the form was not producing.

These three experiments each drove an impressive gain. Now let's look at the math to determine the compounding effect of these sequential gains...

## Holistic Experimentation Results:



### 272% Increase in Overall Conversion

The optimized path increased the conversion rate by 272.2%

Metric	Control	Treatment	Relative Difference
PPC Advertisement	0.89%	1.08%	-3.5%
Landing Page Clickthrough	7.17%	11.06%	124%
Form Completion	15.84%	31.25%	7.17%
Impression-to-lead Conversion	.009%	.033%	7.17%



**What you need to understand:** In this series of experiments, 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 more monthly profit (a 302% increase).

You must remember that experimentation is a continual process. How much do you really learn by running one test? Or several tests that have no meaningful connection? As Rabbi Fred Scherlinder Dobb has said (in a very different context), "Our answers are ever-evolving, ever-tentative, just as science emphasizes working hypotheses over fixed facts." So too must we never settle for the results of a single test, and continually seek to discover what really works for each part of our funnel in an ever-changing economy.

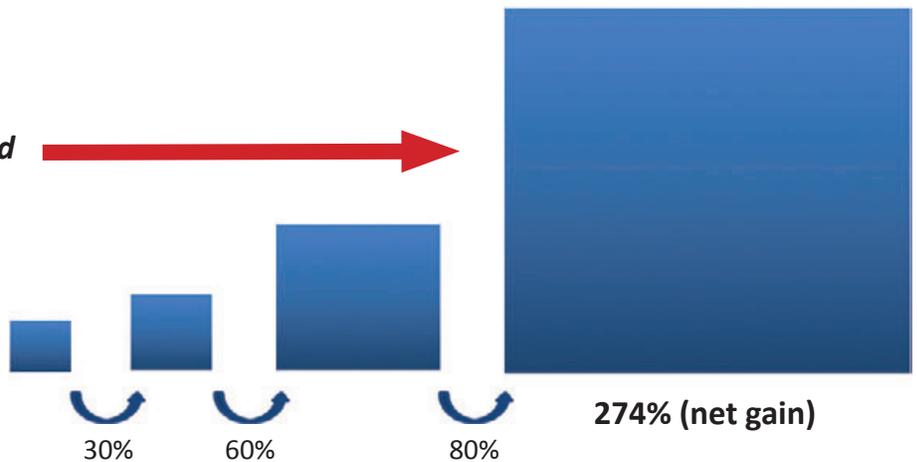


### Key Principle: What we discovered

The impact of a single test is greater when it is part of a holistic testing strategy. Properly applied, the compounding effect of individual, but strategically connected conversion gains creates a significant ROI potential.

*Editor's note: The above example assumes constant lead quality and no interaction among variables.*

### The compounding effect of connected conversion gains

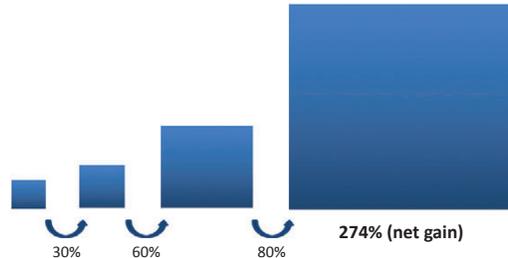


## Compounding gains vs. independent gains

Independent testing results in averaged gains. For example, when you optimize category pages for three unrelated product categories. In that case, the net impact on the business is the weighted average gain across tests. Using the above numbers, that would only result in a 57% gain.

### Net Impact of Compounding Gains

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= [(1) * (1+T1%) * (1+T2%) * (1+T3%)] - 1 \\
 &= [(1) * (1.30) * (1.60) * (1.80%)] - 1 \\
 &= [3.744] - 1 \\
 &= 2.744 \\
 &= \mathbf{274\% \text{ (net gain)}}
 \end{aligned}$$

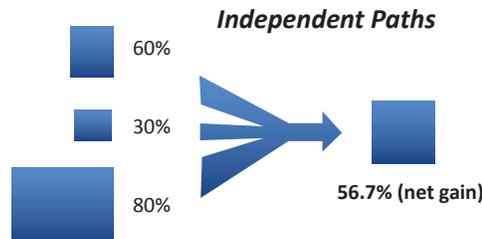


Compounding occurs when you optimize the individual stages of a single-series process (e.g., a [conversion path](#)), such that the gains from one test affect the input to all of the subsequent (or “downstream”) stages. In that case, using the above numbers, you would have realized a 274% net gain.

So, clearly, it is to your benefit to conduct holistic optimization, instead of conducting individual tests in a vacuum. Which, logically brings up this key question...

### Net Impact of Independent Gains

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \text{Average}[T1\%, T2\%, T3\%] \\
 &= (0.3 + 0.6 + 0.8) / 3 \\
 &= (.56666) \\
 &= \mathbf{56.7\% \text{ (net gain)}}
 \end{aligned}$$



### Key

**Question:** How can we ensure that we are getting the most from our optimization efforts?

## STEPS TO HOLISTIC EXPERIMENTATION

### Step One: Consider your entire conversion path

It is all too easy to focus on a landing page at the exclusion of your overall funnel. After all, if you follow industry blogs and speakers, landing page optimization is always a very hot topic. But, as the saying goes, if all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail.

To achieve holistic experimentation, you must expand your toolbox and consider your entire conversion path. For online conversion paths, this includes four key stages:

#### 1. The Channel:

*(e.g., emails, PPC ads, banner ads, offline media, etc.)*

2. **The Conversation:**  
*(e.g., landing pages, product pages, etc.)*
3. **The Exchange:**  
*(e.g., form paths and pages, shopping carts, etc.)*
4. **The Satisfaction:**  
*(e.g., receipts, thank-you pages, additional offers, etc.)*

## Step Two: View your metrics as a tool to detect hidden leaks

Think like a plumber. Analyze your site metrics to identify hidden “leaks” in revenue and conversion. Let’s take a look at a recent experiment to discover exactly how to find those leaks...

## HOLISTIC EXPERIMENTATION



**Experiment ID:** *(Protected)*

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** TP1305

### Research Notes:

**Background:** A website that sells retail and wholesale collector items

**Goal:** To increase conversion rate

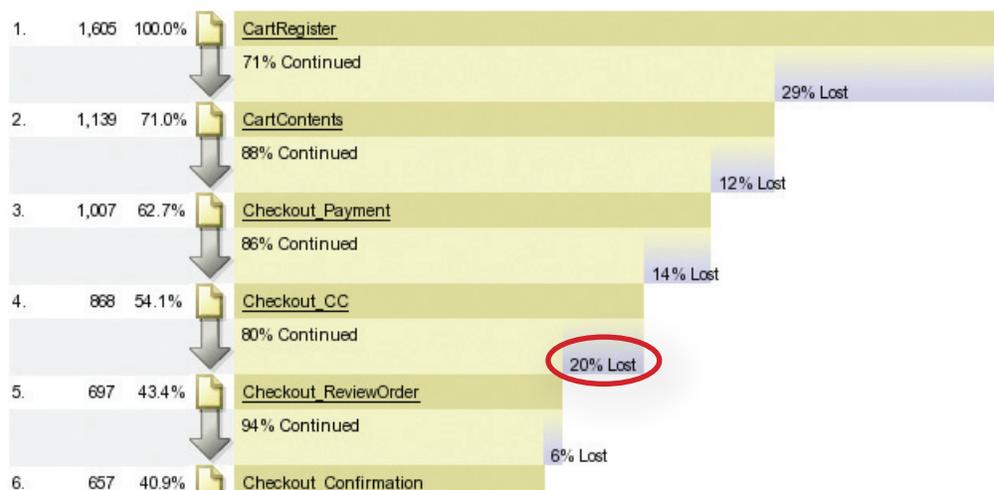
**Primary research question:** Which treatment will produce the highest conversion rate?

**Approach:** A/B variable cluster split test that focused on reducing anxiety through credibility indicators, copy, and re-organization of existing page elements

### Background:

Initially when we approached this Research Partner’s value exchange process, we wanted to optimize the entire conversion path. However, technical constraints prevented us from doing so.

Instead we looked for the most effective place to test. When we analyzed the metrics, the credit card submission page stood out as low-hanging fruit for immediate return due to it having the highest lost revenue per cart (more than double any other step).



## Control:

Only half of their customers paid with a credit card, the other half paid by check or money order. But since the product is a commodity with a price that changes often throughout the day, customers were buying at a set market price and needed to provide a credit card to secure their order at that price, even if they would later send in a check.

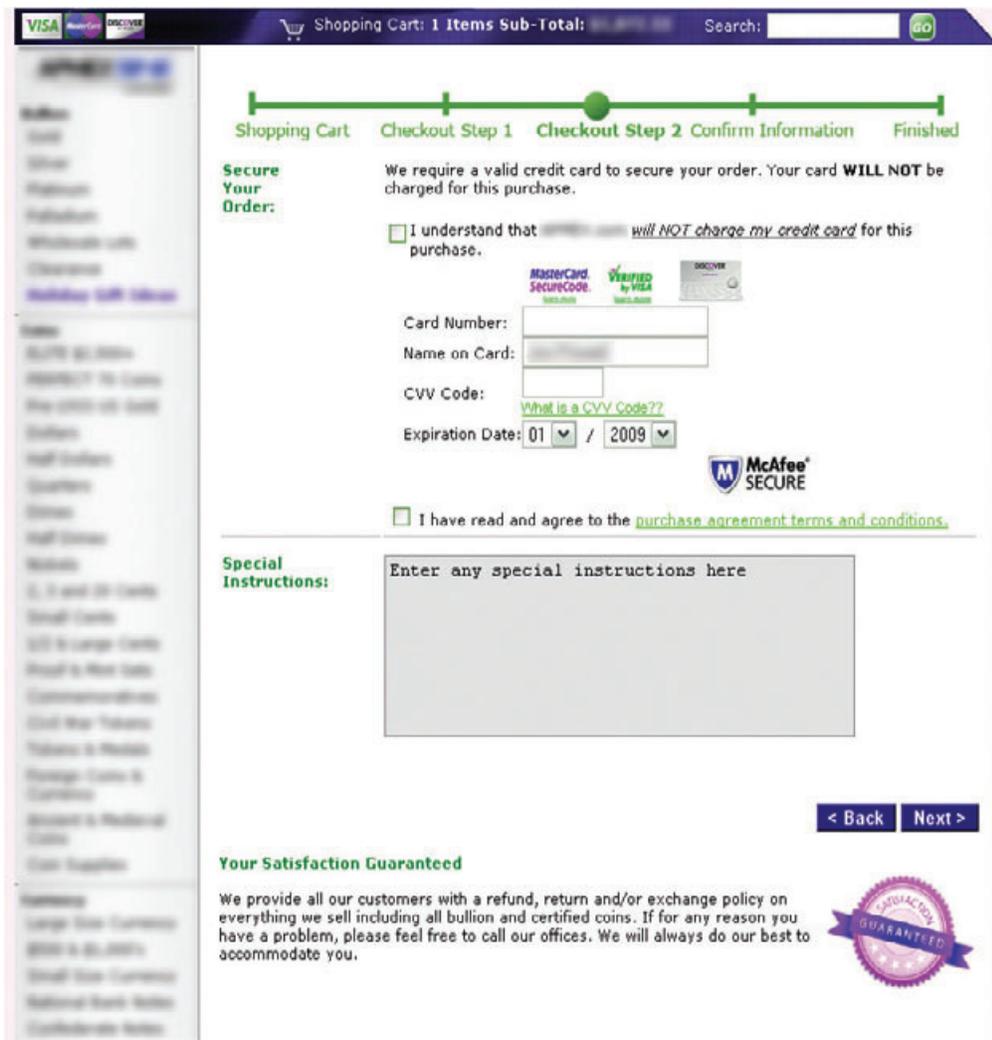
The screenshot shows a checkout page with a progress bar at the top indicating the current step: Shopping Cart, Checkout Step 1, Checkout Step 2 (active), Confirm Information, and Finished. Below the progress bar, there is a "Credit Card:" section with a checkbox and a disclaimer: "I understand that [redacted] will NOT charge my credit card for this purchase. It is ONLY used to secure my order. I have read and agree to the purchase agreement terms (below)." Below this are input fields for Card Number, Name on Card, CVV Code (with a link "What is a CVV Code??"), and Expiration Date (01 / 2009). A "Special Instructions:" section is empty. At the bottom right of the form area are "< Back" and "Next >" buttons. Below the form is a "Purchase Agreement Terms" section with several bullet points:

- Once you have placed an order with [redacted] [redacted] [redacted], you have entered into a binding agreement. If you cancel your order for any reason; your credit card will be charged a \$35.00 cancellation fee as well as the difference between your confirmed price and our market ask price. (Our Ask to Ask price.)
- Your [redacted] order will automatically be canceled if we do not receive payment within five business days. Your credit card will be charged a \$35.00 cancellation fee as well as the difference between your confirmed price and our current market ask price.
- We recommend mailing your payment immediately. Or, using 2-3 day priority mail through the U.S. Postal Service to ensure delivery within five business days.
- [redacted] reserves the right to refuse an order if your payment is not received within five business days after the order is placed.
- [redacted] reserves the right to cancel an order if our quoted price is increased, due to computer-related [redacted]
- All credit card order returns are subject to a [redacted] [redacted] fee.
- For more detailed information please read our [Frequently Asked Questions](#).

But when our researchers analyzed the page, they found that this complex buying process wasn't being communicated clearly. Specifically, there was unclear reasoning as to why the credit card is required when the payment method is different (check, money order, etc).

In addition, the Purchase Agreement Terms' complexity could cause confusion and concern as well. And there were no indicators of the security of entering credit card information.

Treatment:



So MarketingExperiments research analysts created a treatment page with a clearer explanation of why a credit card is required and assuring customers that it will not be charged.

Third-party security indicators were also added as well as a “Satisfaction Guarantee.”

Results:

 **5% Increase in total conversion**  
*The new credit card page increased transactions by 4.51%*

Design	Conversion Rate
Control	82.33%
Treatment	86.04%
<b>Relative Difference</b>	<b>4.51%</b>



**What you need to understand:** The new credit card page increased transactions by 4.51%. This increase in the sales funnel meant a projected \$500,000+ in revenue a year for this organization.

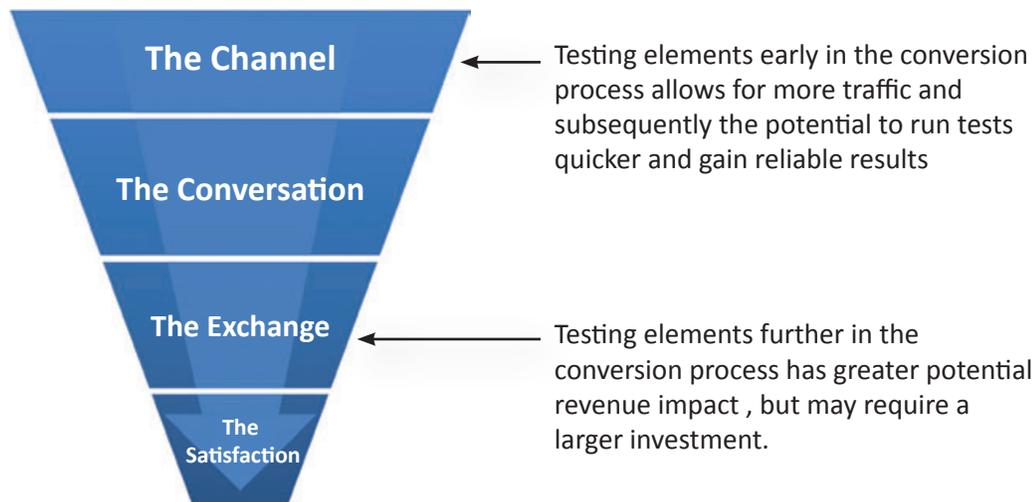
## Step Three: Determine what tests to run and in what order

One of the most common questions we get asked is, “Where should I test first?”

In general, the earlier you test in your funnel, the easier and quicker the tests are to run and validate (due to higher traffic).

The deeper in your funnel you run your tests, the harder they are to run – both technologically (due to possibly having to change a shopping cart) and in terms of getting enough traffic to validate your tests.

However, improving conversion deeper in the funnel is likely more lucrative. As we saw in the above experiment, a 4.51% relative difference on a credit card page resulted in \$500,000+ in more revenue.



One more caveat when optimizing early in your funnel. Let's say you were to optimize your channel before optimizing your landing page, for example, attracting a greater number of traffic, but sending that traffic to an inferior landing page. In certain industries, where prospects are especially perishable, you might lose the possibility of business with that potential customer forever.

Perishable prospect losses are incurred when the nature of your product or your prospects are such that if they arrive and have a bad experience, then they are likely to remember the experience (and you) and never come back. You might alternatively call this “burning bridges” with your prospects.

Merchants at the greatest risk are those:

- For whom the average order value (and consequently the value of each prospect) is high.
- For whom the number of competitors is comparatively low; increasing the likelihood that prospects will remember and associate a negative experience with you.



- In markets small enough that the pool of available prospects could appreciably diminish in a finite period.
- In markets with strong peer networks or communities, where one “bad experience” could translate to many lost prospects.

So what is the right answer to the “Where should I test first?” question. To find the right answer, you must first ask the right questions. And this question is not one we can answer in this research article – because the answer is different for every company.

Determining what to test first is a factor of two deeper questions that only your company can answer...

*Q:* Where can you get the greatest gain for the least amount of investment?

*(How to find the) A:* Conduct an [ROI analysis](#) of the different parts of your funnel with [expected value computations](#) to help you determine the cost and impact of optimizing different parts of your sales funnel.

*Q:* Where can you get the greatest gain for the least amount of investment?

*(How to find the) A:* Your answer lies in a [design of experiments](#), based on analysis of your data and your cost per acquisition for each customer, to help you maximize immediate return as you understand customers and drive higher traffic and revenue.



## **Bottom Line:**

The impact of a single test is greater when it is part of a holistic testing strategy. Properly applied, the compounding effect of individual but strategically connected conversion gains creates a significant ROI potential.

To conduct holistic experimentation, you must consider the entire conversion path, view your metrics as a tool to detect hidden leaks, and determine what tests to run and in what order. If you conduct your testing with this strategy, you will be able to monetize your analyses and realize impressive gains from compound testing.

As Carl Sagan has said, “It is the tension between creativity and skepticism that has produced the stunning and unexpected findings of science.” This is true for marketing experimentation as well. While the creativity in advertising and marketing is often touted and quite celebrated, don’t overlook the skepticism that you must bring to your entire funnel. By testing throughout the buy process in an interconnected fashion, you can channel that creativity to make the greatest impact where it matters most – the bottom-line.



*For examples of how to apply these discoveries on your website, feel free to watch the [replay of a recent Web clinic](#) where Flint McGlaughlin and the MarketingExperiments team conducted live optimization on audience submissions.*

# B2B Marketing: Do you know how much your CEO really invests in demand generation?

For most of us, the phrase “demand generation” conjures up things like campaigns, social media, trade shows, and the corporate website.

But what about sales prospecting? Despite all the newfangled marketing automation tools, most CEOs increase the funding for demand generation by authorizing the expansion of the sales organization.

Surprised?

You shouldn't be. Books like SNAP Selling, SPIN Selling and Solution Selling for years have been teaching sales people to generate demand, one conversation at a time. Most companies don't call what sales people do “demand creation” or “demand generation.” No, we've given it more pedestrian names, like “sales prospecting” or “cold calling.” But, really, what's the difference?

## The percent of the sales budget spent on demand generation

Efficient sales teams spend 10 percent of their time prospecting. They network. They get referrals. They leverage LinkedIn and InsideView. You know. All those really cool things Anneke Seley and Brent Holloway have written about in Sales 2.0.

But sales teams for many companies spend 20 to 30 percent of their time prospecting. And even 40 or 50 percent of time spent prospecting is not unheard of. As the percent of time spent prospecting increases, the return on investment generally decreases.



Multiply any of those percentages of time by the total sales budget and, in most companies, money indirectly (and maybe inadvertently) allocated by sales for demand generation is at least as large as the entire marketing budget. And it could be five times larger. Or more.

Think about that.

It's not like sales people like to cold call. They would prefer to talk to people who have a problem the sales person might solve. But you have to find those people. And cold calling is time consuming and often demoralizing. So why do sales people do it?

There's one simple reason: they have no choice. Marketing rarely generates a sufficient volume of truly qualified leads. So sales people have to pick up the slack.



by J. David Green,  
Director of Best  
Practices

September 15,  
2010

## The case for a larger sales force

Against this backdrop, how hard is it for sales leadership to make the case that the way to increase revenue is to hire more sales people? Or, in challenging economic times like these, how hard is it for a CSO to suggest cutting the lead generation budget rather than the sales budget?

Given all the cool developments for marketers in the last few years, marketing departments should be on the march. Instead, there are a lot of marketing departments that have low lead-to-sale conversion rates. Of those with good conversion rates, few are really delivering a pipeline volume that makes a huge difference to the CSO.

It doesn't have to be this way. Not anymore.

There really are better returns on investment dollars than sales cold calling, which is a financial baseline that every marketer needs to understand. So for this year's planning process, step one should be to estimate the current cost of sales prospecting and what the revenue capacity of that sales force might be if each sales person spent more time selling and less time looking for leads.

*[Dave Green](#) is the Director of Best Practices, Applied Research at MECLABS (the parent company of MarketingExperiments).*

### Related Resources

[MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit '10](#)

[Social Media and Content Marketing: Don't expect the world to find you](#)

[B2B Marketing: Marketing automation helps with lead nurturing and management](#)

*Photo attribution: [bsabarnow!](#)*

# B2B Marketing: Take established tradeshow best practices and adapt them for an online audience with virtual events

“Many tradeshows have experienced a decline in attendance and exhibitors in recent years. In addition to companies cutting back on their tradeshow attendance due to financial reasons, many attendees are also scaling back their tradeshow participation, due to travel costs and time away from the office. Virtual events eliminate some of these issues.”

The above quote is from [Chris Chariton](#), Vice President of Supplier Marketing & Marketing Services at [GlobalSpec](#) – the engineering search engine. To help you incorporate virtual events into your marketing mix, we conducted a virtual interview with Chris...

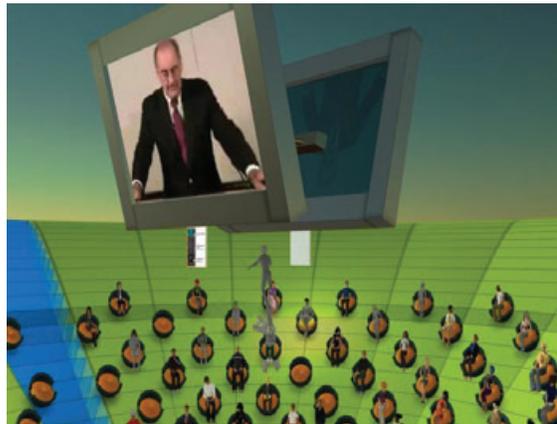
**Let’s start with the obvious question – what is a virtual tradeshow and how is it different than a webinar?**

*Chris Chariton:* Virtual tradeshows go beyond a webinar or webcast, as they include elements of both an educational conference and a tradeshow. A typical webinar lasts between 30 and 60 minutes, and is usually focused on a single topic.

On the other hand, virtual tradeshows encompass a “conference” portion featuring many different educational sessions with a variety of speakers, as well as a “tradeshow” component including exhibitor booths, live chat and networking.

The platform for virtual tradeshows is much more comprehensive, the interactive capabilities are greater, and they offer additional multimedia opportunities, including video.

**In what situations should marketers use a traditional event? When should they choose a virtual event?**



CC: Two reasons why marketers use in-person events are the opportunity to be face-to-face with an existing or potential customer, and the opportunity for someone to see your products “in action.” Virtual events also provide this interactive ability for one-on-one discussions.

Additionally, the economic, time and resource benefits of virtual tradeshows and online events are too big not to experience. They can serve as a complement, a supplement or a replacement to in-person events, as they offer lead generation, branding and networking opportunities – much more conveniently, and without travel, hotel and entertainment costs.

However, you will want to evaluate each individual event for itself, determining the quality of the audience, the “fit” with your company, its products and services, and other factors.



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director  
of Editorial  
Content

August 27, 2010

## How should we approach a virtual event differently than we would approach a traditional event?

CC: We recommend that you approach a virtual event in a similar manner that you would approach a traditional event. Having a successful presence requires effort, so you want to be sure that you have a solid project plan in place.

You also want to create a content strategy that ensures that you are outfitting your virtual booth with the content that is most relevant and valuable to attendees, and that positions you as a thought leader.

Much like a traditional tradeshow, you want to interact with all of your virtual booth visitors as well. Know who the subject matter experts are, in case you need to pass the person off for a technical discussion. And understand the content of the collateral that you have on hand, so you can offer them the appropriate materials.

Maximizing results is key. After exhibiting at a virtual event, you want to follow up on opportunities – like you would for a traditional tradeshow, or any other marketing initiative for that matter.

And while there are many similarities between virtual events and traditional events, there are some differences – without travel costs and time away from the office being a factor, you can implement a cross-departmental team to staff your virtual booth and participate in online chats, especially during high traffic times. So in addition to the traditional sales and marketing folks who typically staff your in-person booths, you can also invite engineers and other subject matter experts to attend.

## How do you incorporate social media into virtual events?

CC: We use a variety of social media channels – including Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter – to promote our events, both prior to the event to encourage registration, and during

the event to attract and engage attendees. For each event, we have a dedicated social media strategy designed to drive interest and registrations, as well as attendance.

## How do you determine the value of participating in a virtual event?

CC: To maximize your virtual event investment, select one that will help you effectively achieve your marketing goals. Before participating in a virtual event, there are a number of important criteria to consider.

First, understand the audience for the event – both the quantity and the quality to expect, including the titles and industries of the attendees.

Next, ask yourself if the topic is relevant to your target market, and a good fit for your business. Inquire how these events are being promoted, both pre- and post-event. And understand the support you will receive as an exhibitor. Will you have a dedicated client services manager assisting you? Is the technology platform secure? All of these will help you ensure you are making the right decision.

Like an in-person tradeshow, virtual events can position your company as a thought leader, and deliver branding, exposure and qualified sales leads.

## Related Resources

[Why Your Web Site Isn't Enough](#)

[Internet Marketing Research: A behind-the-scenes look at MarketingExperiments Web clinics](#)

[B2B Marketing: Playbook for sales and marketing alignment](#)

Photo attribution: [ravenelle](#)

# Anti-crowdsourcing: On (not) getting marketing ideas from your customers

We've written some posts recently about how the [customer should be in charge of your marketing](#) (and really perhaps everything you do as a company). And hopefully along the way we've provided some helpful advice on how to listen to your customers and provide them real value (which will ultimately lead to greater success for your company).

But...there's a line. Let's just say, "the customer is *often* right." To help you find that line, let's take a MarketingExperiments look at...

## When not to listen to your customers

While writing these customer-oriented posts, I started thinking about Apple and Steve Jobs. After all, their customers said they wanted a tablet computer, but instead Apple gave them an iThingy.

Then [Scotty Monty of Ford commented on a recent post](#) about the whole anti-crowdsourcing idea dating back to a famous quote by Henry, "If I asked my customers what they wanted, I would have made a faster horse."

So, how do you create iPad-and-Model-T-level marketing and avoid producing an Edsel? I think it comes down to a simple (but not easy) three-step process...



## STEP #1: Listen (broadly)

*"I want a horn here, here, and here. You can never find a horn when you're mad. And they should all play 'La Cucaracha.'"* – Homer Simpson, designing a car as a an "everyman" customer consultant

When I was young, there were endless commercials for a toy called Spy Tech that supposedly let you eavesdrop on conversations while hiding behind a bush. To a kid, it seemed liked the most impressive piece of technology that could be molded out of plastic.

Today, in the future, you have Spy Tech as well (only now it's called social media). You don't have to rely on phone calls coming into a complaint line to judge your marketing. You can listen to pseudo-real conversations taking



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director  
of Editorial  
Content

August 18, 2010

place (virtually) all over the world. Social media isn't just a megaphone, it's also a great phone tap.

In fact, the [first piece of advice Chris Brogan gives about Twitter](#) is not to come up with a really cool handle or shout about your latest accomplishments/content/offers in 140 characters or less, it's to (shhhhhh) – listen. Search Twitter. Join competitors' groups (on LinkedIn) and fan pages (on Facebook). Follow industry-specific hashtags. [Ask questions on LinkedIn](#) or Twitter.

Of course, it's not all just social media. Really, you're just looking to download as much info into your cranium from your current and potential customers. So ask yourself how else you can tap into their valuable knowledge? A few other ideas:

- **Conduct surveys and focus groups** – Don't make decisions based solely on these (more on that in Step #3), but a tight set of well-worded questions with a clear end goal of helping the customer can provide valuable info.
- **Call them** – Or email. Heck, even send a letter. But tone is important. As MarketingExperiments Research Analyst Corey Trent says, "[Ask in a very personal, human fashion](#) to avoid the 'system-generated message' feel."
- **Tap into institutional knowledge** – You may not talk to customers every day, but likely someone, somewhere in your organization does. Whether their title is sales executive, customer service rep, flight attendant, or maid, they have unique insights than can help. Of course, take that info with a grain of salt, since it comes through a filter.

## Step #2: (stop and) Think

"*THINK.*" – Thomas Watson

Steve Jobs wants you to think different. Thomas Watson just wants you to flat

out think. Either way, your job as a customer-focused marketer is to take the (sometimes contradictory) clay and mold it into the Mona Lisa of marketing campaigns (which is further complicated by the fact that the Mona Lisa isn't made out of clay).

So step back from everything you've been hearing from your customers. Clear your head. Go to a library. Read the classics. Play with the kids. Walk the dog. Pull a Ferris Bueller.

You need to inject some of you into your marketing campaigns. My point being, don't overly rely on your customers' insights, because I'm sure you have essential ideas of your own. Only you understand your marketing goals, your margin, your corporate structure, the internal politics, and how to mix these all together with your customers' desires to hit just the right note.

By considering and then stepping away from everything your customers say they want, you have the chance to come up with a (pseudo) original way to meet all these demands with a marketing campaign that surpasses your goals and makes you proud and perhaps famous...

To remix a famous quote, "There are no original marketing ideas, just ideas the judges at the One Club haven't seen yet."

## Step #3: Test (and measure)

*"Gentlemen, we got 20 calls about the David Hyde-Pierce incident. And as you know, one call equals a billion people, which means 20 billion people were offended by this. Needless to say, something must be done."* – FCC Suit on *Family Guy*

It's one thing for your customers to say they want something in a focus group or phone call. It's quite another for them to actually reach for the wallet and make a purchase.

You need to run real-world, real-time randomized tests to see how your customers actually react to your use of their ideas. The folks in Washington call this a trial balloon.

If you follow a scientific methodology, testing gives you a chance to gain true knowledge into how well your campaign will actually work. If you just listen to customer opinion, you run the risk of releasing a “faster horse,” because, as MarketingExperiments Senior Manager of Research and Strategy, Boris Grinkot, says “You have to be conscious of skewed sampling. People that are upset are the loudest. People that are the loudest may or may not speak for many others.”

Boris mentioned a subtle change in the shopping cart process for a Research Partner that increased conversion. Excellent, right? Well, there was one caveat. They got some kickback about this change creating a “customer-service nightmare.” However, upon digging deeper Boris learned that it was just one upset customer making a big stink on the phone to a manager.

Now, that one upset person can represent many, many more upset people...or not. By designing a series of tests and tracking the right metrics to measure success, you have a full understanding if your spiffy new marketing ideas are moving the needle, which can also help when the manager who just got off the phone with the enraged customer comes barreling down to your office.

In fairness, you need to take into account long-term indicators. If it was just one (or a small handful) of customers, you’re probably OK. But even an entire upset customer base doesn’t necessarily show attrition immediately in the conversion rate. So it really loops back up to Step #1: Listen. If that many people are upset, it will likely show up in other places as well.

So listen...think...test...repeat.

If you’re new to testing and optimization, we have an entire [research website](#) and [training courses](#) to help you test your ideas.

If you’re an experienced researcher, check out a few test ideas in the Related Resources section that you may not have considered...

#### Related Resources

[Domain/Product Name Testing: Our testing demonstrated that choosing product, service, or domain names based on what you “like” can cost you dearly](#)

[What to test \(and how\) to increase your ROI today](#)

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

Image by: [left-hand](#)



# B2B Marketing: Marketing automation helps with lead nurturing and management



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director of  
Editorial Content

August 4, 2010

What will your biggest B2B marketing challenges be in 2011? And how can you overcome them to (over) deliver on your numbers while staying on budget?

These are the kinds of questions our colleagues at MarketingSherpa, our sister company, obsess over.

Senior Analyst Jen Doyle is already knee-deep in B2B marketing data to find insights to help marketers focus on key tools and tactics to fill pipeline in 2011, but was kind enough to answer a few questions about lead generation...

## What are the most significant marketing challenges for B2B marketers today?

*Jen Doyle:* The greatest challenge for B2B marketers is generating high-quality leads to deliver to their sales teams. It is because of this challenge that marketing automation, lead nurturing and lead scoring have become critical for B2B organizations.

In order to optimize the efficiency of marketing and sales departments, walls are being broken down and these teams are working together to identify various stages of the buying cycle or the complex sale, and determining what marketing collateral or level of sales contact is appropriate for each stage.

Through this process, marketing's role has changed from generating leads to generating and nurturing leads to the point that they are qualified and ready for sales involvement.

## What are the top challenges to managing a B2B site and how can marketers overcome those challenges?



*JD:* The greatest challenges for managing a B2B site include developing content, attracting the right traffic, and [optimizing for conversions](#).

Developing marketing content is an expensive and time consuming tactic, but essential for attracting and converting traffic. Marketers can overcome this challenge by repurposing and reformatting existing content for website purposes.

Most B2B organizations have a library of marketing content that has been developed over time, including case studies, presentations, etc. Why not repurpose this content to drive traffic and conversions on the website? For example, case studies can be reformatted into blog posts or reformatted into a whitepaper to be used as an offer for conversion.

Search engine optimization and social marketing are excellent tactics for achieving an increased level of targeted traffic to B2B websites. Organizations need to first understand the social behaviors of their audience, what terms their audience is using to describe their products or services, and

which of these targeted terms generate high volume traffic.

This research can be conducted by monitoring the activity of their target audiences on social media sites and conducting keyword research utilizing various online tools like [Google's keyword tool](#) or [Wordtracker](#) to identify search volume and competition levels.

In order to optimize a B2B site for conversions, organizations need to continually test the performance of their traffic funnel, landing pages and lead forms. In order to accomplish this, a solid analytics solution and dedicated website management and design team are required.

### **How can marketing automation help with lead nurturing and lead management?**

*JD:* By implementing a marketing automation program, organizations are able to elevate the effectiveness of their lead nurturing and management programs.

Select marketing automation programs allow organizations to automate the delivery of lead nurturing content based on lead behavior, such as visiting the website or opening an email, and attributes such as budget amount and timeframe for purchase.

Organizations that implement marketing automation programs are able to test the frequency and content of lead nurturing campaigns to improve performance. Marketing automation programs also enable marketers to automate the process of handing leads off to sales teams once they have met certain criteria or a certain lead score.

These are just a few of the benefits B2B organizations stand to receive from marketing automation programs.

**Many lead scoring systems have become overly complex, often discouraging marketing and sales from using them diligently. Can marketing automation help here as well?**

*JD:* Absolutely. Select marketing automation platforms simplify the lead scoring process by automating lead score calculations based on a predetermined set of rules. Rules can be based on lead attributes or behavior and are constantly changing based on activity.

Additionally, depending on the automation tool that is selected, updates made in CRM systems such as Salesforce can be used to calculate lead score. This allows for lead scores to automatically be adjusted if a sales person makes a certain indication on the lead in the CRM system. With automation features like these, lead scoring processes are simplified and streamlined.

### **Related Resources**

[B2B Success Stories: Four tests with gains of 21% to 254%](#)

[Social Media Marketing in Four Steps: A methodology to move from sporadic to strategic use based on research with 2,317 B2B and B2C marketers](#)

[Search Marketing: Tips on mastering the latest innovations in this mature category](#)

*Photo attribution: [lumaxart](#)*



# Reaching Decision Makers: Four biggest sales challenges Internet startups and entrepreneurs face



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director of  
Editorial Content

August 2, 2010

With the continued high unemployment rate, many professionals have been and are considering hanging out their own (often virtual) shingle and starting a business, website, or non-profit. Hey, that's one way to get a job. Create your own company and hire yourself.

But from my personal experience, the difficulty in having your own business is not in doing what you do well, it's all those other things that you normally don't need to handle when working for someone else. In my case, I love writing and have no challenges there. But sales...

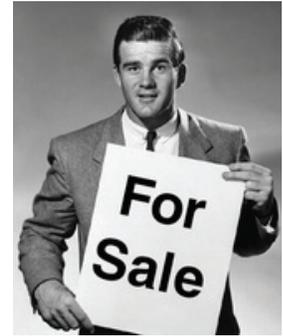
I personally think content marketing works great for this. [Word of mouse](#) can open more doors for you than a skeleton key. But, occasionally, everyone needs to pick up the phone and make a sales call to sell a product, service, or even just an idea.

So to help the next Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, or Craig Newmark learn to sell to potential customers, donors, and venture capitalists, I corralled Jason Croyle and asked him about the four biggest sales challenges I've seen most startups face.

Jason is a Lead Generation Specialist at [InTouch](#), one of our sister companies. In just over one year he's created \$3.3 million for a data integration tools company (and that's just for one of his five clients), and he was kind enough to share his sales insights to help you start flooding your own pipeline...

**What preparation should I take for a sales call?**

*Jason Croyle:* Let me start with the most basic step to making any call – get the digits. If you don't have a direct line phone number, you can call a general "Contact Us" number which is widely available.



But keep in mind, that operators often won't let you through without a name. If C-level executives are listed on their website in the "About Us" or "Investor Information" sections (in large corporations), the operators are also likely trained to screen you to a vendor hotline, website, or e-mail address.

So I use an information aggregator like [InsideView](#) to provide me a break down of contacts from directors all the way up to the Board of Directors. Often I can find a direct dial phone number, at least for lower-level management. But even when I can't, that name and title often help me get past the operator.

Not every company is listed on this site, so you can go back to your prospect's site or to LinkedIn for further discovery.

Before I dial, I make it a point to know my clients' solutions to the best of my ability so that I can act as a trusted advisor on the phone and not just a pitching machine. If I can act as a coach, I'll retain control of the call through my consultative approach.

So I sit back and think about how my solution specifically fits their needs. What have I seen about this company's challenges online or in the news? Do I have any connections in this company? LinkedIn helps here as well.

From this research, you can create some main talking points. It's important to put yourself in the shoes of your buyers. After all, who wants to receive another "sales call?" Business decision makers are bombarded with similar calls throughout the day from your competitors and other services. So try to put their challenges and concerns first.

Once you have these talking points, envision a dry run of the call in your head. Many athletes visualize themselves hitting a home run, sinking a jump shot, or nailing the perfect drive before they ever physically go through the motions.

Of course, once you actually get on the phone, your main talking points will only get you so far. Improvisational skills are crucial. For some people, it comes naturally. If you don't feel like you have those skills, perhaps join a local improv group to help you get better at thinking on your feet.

**OK, so let's say I have that valuable direct line phone number. How do I get decision makers on the phone?**

*JC:* As I stated in the previous answer, companies have mechanisms to keep you out. More so when you're calling to sell technology.

So use the resources I discussed (InsideView, LinkedIn, prospect websites, your own network, and even a simple Google search) to seek out high-level end users in departments that benefit from your solution. Ask for these people or even ask for their assistant. Have a brief overview ready for the assistant so that she understands in layman terms and can redirect you lower/higher if needed. Often if you are not pushy and come across as an information resource and thought leader on

the subject, you'll get through the "screener" and to the right person.

**OK, so I've got them on the phone. Now what? Quick! I've only got 30 seconds of their attention...29...28...**

*JC:* Again, it comes down to helping the person on the other end meet their goals, because no one cares about what you have to sell, they only care about solving their own problems. You have to make sure that what you have to sell, whether it's an idea, a product, or an investment opportunity, meets that criteria.

Let me show you what I mean. I normally make sales calls for our clients, but I'll put myself in the shoes of an entrepreneur and try to sell myself for a moment...

"Hello (Decision Maker Name), my name is Jason Croyle and I'm calling from MECLABS. We help companies increase marketing conversion via web tactics, educational resources and phone centricity. Clients such as X, Y, and Z have realized significant results ranging from 80% to 3,000% and have generated \$x,xxx,xxx in new revenue. I wanted to share with you how we do and don't work with our clients as well as more details on specific customer situations as examples."

In this statement I've said I want to collaborate with you – not sell you something. I've told you what we can and can't do and stated that I'll let you know if we can't help you. I've addressed you as a person who's busy but may need help right now or in the future.

**People seem interested, but I just keep getting strung along. How do I actually close the deal?**

*JC:* Ask. Ask. Ask. Lead your way in from front to back with very open-ended questions to discover what it will take to earn their trust and business. Assure them that you're going to be a partner and advisor and not just another vendor. Don't leave them feeling like you just



want to close the deal. Give them the impression that you're going to help them now and into the future. As Flint McGlaughlin, the Director of MECLABS Group, says, "[Tell me what you can't do, and I might believe you when you tell me what you can do.](#)"

## Related Resources

[Becoming An Entrepreneur: Factors to consider when launching an Internet-based startup business](#)

[Marketing Optimization: How your peers overcome leaks in their sales and lead generation funnels](#)

[Evidence-based Marketing: Why you need more than just numbers to truly drive ROI](#)

*Photo attribution: [hahatango](#)*



## Debate Team (Part 1): Does the future of media companies, ad agencies, and content marketers lie in technology or content?



by Boris Grinkot,  
Senior Manager,  
Research and  
Strategy

July 28, 2010

*Around the MarketingExperiments labs, we are constantly debating the future of Internet marketing. Unfortunately, for the really big picture stuff, our normal answer of “test it” simply doesn’t work. So we’re taking our latest brawl into the streets (so to speak), and asking you to judge what the future holds.*

*But there’s a bit of a twist. In this debate, we’re forcing our team to take the opposite opinion of what their day-to-day role would suggest. On Friday I must hide my content-creating hat and make [an argument for the centrality of technology](#). But first, read on as Boris Grinkot, a technology (among other*

*things) guy, touts the merits of content. Use our [Twitter](#) and [comment](#) features to tell us who you think is right.*

### Executive summary (in three sentences)

The Internet is swarming with content. Technology helps make the content easier and quicker to digest by auto-summarizing, sorting, classifying, or repurposing it in various user-preferred formats. By enabling conversation, technology helps us choose content to consume based on deliberate recommendations or computed popularity. However, technology doesn’t impact content quality. **(Continue reading on page 30)**

## Debate Team (Part 2): Does the future of media companies, ad agencies, and content marketers lie in technology or content?



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director  
of Editorial  
Content

July 28, 2010

*Around the MarketingExperiments labs, we are constantly debating the future of Internet marketing. Unfortunately, for the really big picture stuff, our normal answer of “test it” simply doesn’t work. So in the spirit of Jerry Springer, we’re airing our dirty laundry and bringing the debate straight to you.*

*But there’s a bit of a twist. In this debate, we’re forcing our team to take the opposite opinion of what their day-to-day role would suggest. On Wednesday, Boris Grinkot, a technology (among many other things) guy wrote a [blog post](#) I intend to use in my annual review saying how vital high-quality content*

*truly is. Today I dive into the bits and bytes to make my argument for the importance of technology.*

*Use our Twitter and comment features to tell us who (hint: not Boris) you think is right.*

Here’s the problem with great content. I can’t find it. There’s simply too much of it.

Sure we have Google, Facebook, Twitter, iTunes, and Bing to help us hunt through the haystack and find that glorious hidden needle. But my argument is this. These technologies don’t help you **(Continue reading on page 33)**

## Debate Team (Part 1): Does the future of media companies, ad agencies, and content marketers lie in technology or content? (Continued from page 29)

### Shiny boxes sell faster

Technology for content is packaging, which can be visually appealing, convenient, and useful. If anything, it allows those who are bad at content, but good at gaming the system, to float the lousy content to the top, and pile on lots of it. Both owners of the systems being gamed, and increasingly [incredulous consumers](#), are wising up to the games. Just as Mother Goose, or Honest Abe, or Santa Claus (I am sure it was one of these three) has taught us, it is what's on the inside that counts.

How did we get into this predicament in the first place? Until the last decade of the 20th century, owning publishing technology to a large extent had meant controlling the content. The technology was localized, prohibitively expensive, and required extensive training. Furthermore, distribution channels also added barriers to entry.

In digital media, it's almost exactly the opposite. The technology is largely distributed and free to users, requires little or no expertise, and provides access to billions of potential readers. However, this blog post is not about the [paradigm shift in the publishing industry](#). The argument that Dan and I got into centered around the question of whether publishers (whether it's their core business or part of marketing strategy) need to focus more resources on the quality of their content or on the technology. It's not a rhetorical question, with the obvious answer "Both."

What I'd like to communicate is that while technology certainly helps efficiently deliver and format content, it inevitably becomes a commodity. It does so at an increasing rate, as the proliferation of both new technologies and best practices associated with them

(also traveling down the same content channels) is becoming near-instant. In other words, you need technology to compete, but it's not enough to win.

### Commoditization

There is a good parallel in SEO. For a good decade, the "secrets" behind SEO were known only to the initiated few. With search engine technology in its early stages, there were plenty of opportunities to exploit it, increasing the SERP position or even density of content that was less useful or relevant to the user than its rank implied.

Those practices were used both for spamming the searchers and for increasing the ranking of legitimately relevant content—even the "good" content had to employ black hat techniques to rise above the junk. This cat-and-mouse game is ongoing, but is fought more with resources than with unique know-how.

SEO has become to a large extent a commodity – a must-have, but not sufficient to beat your competition. Various technological tools make SEO management more efficient, but that enabling aspect doesn't transpose well to content – we have a ways to go before typing becomes obsolete.<sup>1</sup>

### The other spam

The SEO arms race had led to an explosion in the demand for writers, reaching so far as to create an entire industry of bloggers-for-hire and, at a lower quality level, of blog commenters for hire. The search technology

1. I can't lose here—either I am wrong and we shortly cross into a new realm, where our thoughts are immediately checked for spelling errors and patriotism, and committed to a file, or otherwise my witty remark will live on for a few centuries... like a speck of ocean sand.

that was supposed to help us focus in on what we need has been responsible for an avalanche of garbage that has flooded the Internet.

However, just as spam didn't eliminate email as an efficient communication medium, this junk won't eliminate the Web as the primary content platform. With spam, both technology and human auditing combined to continuously update white- and black list databases, as well as to improve algorithms to recognize spam that passes the latter. Finally, better-late-than-never legal restrictions took accountability to the next level.



So how are things looking for the content providers out there? Certainly the publishing industry is yet to find itself in the digital medium. I am anxiously awaiting how [The Times](#) and others in the newsprint industry will standardize a profitable way to monetize their online presence. I expect independent content providers are going to settle into their own profitable niches (whether combining forces to establish competing brands or continuing on their own), while others will simply drop off the radar, as they realize that the time they've

spent ranting on blogs just doesn't pay the bills.

Lawmakers might get involved to put a leash on content mills because they reek of mendacity, if not false advertising and conspiracy to commit fraud. The consumer is ultimately going to be the judge of quality, and technology is only going to be important in the sense that, for the consumer to judge, the consumer has to see the content first.

Bottom line: technology delivers, but content quality sells.

### Content quality ROI

Now let's get to the question the ROI-driven marketer is really concerned with: How should I invest my resources in a content-driven world?

- **Use technology, but don't rely on it to write the content for you.** – Invest in research and editorial production and then do the same market research you would do in your product development cycle: understand who your audience [market] is, understand what information [product] needs they have, what communication and reading tools they prefer.

Use what you know already: the abundance of content has made us picky, so you cannot rely on brand name (unless you are Barron's or The Economist) to get your content read. Just as we talk about [conversion on landing pages](#), with content you need to provide a reason for your audience to give you their time. In other words, you need to "sell" your content. Powerful headlines and short summaries require little effort from your readers, but can efficiently trigger a decision to read on.

- **Quality is essential, both in these summaries and in the content that follows.** – You can fool your readers once with a promise in the headline that doesn't deliver, but you will sacrifice return visits and/or



email subscribers. This is another huge problem with thinking that technology can help you by getting your content in front of a large audience: if the content is poor, your one exposure will not likely net any results.

This strategy works well for fly-by-night affiliate marketing schemes, where the supply of unsophisticated site visitors is effectively unlimited for the duration of the enterprise. However, if you are a respectable business, especially in B2B, losing potential customers with poor content is not an option. It noticeably reduces your addressable market size.

- **Find out where the conversation on your topic is taking place and engage with your audience.** – The latter statement is not meant to guide your social media strategy – it’s far too trite for that. My point is that social media will help you get your content in front of people that are already interested in the topic, and likely have both ability and desire to provide meaningful feedback and pass it on to others. If you have quality content, then even if they may disagree with your particular message, it will generate discussion resulting in additional exposure (earned media). Obviously, feedback you receive becomes an essential part of your content “product development” cycle.
- **Take stock of your resources and make decisions about scope.** – Today, there are many technologies to help search, read, and store content. Ultimately, the same folks that deal with communication technology in your organization (whether in Marketing, PR, or IT) need to continue doing so. They can help you package, deliver, and market your content

on the new platforms, test their performance, and ultimately advise the ideal channel mix. Engage only in the content channels you can afford to support. Spreading yourself too thin may gain short-term exposure at the expense of the brand. Whatever content categories you choose to maintain, ensure that you have dedicated resources, whether in-house or outside. Having a company blog can be a powerful tool for maintaining communication with your market, but a poorly maintained blog can reduce the credibility of the core offer. If you do have a blog, it doesn’t mean that you can automatically re-package the content for other channels – quality control must be maintained in transit. The content you produce, whether as part of your marketing strategy or as your core business, is going to be a part of your brand. Its quality can either increase or decrease your brand equity. Technology you use to deliver it has little to do it.

So tweet and comment about this issue and let us know which you think is more important – content or technology. And, if in the process, you think I’m right and Dan’s wrong, well...that sounds like the highest-quality content to me.

## Related Resources

[Google Caffeine: Use social media and quality content to get a jolt for your site](#)

[Marketing Leader’s Perspective: No cogs allowed in social media and content marketing](#)

[Search Marketing: Tips on mastering the latest innovations in this mature category](#)

Photo by: [TheGiantVermin](#)

## Debate Team (Part 2): Does the future of media companies, ad agencies, and content marketers lie in technology or content? (Continued from page 29)

find quality content; they help you find content that is good at gaming the system. To see why, let's take a trip in the Wayback Machine...

### The first few thousand years of content

From "Lothar hunt well" to "And that's the way it was," great content has always been controlled by technology. In those days, content creation was limited to those that had access to the means of production – whether that be a cave and some pine tar, basic literacy and a quill pen, Guttenberg's famed press, or a contract with CBS.

This was both a blessing and a curse, of course. We were not bombarded by endless Facebook status updates about the joy of eating grilled cheese sandwiches. At the same time, content was limited to what people with money could sell to an audience with at least some critical mass.

### Creative destruction of creative endeavors

While we all know what has happened over the past few decades it's still worth asking the question...what the heck just happened? Because it has happened so darned fast. As Joseph Schumpeter said, "Economic progress, in capitalist society, means turmoil."

And turmoil is the right word. While Johann Gutenberg's technology reigned supreme for hundreds of years, content distribution technology is lucky to last longer than Steve Guttenberg on "Dancing with the Stars." Or even the viability of the previous reference. (Gutten who?)

Yet herein lies the opportunity. Throughout history, as one technology has overtaken the next, the content producers that have survived

and thrived are not those that produced the best content, but rather were the most technologically savvy. To annotate Marshall McLuhan, "The technological medium is the message."



### From "All the News That's Fit to Print" to "Pretty Much Anything that Pops in my Head"

I started this post by saying, great content is everywhere. Of course, so is schlock. So in my argument for the centrality of technology for any content-generating company, let me make clear that content is still king. You need (to hire or be) a top-notch writer who provides compelling content.

But that's just the beginning. Without savvy use of technology, that king has no empire over which to rule. In the music industry, savvy bands have adapted by going from producing albums to producing singles (Radiohead even made money by giving the music away for free).

The smart advertising agencies look past the thirty-second ad and big media commissions to integrated brand promotion – like Sally

Hogshead creating a tropical island next to Manhattan's Hudson River to generate \$30 million of free publicity for the Fine Living Network. And the savvy media companies are already taking advantage of Apple's iPad by developing content specifically for it. (Why must a sitcom that tells a story in three minutes and 12 second be forced to fit into a 22-minute window?)

## More news, still paper

This doesn't mean old media is dead. It means the launch of smart media. A traditional newspaper might be a great avenue for serious, in-depth analyses of news and business for high-net worth individuals. Yet that organization can repackaging that same content in a different way with opinion pieces posted on a community-based website that drives sharing and comments among a tech-savvy, middle-income audience.

So don't just rely on creating killer content for everything. Leverage technology:

- **Shop around** – Find the right technology to bring that great content to your audience – or as I said so flippantly before – make sure you're gaming the system to get your killer content seen. I'm not going to give you specific advice here because it depends so heavily on your audience and objective and I'd be in way above my head. But there are a slew of resources on this subject – from niche magazines to entire Internet communities. Find your golden apple. Or perhaps red Apple iPod nano.
- **Find 12 degrees of content reuse** – Use the same piece in 12 different ways using many different technologies to reach people the way they want to be reached. Twelve, you say? How did you come up with that number? Extensive

MarketingExperiments research? No, I just randomly pulled it out of my head (I like eggs). But to show you how possible it is, let's see if I can come up with 12 possibilities for reuse right here and now.



Let's say you're an environmental organization and you interview the CEO of a new, organic laundry detergent company. You could post that interview to your website in the "news" section (1), include a quick synopsis in your email newsletter (2), include extra questions that didn't make it into the official article on your blog (3), tweet the biggest lesson learned from the interview (4), include the interview in a quarterly printed newsletter you send to major donors and prospects (5), make a [Scribd](#) or [Issuu](#) version of that newsletter so everyone else can read it on their mobile device (6), podcast (7) and YouTube (8) recordings of the interview, start a discussion around the interview's subjects on Facebook (9), add the audio files to the iPhone app that updates all of your members to the latest news (10), turn the interview into a press release that you distribute to broadcast and print media (11), and tell Kevin Bacon about it (12).

- **Tie it all together** – I use the above example part tongue-in-cheek, part seriously. With so many free and

low-cost opportunities (not counting man hours, of course), it can certainly pay off to just throw your content onto as many technological media platforms as you can find and see what sticks.

The next level is to hone your use of different technologies into one go-to-market plan that guides your audience from capture to conversion using your content marketing funnel. For example, you might tweet a link to a blog post that promotes a website that has a sales message (keeping a close eye on the metrics all the way).

By doing so, you're leveraging each technology for what it does best. Twitter offers a very low level of engagement but is a great way to promote content and grab new eyeballs. A blog offers a medium level of engagement and provides the chance to tell enough of a story to convince someone to invest an hour with you for a webinar. In that hour, you can provide valuable content to your audience that also illustrates your value proposition and drives prospective customers to the ultimate sales message – perhaps a phone call to a sales rep.

- Experiment. Refine. Experiment some more. – Perhaps you can tell from our name, but we're into this kind of thing. Technology brings opportunity. And it also tends to bring real-time, measurable information. So run tests and see what works best for your audience. This is the excitement of a technology-centric future. There is not necessarily one right answer. I started my career writing print ads that ran in USA Today and Wall Street Journal. Now I'm writing blogs. Same skills...but finding the right use for them. Through testing, you can take the same basic content and gain measurable results to help you guide your investments based on ROI...not on some blog post some guy wrote.

This blog post would have never worked in a newsprint forum. It's meant to be shared, reused, and built upon by the readers. So take advantage of the technology you have in your

hands. Tweet and [comment](#) about this post. And show Boris, once and for all, that I'm right and he's wrong.

#### Related Resources:

[Debate Team \(Part 1\): Does the future of media companies, ad agencies, and content marketers lie in technology or content?](#)

[Online Marketing Optimization Technology: We have ways of making technology talk, Mr. Bond](#)

[Technology Blind Spots](#)



# Becoming An Entrepreneur:

## Factors to consider when launching an Internet-based startup business



by Bob Kemper,  
Director of Sciences  
July 12, 2010

*EDITOR'S NOTE: Historically, at the center of the trough in an economic recession, extended unemployment serves as a catalyst for starting small businesses. Entrepreneurship can be very appealing, with dollar signs popping in your eyes as you think of the Google/Facebook/Your Next Company Here billionaires.*

*Yet while you might be highly skilled at your own profession, being the boss means so much more than knowing how to do what you do well. From my own (extremely minor) foray(s) into entrepreneurship, let me assure you the hardest part is the required intense focus on things you really don't care about.*

*When considering starting a business you're likely already focused on the critical micro elements (your skillsets, potential customers you may know, a snazzy logo) and don't have the resources for an on-staff Economist/Researcher. So below are a few things this Editor really doesn't care about, but you should if you're thinking about making that leap.*

*Director of Sciences Bob Kemper was kind enough to share some observations about recent and emerging legislative, economic and societal trends that, though they're broad-ranging, will have a disproportionate impact on the success of smaller businesses and start-ups.*

I've spent a little time over the last few months researching and reflecting on recent events and changes in the macroeconomic and societal environment, which led me to consider what they might mean to a small Internet-based business or to someone considering starting one.



I'll begin with an observation and statement of principle that will give some context to the comments that follow...

The list of key (internal) factors essential to starting and running a successful online business is long—as is the set books and other resources that enumerate them. Yet, even the best-of-the-best at those remains subject to a host of uncontrollable factors that, if unseen or unheeded, could undo the business. From a law change at the capital that cuts your legs out overnight to the slow suffocation of an emerging trend in technology or consumer sentiment, these external threats are real and tangible.

It's to those same factors though that our iconic Internet startups owe their very existence. The first century Roman philosopher and politician Seneca quipped that "Luck is what happens when preparation

meets opportunity.” From Microsoft to Google to Twitter, the convergence of exceptional internal capabilities (preparation) and a favorable external environment (opportunity) led each to an epic run of good luck.

Following are a few currently relevant external factors that have smiled on the likes of Gates, Brin, Dorsey, et al., and that could be sources of threat or opportunity for any who’d seek to emulate their good fortunes.

### ECONOMIC

The worldwide economic meltdown that began in the Fall of 2007 and accelerated through 2008, culminating in the collapse of U.S. Real Estate prices and serial liquidity crises in the U.S. and abroad among lenders and investors, resulted in a deep and extended recession and in the tightest credit and investment capital markets in more than 80 years.

While some sectors of the economy have begun to show signs of recovery, investors remain decidedly cautious and investment risk premiums remain historically high—particularly for small-cap and privately held companies. Even so, as credit and capital begin to loosen, the sectors most likely to open up first are those which historically thrive in a down economy and—because of the unique characteristics of this recession—those *least dependent upon Real Estate and commercial property values*.

**Key Question:** Internet-oriented services business score well on the first factor, so the second factor will likely be your focus. Which sector(s) will you serve?

### TECHNOLOGICAL

During the last several years, there have been significant advancements in both website development tools and protocols, and in database and application development

platforms – both of which lend themselves to rapid application development and deployment. This trend favors both companies that are agile in decision making and those that employ full-time, dedicated technical professionals.

**Key Question:** Your small size will make you agile, but do you have the resources to hire, recruit, and retain technical professionals? If not, how will you compensate (outsourcing, etc)?

### POLITICAL/LEGAL

The combination of a justifiably suspicious consumer population and the increasingly fervent public debate over [personal privacy](#), spurred on by a seemingly constant stream of high-profile news stories exposing both the intentional misuse of, and the accidental disclosure of private information resulting from corporate security breaches, has led to a broad array of both federal and local legislative proposals seeking to limit and to regulate the collection and use of personally identifying information both in the U.S. and abroad.

In just the last several years, a host of laws regulating the collection and use of personally identifying information over the Internet have been enacted, including the federal Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA)<sup>1</sup>, the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA)<sup>2</sup>, the USA Patriot Act of 2001<sup>3</sup>, the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)<sup>4</sup>, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978

1. U.S. federal Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA): 2006. (18 USC § 2511)
2. U.S. Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA): 1998. (15 U.S.C. 6501 or 16 C.F.R §312) – [FTC link](#)
3. USA Patriot Act of 2001 ([H.R. 3162 – USA PATRIOT ACT](#))
4. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). 1996, 2005. ([H.R.3103.ENR](#))



– Amendments Act of 2008 (FISA)<sup>5</sup> and many similar laws enacted by states, most pertaining to the practices and policies of government and employers in their jurisdiction.

In addition, the rate of new complaints and calls for further regulatory action continues to rise<sup>6</sup>. A thorough and continually updated treatment of Internet privacy and associated federal, state and international laws can be found in the [Privacy Rights Clearinghouse's](#) topical "fact sheet" titled "[Fact Sheet 18: Privacy and the Internet: Traveling in Cyberspace Safely](#)".

Add to this already strong momentum toward increased regulatory restrictions on Internet marketing practices, the intentions of the present White House administration – both stated and implicit – toward greater government regulation and oversight, and ***it should be presumed that some of the customer segmentation and targeting methods that have recently emerged may soon be significantly restricted – or even prohibited – by federal law as unfair or unduly invasive of personal privacy.***

**Key Question:** Data is the lifeblood of the evidence-based Internet marketer, so this will likely be a necessary consideration. What strategic alternatives do you have for collecting and using information about customers – both to match them with potential partners, and also to other products and services that may be ideally suited their needs and their motivations?

**SOCIO-CULTURAL** In the last ten years, the relative scope and volume of information available online has grown explosively – driven primarily by the emergence of enormous and pervasive search networks, and global

5. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act – Amendments Act of 2008 ([H.R.6304 – FISA Amendments Act of 2008](#))
6. Full list of FTC's enforcement actions under children's privacy laws ([FTC Internet privacy enforcement actions](#))

information repositories such as Google and Wikipedia.

The corresponding trajectory toward an "oligopolical" – and plausibly a monopolistic – market profile within the coming two-to-five years represents a significant threat not only to the other competing search networks, but also to advertisers.

For example, Hitwise reported in March 2009<sup>7</sup> that Google's market share in the U.S. was 72.11% in February 2009, with Yahoo Search, MSN Search and Ask.com receiving 17.04%, 5.56% and 3.74% respectively. Further, it reported that these market share figures were down from the same period the prior year by -17%, -20% and -10% respectively.

On the international level, the market share imbalance may be even greater. A report from the [AT Internet Institute](#) indicates that Google's market share in France for February 2009 exceeded 91.2%, and comScore [reported](#) Google's March 2009 market share in Belgium as 96.00%, with Yahoo and Live Search accounting for the bulk of the remaining 4%.

Add to this somewhat alarming state of the competitive search market, the staggering level of investment by Google in both hardening its existing core of dominance and in aggressively expanding into other loosely-related markets traditionally led by others – such as the Internet Web browser (Google Chrome), global mapping and geo-location based search services (Google Maps / Google Earth) and office productivity applications (Google Calendar / Google Docs), let alone entertainment, social media, mobile device apps, and photo-sharing spaces (YouTube, Google Wave, et al., Android, and Picasa Web Albums respectively) – and one might conclude that a proportional investment in anti-trust attorneys should round out their growth strategy.

7. Google's Market Share in Your Country – 2009-03 ([googlesystem.blogspot.com](#))



While the growing imbalance in relative market share among the search networks is a potential source of vulnerability for all online advertisers, those businesses that currently depend almost exclusively upon Natural Search (SEO), may be disproportionately at risk. That is, as Google continues to expand into an increasingly broad range of non-search-specific services, it will simultaneously begin to compete directly against an ever-increasing proportion of its advertisers.

Since Google is a Ninja master of profit-maximization, the second to lose among Google's field of new competitors in a given market would "naturally" be those who are already paying them the least for favorable ad placement – i.e., right behind those who are not paying them at all (for SEO traffic).

Key Question: Is your business model centered around organic search traffic from Google? What other options might you have should this develop into a strategic threat?

## DRIVING FORCES

If you are considering a business that will rely on Internet marketing to a large extent, keep these overall driving forces in mind:

- The well-established and accelerating trend of consumers to research alternatives and to "shop" for solutions over the Internet.
- The increasingly ubiquitous access of consumers to broadband access to the Internet.
- The consolidation of the search network market and the consequent concentration of available traffic among fewer suppliers – specifically, the emergence of Google as the dominant supplier of online search traffic.
- The well-established and growing trend of Google broadening and diversifying its range of services such that it increasingly competes directly against its online search advertiser/customers.

## Related Resources

[Domain/Product Name Testing: Our testing demonstrated that choosing product, service, or domain names based on what you "like" can cost you dearly](#)

[Offer Pricing: Literature Review](#)

[Online Competitive Analysis Tested](#)

Photo Attribution: [dierken](#)



# Marketing Leader's Perspective: No cogs allowed in social media and content marketing



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director  
of Editorial Content

July 7, 2010

If you lead a team of marketers, you likely have a creative bunch. People who, ideally, have a lot of passion about what they do – the key ingredient for successful social media and content marketing.

But that natural passion can easily get buried under layers of indiscernible corporate fiat. So how do you help your team break free of the stultifying grind that makes the average enterprise run? How do you make sure they don't just feel like a cog in the wheel mindlessly hewing to corporate policy and filling spreadsheets all day?

To find out, I talked to [Brian Carroll](#), the CEO of [InTouch](#) (our sister company). While you might know Brian as the guy when it comes to lead generation and lead nurturing for complex sales, he made a very interesting comment on a [recent blog post I wrote with Andy Mott about marketing silos](#).

Brian talked about the important role heart and passion (should) play in our job as marketers. This intrigued me. I don't often hear anyone talk about marketing this way. So I gave him a call. Here's an excerpt from our conversation...

**“Passion” and “heart.” Those aren't words I often hear associated with “job,” at least not “marketing job.” How do you instill passion in a company, in a marketing department?**

*Brian Carroll:* The most important thing is clarity about your values and vision. [Clarity trumps persuasion](#). Do people understand what your company stands for? What difference do they make? And how do they fit into the big picture? How are they integral parts in making that difference?

Unless the people who do your marketing, advertising, sales and public relations are passionate about their roles, it's nearly impossible for them to acquire and grow customer relationships.

**What role does fear play in a passionate company?**

*BC:* Some people are motivated by the things they don't want to have happen – lack of job, loss of lifestyle, family stress. When that's the primary thing that drives you, that is a bad thing.

But fear can play an important role. Knowing that revenue is needed when people are invested in your company, for example, certainly helps drive people. As long as there is transparency and clarity around goals and culture, fear can be a positive motivator.

For example, we had someone who was written up and was quickly moving down the path to getting fired. That fear helped send him down a positive path of transformation, and two years later that person won the award for being the most valuable employee in our company.

Of course, prolonged fear is bad. It means something is wrong. And you must balance fear as a motivator with reward.

**How do you do that?**

*BC:* It comes down to two things – the organization and the individual.

As individuals, we may have all the potential in the world, but it doesn't matter if we're not willing to do the difficult, mundane, repetitive things that are essential to success. Only then

can we focus on the fun, enlightening things that we really have a passion for. These things aren't going to make the impact they could without doing our homework, getting those mundane yet essential tasks done right.

That's where the heart comes into play. If someone loses heart and only has fear as a motivator, they are going to do just enough to get along at this particular moment.

Every marketer has a huge opportunity in the company they work for. They have the chance to do things differently, look outside themselves and do something that's never been done to grow and acquire customers. To be that representative presentation to the world about what their company is, what it stands for, and why it matters.

But you need passion for that. And if you don't have it, you may need to manage up. Seek out your leaders and pull that clarity of purpose out of them. Find out what's important to them, what their goals are, and figure out how it can mesh with what matters to you.

**I imagine that clarity can be easier to obtain in a sales organization if you're, say, a quota-carrying rep or a sales leader with a specific budget to make. But marketing, advertising, these disciplines can be a little more fuzzy. At MarketingExperiments, one way we advise marketers to confront this challenge is with testing, which offers verifiable proof of impact to the bottom line. What else can marketers do?**

*BC:* Testing is a great example, especially because it often shows improvement, that you're making things better.

I think the metrics that you use are also important. In B2B, our goal is to help the sales team sell. Marketing can be run like sales to measure leads generated and track our pipeline contribution with lead-to-pipeline conversion rates.

B2C marketers can have an even easier time proving their value. It is often a more transactional sale; there is not a series of steps between the marketer and the purchase. Whether it's ecommerce, or bar codes at a bricks and mortar retailer, or a service, the buying process is simpler. So you can usually look at metrics beyond just "activity" (like traffic) to key numbers like expense-to-revenue and time-to-revenue ratios.



Now I'm not trying to dismiss brand, but it helps to have more passion for what you do when you get a clear understanding, and provide key business leaders a clear understanding, of the contribution you're making.

Of course, this isn't news. It's a constant struggle in marketing to be seen as a revenue center, not just an expense. But, remember, the onus lies on you to make that happen. Executives now often manage by spreadsheet out of necessity. So make sure you can prove contribution to revenue and sales so they (and you) understand the real value you're bringing with hard metrics...especially in a down economy.

**So part of establishing a culture of passion is having clarity around hard performance targets, but not everything is revenue driven.**



BC: That's true. And there's more to a job than just the paycheck. At InTouch, we give awards as well. Just the recognition from peers and leaders can make a big difference to feeling appreciated and feeling like you make a difference.

We have awards like Nurturer of the Month, Specialist of the Month, the Executive Mission Award, and awards that employees can give to each other. We identify and highlight what contributions lead to success based on our mission and our promise to our clients.

From an employee standpoint, they get a clear scorecard of what success looks like. When someone's doing a good job, they need to be recognized. In some companies that have a fear-based culture, managing is almost like a game of Whack-a-Mole – the manager is just trying to catch people doing something wrong.

In addition, employees can give awards to each other, to build up camaraderie and teamwork.

At the heart of this, everybody wants to know "I am making a difference...my contribution matters." That's the whole point.

**We've focused on success, but what about a culture of failure? How do you build a system where failure is OK? As Thomas Edison once said, "Why, I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." In marketing, and really any discipline that thrives on motivation, if you're going to truly drive success you have to stick your neck out there and take a chance.**

BC: Absolutely. Everyone should stretch. And when you do that, mistakes will be made.

So you need to balance things. You want everyone asking "What can I do to improve this?" but you can't abandon the tried and true tactics that work.

I like to use the analogy of a high-quality, well-balanced mutual fund. A good mutual fund seeks to balance high risk with steady performance. Generally speaking, you can stretch and take some risks, but if you put all your eggs in that basket, and then something bad happens, you're really in trouble.

As marketers, let's look at our entire portfolio and categorize what is high risk versus what is relatively safe on the path to making things better. Based on that, you'll know just how much you can let your team take a chance in certain areas, while ensuring you have a reliable base of execution that is always there for you.

Another thing, that you mentioned earlier, is to test. That way, you learn what works and what doesn't before betting a sizable chunk of your marketing budget on it.

**And, of course, we're not just marketers. We're people, too. How do you bring, and perhaps channel, personal passions in the workplace? What about cause-related marketing?**

BC: People need to know, at the end of the day, that what they're contributing to does other kinds of good for their community or for society at large. And there are a number of big brands and small companies who get that, where it's not just about profit.

The workforce has changed, and people under 45 or so need to know that what they're doing is making an impact. It's not all about "me."

So it's important to connect them with the difference they make. And that isn't just at a company-wide level, it's at an individual level as well, allocating funds or time. For example, lawyers who do pro bono work or sponsoring an employee in a cancer walk.

Companies need to welcome that and give permission to do that. If you sponsor something as a company, great. But it's better

to have the company as well as employees doing things, so you empower people on a collective and individual basis. I'm all for profit, but the whole point is to make a difference.

**Once you have a passionate marketing department and a passionate workforce, social media and content marketing seem like great ways to channel that passion.**

*BC:* And this is a place where small companies often have a huge advantage. They don't need to have the established rules of a big, publicly traded company has or a company in a heavily regulated industry like health care or telecommunications. In any company, there are some things that people can't say, but in general smaller groups can be more open and transparent.

But I don't want to discourage the big companies. In [my book](#), I took a look at Sun Microsystems before it was acquired by Oracle. It had about 2,500 blogs from employees, including [Jonathan Schwartz](#) (the President and CEO at the time).

Whether large or small, most companies have a few passionate employee advocates using social media. But, especially in large companies, there is often an important element that is missing. Individuals want to know, "What can I do to make a difference using social media?"

The answer is simple – be yourself. Share your individual passions. Don't make it just another corporate mouthpiece. Social media should be about who you are as much as about the company or brand you work for. Distinction is everything.

Because, I've got news for you, even in a large company "you're already self employed." Don't just take it from me, that is [a direct quote from Seth Godin](#).

**How does thinking of myself as self-employed affect how I use social media and content marketing?**

*BC:* My point is, every marketer has a personal brand in addition to your company's brand. Don't just look at yourself as some cog in a big company.

Now don't go too far. We all know the story of someone who lost his job by saying the wrong thing on social media. And your boss and peers are listening...or will be soon. So pretend your boss is standing next to you when you're typing.

Thanks to the prevalence of the Internet in general and social media in particular, every brand, both personal and corporate is held accountable for all of our actions. So in some ways, reputation has become more important than brand. Customers and employers will find out about you.

So put yourself out there. Share your heart and passion and the greatness of what you have to offer. But be [transparent](#). After all, the World (Wide Web) is watching.

## Related Resources

[Holistic Marketing Optimization: What's more likely to show up on Twitter?](#)

[Favorite Industry Blogs and Websites: The Romeo and Juliet of the MarketingExperiments community share the love](#)

[Resources on Transparent Marketing: How to earn the trust of a skeptical consumer](#)

*Photo Attribution:* [Elsie esq.](#)



# Marketing Career: Can you explain your job to a six-year-old?



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director of  
Editorial Content

September 27, 2010

“What’s your job, daddy?” When asked that question, do you have an answer? Essentially, what’s the elevator pitch for your job? And, as Denzel Washington says in “Philadelphia,” “Explain this to me like I’m a six-year-old.”

A laser-like, compelling answer to the essential question of “What do you do?” has never been more important. I’m not going to quote grim statistics about the current economic situation, but I think we can all see the value in being able to clearly articulate why you should stay on (or be added to) the payroll.

The testing-optimization cycle offers strong, numerical proof of your value to an organization. After all, you’re essentially gaining metrics showing how you’ve improved your company. But [sometimes numbers aren’t enough](#).

And in marketing, it can be difficult to clearly articulate what we do. This was brought into stark contrast for me when I spoke at my daughter’s kindergarten class on career day (the very definition of a tough crowd). It didn’t bother me when the kids were clearly more impressed with the Navy aviator (as “Danger Zone” played through my head), but when they were more impressed with (or at least better understood) the podiatrist, well... that hurt worse than plantar fasciitis.



## Marketer, sell thyself

One of the most important products we will ever have to sell in our careers is ourselves. Yet, it is also the most daunting. So here’s my idea for you today...if you can sell a six-year-old, you can sell a CEO. To help prove your value to your current or future company, I suggest you:

- **Determine how you help that organization achieve *its* goals (your goals are meaningless)** – for a business, that’s probably a bottom-line number. For a nonprofit, making the world a better place? The point is, goals you set for yourself (increase word-of-mouth) are meaningless, you must show how they fit into goals that really matter to the organization (increase word-of-mouth to drive an incremental 10% growth in subscription revenue).

- **Back it up with hard evidence** – That hard evidence is likely a number. If you're involved in the testing-optimization cycle, this task will likely be easier. If not, hopefully you're measuring your performance in some other quantitative matter. Either way, metrics matter. And presented correctly, they can be very compelling. And now for that "and presented correctly" part...
- **Don't waste their time** – Look, I'm a little sensitive to this last part because I'm currently hiring for a few openings (if you know good people, point them to our [careers page](#)). If you're trying to get a job that involves marketing, show the hiring manager how well you market yourself. If you have a job, you need to do a little internal selling. I know a manager who would receive 30-page reports, and say, "I don't need 30 pages. I don't have time for 30 pages. Give me one page that tells me everything I need to know."

To that end, I present you this challenge – write a children's book that describes your job. Read it to a six-year-old you know. Gauge their reaction. Repeat. Refine.

It seems like a crazy exercise, but children will freely share unfiltered opinions, have zero patience, and you must grab their attention with something shiny or you will lose them for good. Sound like any business leaders you know? (hint, hint, shiny = profit)

In addition, sharing the value of the career you've chosen to invest your life energy in just flat out makes you a good dad/mom/uncle/aunt/etc. They're young. Give them those wide eyes. Show them that the future is bright. And illustrate the value of hard work in an endeavor worth pursuing.

To help you get started, I've tried this ridiculous exercise myself. I hope this helps on your career journey. If not, at least you can print it out to your kids and maybe they'll finally understand exactly what it is you do, even if you're not a Navy pilot...or podiatrist.

### THE BIG TEST: LPO for little ones

Rebecca and Liam work in Web marketing. While a carpenter has a hammer and a fireman has a hose, their tool is called a web site.

All over the world, people can look at websites on computers. People in Miami and Paris and Jerusalem and Tokyo can all look at the same website at the same time.

But people in Miami and Paris and Jerusalem and Tokyo might not all want the same thing at the same time.

People in Miami might want shorts.

While people in Paris want big coats.

And people in Jerusalem might want sunglasses.



While people in Tokyo want umbrellas.

To help discover what people in Miami and Paris and Jerusalem and Tokyo want on a website, Rebecca and Liam give tests.

Like a book, a website is made up of many pages. Tomorrow, Rebecca and Liam were going to run a test for people in Miami and people in Jerusalem. They had two pages to test... "A" and "B."

"A" had been on the website for a year. "A" was very proud. People all over the world had read "A."

"B" had never been on the website before. "B" was very excited. This was the first chance for "B."

When "A" and "B" heard about the test, they were very nervous. Neither one of them had taken a test before.

So they went to Old Man Homepage. Old Man Homepage was the oldest page on the website. "What if we don't know the answers?" "A" asked. "How can we study?" "B" wanted to know.



Old Man Homepage laughed when he heard the questions. "Oh, little pages, it's not that kind of test. They just want to know what different people like. Just be yourself and you'll do fine."

"A" and "B" couldn't sleep all night. They were still worried. But Old Man Homepage said he had been through many tests, and it only made him better and stronger.

When the big test day arrived, nothing really seemed different. Or felt different. "A" and "B" just went about their day as they usually did. And the next. And the next.

At the end of the week, they learned that they had finished the tests and the results were ready. They were surprised. They hadn't felt a thing.

You see, they didn't even know they were being tested. They had just gone through their day, greeting people from all over the world. And telling them what they had to tell the best they could. As Old Man Homepage had said, they were just being themselves.

Rebecca and Liam told "A" and "B" that they both did very well on the tests. So well, in fact, that they both won. And they both could stay on the website.

"People in Miami learn better from you, 'B,'" Liam said. "But people in Jerusalem learn better from you, 'A,'" Rebecca said. "So you will both stay on the website. And the people from Miami will read only 'B,' and the people in Jerusalem will read only 'A.'"

And so it was. For many years, "A" happily served his fans in Jerusalem. And "B" happily served his in Miami. And the people in Miami were happy, and got to read about their shorts. And the people in Jerusalem got to read about their sunglasses.

*Special thanks to our very own Austin McCraw for help me write the above "children's book." Hey, it's not an easy exercise. Ask for help if you need it.*

## Related Resources

[Marketing Career: How to become an indispensable asset to your company \(even in a bad economy\)](#)

[Landing Page Optimization Certification course](#)

[The Business Case for Testing: How one marketer convinced her business leaders to start testing and drove a 201% gain in the process](#)

*Photo attributions:* [sizumaru](#), [bucklava](#), [ornellaswouldgo](#)

# Dances with Science: Are you better off not A/B testing?

When a news headline contains the word “scientists,” I get warm fuzzies: working routinely on the design of experiments affords me a sense of camaraderie.

Occasionally, the news is disappointing. Not because science failed, but because the scientists employed a questionable design of experiments. When this happens in conversion optimization, the marketer would have been better off employing the infamous “[marketer’s intuition](#)” than testing. Relying on improperly generated test results just creates a false sense of confidence.

I wanted to use a recent news report to illustrate several validity threats that can occur in conversion optimization experiments.

## The Story

The [news story](#) in a nutshell: a team of psychologists from Northumbria University modeled the dance moves of 19 men using featureless computer-generated 3D mannequins, and then asked 35 women to identify the one they found most attractive.

The general concept at first seems plausible— isolate dance moves from other attributes that contribute to a man’s attractiveness (like clothes, facial features, etc.) and compare them to determine which ones are more desirable.

We may similarly want to isolate the layout of a Web page in terms of the number of columns of content to determine which layout converts the best. However, both in studying the attractiveness of dance moves and the performance of a landing page, there are several experimental design factors that need to be considered to make a meaningful result even possible.

## Research Question

In the Northumbria experiment, there were 19 treatments (dance move combinations) and 35 human subjects. There are two implicit assumptions that undermine the validity of the reported discoveries:

- 1) that these 19 men are a good representation of the universe of possible dancing moves, even within one culture, and
- 2) that the dance move preferences of these 35 women are representative of most women.

The first assumption matters only if they attempted to generalize the results of the experiment to all dance styles. If the objective of the experiment were only to determine the best one of the 19, this in itself would not be a problem. When we test several landing page treatments, a valid research question would be something like “Which one of the three layouts produces the highest conversion rate?”—rather than “Which layout is always the best?”

## Selection Effect

With only 35 individuals making all the decisions, it’s intuitive that their preferences should be difficult to extrapolate to the entire population. We know from real-life experience, that people have widely different mating preferences.

Likewise, in landing page testing, it is essential to make sure that the profile of the subjects sampled is both consistent among all of the treatments and representative of the people who will be visiting the site after the test. The story implied that the researchers were using the results of this experiment to advise men on the “better” dance moves. This opens a second sample selection problem: even if



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September 24, 2010

the women in the study did represent the preferences of all women, the aggregate result may not be useful to any one man.

The reason is simple: each man would likely not be interested in attracting the *average* woman—in simplistic terms, he would only be interested in his type. In marketing, we call this [segmentation](#).

This is why when you test your pages, it is critical that you dissect the data by various traffic channels, geography, etc. You may find that Treatment A gives you a 10% lift on weekdays, but underperforms the Control by 50% on weekends. Had you looked only at the aggregate data, you might have concluded that you should keep the Control, whereas the right outcome is to use each version on the days that it performs best.

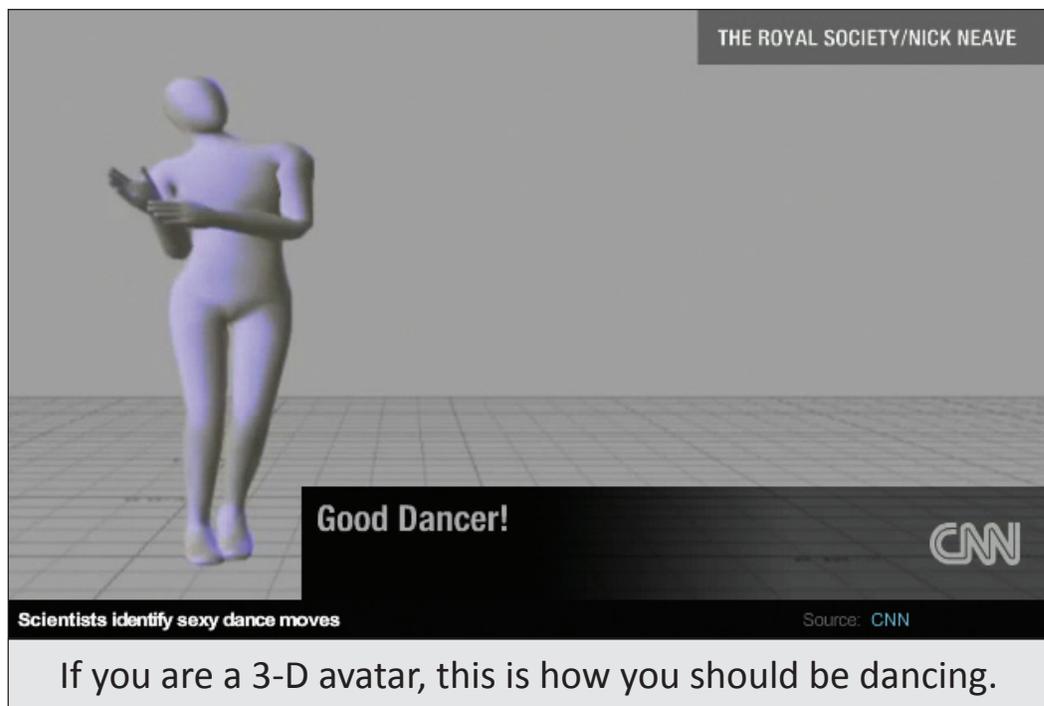
### Multi-variable Dancing

Finally, the Northumbria experiment entirely ignores the interaction between the independent variable they isolated (dance moves) and other variables that have a powerful impact on the dependent variable (attractiveness).

It is easy to imagine that the same set of dance moves can be seen as very attractive on one man, yet very unattractive on another. That is, the very factors that the Northumbria researchers sought to eliminate—by mechanically separating the human physical form from its movements—may, in a very practical sense, be so entangled in the mysterious gestalt of attraction that the removal of either factor makes the results meaningless outside of the 3-D model.

Detecting such things is the purpose of the category of statistics called “factor analysis,” which spans from simple regression (drawing the best “line” through the data) to more sophisticated methods like principal component analysis. It enables you to recognize when your test design doesn’t support your objective.

While [multi-variable testing](#) (MVT) possesses its own set of challenges and constraints, the interaction between variables cannot be ignored when we interpret even single-factor tests. For example, even if a specific headline improved your conversion rate significantly, you will still need to re-test it after any



changes to the body copy or when a different PPC ad sends it traffic.

### Don't Drink and Test

One particular factor, seasonality, is an important issue in optimization testing. Website visitors behave differently at different times of year, days of week, and even times of day (more data for you to use in your segmentation). The study on dance moves ignored a key variable: the passage of time.

While it wasn't reported in the story, I suspect that the study was not conducted at a local nightclub, and the subjects were not already at least a bit tipsy. For studies involving human behavior, environmental and physiological conditions (e.g., blood alcohol level) of the subjects during measurement is essential to the predictiveness of the outcome.

As an apparent fellow scientist, who identified himself only as BuckHippo, [commented](#) on the story, "This study is so flawed. No one dances when they are sober. And when they are drunk dancing, it all looks good ..."

### Related Resources

[MarketingExperiments Methodology](#)

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

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



# Marketing Career: How to become an indispensable asset to your company (even in a bad economy)



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director of  
Editorial Content  
September 27, 2010



From my experience, marketing and advertising jobs always get hit hard when the economy goes down. We aren't directly involved in either "making stuff" or "selling stuff" and are too often seen as...probably the most dreaded word in a bad economy...mere overhead.

Ouch! Hurts...I know. But, as Shakespeare wrote, *"The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, But in ourselves."* Because, much like the old Bard himself, we are master communicators. How do you think he got a few headline shows at The Globe Theatre? Or the thing built at all? Beyond the quality of his work, he had to sell himself in some way at some point.

Call it personal branding. Or perhaps just marketing the marketer. This skill is essential to succeed for any marketer in any company. Since I myself am far from expert at this task, I was quite excited when the [MarketingSherpa "How to Become Indispensable to Your CEO" Special Report](#) came across my desk. (Full disclosure: I oversee editorial content for MarketingSherpa, too, so I might just be a little biased).

Now I had someone to ask these pressing questions. The kind of information I've been wanting to share with this blog audience for quite a while. That person is Kristin Zhivago, the author of that report, a revenue coach to company leaders, and the President of

[Zhivago Management Partners, Inc.](#) A quick plug for Kristin – her clients range from start-ups to Fortune 500 companies, including Dow Jones, IBM, and Johnson & Johnson.

Here's what she had to say...

**First of all, in my career I've worked with both sales and marketing organizations. And when it comes to proving your worth, I've got to say that it seems like sales has it good. The numbers are clear. Marketing always seems to have a tougher time. So how can marketing compete with sales for credit in the eyes of the CEO?**

I'm sorry to say that many CEOs have become discouraged with marketers in the last few years. We all saw it coming, but then it came, and now it is ubiquitous. What happened was most marketers do a great job of "getting things done," while giving short shrift to three key areas that are essential – to their careers and to the company's revenue stream:

- Regularly and personally interviewing customers by phone
- Building measurement into all campaigns
- Forcing themselves to continually learn new technologies.

Some marketers do some of these things, but very few marketers do them all.

**Interviewing customers? Sounds like one way to get on equal footing with sales.**

Interviewing current customers is the most important of these three activities. Without knowing why customers bought, how they bought, and what they think of the product/company after they bought, the marketer is flying blind. The marketer, in fact, has no power. None. He or she will be buffeted about by politics, subjectivity, dominant personalities, CEO pet people and pet projects, marketing myths, method biases, inappropriate strategy that "worked for us in

my last company," and so on.

Marketers who depend on outsiders to gather this information will always be handicapped. There is no substitute for personally interviewing customers – by phone – and asking open-ended questions, such as:

- "What do you think of our company/product?"
- "What problem were you trying to solve when you came to us?"
- "If you were looking for this type of product/service again, what would you type into Google?"
- "What was your buying process for this product/service – what were your steps, who was involved, and what were your concerns?"
- "If you were CEO of our company tomorrow, what's the first thing you would focus on?"
- "What trends do you see in your industry right now?"
- "What's your biggest challenge?"

It's important for the marketer to make these calls personally, to get to know customers as real human beings. It's also important to see this as a conversation – an exchange of ideas – rather than just a survey. Surveys are boring and insulting, and also tend to be driven by "what we already know" rather than "what new things we could be learning."

By the way, if the conversations are each an hour long (quite doable if you make an appointment in advance), after the fifth conversation you will start to see trends, and by the 10th conversation there will be no doubt in your mind about the dynamics driving your market. You will be shocked at the confidence it gives you.

Again, no customer conversations, no power. No credibility. No fun.



**Let's say...just hypothetically...sales is wrong and you're right about an issue. Sales always gets to pull the, "Well I talk to X customers every day, and here's what they have to say..." Interviewing customers will certainly help with that. How else can marketers respond?**

Same exact problem, only manifesting itself in a different way. The problem with salespeople (and I was one, and managed them, for years) is that they pay the most attention to the last person they talked to. It's very rare for a salesperson to be able to see "the big picture," whereas a marketer who has interviewed ten customers will see trends and understand what must be done.

Also, when was the last time you told a salesperson what you were really thinking? No one ever tells a salesperson the truth while the salesperson is selling to them. So the data gathered by the salesperson is inherently – and dangerously – flawed.

It's only *after* the customer has purchased from you that they will tell you what they were thinking as they were going through their buying process. Existing customers have a vested interest in your success (because they've purchased something from you), they are happy to be helpful, it doesn't "cost" them anything to tell you what they were thinking, and they like talking about their thought process.

If the interviews are conducted correctly (something I teach in my upcoming book, *Roadmap to Revenue: How to sell the way your customers want to buy*), essential information is extracted that leads to spot-on strategy.

The next time the salesperson comes into the room saying they talk to customers every day, the marketer can say, "I've

talked to X customers this week/month, and have a report here showing how they perceive us, what they want from us, and how they want to buy from us. It showed me [what we need to do to increase our revenue]."

At the very least, ***the marketer is now on equal footing with the salesperson***, and if the data is organized and analyzed properly, and opportunities are identified and optimized, the salesperson will be completely repositioned (and the marketer will be elevated) in the mind of the CEO. Plus, you can always ask the CEO, when you have a moment alone with him/her, "When was the last time you told a salesperson what you were really thinking?" This will help your CEO see the truth about the "customer insights" coming from salespeople.

**Another challenge I see marketers have is: they aren't on the frontlines delivering the actual product or service for revenue. So in a down economy, the axe always seems to fall harder on those who work in advertising or marketing. How does someone in marketing prove their individual worth when it comes layoff....or, more optimistically, annual review time?**

Yet another way of looking at the same basic problem. Some years ago, I started branding myself as a Revenue Coach, because it was obvious to me that 1) that's what I was doing anyway – helping CEOs increase their revenue and 2) CEOs are really disenchanted with marketing (and sales, too, but less so).

***Marketers have made a fundamental marketing mistake*** – with themselves as the "product." Their first customer is the CEO, because if you can't sell the CEO on doing the right thing, you may as well pack up and go home. Marketers have not



viewed the CEO as their first customer.

For example, marketers should interview their CEO when they take a new job and every six months or so after they take that job. They should ask the CEO what he's concerned about and how he feels about marketing in general. Ask "what's working" and "what's not."

Marketers, working closely with the CEO from day to day, think they know what the CEO is thinking. My experience as a Revenue Coach is that they really don't. Marketers are often missing essential concerns and clues that would come out in an interview meeting.

Asking the CEO to talk about what he/she thinks is working and what's not will give you the insight you need to understand what matters to him/her – and what you can do to meet those needs. Note that I did not say, "find out what matters to him/her so you can successfully pitch your ideas." The goal is to solve the CEO's real revenue problem. The pitching is almost child's play when you're pitching the right solution.

**It's a little ironic that marketers, who can communicate about their brand so well, often have challenges marketing their own efforts in their own organization. When it comes to internal communications, where have you seen marketers fall short? And how can they do a better job at, well, for lack of a better phrase "marketing about marketing?"**

I'm going to say something that will sound really harsh, but it's important for marketers to hear this. If you're selling what the CEO wants to buy, you won't have to go out of your way to promote your accomplishments. Sure, I've always recommended that marketers post/send their latest accomplishments around to everyone every Friday, say, or every two weeks. But if you're bragging about accomplishing things that don't matter much to the CEO, you're actually doing yourself a disservice.

**CEOs are DYING for their marketers to be successful.** If they could see revenue growth as a result of marketing efforts, marketing wouldn't have to worry about its image. Since 1994, my branding mantra has been that "Branding is the promise that you make; your brand is the promise that you keep." The same holds true for marketers. It's not what you say about what you're doing that matters. It's what you're doing – and the results you are getting from your efforts.

Once again, Mrs. Broken Record has to say that if you interview your customers, you will *know* what matters to them, what questions marketing should be answering, what they expect from your company, what they think of your competition, and how they want to buy from you. If you then work hard on bringing that reality back into the company, and using it to create relevant concepts, answers, and buying tools, your company's sales will increase. Marketing won't have to prove anything to anyone. The results will speak for themselves.

If you don't do these things, you will be an example of the definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. If you want to change how someone perceives you, you have to change what you are doing. There is no other way.

**A key buzzphrase lately is "transferable job skills." I've noticed that recently many marketers seem to be opting-out from corporate marketing and using the skills they've picked up to either work with charities or start their own businesses. What transferable skills do you think marketers can gain? And where can that take them? Even for me personally, I think being in this field has helped me communicate better with my wife.**

Marketers can always benefit from two things: learning new technologies (and mastering them) and learning how to create concepts



that clarify and simplify complex products and services. Marketers have earned a reputation for shying away from things that cause your brain to cramp when you try to figure them out.

Over the years, I have forced myself – and I majored in music in college – to actually understand super complex things, like finite element analysis, the behavioral design of integrated circuits, and the entire networking environment, from the local area network to the phone company switching systems. I did this so I'd learn how to organize complex information so that anyone – including a C-level executive who was trying to figure out which one of these types of products/systems to buy – could understand the main elements and decide how they could use those technologies to solve their problems.

A lot of what I've talked about here is focused on B2B, but the same principles apply to consumer products. ***If you can understand something well enough to explain it, in a way that anyone could "get it," then you have learned a valuable skill that will help you in any area of business.*** So much of the work I do – and it is intense, company-changing, revenue-growth work – involves helping companies understand how to explain what they do to their customers, in a way that is customer-centric. This is a much-needed and much-appreciated skill. I should also note that many marketers are dropping out of marketing because they're so frustrated by their status (or lack of it) in the organization, and the complexity of the technical tools they must master now. Some marketers have even told me they are just trying to keep a low profile and get by until they can

retire. How sad...and how dangerous! Many are depending on their stock-based pension plans for retirement, and if the Dow crashes, they're going to have to keep working. Plus, it's not really good for the soul to "give up."

The answer is so simple. Sure, it will require a conscious decision to make a change, and then actually do it. But it is not impossible. Not by a long shot:

- **Get on the phone** – start interviewing customers. Start to KNOW what they want from your company and how they buy.
- **Force yourself to get as savvy about tech as you can** – and NEVER say, "I'm not technical." That's a cop-out. In this day and age, we are ALL technical. Interview technical people. Learn how stuff works. Keep asking questions until you get it.

If you do these two things – interview customers and truly understand technology – every single one of these questions I've just answered wouldn't apply to you. You'd be a vital, valuable, indispensable resource to *any* CEO.

## Related Resources

[MarketingSherpa "How to Become Indispensable to Your CEO" Special Report](#)

[SherpaBlog: Marketing Layoffs – How to Flourish Despite Them](#)

[MarketingExperiments Careers](#)

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# B2B Marketing: On Occam's razor and value propositions

If you're in B2B marketing, chances are you have a complex sale. And I'm not just talking about your sales process. I mean the communication involved to make the sale itself happen – starting with the [value proposition](#). Does it clearly answer this question, "What value does your company provide to your customers?"

Sometimes, the problem with marketers is that we think like marketers. We add [powerful marketing words](#) to everything we write – "New!" "Easy!" "ShamWow!" We want to include every possible feature and function (with no small prodding from product development). We also want to cast a wide net to gain market share with every possible audience segment.

The result can be long and confusing. Because we marketers aren't really trying to make this complexity any clearer, we're trying to make it more compelling. But what if, instead of thinking like a marketer, we thought like scientists?

**"Everything should be made as simple as possible, but no simpler." – Albert Einstein**

Scientists, unlike marketers, are actually trying to understand something – usually something of breathtaking complexity. As Occam's razor loosely states, "...the simplest explanation is usually the correct one."

Now, there are a few caveats here. If you've ever read anything from a scientist, you certainly know that the writing itself isn't simple and clear. But this heuristic does help keep scientists focused when delving into theoretical models.

**Just what the heck does your company do?**

With this in mind, take another look at your value proposition. And remember that all-important word – value.

- Does it clearly communicate what your company does?
- Are you trying to be [persuasive at the expense of clarity](#)?
- Is value to the reader plainly stated?
- Why should anyone care?

Hey, I have a background as a copywriter. So no one appreciates clever wordplay more than yours truly. But as a communications consultant to B2B companies, I've also encountered far too many companies that didn't clearly demonstrate what they do...and certainly not why anyone should part with scarce budget dollars to acquire it.

Crafting a value proposition is tough, and this blog post alone won't help you do it – but if you can clearly communicate with your audience, at the very least you're off to a good start.

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**by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director  
of Editorial Content**

**September 30, 2010**



# **SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director  
of Editorial Content

August 27, 2010

## Local Social Media Marketing: Obama is not the mayor of the White House

I recently found out that [Andy Mott](#) is the Mayor of MarketingExperiments. Which got me thinking...who rules the roost at other austere workplaces according to Foursquare?

Well, it turns out that [Rob R.](#) is the so-called Mayor of the White House. Rob who? I don't know, but clearly not Barack O. So, if the Leader of the Free World can't even be in charge of his own house, how valuable of a technology is this really?

### I don't care where you are

After I found out about his Mayordom, I also learned that Andy is the Mayor of a local Dunkin' Donuts and Chili's. But what do I really learn from this other than that Andy

could be making healthier choices in life than scarfing down Boston Kreme donuts and Baby Back Ribs?

After all, when he checks in somewhere, all I really see is "I'm at BLANK." So how social is Foursquare really?

I'm at MarketingExperiments. <http://4sq.com/vJ1TgL>  
10:20 AM Jul 27th via foursquare

The true power of social media is not that it allows people to be a shill to their friends (Andy ate a donut, and then two of his friends ate a donut, and then four of their friends ate a donut...). Social media, broken down to its essence, is essentially [Transparent Marketing](#) (Continue reading on page 60)



by Andy Mott,  
Senior Manager,  
Research  
Partnerships

August 25, 2010

## Local Social Media Marketing: What's in your pants? Not Foursquare.

So when Daniel Burstein proposed this [oh-so-witty blog debate](#) about Foursquare, the first question I asked him was, "What's in your pants?" Sure enough he whips out his keys and there is a flimsy plastic reward keychain (complete with barcode) for [Native Sun](#), an organic foods market here in Jacksonville.

Carrying around a Native Sun loyalty card while questioning the wisdom of Foursquare is a prime example of how the duality of man is witnessed through marketing. "Your idea is stupid, while mine is smart (yet they are both the same)."



### It's good to be the mayor

Foursquare allows marketers to conduct loyalty programs without having to rely on customers carrying around yet another piece of pocket flair with a bar code. In fact, it's the easiest, most customer-responsive way to have a loyalty program. (Continue reading on page 58)

## Local Social Media Marketing: What's in your pants?

### Not Foursquare. (Continued from page 57)

A good analogy would be a comparison between a pay-per-click (PPC) ad and a TV commercial. A PPC ad gives you continuous, real-time metrics that can be changed to react to new information on the fly. A TV commercial is a great chance to go grab a beer before getting back to the Jaguars game.

In the same vein, with Foursquare you can change your promotions in real time. Perhaps you decide your #1 fan (your "mayor") gets some free food. You can change that overnight to giving a reward for every five times a customer visits your restaurant...or even giving a dollar off for every check in.

Also, how many plastic pieces of junk will Dan carry on his keychain to be rewarded for his loyalty? Since Native Sun was the only card on there, I'm guessing not many.

But man doth not live by (even organic) bread alone. With my iPhone, I check in anywhere using Foursquare and am rewarded for my loyalty. Thus a deeper set of marketers can have a relationship with me than just the local organic grocer Dan carries in his pocket.

#### So I got that goin' for me, which is nice

Using Foursquare at retailers just scratches the surface. Unlike Dan's synthetic keychain, when I say I can check-in anywhere using Foursquare, I really do mean anywhere – no bar code scanner required. This is where the possibilities really start to open up. No longer are loyalty programs only easy to pull off for retailers with inventory management systems.

Say you're a golf course. All you have to do is sign up with Foursquare, and then you can give your mayor a free drink at the 19th hole. Even better – how about a parking space right at the front of the country club? This is another benefit of Foursquare, your customers fight for bragging rights.

#### Let your fingers do the walking

If you're a local marketer, hopefully I've got you salivating already. Now here's the biggest benefit I see – local search. If I'm hungry, I just whip out my iPhone and Foursquare tells me what deals are near me. Hey, a dollar off at Starbucks. Ooh, free chips and salsa at Chili's.

This is a local marketers' dream come true. I remember when running a TV ad for pizza around dinnertime was considered targeted. Foursquare blows the rabbit ears off of that strategy. You are able to target people near your location who are interested in your product. This was unthinkable just a few years ago!

#### Now go and learn

Of course, Foursquare is just starting and there's a lot to learn. I wish we were at the point where we could give you test results. However, we are currently testing with Foursquare and hope to have results to share in the near future.

Oh, and Dan, perhaps you can get Native Sun to fix that pothole for you with some organic gravel. This mayor is out to lunch (and getting some free chips and salsa while I'm out.)

Daniel [shared his opinion of Foursquare](#) on Monday. You've just read what I thought. Now we want to hear what you have to say. [Let us know how you use Foursquare or Groupon](#) for marketing, if you think they have any value, or if you have a better local social media technique. We'll publish the best answers right here on the blog in a future post.

#### Related Resources

[Local Social Media Marketing: Obama is not the mayor of the White House](#)

[Antisocial Media: Social media marketing success does not lie in you](#)

[Social Media Marketing Human Factor: Finding the right person for the job](#)

Photo attribution: [dpstyles™](#)



## Local Social Media Marketing: Obama is not the mayor of the White House (Continued from page 57)

microcast to a highly niche audience – people who care what you have to say.

And the quickest way to turn those people off to caring what their friends and associates have to say is to shill.

Even in a tweet, I learn something about what someone thought of something – the bare minimum essential for communication to actually take place. They liked it. They didn't like it. They ate too much. Something. Not just, "I'm at BLANK."



Beyond that, once the novelty of campaigning against Mayor McCheese wears off, what value is there going to be to the FourSquarers? Essentially, all I'm learning is that someone can be enticed by the potential for a free cup of coffee and a virtual Girl Scout badge to let his friends track him on an odyssey through the strip malls of America.

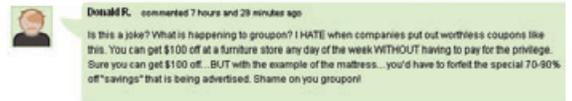
### Get your Groupon

Now, don't get me wrong, I agree that the convergence of Local + Mobile + Social Media = The Next Google. And since the current Google hasn't mastered this equation (Buzz is about as likely to generate any buzz as non-alcoholic beer), the field is wide open to upstarts. To me, the let's-use-incentivized-social-media-to-get-people-into-B&M-stores horse to bet on is Groupon. For one, there is clear appeal to users. Huuuuuuge discounts (the prices are insane). And two, people ACTUALLY SAY SOMETHING about the product or service. Sure, there's some discussion on Foursquare...



But on Groupon, people are actually putting their money where their mouth

is, and making a buying decision, so the information for those interested in making a local purchase (which is, after all, what both Foursquare and Groupon are really about), is much more valuable – a true marketplace of ideas...



### Tips for location-based social media marketing

So if you have a local company or a national brand with bricks and mortar locations, what should you do? Until we release more detailed research into social media marketing, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Transparency** – Something both these services get right is that they are clearly, openly, and honestly promoting local businesses. That's a huge plus considering all the unethical, black hat social media "powerful promoters" currently flooding the digital airwaves with what is essentially spam.

But Groupon gets my vote for that extra layer of transparency. As you can see from the comment above, people debate if these deals are really worth it, and that provides much more value to a local consumer than just knowing your buddy likes to grab a beer at the local pub.

While your company may not be on Foursquare or Groupon yet, keep the value of transparency in mind on Twitter, Facebook, and blogs as well. If you are promoting a product, service, or non-profit, be clear in your intentions. And encourage your followers and customers to be clear as well, [if you incent social media action](#) with a contest, discount, or freebie.

- **Actual content** – Social media is, after all, a form of content marketing. And as the name suggests, content marketing requires actual content.

Groupon does a better job than Foursquare of actually producing content that a local customer would be interested in. Even if I don't purchase a discount through a Groupon, it's interesting to get people's feedback on that product or service.

But content can help you in another way as well. Both of these services, especially Groupon, rely on [incentives](#) to grab attention and drive traffic. And that's a great way to begin your local social media promotions... especially in a down economy. But if that incentive is the only value you offer potential customers, you're going to kill your margins.

Content marketing, through social media or any other media, does an excellent job of building an audience for your offering while strengthening your brand and showing the real value you provide. But to get to that step, you must first provide real, valuable, genuine, authentic content that is valuable to your audience in its own right. In this arena, both Groupon and Foursquare fall short.

- **Actual decisions** – If you're a local business or a national brand with B&M locations, here's the real value of Groupon over Foursquare. Groupon drives actual purchase decisions. Users get a discount, they debate the merit of your product or service, but you're likely getting significant net new traffic to focus on what you have to offer.

The difference is akin to the gap between surveys and real-world testing. With a survey, you're asking people what they might like to buy. With Foursquare, the conversation (if you can call it that) essentially revolves around places people have been and may go.

Groupon, like real-world testing, is focused on actual conversions. The buying process itself. As such, it provides content and value that is aligned with your goals, which is likely not

traffic and badges but rather – real purchases.

Unless some major changes are made, in two years FourSquare will largely be remembered as a lame game you play at recess when you can't find a football.

Oh, and Andy, if you really are the Mayor of MarketingExperiments, when are you going to fix the pothole in front of my office?

*Join us on Wednesday when Andy hopefully answers that question while telling you the value he's discovered in Foursquare from working with some of our enterprise-level Research Partners...*

## Related Resources

[Social Media Measurement: Are you getting value out of Twitter and its peers?](#)

[Facebook Case Study: From 517 to 33,000 fans in two weeks \(plus media coverage\)](#)

[Social Media Marketing in Four Steps](#)



# Social Media and Content Marketing: Don't expect the world to find you



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director of  
Editorial Content

July 23, 2010

*Social media is essential for promoting content marketing. You might have the Mike Tyson of blogs, but without the Don King of social media promoting it, you likely won't be discovered and will never even get to step into the ring to prove your mettle. But together, social media and content marketing drive up demand generation like an Iron Mike uppercut knocks out Michael Spinks.*



**When asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, English mountaineer George Mallory simply stated... "Because it's there." Why did Eloqua start this blog? Simply because it wasn't there?**

*Joe Chernov:* Hall of Fame football coach John Madden once said, "If you have two quarterbacks, you have no quarterback."

We had three quasi-corporate Eloqua blogs – one thought-leader blog, one best practices blog, and one product "how-to" blog – in addition to several executive blogs. Each had its own voice, own look-and-feel, and own (desired) audience.

Early on in my lead communications role, I wanted to blog about the story behind a new social media product we were launching, yet none of the blog owners would accept my "commercial" content. That's when I realized that we needed a central blog, a resource for Eloqua to talk more broadly about the industry, competition, and our plans for the future.

We launched the blog in April, and we've averaged about three posts per week, with the most popular post receiving about 6,000 views. Not a bad start.

Also, it's become an outlet for news commentary by Eloqua. Within 24 hours of Oracle buying a competitor of ours, Eloqua CEO Joe Payne [blogged his analysis](#). He picked up so much press that super-influencer David Meerman Scott himself [blogged about Payne](#) being an example of the importance of executive nimbleness, the value of being fast.

*To get some inside-the-ring advice, I turned to the demand generation experts at one of our strategic partners, Eloqua, to learn how they promote their own offerings.*

*Eloqua CMO Brian Kardon recently created a new role at the company – director of content marketing – and filled it with an old face – [Joe Chernov](#). Joe was the global director of communications and social media at Eloqua – where he was responsible for analyst relations, press relations, and social media.*

*In addition to being the marketing automation company's newly named director of content marketing, Joe co-chairs the Word of Mouth Marketing Association's member ethics panel ... so if you like this interview, please tell three friends.*

**One of your first decisions upon heading up content at Eloqua was to launch Eloqua's new [It's All About Revenue blog](#).**

**Even though Eloqua is an established company, launching a new blog from zero is an ambitious (and daunting) endeavor. How did you use social media to begin to build an audience? And how do you continue to use social media to promote content and deepen that engagement with your audience?**

JC: Here's an unpopular answer: You have to earn it. For the most part, our good posts generate lots of views, our not-so-good posts generate few views. Believe me, I know: I own the "least viewed" post award.

Now this isn't to say you can't effectively promote your own blog. There are a number of practical steps you can take to build an audience:

- **Invite guest contributors or interview known figures in your industry** – in other words, involve people that have a vested interest in promoting their post to their followers.
- **Mix media** – video, illustrations, and graphics tend to be hyper-consumable formats.
- **Don't be afraid to stir the pot** – Sometimes controversy is a good way to attract new visitors. Everyone rubbernecks, even online. But market at the margins. Your central focus should remain on the quality of your content.

**Sometimes content is about clever repurposing, and when you launched this blog you did just that. You took two internal documents and made them public.**

**Let's talk about the first one – "[The Content Grid](#)." This really shows how the blog is the hub of your content marketing, right there in the middle, next to Twitter. But how does this awareness and consideration get turned into revenue? After all, "It's All About Revenue," right?**

JC: We have a long sales cycle. Most prospects that enter our database aren't ready to convert immediately, so we nurture them over time. So it's a little early for us to measure the ROI of this initiative.

But the indicators are strong. For example, we know that visitors to [Eloqua.com](#) who watch a product demo ultimately convert at a much higher rate than those who don't. And we know that a disproportionate number of visitors who discover Eloqua.com through our blog view a product demo. We also know that the It's All About Revenue blog is referring visitors to Eloqua.com at a much higher rate than all of our other blog assets combined. We are confident that in the next quarter or two, we'll begin to see these leads convert.

There are a couple of media channels that we may inch in one direction or the other in our next rev of The Content Grid, but one change I cannot imagine making is to shift the location of the blog.

The blog is the hub of the content wheel. It allows for immediate posting, direct language, reader engagement, and it feeds traffic to the corporate site.

It's also a medium that third parties are comfortable pointing to. Could you imagine someone like Jeremiah Owyang tweeting a link to a company's website? No way. He'd never do it ... and with good reason. Jeremiah's loyalty is to his reader, and readers don't want to be pushed to websites that are trying to sell them stuff.

A properly executed blog, however, is different. It's the human voice of the company, and, as such, people are reasonably comfortable pointing their readers to that channel.

**If all of your content marketing efforts eventually drive into Eloqua.com as the main place for lead conversion, how have you worked to test and optimize the website, and**



the entire process, to maximize lead conversion and reduce the potential for leaking leads and therefore revenue?

JC: Content marketing is leaky. We leak out a lot of leads. It's literally a daily conversation I have with our demand generation director. It's a Catch-22: You can't capture leads if you don't gate content, but your content won't spread if you gate it. So what do you do? We are experimenting.

We set The Content Grid and Social Media Playbook free, completely ungated. If we sponsor an analyst report, we may gate that – after all, it's a very specific, and highly valuable, piece of content and one that our audience is used to paying for.

We have some other content planned – topical guides, ebooks that we've written – and we may set them free for a finite period of time, after which we could introduce a small gate. Or perhaps we will embrace the channel: if the guide is distributed on the social Web, it's ungated; if we send it to someone in our database, we may direct them to a landing page where we can collect more information.

We are trying different models. In the end, Eloqua is shifting to the school of thought espoused in the new David Meerman Scott/Brian Halligan book, [“Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead.”](#) In the long term, setting your knowledge free is the most direct route to success.

**The second key piece of internal content you posted was the Social Media Playbook, and you weren't shy about it either. The Abbie Hoffman-esque blog post you wrote to promote it is entitled, [“Steal Eloqua's Social Media Playbook.”](#)**

**I was most interested in the ethical considerations you mention in the**

**Playbook, which seem to be inspired by your role with the Word of Mouth Marketing Association. It seems like everywhere you turn there is some flashy/shady social media “evangelist” using black hat tactics.**

**As you say in the Playbook, “On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog. But they can smell a marketer from a mile away.” So what are some key tips for being an ethical social media marketer...both to be a more effective marketer and also simply to be a decent human being?**

JC: I am going to take that Abbie Hoffman comment to my grave with me. That made my day.

But the ethical component of social media marketing cannot be understated. The fact is there are federal guidelines designed to protect unwitting consumers from deceptive businesses.

But I think the social Web does a remarkable job at policing itself. I believe what the government has been good at is giving some fundamental ground rules.

For years, marketers struggled to distinguish cunning from deceptive, but now the FTC has done that for us. In their [guidelines for testimonials and endorsements](#), they make it very clear that if there is a relationship between a company and a consumer, and that consumer “speaks” (blogs, tweets, etc.) about that company, then that testimonial is a form of advertising, and therefore must be disclosed.

I don't think companies realize how far this directive reaches. Frankly, it means that if a staffer at your organization runs a personal blog in which he writes about your industry, then he must disclose his employment. I think many companies are in violation of this FTC rule, not out

of malice, but ignorance. I wanted to include a larger section on ethics in the Playbook, but feared it'd come off as preachy.

**To sum it all up, what are the main things companies should focus on to drive demand and leads with content.**

JC: Here are a few things to keep in mind:

1. Use your **blog as the hub** of the content wheel
2. Stop thinking of Twitter as the goal, *consumption is the goal*...Twitter's value is that it is a useful tool in directing people to points of consumption
3. **Don't expect the world to find you.** Yes inbound marketing works, and your blog should be your hub. But of the 20,000 downloads (in the first month) of The Content Grid and Social Media Playbook, nearly half occurred "in the wild" (SlideShare, Scribd, Facebook).
4. Assume that 50% of your time will be spent in the dialogue phase of content marketing. Creating remarkable content, distributing it broadly and measuring the impact is, together, only half of the battle. **Engaging in a dialogue everywhere you publish** your content is vital for success. It's also the best trigger for sustained interest and long-term word-of-mouth.
5. In the end, remember that **this is a meritocracy**. Good marketing isn't going to turn bad content into a success.

#### Related resources:

[Marketing Leader's Perspective: No cogs allowed in social media and content marketing](#)

[Google Caffeine: Use social media and quality content to get a jolt for your site](#)

[Social Media Marketing in Four Steps](#)

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# Social Media and the CEO: Does Twitter know more than Henry Ford?



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director of  
Editorial Content  
July 9, 2010

In a [recent blog post](#), Andy Mott brought up some excellent points about silos and skewed compensation plans in marketing departments.

I want to take this idea a step further. If only this were just confined within the marketing (or any) department. An even bigger problem is when different groups within the same company have different incentives that jeopardize your relationship with the customer.

Second only to intellectual property, a company's most valuable resource is its customers. Not just the new customers we're constantly chasing, but existing ones as well... especially in the age of social media, when your triumphs and foibles are just a click away from becoming a huge sales generator or PR disaster.

**"Any customer can have a car painted any color that he wants so long as it is black." – Henry Ford**

As an experienced business leader, customers = valuable is not a breathtakingly new equation to you. But, why, then, in an era of social media, do so many companies still treat customers the way they did in the early industrial age? In other words, does the mission serve the process, or does the process serve the mission?

Take the airline industry, for example. Customers hate to be nicked and dimed, yet every major airline does it. They charge fees for checked bags, phone reservations, curbside check-in, and snacks and beverages.

And they have to, right? It's how they make money. Except...they don't make money, do they? It is the rare airline that has not been

through bankruptcy protection, let alone turned a consistent profit.

That rare airline is Southwest, which charges no fees, yet has been [profitable for 37 consecutive years](#).

## Everything is marketing

Those mainline carriers spend millions on advertising, with beautifully shot, heartstrings yanking commercials poetically telling us about how they keep us "United." But every time someone has to pull out a crisp Andrew Jackson just to get a bag on a plane, how much do you think those ads matter?



To the savvy CEO, everything is marketing. From the fees charged to customers to the accounting department collecting on a late payment. Because even if you're not promoting it with slick ads during prime time,

your customers and former customers are doing the promoting for you thanks to social media marketing – Twitter, Facebook, YouTube.

Instead of going through the litany of social media marketing disasters you’ve probably already read about (and will be to future marketing textbooks what the Nova was to our marketing textbooks), let’s seek to answer the question at the root of this challenge – how do you protect the investment you’ve made in your brand by keeping customers happy while continuing to grow that top-line revenue number?

Make it lucrative and make it possible:

- **What gets measured gets done. What gets incented gets done well.** – You may say you’re customer-focused, but do your comp plans back you up? From top to bottom, does every MBO (Management by Objectives) document, every incentive plan, every compensation package, every corporate policy put the customer first?

Take a look at the recent financial meltdown. Investment banker compensation was based on fees generated from assembling financial products, not the performance of those products for the customer...

“These people contend that Wall Street’s pay structure, in which bonuses are based on short-term profits, encouraged employees to act like gamblers at a casino — and let them collect their winnings while the roulette wheel was still spinning.”

“‘Compensation was flawed top to bottom,’ said Lucian A. Bebchuk, a professor at Harvard Law School and an expert on compensation. ‘The whole organization was responding to distorted incentives.’”

– [“On Wall Street, Bonuses, Not Profits, Were Real”](#), Louise Story, The New York Times

- **If everyone is in marketing, empower everyone like a marketer.** – Marketers, at the very least, have tools and (in a best-case scenario) juicy budgets to entice, please, and sell customers. Why should other employees be any different? And, besides, if you’re going to make customer satisfaction part of everyone’s comp plan, you have to make it possible for them to reach that goal.

The prima example of this is The Ritz-Carlton. This luxury hotelier puts [its money where its customer-focused mouth is](#). Every employee can spend up to \$2,000 to make a guest satisfied. That is a corporate policy that puts the customer first with no questions and no doubt and helps employees live up to what is clearly more than just a cleverly worded motto – “We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen.”

Yes I know that The Ritz-Carlton is a very high-end luxury hotel that has the margins for this kind of thing. And, while we’re on the subject, yes those robes are particularly fluffy and comfy. But get creative. Anyone can do this on an applicable scale....

- Do you allow customer service reps to solve problems or do you treat them like a 1980s-era teenager trying to make a long-distance call?
- Do you give customer-facing employees an opportunity to share customer plaudits and grievances with product marketing, product development, someone somewhere sitting in a corner office?
- How hard is it for someone in front-line manufacturing or production to stop the process when QA isn’t 100% met?

It’s banal, it’s hackneyed, it’s Businesses 101, and it’s certainly not new to you...however, the best way to protect your marketing investment (and make it thrive) in the age of social media marketing is to remember that the true boss is always the customer.



**Related Resources**

[Holistic Marketing Optimization: What's more likely to show up on Twitter?](#)

[The Compounding ROI of Sequential Conversion Increases: How one company took a small gain and multiplied it tenfold](#)

[Social Media Marketing in Four Steps: A methodology to move from sporadic to strategic use based on research with 2,317 B2B and B2C marketers](#)



# Transparent Marketing and Social Media: Twitter and Facebook are the new Woodward and Bernstein



From time to time here on the blog I like to revisit [Transparent Marketing: How to earn the trust of a skeptical consumer](#), which I believe to be an excellent blueprint for the modern marketer. Of course, I may be biased because it was written by my boss, the Director of MECLABS Group, Flint McGlaughlin.

But I consider it to be one of the best things Flint has ever written (second only to his name in the lower-right-hand corner of

my paycheck), because it was so incredibly prescient. It was written in 2003. And while it was certainly relevant at the time, it has become an even better guide to modern marketing thanks to the rise of social media.

## Rage against the machine meets unbridled access to information plus megaphone

The recent meteoric rise of social media, coupled with Google's impressively fast and accurate algorithm, means that now every 13-year-old with an iPhone is an instant fact-checker. Teen angst can be channeled at "the man" (sorry, that's now you) with the tweet of a button. Or even worse...[mom angst](#).

Bill Maher sums it up best, "...we just had the fifth anniversary of YouTube and the twelfth of Google, and between them, they're killing off a great institution: lying. You just can't lie anymore – facts are too easy to check, everything is on video...our Internet conversations are forever."

Of course, where's the line, right? Unless your email marketing is trying to help a Nigerian prince get his oil wealth safely to the shores of America, you're probably not outright lying in any of your marketing. So I'm going to present a few examples and we'll play "You Make the Call." Share your opinions via the comments section, Twitter, however you want.

And when you read the below examples, you might be thinking, "Wait a minute Dan. You are a supersleuth private eye type who has an uncanny knack for getting to the bottom of things." Really, I only have two assets. A free, unlimited, lifetime plan for Google searches. And the ability to read. Yes, it's that easy for your customers to dig stuff up.



by Daniel Burstein,  
Associate Director  
of Editorial Content

July 2, 2010



## Like a rock? Or like a brick?

If you've taken any [MarketingExperiments training](#), you know that we often recommend using third-party credibility indicators to reduce [anxiety](#). And a central tenet of Transparent Marketing is "Let someone else do your bragging."

However, it doesn't say "Let anyone else do your bragging." You can't pick just anyone. You must choose wisely. Chevy's homepage proudly boasts, "No one has more *Consumers Digest* 'Best Buys' for the 2010 model year than Chevrolet." And it's not just the homepage. TV ads, magazine ads, banners ads...the entire campaign is built around *Consumers Digest*.

The first thing that comes to my mind is, "What the heck is *Consumers Digest*?" To the Google...

Let's first talk about what *Consumers Digest* isn't – *Consumer Reports*. (bait and switch?) According to [Wikipedia](#), "The publication has no connection to the *Consumer Reports* magazine published by Consumers Union (which, unlike *Consumers Digest*, is an independent non-profit organization).

*Consumers Digest* is a for-profit magazine. And how does it make a profit? Not through subscriptions, it has zero subscribers. "Many car makers have financial ties to the publication," according to [The Wall Street Journal](#) (although, in fairness, it does sell some issues on the newsstand. How many? Nobody seems to know).

*Consumers Digest* website (I'm not giving them the link juice, use Google or common sense to find it) is poorly designed, to put it kindly. After a thorough (five-second) analysis, Senior Manager of Research Partnerships Andy Mott remarked, "It looks like it was built by a third-grader." And I'm not trying to be harsh, no website is perfect, but they don't even look like they're trying. The site is essentially PotemkinVillage.com:

- There are several bullet points in both columns purportedly stating what they review (baby gear, cameras, etc) that are not links, you can't click on them and find out more
- In fact, there are essentially only three pages to the whole site – homepage, latest issue (table of contents has no links to content), and automotive best buys (in fairness, you can click-through for a paragraph-long "review" of each car)
- Best line on the site... "If you are interested in receiving information on how you can subscribe to our Web site, please write to: Postmaster, Consumers Digest Communications, 520 Lake Cook Road, Suite 500, Deerfield, IL 60015 or send an e-mail to: [postmaster@consumersdigest.com](mailto:postmaster@consumersdigest.com)"

And then there are the Automotive "Best Buys" themselves. While different independent ratings organizations may disagree, you would think that there would be some overlap. [Consumer Reports' Best Car Overall for 2010](#) is the Lexus LS 460L, which "scored an outstanding 99 out of 100 in our road test, making it our highest-rated vehicle." While *Consumers Digest* has 44 "Best Buys" for 2010, the LS 460L is not one of them.

In fact, of *Consumer Reports'* top cars in ten categories, only two made it onto the *Consumers Digest* list. You guessed it, both were Chevrolets.

Before I ask you to make the call for this campaign, let me set the tone. First of all, Chevy is in a segment – automobiles – that is usually heavily researched by customers. Cars tend not to be a point-of-purchase decision, like cereal or gum. So if a customer was interested in a Chevy, how hard would it be to Google "Consumers Digest" to learn more about these awards the carmaker has been boasting about?

Secondly, Chevy isn't just any car company.

In fact, the only reason it is in business is because just last year taxpayers bailed the company out, at which time then General Motors President and CEO Fritz Henderson said, “We are deeply appreciative for the support we have received during this historic transformation, and we will work hard to repay this trust by building a successful new General Motors.” So while third-party awards could certainly help Chevy regain that trust, does *Consumers Digest* fit that bill? In other words, I won *Who’s Who Among American High School Students* but I didn’t brag about it and put in on my resume.

*Social media factor:* So far, with the notable exception of *The Wall Street Journal*, the mainstream press hasn’t reported on this campaign as far as I can tell. But the first hit in Google for “Consumers Digest fake” is a blog. And I found tons of blog posts claiming that Consumers Digest is fake, from the well-known (Clark Howard) and the unknown. So, for even the mildly curious, it is quite easy to learn more.

Now marketer, I turn it over to you, if you worked in the Chevy marketing department, would you have green-lighted this campaign?

[You Make the Call](#)

**So real, it’s fake**

OK, not to bias you, but that first one it a bit of a gimme. So let’s ratchet it up a notch. This next call comes courtesy of my wife.

For my last transparent marketing blog post, I told you how impressed I was with Domino’s “[The Pizza Turnaround](#)” campaign by Crispin, Porter & Bogusky.

As a follow up, they came up with their new “[Pizza Holdouts](#)” campaign. If you’re not familiar with it, they basically stalk people who haven’t tried the pizza yet with a personal ad campaign. Billboards that say, “Bill Johnson, our sauce is now herbier” along with signs, trucks, planes, radio announcements, etc.

Eventually the person takes the hint and, surprise, loves it! My wife is convinced that these are fake. And ever since I wrote about Domino’s Pizza the first time, she’s wanted me to do a follow up to expose how they turned their backs on transparent marketing this time. To the Google!

Well, it turns out, as best as I can figure, this is for real. Again, my research is not extensive. For the Chevy info above, I simply typed “Consumers Digest” into Google, found an interesting Wikipedia entry, and then tried “Consumers Digest fake.” “Pizza Holdout fake” didn’t provide me with the same flood of bad publicity, but it did show a very wise use of social media by Domino’s – they listened. And responded.

The first search result was a YouTube video of the campaign. Right below the video are negative comments, most notably skepticism over the reality of the video. Domino’s responded to those negative comments with more info about the campaign. And since “Uploader Comments” show first in YouTube, you quickly see these replies. While they didn’t address every negative comment on the page (there will always be naysayers), they did prominently speak to a few key issues.



And that was about the extent of my research. After all, who researches the purchase of a pizza that much?

Of course, just using common sense, there are a few obvious things to be skeptical of. After Domino's made a personal ad campaign for you in your town that your friends and family were in on, and then shoved a camera in your face when you tried the pizza, could you really bring yourself to say, "Tastes like cardboard warmed over. Honey, call the local pizza joint."? (And what town has only one Bill Johnson?)

*Social media factor:* Social media played a positive role in this case, thanks to Domino's proactively responding to skeptical customers. Also as part of my lazy research, I went to Domino's microsites where they promote use of Facebook and Twitter. Since they're encouraging social media and giving people positive things to tweet about (such as a contest to capture so-called pizza holdouts), not surprisingly, there seems to be mostly positive stuff out there.

So the campaign is real yet it looks so real some people think it's fake. If you were asked to green-light this campaign, what would you do?

[You Make the Call](#)

### Trust but verify

You didn't think I could write a post about transparent marketing without shining that harsh light of analysis in the mirror, did you? You did? Really? Then just skip the next part and move right along.

Here at MarketingExperiments, our job is to serve you, our audience, and help you do your job better. To that end, we freely publish our experiments.

However, in publishing those experiments we have a debate raging internally, because we anonymize our experiments. We don't share the name or our Research Partners and we obscure identifying information as well. And just in case a competitor could figure out which company we're talking about, we also don't share data like "number of conversions."

On the one hand, we feel that this does a disservice to you, our audience. We want to be transparent and share as many juicy details as possible.

However, we do work with real-world Research Partners on their actual marketing campaigns. We believe this provides far greater value than running hypothetical experiments with brands that don't exist. But because our Research Partners are actual companies competing every day for business, they view the experimentation we do as sensitive information. They consider "number of conversions" and other data we use in experimentation to be sensitive business intelligence that could give competitors a leg up.

*Social media factor:* Zero. I've never seen anyone tweet, blog, or even Foursquare about this, and I listen to the conversation every day. In fact, other than this blog post, no one probably even noticed.

So what would you do if you were in our shoes (well, mostly sandals, our office is by the beach)?

[You Make the Call](#)

### True perfection

If you follow the news at all, you probably know where I'm headed with this "You Make the Call" theme – [the imperfect game](#). Long story short, Armando

Galarraga was one out away from a perfect game when umpire Jim Joyce blew the call. Galarraga didn't throw a temper tantrum. And after the game, once Joyce saw the replay on TV, he apologized for getting it wrong.

That's transparency. No one is right all the time. And your produce isn't right for everyone.

So how can you apply these lessons to your own transparent marketing?

- **Don't be everything to everyone** – Focus on what you do best and hammer it home.
- **C'mon, keep it clean** – That line isn't always totally clear, as I've referenced above, but some practices are egregious. Quick hint: If you've hired a consultant or agency with the words "Black Hat" in its name, you've crossed the line. Stay on the sunny side of marketing.
- **Listen** – Social media makes it very easy to listen to your customers. Don't just use "powerful auto-tweet technology" to build followers and blast promotions. Hear what they have to say. Then go the extra mile. Ditch the auto-tweet technology and actually have a conversation. You may be tipped off to (and mitigate) a mistake before it becomes a full-blown crisis.
- **Test** – Good marketers with good intentions can disagree on how transparent your brand should be and what will work best. While one of you might be wrong, the customer never is. So test. See what works.
- **Hear it straight from the source** – Heck, [just read Transparent Marketing: How to earn the trust of a skeptical consumer](#). It's all in there. And it's a free download.

- **Of mice, men, and marketers** – In the end, even with the best intention of transparent marketing, you will go awry. While writing this very blog post I got a note calling a promotional email I wrote a scam. Ouch! But, as with anything, if your aim is true, you're more likely to hit the target.

## Related Resources

[Transparent Marketing: A slice of honesty from Domino's Pizza](#)

[Holistic Marketing Optimization: What's more likely to show up on Twitter?](#)

[Resources on Transparent Marketing](#)

*Photo Attribution:* [Ruovesi](#)





# **SEARCH OPTIMIZATION**

# Instant Speculation on New Google



by Adam T. Sutton  
Senior Reporter,  
Marketing Sherpa  
September 13,  
2010

Google rocked the search world last week by introducing a [new feature](#) that automatically predicts and displays search results as users type their queries.

Google Instant met with a swarm of speculation, including predictions that it would [kill SEO](#), [change SEO](#), and [not change SEO](#).

All commentary is speculation at this point.

Google Instant's impact on search marketing will not likely be clear for another 30 to 60 days. The change will likely affect some marketers more than others, depending on search's role in your marketing.

The folks at search agency and software provider [Covario](#) sent me a seven-page brief on the topic they wrote for their clients. Three highlights from their analysis and predictions:

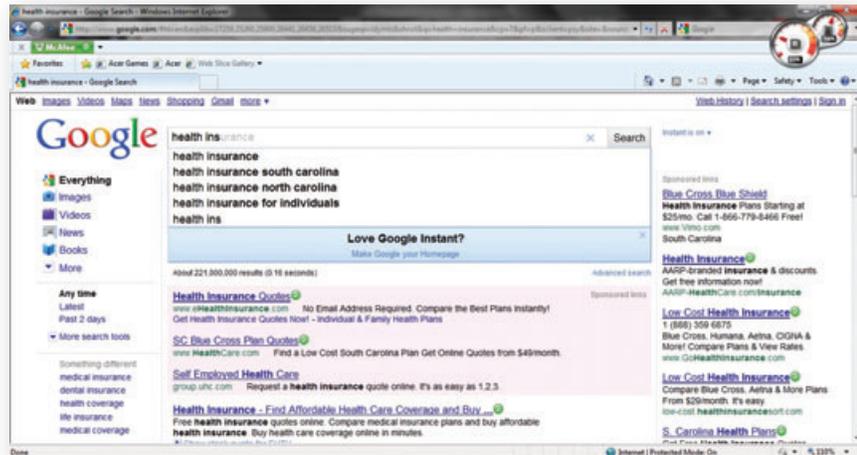
1. Top organic positions are more important than ever

Google Instant pushes down organic results. As users type search queries using the new feature, a drop-down "suggestion box" appears, pushing down paid and organic search results, and pushing some organic results below the fold.

Results pages with three or four ads in the top position sometimes only list one organic link above the fold (see image). The links pushed below the fold will likely experience a drop in traffic.

2. More 'broad matching' in [PPC](#)

Since users see results as they type, marketers will migrate toward strategies that use [broad matching](#) on the first keywords of popular multi-keyword queries.



In the short term, CPCs will increase and advertisers will have to budget more toward Google to drive similar volume, according to Covario's brief.

3. Not all searches are "Instant"

Google's new feature is designed to work in the following browsers:

- Internet Explorer v8
- Safari for Mac v5
- Firefox v3
- Chrome v5, v6

Users running other browsers will perform traditional Google searches. Filtering your website analytics to track visitors by browser will help your team better understand how Google Instant changes your visitors' behavior.

Please note: Covario's brief emphasized that its analysis is strictly speculation. Only time and rigorous testing can determine what impact Google's latest feature will have on your marketing and the marketing community as a whole.





# **SITE OPTIMIZATION**



By Boris Grinkot

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July 29, 2010

# Landing Page Optimization: What we've learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three basic principles

Over the past year, the MarketingExperiments labs have conducted more than 200 digital marketing experiments. And while we have many complex heuristics and training courses to assist you in optimizing your entire digital marketing investment, the focus of this research article is to help you find a few “quick hit” landing page improvements to increase conversion right now. In this research article, we will use these experiments to illustrate common principles that we confirmed time and again throughout the year as we conducted our experiments ...

While these three levers of optimization have been covered as part of broader principles in our published materials and training, it appears that they can provide the greatest immediate return on testing (after all, testing requires time and resources), because they typically patch the biggest gaps in website performance. Once you're harvested the low-hanging fruit of an underperforming site, it will likely take [more advanced methods](#) to continue to plug your conversion leaks.

Where did these three basic principles come from? Three of the five elements in the [MarketingExperiments Conversion Index](#)—motivation (m) of the visitors before they are exposed to the offer, clarity of the value proposition (v) as it's expressed in the offer messaging, and anxiety (a) of the visitor in relation to the credibility of the offer or specific information being requested—are all closely tied to the kind of messaging that we present to the visitor. They reflect how the meaning—whether through verbal or non-verbal cues—of our message is received and processed by our potential customers.

Simplicity, continuity, and relevance—the three principles, on which we focus in this

article—have been taught as sub-components of the Conversion Index. We emphasize them here because, based on current trends in Web design and copywriting, it appears that they are the ones most often forgotten, ignored, or made secondary to other considerations. In other words, they are evidently out of use, which means that those marketers who choose to employ them stand to beat the competition.

At the same time, these principles are perhaps the easiest to follow (as you will see in the experiments we present below) in terms of the simplicity of adjustments that are required, and consequently in terms of the resources involved. Even marketers who are well aware of the outsized ROI potential of online testing would be glad to know this: when budgets and human resources are tight, it's difficult to find a way to support even very promising efforts. As a result, marketers become conservative, sticking to the tried and true methods—hence, the opportunity for those who want to stand out.

You will not have to fundamentally rewrite your website copy. You will not need to create any new designs. You will simply need to use what you already have. Perhaps only to take advantage of the principle of relevance, you might have to go a small step further—by explicitly acknowledging who your ideal customers are.

To that end, let's begin with a review of experiments that we analyzed in [The Compounding ROI of Sequential Conversion Increases research article](#). In that article, we took an in-depth look at a series of experiments to help you understand how these discoveries can impact your marketing campaigns.

## REVIEW OF EXPERIMENTS



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)  
**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library  
**Test Protocol Number:** TP1214

### Research Notes:

**Background:** A leading software provider **Goal:** To increase the amount of home delivery subscriptions  
**Goal:** To increase the number of leads captured for the same (or smaller) marketing spend  
**Primary research question:** Which funnel will generate the most leads?  
**Approach:** Radical redesign of the lead generation process, focused on strengthening the communication of the value proposition

## Experiment #1: PPC Ad

Original

{Keyword} Business Software  
 Award-Winning Business Software.  
 Fully Integrated. Free Trial.  
[www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business](http://www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business)

Optimized

Business Software Suite  
 #1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients  
 Award Winning Solution. Free Trial  
[www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business](http://www.XXXXXXXXXX.com/Business)

Our research analysts utilized MarketingExperiments optimization principles to ensure that a PPC ad stuck out from competitors. What is the key difference between the ads? The optimized version is far more specific. By stating the number of clients and its #1 standing among other on-demand business software, we were able to communicate the value of the offer with greater credibility and clarity.

PPC ads are an excellent opportunity to make specificity work for you: rigidly limited by the number of characters you can use, you should trade more general, qualitative statements for the more specific and—if possible—numerical ones. In this case, “Fully Integrated” may well be an important aspect of value, but we swapped it with “6459 World Clients,” letting the specificity of the message do the work. The result—the optimized PPC ad obtained 21% more clicks.

## Experiment #2: Landing Page

Original



Optimized



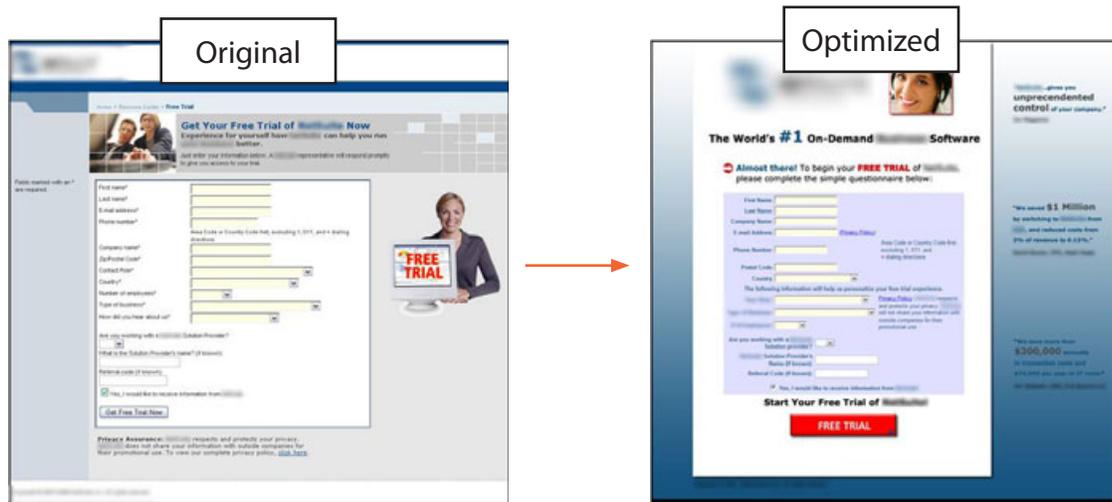
The first difference that you may notice between the original and optimized versions is a change in layout. Eliminating the left navigation and creating a more natural top-down flow to the call-to-action button (also reducing the number of buttons to just one) certainly helped improve the performance of this page. The optimized landing page generated 54% more clicks.

However, in our testing, these simple layout changes rarely result in such dramatic improvement (although they still tend to be in double-digit range). The more dramatic changes, though visually not as evident, were in the messaging itself. Note that the headline, sub-headline, and award logos at the top of the page essentially deliver on the promise made in the PPC ad: “YES, we are #1 on-demand business software; YES, we have over 6459 customers; YES, we have won awards.” The last point is confirmed in the bold call to action: “YES, we do offer a free trial!”

This is perhaps a near-perfect example of continuity from a PPC ad to a landing page. And as you see, we didn’t have to do much work to get there: we simply repeated the information, in which the visitor has demonstrated interest by clicking on the PPC ad. In other words, we can use what worked in the ad (increased click-through rate) as an indication of relevance.

Further adding to the relevance of the page, we included customer testimonials that reflected the benefits that would be considered key in our research partner’s customers’ purchase decision. But we didn’t stop there. We applied the principle of specificity to the testimonials themselves by putting emphasis on hard numbers and benefit-oriented phrases. Thus, we magnified the ability of these testimonials to communicate value. (Note that the last testimonial was included for a different reason, outside of the scope of this article—briefly put, the credibility of the offer was increased by using a testimonial from a highly respected third party.)

### Experiment #3: Form Page



Lastly, we took the visitors (now quite a few more of them than used to be able to make it this far in the past) to the optimized form page. Rather than compare the optimized form page to the original, take a look back to the optimized landing page. What do you notice? The page design of the form is near-identical to that of the landing page. In contrast, the original versions of the landing and form pages look as if they came from two different web sites. Some visitors likely checked their address bar to make sure they were still dealing with the same company.

We used the continuity in both design and key messaging (headline, testimonials, call to action, button) to ensure that the visitor—who has demonstrated interest in the offer by clicking on the previous page—is not in any way caused to think outside of the “I want to get a free trial” thought sequence. At this point, our goal is to collect the necessary form information as seamlessly as possible, while continuing to support the value and credibility of the offer. The optimized form page generated 97% more submissions.

**Results:****272% Increase in Overall Conversion***The optimized path increased the conversion rate by 272.2%*

Metric	Control	Treatment	Relative Difference
PPC Advertisement	0.89%	1.08%	-3.5%
Landing Page Clickthrough	7.17%	11.06%	124%
Form Completion	15.84%	31.25%	7.17%
Impression-to-lead Conversion	.009%	.033%	7.17%



**What you need to understand:** In this experiment, the compounding effect of the sequential gains was significant. A 272% increase in conversion led to 268% more projected revenue and, when combined with the corresponding 66% reduction in cost-per-acquisition (fewer unqualified searchers clicked on the optimized ad), the optimized path produced more than four times the monthly profit (302% increase).

These results were achieved with simple changes that required little technical or research effort. We used information that was already available on the site itself (plus, asked our Research Partner to dig around for more relevant testimonials) to make our messaging more relevant, applying specificity and continuity throughout the customer's journey.

So, what if you have never heard of the MarketingExperiments Conversion Index? It's OK, our feelings are not hurt. However, it would be difficult to find a professional marketer who is not familiar with the concept of relevance. While it still occurs today, shouting down the customers with marketing messages is considered a weak—if not cost-prohibitive—marketing tactic. It's understood that there is little reason to waste marketing budgets on prospects who could never be interested in our offer, or prospects that would require an inordinate expense to convert. By making a message relevant to the prospect, marketers achieve two objectives:

- 1) The message is more familiar to the customer, and is able to communicate value more clearly.
- 2) Where a sales force is involved, customers for whom the message is not relevant are self-disqualified, reducing the cost of sales.

The success of the above objectives, of course, requires that the message is indeed relevant. Otherwise, the right customers will not understand the value of the offer, and/or self-disqualify for the wrong reasons. Therefore, it is essential that marketers understand who their customers are and what messaging is relevant. But how *do* we arrive at relevance?

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a fascinating and data-intensive new area of marketing that is celebrated with good reason: not only does it deliver workflow automation, it provides invaluable insights about your customers which you can use to craft ever more relevant (on a customer segment and even individual level) messaging. However, in this article we wanted to give you a few quick rules, so a simple exercise of [channel mapping](#) can help you use the customer information you already have—and organize it in a way that will help you craft relevant messages like the ones we used in the tests covered here.



The other two principles build on relevance and magnify it. The latter aspect is essential: a message that is not relevant becomes more harmful with specificity and continuity. In other words, when you say something that *does not* connect with the prospect, and you do so with specific examples and figures continually throughout the prospect's experience, you can ensure that this experience will not be a good one.

In [another Research Article](#), we used this case study to illustrate the potential impact of holistic optimization efforts. In this Research Article, we would like to distill three simple optimization principles based on this experiment (and 200+ others we've conducted this year) to help you increase the effectiveness of your online efforts...

**i** *Three Simple Principles:*

**Principle #1: Increase specificity**

First, by increasing the specificity of the message, we were able to better communicate the value and ultimately generate more response.

{Keyword XXXXXXXXX Software}  
 Award-Winning XXXXXXXXX Software.  
 Fully Integrated. Free Trial.  
[www.XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.com](http://www.XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.com)

XXXXXXXXXX Software Suite  
 #1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients  
 Award Winning Solution. Free Trial  
[www.XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.com](http://www.XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.com)

By using specific quantitative statements instead of relying on vague qualitative statements, we were able to increase the communication of the value of the offer.

When writing your marketing copy, use quantitative statements, not qualitative. Here are a few examples...

When we approach a page like the "Not this" example, we use a disciplined methodology. We don't believe in applying a set of rules, we use a set of

principles that are essentially flowing out of a metatheory about the cognitive psychology of the buy process.

Here, we would normally apply that metatheory using our [conversion heuristic](#). But since for this research article we are seeking to simplify that heuristic into three principles, let's only look at how to increase specificity.

**Not this:**

**100% Satisfaction Guarantee**  
Our data may not be perfect, but we think our guarantee is pretty close.

**Searching for the Most Accurate Mailing Lists? Your Hunt is Over!**

**Register Today To Get Your 500 Free Leads!**

**Get 500 Free Leads Today with Qualifying Purchase**

**We Have the Best Data Guaranteed!**

The industry leader in database marketing, **Quality's** offers the freshest, most accurate business and consumer sales leads and mailing lists available anywhere. Nearly 2 million customers use our services to find new customers, grow their sales, and for other direct marketing, telemarketing, customer analysis and credit reference purposes.

**Why Choose Quality's?**

- Safe & Secure online shopping
- Expert advice to help you succeed
- Privacy & Do Not Call compliant
- Free quotes & quotes
- Free Business Resource Center
- 100% Satisfaction Guarantee

**Plus Phone Verified Data!**  
 We make more than 26 million phone calls each year to verify and enhance our business databases. Why? To ensure you have the freshest, most comprehensive information available. No other company in the industry does that. Period!

**How Can We Help?**  
 From mailing lists to email marketing, we're your one-stop shop to grow your sales. We'll focus on your marketing needs so you can focus on your business and grow your sales!

**Why Should You Market Today?**  
 Click to watch.

**Why Choose Quality's?**

**Plus, get 500 FREE leads added to your purchase!**

\*Disclaimer: Receive 500 FREE leads with your minimum purchase of 2,000 business leads or 4,500 consumer leads. Offer valid one per customer.

Privacy Policy

**But this:**

**100% Satisfaction Guarantee**  
If you receive any bad data, we will refund your money, no questions asked! Learn More >>

**We Make 26 Million Phone Calls a Year to Ensure You Get The Most Accurate Mailing Lists Available!**

Trusted since 1972, **Quality's** has compiled the most comprehensive databases in the industry including 210 million U.S. consumers, 14 million U.S. businesses, 13 million executives and more, all cleaned for duplicates and phone verified.

**Why choose Quality's?**

- 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

**Plus, get 500 FREE leads added to your purchase!**

**Set up your FREE access to Quality's**

- Search our business and consumer database
- Preview leads, get a quote, and download lists
- Build a list 24 hours a day 7 days a week
- Personalized online service to assist you

**What Our Customers Are Saying**

It's a powerful tool for small businesses to market like the big guys.

**Haydens**  
 Sparta, New Jersey

*I would recommend Quality's to anyone looking for speedy service, accurate listings and great customer service. It is refreshing to receive a follow-up phone call within a week, just to make sure that I am satisfied.*

**Ruhter Auction & Realty Inc.**  
 Hastings, Nebraska

It's great, one-stop shopping. There's no need to coordinate between the mail house and the printer!

**Habitat America**  
 Annapolis, Maryland

**Get Free Access**

**100% Satisfaction Guarantee**  
If you receive any bad data, we will refund your money, no questions asked!

The headline for the “Not this” page is “Searching for the Most Accurate Mailing Lists? Your Hunt is Over!” This is a classic headline you will see all over the Internet. And also ineffective.

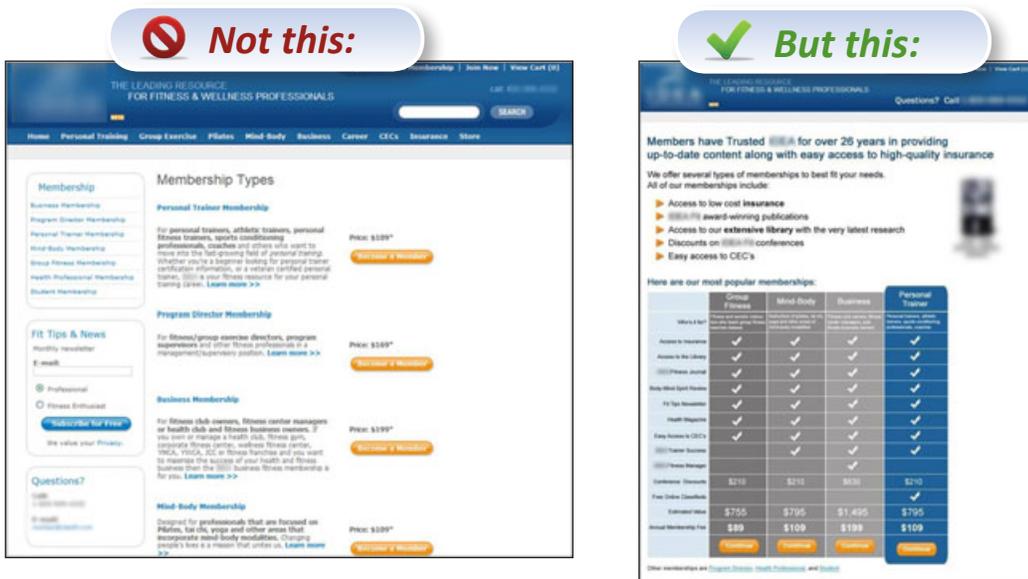
The visitor did not come to this page to answer a question, the visitor wants a question answered. Clever turns of words do not lead to conversion, and there is nothing about the headline that seems instantly credible.

In the optimized version, there is a critical, quantifiable statement, “We Make 26 Million Phone Calls a Year to Ensure You Get The Most Accurate Mailing Lists Available!” The optimized page also includes more specific information—“Trusted since 1972.” It doesn’t just vaguely claim that this company has the most comprehensive databases, but specifically backs those words up by letting visitors know that they have “210 million U.S. consumers, 14 million U.S. businesses, 13 million executives...” and the specificity continues in the bullet points.

This is all quantifiable information that we found somewhere on their website but is not stated on this landing page in a way that emphatically set them apart from their competitors. What information is buried on your website that could increase the specificity of your value proposition on your landing pages?

The next “Not this” example is a signup page where visitors can click on a button to choose their membership type. But, it is not specific, you have to read a lot of copy, it is difficult for the consumer to make the decision, and they don’t know why they should choose this company. There is too much [unsupervised thinking](#).

The optimized page is more specific. Not only does it clearly lay out the costs and benefits of each



option at a glance, it also tells customers why they should trust this company with specific copy right at the top. It is not necessarily very cleverly worded copy, but it is very clear. And [clarity trumps persuasion](#).

If you’re thinking of your landing pages right now, you should ask, “How can I be more specific with my claims?” To do that, you must answer three questions that will pop into your potential customer’s head when he visits your page:

- **Where am I?** – On a webpage, you have four inches to answer this question. If you don't, your visitors will find clarity by clicking the back button.
- **What can I do here?** – No unsupervised thinking. The main objective of the page should be crystal clear.
- **Why should I do it?** – The rest of the time visitors spend on your site you are using communication of your value proposition to answer this question.

You can tell your prospective customers that you're the fastest, or the most reliable, or the best... but there are likely five (or 500) other companies that can make the same vague claim. You must use quantitative statements and prove it. If you increase the specificity of your marketing message, you will likely generate more response.

**Principle 2: Increase Continuity**

XXXXXXXXX Software Suite  
 #1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients  
 Award Winning Solution. Free Trial  
 www.XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.com

Key value is communicated in each step of the process keeping the user motivated.



By ensuring continuity in every step, we were able to keep the user engaged and motivated throughout the entire process. The message is matched not just on the landing page, but through the entire form submission process, step by step.



From the PPC ad to the last form submission page, the value is communicated, keeping them engaged every step of the way.

Ensure continuity across all the elements of your funnel—from search engine marketing (SEM) to landing pages to the sign-up form—and through every step of the communication process to keep potential customers engaged.

**Principle 3: Increase Relevance**

Finally, by crafting our message with relevance to the motivations of the potential prospects, we increased conversion significantly.

To tap into these motivations, we conducted some rudimentary channel mapping. For this example, the visitor had clicked on a PPC ad that appeared when a user searched for “business software” in Google. By matching this search term and the copy in the PPC ad that solicited the click with information we have about past customers, we were able to create a possible customer profile to help us understand the motivation of this channel...

**Who they are:** (1) CEOs needing integrated systems for company, needing highly visible key performance indicators (KPIs), wanting to reduce technology costs, needing reliable solution to allow for long-term growth. (2) CFOs wanting more powerful accounting features, needing better reporting capabilities, needing more automated transactions

**Why they purchase:** *CEOs:* Like company-wide module interaction, impressed with dashboard capabilities, see potential to significantly reduce technology and operations costs, like the fact that so many other large companies are using it, like the expandability of the system. *CFOs:* Like ability of modules to interact directly with accounting, like automation capabilities, impressed with reporting features.

**Why they purchase:**

CEOs like company-wide module interaction, impressed with dashboard capabilities, see potential to significantly reduce technology and operations costs, like the fact that so many other large companies are using it, like the expandability of the system.

CFOs like ability of modules to interact directly with accounting, like automation capabilities, impressed with reporting features.



Here’s how we used this information about motivation...

Messages with relevance to the motivations of the potential prospects are more likely to increase conversion. To learn more about channel mapping and how to craft offers that are relevant to visitor motivations, you can enroll in our online, on-demand [Landing Page Optimization](#) training course.



**Bottom Line:** We conduct more than 200 digital marketing experiments every year. That's about one per business day. From these experiments, we've developed many [complex heuristics](#) to help you understand what really works. In this Research Article, we've extracted three simple optimization principles from this research to give you quick, basic ways to increase the effectiveness of your online efforts:

- **Increase specificity** – You can better communicate the value of your offering by using specific, quantitative messages instead of vague, qualitative messages. Clarity trumps persuasion. To help you increase specificity, analyze your current pages and see if you are answering these three questions that visitors will subconsciously ask themselves:
  - Where am I?
  - What can I do here?
  - Why should I do it?
- **Increase continuity** – Ensure continuity in every step of your sales funnel to keep prospective customers engaged and motivated throughout the entire process.
- **Increase relevance** – Craft your messages with relevance to the motivations of your potential prospects.

Combine these principles with the knowledge gained through experimentation on your own site to increase conversion. And note that word – experimentation. You must go beyond being satisfied that you have installed Google Analytics or Adobe® SiteCatalyst® and are getting some numbers.

Metrics should not be about how much, they should be asking why. That is the true power of experimentation. The principles in this research article are a good start. For a deeper look, feel free to explore our paid [Online Training and Certification Courses](#).

## Optimization Examples

*During the Web clinic on which this research was first released, the MarketingExperiments team conducted live optimization of audience-submitted landing pages to serve as examples for the principles taught here. To view a replay of this live optimization, please watch the [“Live Optimization: What we’ve learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three basic principles — plus live-optimization examples”](#) Web clinic replay, which you can find in our Research Directory at [MarketingExperiments.com/Research](#).*

# Homepage Optimization: Lessons you can reuse from ReUselt.com



by Boris Grinkot,  
Senior Manager,  
Research and Strategy

September 8, 2010

Optimizing home pages probably demands more from a marketer than any other kind of Web page or process optimization, because it forces the marketer to speak simultaneously to multiple audiences. The concepts of segmentation, relevance and continuity are meaningless when there is no data, by which to segment; no previous messaging, to which to be relevant; and no previous experience, with which to be continuous. The only thing we know is that the customer is, broadly speaking, interested in your product category.

The folks at ReUselt.com submitted their homepage for live optimization in one of our recent Web clinics, and even though the page didn't make it into the live event, I wanted to borrow it as a shining example of a good (and it's good for the planet!) homepage.

## Just make everything bigger?

The key to optimizing the prime homepage real estate is prioritization. Homepages always remind me of the time when I was frequently involved in developing direct mail and other print pieces, and the clients insisted on making every element of a postcard-size mailer "bigger." I think at one point, I suggested that they print their post card on a balloon instead—the perfect medium for making everything bigger by supplying only hot air.

Just like a postcard, a homepage has a size (or as importantly, attention span) limit. No, you don't have to try to cram everything above the fold, but you do have to put the most important stuff on top. This is where prioritization is essential—everyone in the organization thinks that their stuff is "important." How do you decide, then?

## Have a purpose

First, ask yourself what the purpose of the website is. I will use ReUselt as an illustration. The way I see it, in the simplest terms, ReUselt is an e-commerce site. It's a site with a mission, but its primary purpose is to serve as a storefront. Its secondary purpose is to educate potential customers, and its tertiary purpose is to empower its existing (and potential) customers to help fulfill its broader enviro-conscious mission and, in turn, educate and empower their peers.

To put it in simple, cold-blooded capitalist terms, I see the objectives of the site as follows:

1. Sell (obviously)
2. Educate (to create customers, to whom they can sell stuff)
3. Empower (to keep existing and create new customers, to whom they can sell more stuff)

In addition to the immediate objectives, the site overall and the homepage in particular must support the brand. For companies with a more powerful brand presence, this can mean a greater investment in brand-related imaging on the home page. After all, brand recognition should be the top reason your homepage gets traffic in the first place—advertising and other link traffic should be going to dedicated landing pages.

## Turf truce

Second, look at the available real estate, and make sure that the priorities you have identified are allocated a share of visibility accordingly. On ReUselt.com, the first things a visitor sees are the featured products,



“quick links” to the most popular shopping categories, and a “summer sale” ad in the right column. All of these items are above the fold, and are useful both to first-time and returning shoppers.



Note that the other content above the fold is also providing an essential connection with the brand—the image/message loop in the center and the live counters in top right—without confusing the visitor about the purpose of the site. This is clearly a storefront, yet the mission and message of the company are apparent and help connect with the right customer segment.

all serve to educate and empower ReUselt’s visitors.

This integration—and proper prioritization—of both shopping and evangelism objectives is what appeals to me in the ReUselt homepage. Of course, I would run **a few tests to refine that balance**: if we increase emphasis on shopping by adding more products or using images to illustrate some of the product categories at the top—necessarily, at the expense of the branding content—would we increase sales? It’s important to note that since this retail segment does require a degree of awareness, reducing content that creates and empowers such awareness can have negative long-term impact.

**Strength in numbers**

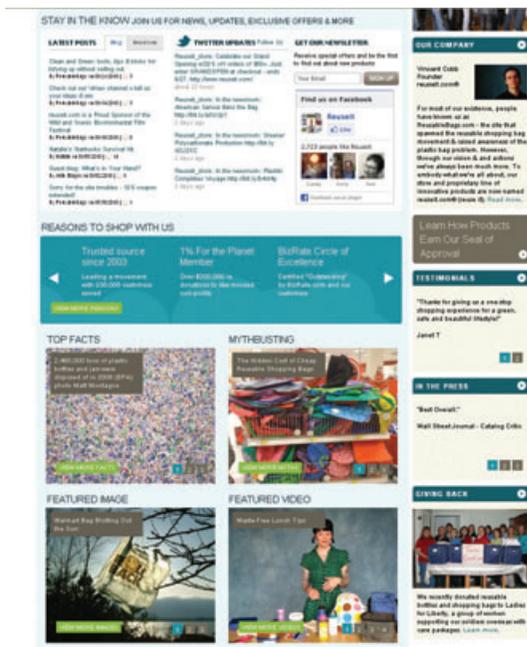
To reduce the risk to long-term customer base retention and growth, optimizing the homepage must start with data analysis. In the simplest terms, we need to figure out where visitors are clicking—and where they’re not.

Items that are unlikely to contribute to branding and get no clicks can be easily eliminated, yielding precious space. Items that are heavily trafficked, even though they are further down on the page, should be tested at the top.

**Introduce yourself**

One item that I thought should be tested further up on the ReUselt homepage (perhaps, in a more static format) is the “reasons to shop with us” box. The page is ostensibly missing a headline and some intro copy—and the material in this box can help build a conversation.

Many e-commerce sites have much trouble formulating that essential value-proposition-based headline and intro. For ReUselt, it should be easy. A site with a message and a purpose—not to mention, street teams—can’t be shy about stating a few things up front to the visitor.



The secondary and tertiary objectives are thus already subtly addressed at the top of the page, but they become the primary focus as we scroll further down. Newsfeed, relevant facts, videos, the ReUselt story, the team, etc.,



**Related Resources:**

[Homepage Design: The five most common pitfalls and how to overcome them](#)

[This Just Tested: Could you spot the better homepage if a 59% conversion difference were at stake?](#)

[Homepage Optimization: How your peers use keywords and communicate with visitors](#)



# Competing With The Big Dogs:

## How to earn the visitors' trust



by Boris Grinkot,  
Senior Manager,  
Research and  
Strategy

September 3,  
2010

It's always great to see our students set sail in the world of testing. When Seth Jenks of G5 Leadership (a company that provides [online leadership training](#)) submitted his treatments for the [MarketingExperiments Optimization LinkedIn Group](#) members [*Editor's note: It's reassuring to see that, after Boris first sent me this post for editing, some of our group members offered similar optimization and testing advice*] to review and critique, I wouldn't have guessed that it was one of his first attempts to structure a split test.

The results of his test are not only useful in the immediate sense—he **doubled the conversion rate**—but also are highly valuable as a starting point for building future iterations of tests.

What we can glean from Seth's results, and how might subsequent testing be shaped? I thought Seth was already on to the key issue here: he called it "trust." At MarketingExperiments, we're used to calling it "[credibility](#)" and "[clarity of the value proposition](#)." Both of these must be understood in the context of what [motivation](#) (another special term in our jargon) the visitors bring to the page. So let's start from the top—what are visitors looking for when they arrive?

### What is the offer?

Looking at the search terms that drive traffic to the page, it appears that most visitors are interested in training, workshops, courses, seminars, etc. Targeting search terms that include these words makes sense—they connect with the "live workshop" nature of the offer. However, does the page itself reflect the visitor's motivation?

After initially looking at each version of the page (before reading through all the copy), I didn't have a clear idea of what it was selling. It displays a boxed product, reminiscent of a software or DVD package. However, small text at the very top of the page tells me that these are "live, online workshops."

This might seem insignificant, but especially when you are competing in Search, **your visitors are arriving on your page with a singular initial objective: to eliminate you from consideration**, much like you would try to sort out the junk somewhere between your mailbox and your office or kitchen.

If they were looking for a workshop, and you are ostensibly selling a boxed product, they instantly go for the "x" button. No copy (and certainly no video—more on that below) can save you.

The confusion about what's being offered, continues even after the visitor figures out that it's a workshop: "Am I being offered one or all four workshops on this page? Is its \$39 for each, or for all four?"

This is where I suggest looking at you time-on-page metrics. The average will not be very meaningful, but look into different time-based segments (Google Analytics breaks them down nicely into – under 10 seconds, 10-30, 30-60, and so on) as you run subsequent tests to understand whether you are improving clarity. Especially using them to slice your ad CTR and conversion data can tell you whether and who tends to bounce right off and who tends to stay and/or buy.

### Why your offer?

Aside from confusion about the product, which should be fairly easy to eliminate, another key instant-elimination criterion is lack of a clear value proposition. Value proposition must be communicated throughout the page, but it's especially critical at the top, where the visitor initially starts the "conversation" with you. **If you don't do a good job of introducing yourself, the conversation can be quite short.**

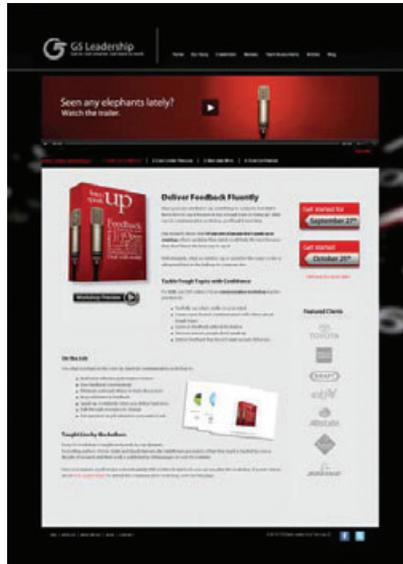
One hypothesis I would test is that all three pages (in the [LinkedIn discussion](#), Steve Myers makes an excellent point about looking for similarities) heavily rely on video to communicate your value proposition. None of them has a specific value-communicating headline. The problem with video is that it implicitly demands "work" from the visitor (time), whereas they can read text effortlessly in seconds. Video can be great at supporting the value proposition, but not as the primary means of expressing it.

In fact, I suspect that the sub-headline "69% of us ..." is in large part responsible for the lift in the treatments (that would make for a great single-factorial test to confirm), along with the bullets being nearer to the top of the page. These elements quickly communicate several key aspects of value—and the visitors are more likely to want to read on.

I would test into other headline and sub-headline variations that explicitly answer the question "What will I/my company get out of watching this?" I think the site offers great answers to this question, but they need to be stated sooner and more explicitly. For example, some statements on the "Credentials" page should be tested on the landing page.

**Too good to be true?**

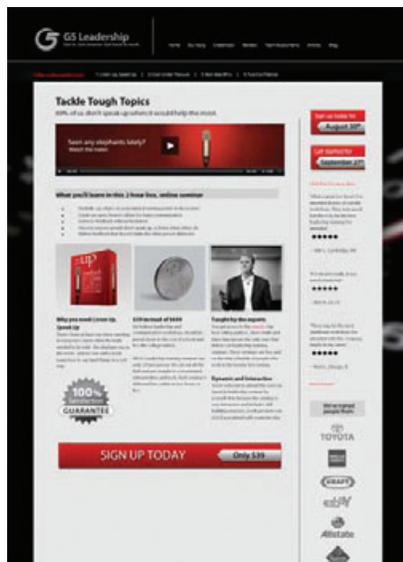
I would further put the price comparison of \$39 to \$699 to the test. The adage "you get what you paid for" is embedded deep in the consumer's psyche. Perhaps the stark "discount" resonates well with some visitor segments, while to others such a wide gap can look suspicious. **Consumers have been conditioned to distrust** claims like "you can



Control



Treatment 1



Treatment 2



be paying thousands of dollars for [fill in the blank], but with this special TV offer, you can have it for only \$19.95.”

I would test focusing the message on the idea that previous customers got the same results from your \$39 product as others did from the \$699 product. As with any of the tests mentioned above, tracking your data separately by source can reveal that different language works best for different traffic channels.

Price testing can be quite telling here. If the market currently is 17.5 times higher than your offer, you probably have some room to increase the price. Also, [as Bob Schewe points out in the LinkedIn discussion, stating the price in the ad can pre-qualify your](#) traffic, reducing the CPA.

### More ideas?

I wanted to keep this post focused on the “trust” issue, but there’s certainly a pressing need to test a more continuous eye path that leads to a single action (order button). This page just makes it complicated for the visitor to answer the question “[What can I do here?](#)” More importantly, I wanted to ask you, our readers, to weigh in using the Comments feature: **What would YOU test next?**

### Related Resources:

[The MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal – Q2 2010](#)

[Reaching Decision Makers: Four biggest sales challenges Internet startups and entrepreneurs face](#)

[The MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal – Q1 2010](#)

# Landing Page Optimization: Clean air or a free backpack? (Which is the bigger incentive for Sierra Club members?)

B2C e-commerce is probably the road most traveled in landing page optimization. With shopping cart processes becoming increasingly standardized, e-tailers have learned on their own and from each other, creating better and better shopping experiences. Top names like Amazon.com and Ebay certainly waste no time in their testing and optimization work (or so I hear).

However, in B2C, there is a special segment of sites that sell...nothing. That is, they sell an idea, a feeling, an emotion. These are typically charitable or other non-profit organizations that solicit donations for a cause.

## Selling air

When you sell a physical product, the value is largely encapsulated in the features and benefits that the product will deliver. Before I get death threats from branding experts, I certainly do acknowledge that there is more to the product than its physical and functional attributes—but it's sure easier to explain on a Web page what an air conditioner will do for you, as opposed to what the Clean Air Act will.

When non-profits ask for a contribution, being able to delineate correctly the value exchange in the mind of the website visitor will make a huge difference in their ability to attract donors. In this post, I am looking at how Sierra Club approaches this issue.

At first glance, [the page](#) that our friends at Sierra Club initially provided for our [Live Optimization Web clinic](#) looks fairly plain—much like many other donation pages I have seen in the past. Here is some quick math: in

the space between the header and the footer, (to be gracious) about 10% of the content is dedicated to what Sierra Club does, 20% to the gift incentive that the donor will receive, and the balance to the payment information form.



by Boris Grinkot,  
Senior Manager,  
Research and  
Strategy

August 16, 2010

This layout is typical, and contains an inherent contradiction: the minimal information about the organization and a single-page long payment form would be ideal for

highly-motivated visitors, who are ready to donate; in contrast, heavy emphasis on the incentive suggests that visitors to this page are yet to make their decision.

### Incentive overkill

I am going to make an explicit assumption that people that want to help the Sierra Club are not doing it because of the free backpack (what on Earth is a rucksack?!). People who are shopping for backpacks probably want to see several different styles, different brands, and few will buy without having touched one (e.g., in a store).

They don't go to Sierra Club for their backpack (or even rucksack) shopping. It's a nice gift, but in the framework of value exchange occurring on this page, it is incorrectly positioned as the most prominent part of the offer. It is the single most distinguishable image on the page. The "loudest" message on this page is: free backpack.

However, I am not saying to kill the incentive! Since this item is probably not available in stores, it might be a great way to show off being a donor. As such, this may truly be the *right* incentive—one that directly connects with the same motivation as the core offer: people that would be willing to support Sierra Club financially may also want to help support its brand and thus influence others to provide financial support.

### Value Exchange, Part 1: What will I get?

Sierra Club offers something very special to its donors. It's the satisfaction of knowing that their hard-earned cash is going to help plant more trees, clean up an oil spill, protect wild places, and so on.

Importantly, Sierra Club does this on a lean operational budget—a hot button topic, especially for large,

experienced donors. There is an attempt to communicate the immense number of things that Sierra Club does in two sentences of the intro paragraph. However, this is simply not clear enough to lead to an exchange.

The objective in conveying value is to paint a complete picture in the mind of the visitor of the value to be received—in this case, experienced as a thought and/or a feeling. As I stated above, without a physical product, this is challenging (hence the crutch of using a physical incentive), but not impossible.

Ironically, the clearest expression of value is stated at the very bottom of the page (I noticed it only after examining the page in fine detail), after the visitor, presumably, has filled out the form—in other words, it doesn't help to get the visitor to that point: "Your gift will help support our efforts to protect our wildlands and wildlife, keep our air and water free from pollution, stem global warming, and promote a clean energy future."

This page needs to tell the visitor succinctly, but clearly all the things that Sierra Club does, and how well it does it. More importantly, this page needs to relate what Sierra Club does with the donations being requested below. **A headline like "Last year, 2,394 donors just like you contributed over \$350,000 that was used to [fill in the blank]"** can get that conversation started.

Making a reference to "other people just like you" has been shown to be effective not only in online offers—Robert Cialdini conducted an experiment on reuse of towels in hotels. In his experiment, referencing "other visitors that stay in room 125" (I'm paraphrasing) in the card that asks to consider reusing towels—as opposed to leaving them on the floor to be replaced—to save water and energy, dramatically reduced the hotel's laundry bill.



## Value Exchange, Part 2: What do I give in exchange?

The form itself is simple enough, but there is room to make it appear even simpler. The pre-selected radio button is already a plus. In past experiments, we have seen that suggesting a choice is more likely to prompt action—even if the visitor ends up choosing a different option.

The “Don’t send me the free gift” option is just a little confusing the way it’s laid out. This is not a critical issue, but **making it clear that text belongs to an item by indenting it** can go a long way to making this long form easier to read.

More importantly, even within the form, we must never forget that a value exchange is in progress. If we are asking for a physical address, it’s an opportunity to remind the visitor about the value he/she will get by entering the information.

Both the gift and the magazine need an address, so a value-focused subhead like **“Where do we send your gift and magazine subscription”** both make the form more relevant and reinforce value to be received. Likewise, organizing all the fields into subsections will make the form look less lengthy and more manageable, reducing psychological friction that online forms necessarily create.

The form button is an often overlooked opportunity to reinforce value. Simply “next” communicates little. It implies a negative: that the work of donating is not finished—there’s more to do. Instead, it needs to communicate something positive, related directly to what we are asking the visitor to do (click).

Thus, **“Start My Sierra Club Membership”** can make a succinct value statement (since “Use my membership dues to protect our wildlands and wildlife, keep our air and water free from pollution, stem global warming, and promote a clean energy future” just can’t fit on a button).

Finally, in asking for value (form completion), we can make the process to feel like less value is being surrendered by increasing the credibility of the request. In the case of Sierra Club, **adding testimonials from fellow donors** can create a clear connection in the mind of the visitor between the request and the ultimate outcome: between the payment and what the contribution does for the *person* contributing.

Going back to Cialdini’s research, this is similar to the “social proof” mechanism that he had uncovered. Enforcing the *social aspect*, **letting the donors upload their photos, or better yet, the photos of natural wonders they’re hoping to protect (or both!)** may on the one hand reinforce the value being implied in the offer, and on the other hand provide invaluable material that can be used by Sierra Club to demonstrate social proof.

Another innovative way of saying “other people like you are doing it” is to **let visitors sign in with their Facebook® credentials**. Building a simple Facebook application that would post something like “Jane Smith is now a member of the Sierra Club” with a link to a special landing page would let Sierra Club leverage the network effect with no additional marketing efforts. Likewise, implementing the “Like” button should be effortless.

### More test ideas

Here are a few other tests that Sierra Club may want to try:

- **Depending on traffic quality, perhaps try test a two-step process**—The first page could focus entirely on communicating the value of being a member/supporting Sierra Club. Since there is a dollar cost, mention something like “for as little as \$15 your first year” to minimize price anxiety. The second page could focus on the incentive and payment page.



- **Obviously, test different membership levels (probably already did that)**—Both with one- and two-step processes. In the two-step process, it may be easier to list higher membership levels.
- **Video testimonials**—Expressing an idea or a feeling is certainly easier through video than through text.

## Related Resources

[Live Optimization: What we've learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three principles](#)

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

[Web Page Optimization: In search of a value proposition as fast and reliable as Verizon FiOS](#)



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

In today's Web clinic, *Live Optimization: What we've learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three basic principles – plus live-optimization examples*, Flint McGlaughlin and the MarketingExperiments team will spend a full 40 minutes optimizing audience submissions to help you identify changes you can make today, based on our research, to improve conversion.

Thanks to BMC Software for submitting [this landing page](#) for optimization...

Most technology company names are three letters followed by an IT noun (software, systems, etc), so the name BMC Software probably sounds vaguely familiar. If you're not familiar with them, they provide a solution called Business Service Management, which they describe as "A unified platform that simplifies, standardizes, and automates IT."

The intended audience of this campaign is IT management and help desk managers. And the objective for the landing page is to get that audience to sign up for free trial of BMC Service Desk.

OK, now that we've got our introductions out of the way, let's roll up our sleeves and dive right in to some heavy-duty optimizing. First off, I'd like to comment that BMC has done a great job with the email-to-landing page continuity. The imagery and messaging are carried through seamlessly, which helps the prospect identify that they are indeed in the right location when they click through from the email to the landing page.

Alright, let's look at the free trial sign-up page. We'll diagnose some problem areas and offer solutions for increasing free trial sign-ups.



by Gina Townsend,  
Senior Manager,  
Research and Strategy  
July 21, 2010

Email



Landing Page



When I am analyzing a landing page, I always start off by asking three questions:

- Where am I?
- What can I do here?
- Why should I do it?

When trying to answer these questions on the BMC landing page, the first two questions are pretty easy to answer.

- **Where am I?** – Like I mentioned earlier, with the consistent imagery you can easily identify that you’re in the right place if you were motivated enough to click on the call to action in the email.
- **What can I do here?** – It’s pretty apparent, I have to fill out the fields to sign up for a free trial... everyone should be able to answer that.
- **Why should I do it?** – This is where I encounter some difficulty. Let’s look into to this a little deeper...

## Supporting the Value Proposition

Images often help to support the value proposition. In this case, while the main image connects with the email, it does not emphasize the value proposition. Since it takes up a lot of real estate, I’d recommend that BMC test an image that better supports the product benefits.

I do like the screenshot of the BMC dashboard. I think this could be a great supporting feature, although it’s kind of small and difficult to see the specific details of the dashboard. I’d recommend making the image larger or at least offer an option to enlarge.

I’m assuming that the “consolidation of information” is the key selling point, so let’s highlight that with a better image and supporting copy.

## Terms and Conditions

In the scroll box below the form, you can see the terms and conditions (T&Cs). The T&Cs look daunting. There are six pages of information condensed into a small embedded scrolling box. You’re already linking to the document, embedding it is overkill.

Test adding [event tracking](#) to see how many people are scrolling vs. clicking the text link. In making visitors scroll through the T&Cs, my initial thought is “what are they trying to hide?” Since this is one of the last items on the page before making the commitment to hit “submit,” this could really be a roadblock in the process.

## Headline/Page Content

There are no real [differentiators](#) in the headline. The “free trial” offer and “risk free” guarantee are great benefits, but why should I choose BMC over another solution? Test a comparison chart or a features matrix. This could be in place of or in addition to the right-column content.

If you’re testing it in addition to the right column, I’d recommend adding a “Why BMC Software” text link that prompts a [DHTML pop-up](#). This is always a good practice when including supplementary content without overwhelming the user.

## Related Resources

[Live Optimization: What we’ve learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three basic principles – plus live-optimization examples](#)

[Web Page Optimization: In search of a value proposition as fast and reliable as Verizon FiOS](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Regions Bank opts for the information underload strategy](#)

# Homepages Optimized:

## How using the homepage as a channel led to a 59% increase in conversion

Home pages can have many masters. From the notorious HiPPO (Highest Paid Person's Opinion) to the rank-and-file graphic designers, everyone has an opinion on what goes where, what color is the best, and what image is most emotionally moving. Needless to say, deciding what *works* best—that is, what produces the best outcome based on the success metrics that have been defined for the page—cannot be based on any one person's sensibilities.

Many, if not most, marketers have recognized this and have sought—or developed—best practices for home page design. Some of these best practices have been strongly ingrained into the marketers' collective consciousness, like “keep the call to action above the fold,” “have a hero shot,” and so on. In keeping with the MarketingExperiments tradition, it should be mentioned that no best practice—even if it has been conclusively shown to work in certain cases—should be applied blindly without testing to show that it works in the new scenario.

This point is critical, as the growing propagation of the “testing culture” that has been pioneered and championed by MarketingExperiments has led to a whole new way of misusing experimental data (even the [valid](#) kind). Test results have replaced best practices as the go-to guidelines for marketers, perpetuating the underlying misunderstanding of the purpose of testing: to ensure the optimized treatment indeed outperforms the control in the *present* scenario. Instead, the fashionable industry trend is to use other marketers' test results and apply those “learnings” to the case at hand.

The result is perhaps the worst of both worlds: the impression that test-driven optimization is being utilized, and therefore a false sense of scientific credibility and rigor, while in fact the “[marketer's intuition](#)” may well have provided a better result (or at least one better recognized as arbitrary).

In this research article, we introduce a methodology for home page optimization, from understanding what the home page is meant to achieve, to testing the outcome. In many ways, optimizing home pages is similar to optimizing landing pages. In both cases, we apply the MarketingExperiments Conversion Index to analyze the page and identify optimization opportunities. However, there is one categorical difference between home and landing page optimization, as home pages rarely serve the same general function.<sup>1</sup>

In the following case study, we identified a number of optimization opportunities that should look familiar from landing page optimization. However, there is a fundamental difference in thinking about homepages that will soon become clear. Can you figure it out based on this experiment?

1. When the home page is effectively a landing page, as with single-offer sites (e.g., the [hanging tomato plant](#)), optimization is no different from landing page optimization at all. When we refer to “home pages” in this article, we are talking about home pages of companies that offer multiple products or product options, received undifferentiated (or unknown-origin) traffic, and are meant for multiple audiences.



By Boris Grinkot

**Contributors**  
**Daniel Burstein,**  
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**Austin McCraw, Flint**  
**McGlaughlin**

September 9, 2010

## EXPERIMENT #1



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** TP1315

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Homepage test for a B2B company that offers email marketing solutions. This homepage had already been through a series of incremental tests resulting in small gains. We wanted to use a radical redesign to fundamentally change the thought sequence in the mind of the visitors, as they proceeded through the page content.

**Goal:** To increase the amount of free trial sign-ups.

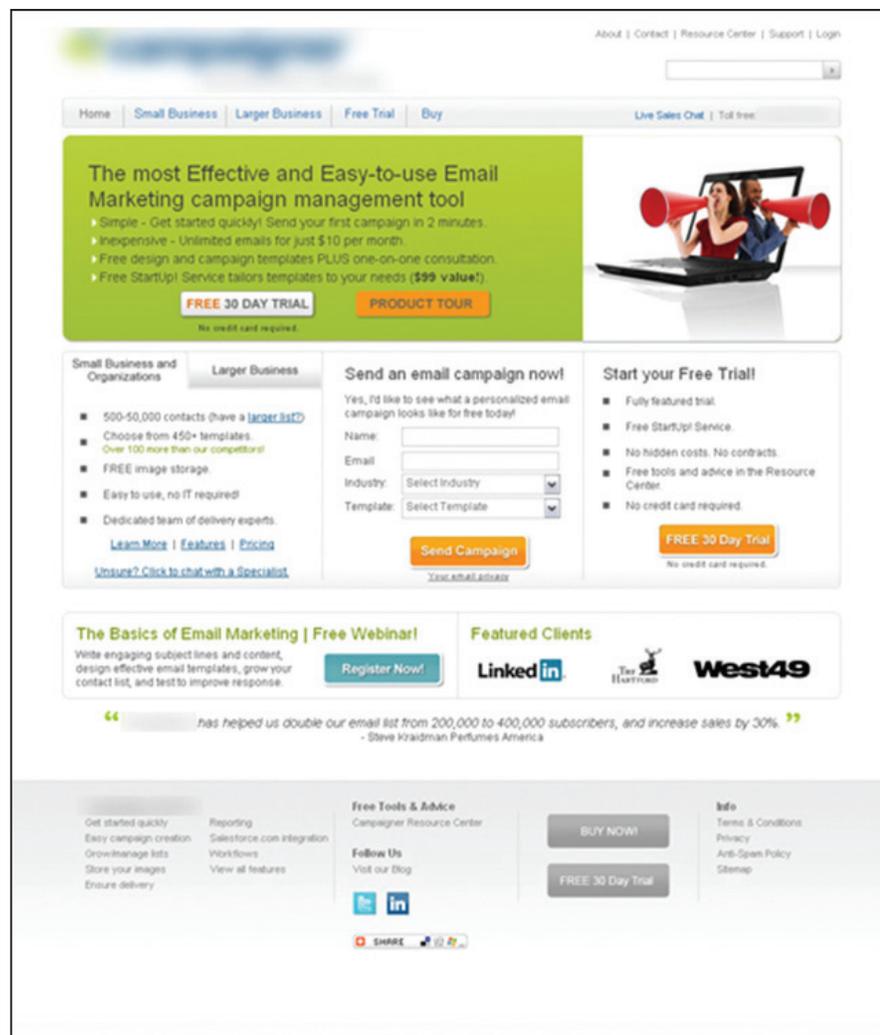
**Primary research question:** Which homepage will generate the highest free trial sign-up rate?

**Approach:** A/B multi-factor split test (radical redesign).

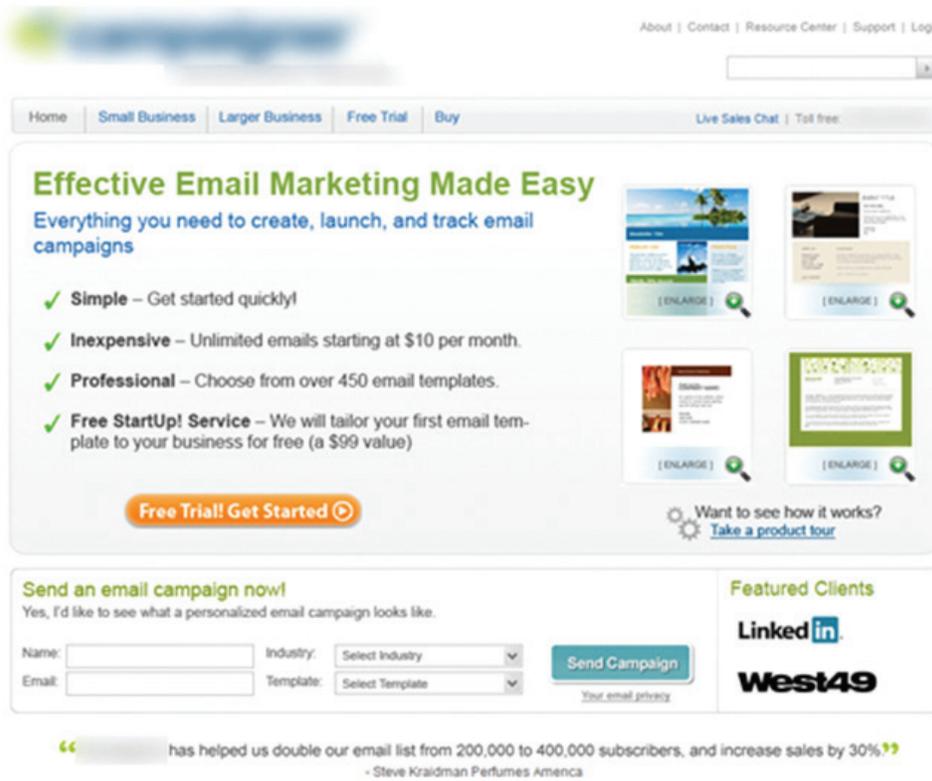
### Control:

In this radical redesign, we addressed several key factors that shape the thought sequence in the mind of the visitor

- 1. Eye path direction:** providing visual cues to help the visitor understand how the content is meant to be consumed
- 2. Distinguishing multiple objectives:** helping the visitor understand the difference between competing calls to action, minimizing the decision-making process
- 3. Flow logic:** helping the visitor immediately understand the relationship between different sections of the page
- 4. Strength of the value proposition statements:** increasing the clarity of the value proposition to keep the visitor wanting to move further into the process
- 5. Color combinations:** using color to weigh and prioritize various elements on the page, supporting objectives 1-3
- 6. Image relevance:** using images that directly support the value proposition or illustrate some aspect of the core offering (rather than a general eye-catching graphic)



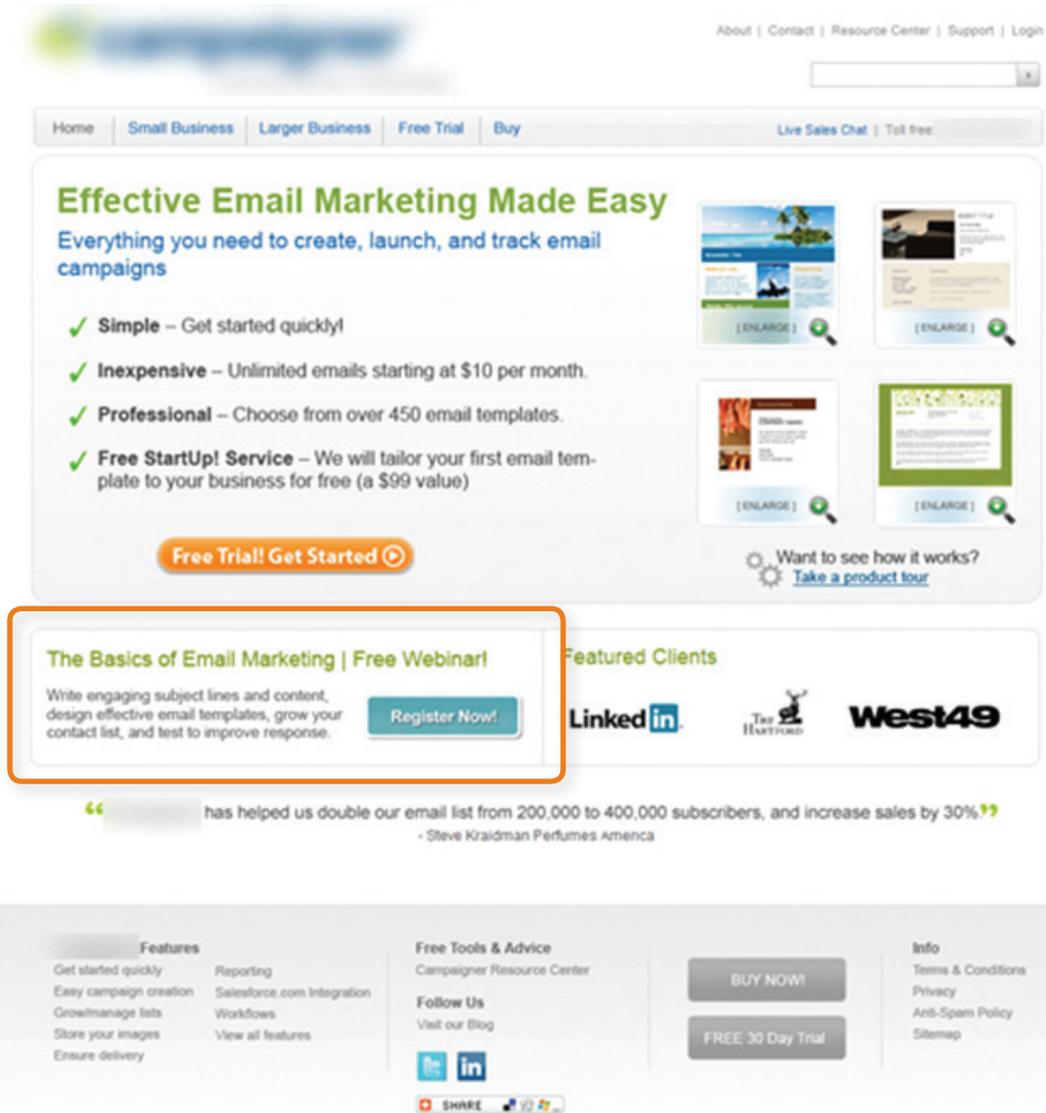
**Treatment #1:**



- Reduced the three-column layout to two columns: by reducing the number of columns, the vertical eye path is more clearly defined, and the logical flow of the content is more intuitive
- Reduced the amount of copy: by reducing friction, we were able to focus the visitor on the remaining (fewer) calls to action, effectively emphasizing them
- Focused attention on the free trial offer more than on the product tour: by weighing these two objectives differently using position, shape, and color, we made it easier for the visitor to understand the more “common,” and therefore less thinking-heavy step
- Strengthened headline and sub-headline: by increasing the clarity of the value proposition, we made it more likely that the visitor would engage with the page initially and continue on reading
- Added black-on-white bullet points for readability: by increasing contrast, we made it easier for the visitor to absorb the statements of value and effortlessly continue through the primary eye path
- Provided email template examples in place of the original image: by using product images, we created a relevant visual section that supported the value proposition of the offer



Treatment #2:



Treatment 2 is identical to the first treatment in every way except that it features an upcoming webinar instead of the “send campaign” feature: we wanted to understand which one of these two elements is more likely to increase the conversion rate

Results:

Design	Click-through Rate (%)	Relative Difference	Conversion Rate (%)	Relative Difference
Original Page	4.19%	-	1.18%	-
Treatment 1	4.87%	16.22%	1.52%	28.91%
Treatment 2	6.02%	43.67%	1.88%	59.36%



**What you need to understand:** The test resulted in a 59% Increase in overall Conversion, with Treatment 2 also significantly outperforming Treatment 1. The impact of the difference between Treatments 1 and 2 is also immediately evident in the numbers: the “webinar” feature is getting more clicks than the “send campaign” feature. It appears that the webinar feature is considered to be an easier form of initial/introductory engagement with the company, while the idea of sending a trial campaign just sounds like too much effort, too early in the relationship.

### Homepages Optimized

So, what was the difference between this homepage optimization project and landing page optimization? The key distinction is that, unlike landing pages, homepages have the job of getting the visitor to the right content, rather than into the conversion funnel. For companies that speak to multiple audiences about multiple offers, there is simply no way to make a landing-page-like homepage.

An important caveat is understanding how you manage your incoming traffic. If you are using PPC or display ads, affiliate marketing, and so on—you should be landing that traffic on dedicated landing pages, based on the offer, on which the visitor had clicked. There is rarely a good reason to send those visitors to your home page: you would be missing out on the extremely valuable information you are able to glean about those visitors, simply based on what ad they are coming from. Therefore, ideally, your homepage traffic should be difficult to differentiate—you shouldn't know what these visitors really want or who they are—because if you did know, you would've put them on a separate landing page.

This is both the primary challenge with optimizing homepages, and their defining property: given undifferentiated traffic, the job of the homepage is to effect such differentiation. By properly positioning the available choices in front of the visitor, the homepage should be able to tell you exactly what the visitor came there for, based on

where they click. In a sense, it is based on that information that you put subsequent content in front of that visitor. The objective of the homepage is to make this choice on the part of the visitor as effortless, yet as informed as possible, so that you can put them on just the right next page.

### Common B2B Homepages

When we review common B2B homepages, we see a recurring pattern: marketers are trying to do too many things at the same time, completely disregarding the fact that their visitors might not give them the three-to-five minutes required to figure out exactly what they are expected to do, what the best choice for them is to click. When you are competing against numerous other pages that the visitor might be pulling up in other browser tabs, you need to provide clarity and value to keep them—as opposed to losing them when they click on the little red “x” to close the tab, with the hope of finding an easier page to comprehend.

We are confusing these visitors with product offers, free trials, company information, fun facts about the CEO, employment opportunities, sponsor logos, and so on, instead of focusing them on a short list of things they can choose from, so that we can put them on the right next step. It's like arriving at the offices of a large firm, without a front desk person or a directory. What we are doing is asking the visitor to go through the building, knocking on each door, to find the office they need.



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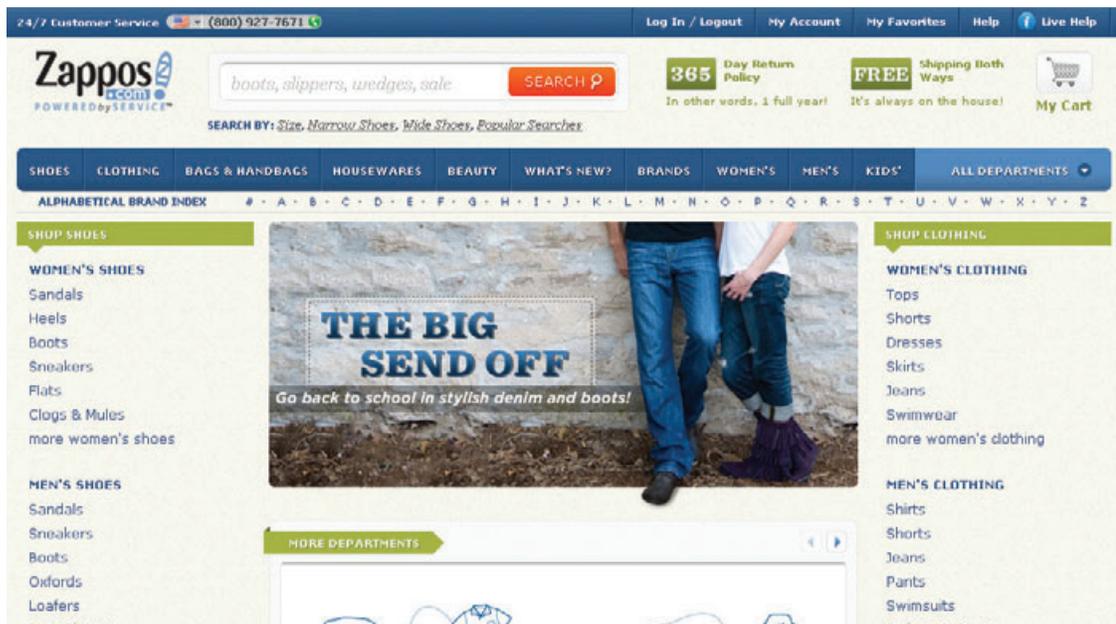
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### Common B2C Homepages

In addition to the issues discussed above, we see a tremendous emphasis on brand imaging in B2C homepages. While the branding aspect is certainly understandable, it probably should not also be all-consuming. Your customers did not come to your site to marvel at your amazing graphics (unless, of course, you are selling marvelous graphics or things with said graphics printed on them). Your visitors are there to engage—for a wide range of possible reasons, from purchase to career information. As mentioned above, your homepage traffic *should* be undifferentiated if you are managing your traffic channels properly with targeted landing pages.

As a result of over-emphasis on brand, there is tremendous confusion about what the site is there to do. It's like going to Home Depot on a busy day—you can just walk around and look at all the things that you need, but if you came seeking help with a specific project, there is nobody there to help you. You know that everything you need is in there somewhere, but getting it into your shopping cart seems like a far-fetched dream.



## A Process for Optimizing Homepages

Based on our experience optimizing homepages, we have developed a step-by-step process that makes these projects manageable and effective. This process is not a collection of design best practices—it's a roadmap for your homepage optimization efforts.

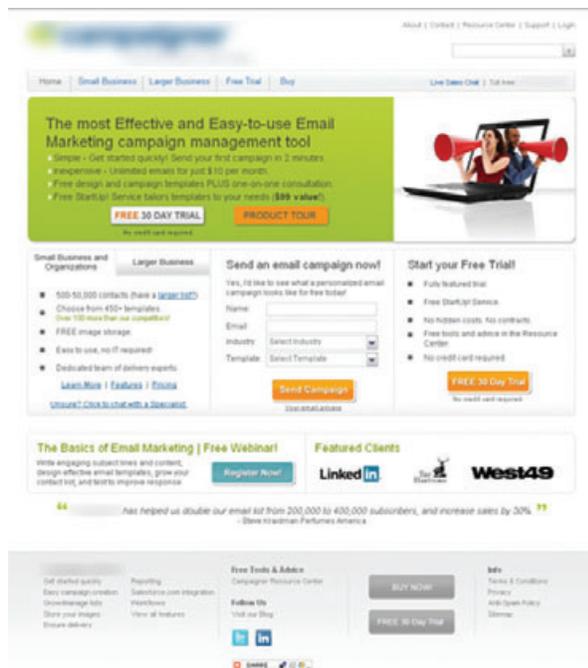
### Step 1: Identify all homepage objectives



To understand how we think about homepage objectives, consider the following characteristics that make homepages unique:

- Homepages vary significantly, but the most common challenge (and point of weakness) is managing competing objectives. We have a lot to say, and we try to use that one page to say it.
- Homepages are prime real estate for organizations and so frequently they are a marketing battleground. Unfortunately, it's the visitor that often loses.
- For most online optimization strategies, *eliminating* competing objectives is essential. For homepages, however, we must clearly *manage* and *sequence* multiple objectives. We can reduce them on a homepage, but rarely to just one.

We identified the following (long!) list of objectives based on the original page:



- Establish branding
- Provide current customer login/support
- Provide live chat and phone #
- Provide general site navigation
- Feature free product trial
- Feature product tour
- List small/larger business offer details
- Feature email campaign preview/lead gen capture
- Provide a secondary link to the free trial
- Link to webinar on email practices
- Feature clientele
- Feature deeper product information
- Provide social media info
- Provide an option to buy now
- Provide legal information

## Step 2: Prioritize the objectives into three categories

When we cannot simply eliminate an objective, we need to understand its importance to the business. That way, we can start planning, for which objectives we want to optimize—in other words, what visitor actions on the homepage are going to be most beneficial to the business. For simplicity, we divide all objectives into three major categories:

**Primary Objective:** When possible, a homepage should have a single objective identified as the key performance indicator (KPI). These objectives will be more long-term, usually directly connected to the business model, and should have the highest revenue potential. (e.g., *lead generation form, membership product offering*)

**Major Objectives:** These objectives are very important to the homepage’s overall success, but are not the primary goal. They are usually short-term objectives that may or may not be directly connected to revenue. These will most likely come from differing internal departments and/or differing marketing campaigns. (e.g., *upcoming sales presentation, special featured product offer*)

**Minor Objectives:** These objectives are functionally necessary for a homepage, but are not tied to directly revenue or any marketing efforts. (e.g., *site navigation, legal information*)

Starting with the list of objectives obtained in Step 1, we prioritized them in order of business value. Below, different colors illustrate the three categories of objectives on the original page:

**Primary Objectives** ■      **Major Objectives** ■      **Minor Objectives** ■

The screenshot shows a homepage for an email marketing tool. The layout is as follows:

- Header:** Navigation links (About, Contact, Resource Center, Support, Login) are highlighted in green (Minor Objectives). A search bar is highlighted in blue (Major Objectives).
- Navigation:** Home, Small Business, Larger Business, Free Trial, Buy are highlighted in green (Minor Objectives). A Live Sales Chat button is highlighted in blue (Major Objectives).
- Main Hero Section:** A large green box (Primary Objective) contains the headline "The most Effective and Easy-to-use Email Marketing campaign management tool" and a list of benefits. Two buttons, "FREE 30 DAY TRIAL" and "PRODUCT TOUR", are highlighted in blue (Major Objectives).
- Left Column:** A green box (Minor Objectives) lists features like "500-50,000 contacts" and "FREE image storage".
- Middle Column:** A blue box (Major Objective) contains a form to "Send an email campaign now!" with fields for Name, Email, Industry, and Template, and a "Send Campaign" button.
- Right Column:** A green box (Minor Objectives) lists trial benefits like "Fully featured trial" and "No hidden costs".
- Footer/Bottom Section:** A green box (Minor Objectives) contains a testimonial, "The Basics of Email Marketing | Free Webinar!" with a "Register Now!" button, and "Featured Clients" including LinkedIn, The Hartford, and West49. Below this are social media links, a "BUY NOW!" button, a "FREE 30 Day Trial" button, and an "Info" section with links to Terms & Conditions, Privacy, and Anti-Spam Policy.



## Step 3: Connect success metrics

Determining the success metrics for homepages is more difficult than for single-objective landing pages, since multiple actions can lead to different, and often difficult-to-compare, business outcomes. The most obvious metric by which marketers tend to judge homepages is the bounce rate, or its converse (the click-through rate or CTR).

However, these simple go/no-go metrics should *not* be considered in isolation. We have seen many times that pages that are good at getting higher CTR can also lead to decrease in revenue, because they end up driving away qualified visitors, while making up for it by letting more of the less qualified—yet curious—visitors through.

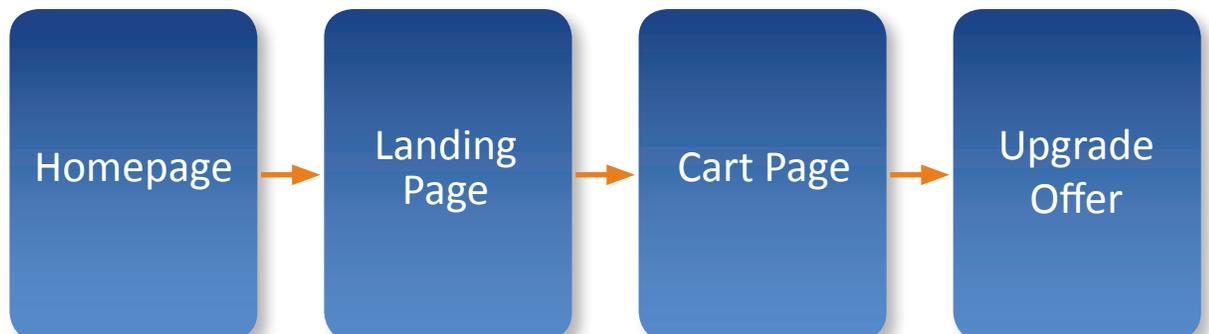
Objective	→	Key Success Metrics Examples
<i>Free Product Trial</i>	→	<i>CTR + product trials + product purchases</i>
<i>Upcoming Webinar</i>	→	<i>CTR + registrations + product trials + product purchases</i>
<i>Main Navigation</i>	→	<i>CTR + pages per visit + bounce rates + product trials + product purchases</i>

Homepages should be viewed as part of a holistic conversion funnel. This means that you may need to track metrics like

- Conversion rate
- Revenue
- CTR on each homepage link
- Time on page and site, and page depth
- Bounce rate

Given that the homepage typically received traffic from more than one source, you would ideally need to understand each metric with respect to each source separately. As you can imagine, this data gathering can require a lot of effort, potentially making the optimization project impractical. This topic is outside the scope of this article, but you must carefully select a reasonable number of metrics that you will track—sufficient both to validate the results and to alert your attention to any anomalies.

### Holistic view of the homepage



**Step 4: Design the homepage to weigh objectives strategically according to priority.**

In our next Research Article, we will cover this Design step in detail. We intentionally left it out of this Research Article, and covered it in a separate Web clinic (you can view [“Homepage Design: The five most common pitfalls and how to overcome them”](#) in our Research Directory and read a Research Article about this topic in our in the Fourth Quarter issue of the *MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal*). For the purpose of this Research Article, we will briefly describe the design decisions that were made after Steps 1 through Step 3 were completed.

In the screen capture below, each category of homepage objectives is color-coded on the Treatment page to illustrate how each is given different weight based on the category, in which the visitor falls. Note that this example certainly does not exhaust the different ways of distinguishing the priority level of each objective—we will discuss design considerations in more detail in a Research Article in the Fourth Quarter version of the *MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal*, focused exclusively on Step 4.

**Primary Objective**

By dedicating the primary column to this objective, we ensured that it is clear to the visitor what the primary objective is. The Free Trial offer flows directly from the main headline in the natural eye path. The orange button clearly stands out as the primary answer to “What can I do here?” Overall, about half of the “real estate” of the page is dedicated to the primary objective.

**Major Objectives**

Major objectives are accomplished using the space around the primary content. While they are clearly visible, they are also clearly secondary to the Primary objective. Major objectives account for about a third of the homepage real estate, making them easily accessible to the visitor.

**Minor Objectives**

Minor objectives are clearly de-emphasized using the gray background color and generally low-contrast color scheme. This information is available for those that may seek it, but it is entirely out of the way of the Primary and Major objectives. While the amount of space dedicated to the Minor Objectives is not insignificant, their positioning at the bottom of the page makes them effectively invisible to those who are not specifically looking for them.



**Step 5: Test the effect of each objective**

Prioritizing the objectives arbitrarily is often not the best solution. While you probably know what the Primary objective of the homepage should be, deciding which Major and Minor objectives should be included may not be as intuitively clear. The typical result is what we presented at the

beginning of this Research Article—homepages that are trying to accomplish too many objectives at the same time, leaving the visitor to look for a site that’s a little easier to comprehend.

For a marketer, there is a clear way out of this conundrum: testing. You can conclusively decide which objective is more important by comparing them directly, especially in a single-factorial test. In a simple experimental scenario, you could start with a homepage that has only the Primary objective (or the primary objective and the non-negotiable Major objectives) present—this would be the Control. In each subsequent treatment, you could add one objective to determine its impact. Then, you can take the list of objectives you had put together in Step 1 and assign a conversion rate or revenue impact figure to each. From there, choosing the right objectives becomes more data-driven.

Of course, this is an over-simplification: depending on the objectives themselves, they may interact with each other, and a multi-factorial test would be required to determine the best combination. Furthermore, in a realistic business scenario, like the one described in this article, the question is often not “which of the long list of objectives we should include on the homepage.” You may only have one “cell” on the homepage, where you can test different objectives.

For any number of political (homepage turf wars), business (“we are promoting a user conference, and it must be on the home page”), or resource (“we can’t get the data to do proper analysis of each objective’s impact on revenue”) reasons, you may have very little flexibility in choosing the right objectives for your homepage. However, where you can choose, you must test.

For the homepage in our case study, we chose to test the difference in choosing among just two Major objectives: a do-it-yourself test of the product (“send campaign”) and an educational webinar on a relevant industry topic (“register now”). Using the available section on the homepage as the independent variable, we wanted to measure the impact on the completion of the Primary objective (free trial)—the dependent variable.

## Email Campaign

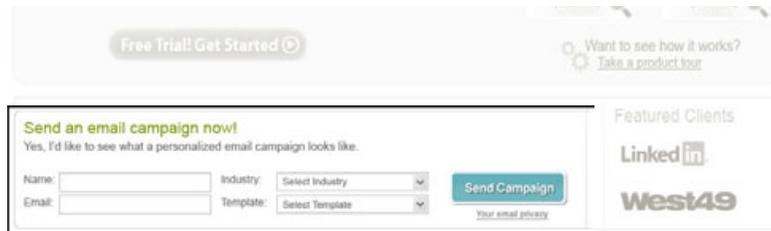
Vs.

## Free Webinar

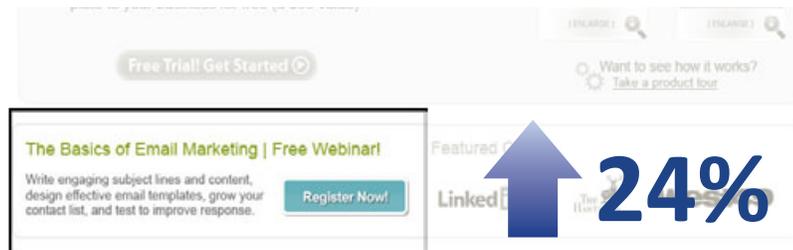
The outcome was significant: there was a 24% conversion rate increase potential in understanding the impact of different competing objectives.

In other words, we learned that we could keep the Primary objective the same, change the Major objective, and get a significant boost in the conversion rate of our Primary objective (without changing the Primary objective at all). Keep in mind that every element on your home page has a potential affect on every other element.

## Treatment 1 Email Campaign



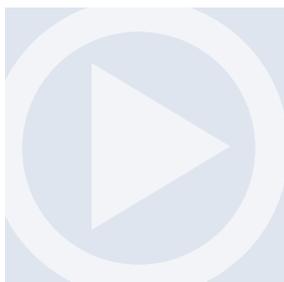
## Treatment 2 Email Campaign



**Bottom Line:** In this Research Article, we outlined five steps for optimizing homepages. While homepages vary widely in terms of the industries, customer segments, and traffic channels—making any one-size-fits-all best practice useless—this simple five-step method will help you *think* through your homepage optimization efforts:

- Step 1:** Identify all homepage objectives
- Step 2:** Prioritize objectives in three categories: primary objective, major objective, and minor objectives
- Step 3:** Connect key success metrics to each objective category
- Step 4:** Design the homepage to weigh objectives strategically according to priority
- Step 5:** Test the effect of competing objectives

The goal of this process is to maximize the return on your investment of time and resources into optimization and testing. In the end, you should have a homepage that does its job: it greets the visitors and put each of them exactly where they need to be next.



For examples of how to apply these discoveries on your website, feel free to [watch the replay of “Homepages Optimized: How using the homepage as a channel led to a 59% increase in conversion” in the Research Directory of the MarketingExperiments website](#). At the end of this Web clinic, Flint McGlaughlin and the MarketingExperiments team conducted live optimization on audience submissions.



# Web Page Optimization: In search of a value proposition as fast and reliable as Verizon FiOS



by Jon Powell,  
Research Analyst  
July 16, 2010

In our July 21st Web clinic, [Live Optimization: What we've learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three basic principles – plus live-optimization examples](#), Flint McGlaughlin and the MarketingExperiments team will spend a full 45 minutes optimizing audience submissions to help you identify changes you can make today, based on our research, to improve conversion.

[Send us your pages](#) for a chance at free optimization advice during that Web clinic, or right here on the blog. Thanks to Verizon for submitting [this landing page](#) for optimization.

Upon given Verizon's landing page to optimize, I first had to think like the customer. Purchasing telecommunications isn't something most people do every day, they just tend to set it and forget it. So journey back with me, if you will, to the last time I made this purchasing decision...

## Who's shopping for big changes?

When it comes to entertainment, it's an essential in my house. That means when I moved in, I made a decision, and fast, on the company I was going to go with. And I ended up picking the company that I could trust to get my system running fast, and keep it that way – the cable company.

There was only one time I can vaguely remember wanting to switch away from the cable company and it was because of a big a customer service issue relating to price. But I was tied down – phone, Internet and TV. So how far was I willing to go to change all of that? When would it become worth it?

I did some shopping around and came across a few decent price offers. But after my research, I decided that I couldn't find the same quality for the price I was getting and decided to not change at all.

Have you had a similar shopping experience?

If so, then Verizon's landing page probably wouldn't convince you to change either. At a glance it makes one of the biggest mistakes any landing page can do: **it leaves me asking more questions.**

## What in the world is FiOS, anyway?

After a few clicks, I learned that FiOS is a fancy acronym for Verizon's FiberOptic network. Immediately I question the quality of the TV, the quality of the internet, and even the Worry-Free Guarantee – just because I don't understand what FiOS stands for.

This page should either immediately define FiOS in the copy or a large header (if it truly adds value) or completely drop the acronym and lean on the brand itself. If thousands of people are waiting for the iPhone to land on Verizon just because of their reputation for reliability (including my wife who refuses to give up her service for a better phone), then why not use that brand recognition to help bring people into the residential part of their business as well (even if they are completely unrelated)? Especially if the fiber-optic network quality is just as reputable. If I were testing this page, I would definitely have one treatment playing up the value of the futuristic fiber-optic network and another treatment leaning completely on the Verizon brand. The key question is this: which focus answers customers' concerns about quality and reliability more effectively?

**Best Price Available only Online with NO TERM CONTRACT!**

FiOS Triple Play: FiOS TV + FiOS Internet + Phone

**\$40/month discount for 1 year - \$480 total savings!**  
**+ FREE multi-room DVR for 6 months**

**\$89.99/month**  
For 1 year. Regular price \$129.99/month. Plus taxes and fees.

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**FiOS TV Prime HD**

Packed with entertainment punch, the FiOS TV Prime HD package includes our dynamic Interactive Media Guide that makes it a breeze to take control of your entertainment, cool widgets that give you on-screen access to your Facebook and Twitter accounts and:

- 230+ channels with FiOS TV Prime HD including 40+ in HD
- Must-have programming from ESPN, Discovery, FOX, HBO, MTV, and more

**FiOS Internet Fast Plan (Up to 15Mbps/5 Mbps)**

Breakneck speeds for gaming, videos and more. Great for frequent users & media lovers, you get the only national provider of a 100% fiber-optic network to your home along with:

- 9 email accounts (everyone in the family can have their own)
- 10 MB of personal Web space (create your own blog or VWeb page)
- Remote email access online from any PC

**Verizon Home Phone**

Talk as long as you want with unlimited calling and loads of super convenient calling features.

- Unlimited local, regional & nationwide long distance residential calling
- Home Voice Mail, Caller ID and more
- Crystal clear voice quality

[More details](#)

**Price alone here is not enough**

The main reason I chose the cable company in the first place is because I could trust them to get the installation and service right. If the price was competitive, then the choice was easy. When that price significantly changed and they did nothing about it, I wanted to find the same service for around the same price I was used to.

If this is the case for a significant number of visitors coming to this page, then the headline and subheadline needs a new focus. They should immediately translate to me as (don't copy this word for word):

“The quality/reliability you demand for these three products at a competitive price.”

When I did some shopping around, it looked like Verizon Residential was only winning by about \$10 per month. The cost benefit compared to the cable company could build up over time, but it's not the kind of difference that's going to motivate me to completely change everything and risk losing my service for a day or two while I'm trying to switch (especially to a completely different kind of network and installation).

**Support your focus**

Depending on how you convince customers that you are just as reliable as the guy they are trying to leave (whether the winner of the testing is the “brand” treatment or “FiOS” treatment), it needs to reflect consistently across the bottom headers and supporting copy. Verizon's “About FiOS” page does this



much better, as it ties in the quality benefit into each product header (i.e. “The fastest Internet in the U.S., the best TV Experience”).

Also, the current call to action doesn't mean anything to me. What I want is to know if this is real and is worth my time. Make the call to action match that expectation.

### **Don't make visitors work harder**

Visitors looking to switch are already working hard to find comparable quality and price and the rest of the competitive world is asking for their information on this offer page. Why should visitors of the Verizon site have to make an extra click, and then decide if they want to put in their information for a service quote? On top of that, there is no value surrounding the next page form – just an information request. Make “the ask” when it makes sense – in this case, on the page where you are making the sell.

### **In Summary: Match visitor motivation**

The best opportunities on this landing page are not necessarily the incremental layout, copy or image adjustments, but in re-writing the page to clearly answer questions that visitors are coming in with (and produce a whole new set of questions in their heads):

- Is the service reliable and responsive?
- Is the price competitive?
- Is it enough to convince me to look into the process of changing everything I already have?

If you can clearly and quickly address those questions, then you might have yourself a significant increase in online leads and possibly orders.

### **Related Resources**

[Live Optimization: What we've learned from the last 200 experiments distilled](#)

[into three basic principles – plus live-optimization examples](#)

[Landing Page Optimization: Regions Bank opts for the information underload strategy](#)

[Become a Certified Professional in Landing Page Optimization](#)



# Landing Page Optimization:

## Regions Bank opts for the information underload strategy

In our July 21st Web clinic, [Live Optimization: What we've learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three basic principles – plus live-optimization examples](#), Flint McLaughlin and the MarketingExperiments team will spend a full 45 minutes optimizing audience submissions to help you identify changes you can make today, based on our research, to improve conversion.

[Send us your pages](#) for a chance at free optimization advice during that Web clinic, or right here on the blog. Thanks to Regions Bank for submitting [this landing page](#) for optimization...

I don't know about you, but I have opened very few checking accounts in my lifetime. I probably co-signed for an account when I was twelve or thirteen. Then when I was eighteen, I thought it imperative to have my own account (sorry mom, I don't need you for that kind of stuff anymore). And since then, I've switched bank accounts only one other time.

So that adds up to three in my entire lifetime. I would guess many people share a similar situation. I mean, who wants to go through the hassle of transferring money, updating online billing, and waiting around in a

cramped and cold office behind a rather large desk while an account manager slowly pecks at their keyboard.

With that said, my anecdotal evidence indicates that opening a new bank account is a big decision. I mean, most people will buy more automobiles than open bank accounts in their lifetime. So when I am at the precipice of making that decision, I am going to need a little bit more information than five short bullet points and a weird graphic that I think spells the word “save.”

Don't get me wrong, short and succinct landing pages can be very effective...for selling a free Facebook account. But for banking, I just need to understand a little bit better what I am getting myself into.



by Adam Lapp,  
Research  
Manager,  
Optimization and  
Strategy

July 28, 2010

So, how can we improve this page? We will get to that in a second, but first I need to communicate one caveat. Every idea, suggestion, or recommendation that anyone provides (including myself), or that you read online, absolutely and positively needs to be tested. You will never know what really works unless you measure and compare different strategies.

And I would not recommend anyone make any dramatic business decisions without the confidence that data provides. Changes to your web page must be measureable or you are just flying blind out there and most likely leaking dollar, dollar bills y'all.

*Exeunt Adam from stage right carrying his soapbox*

**Headline – Is it providing value?**

When a visitor arrives to a page, you must immediately begin a conversation with them. The best place to initiate this conversation is with the headline. It should be the largest font on the page, near the top left of the page directly in the natural eye-path, and the first primary page element a visitor sees. Regions Bank gets this part right. Their headline is big, bright and immediately visible.

**Save time, money and for the future.**

However, its meaning does not provide much, if any, value. Saving time and money for the future are sort of standard for banks right? The first impression Regions Bank makes to their visitors is that we offer the same value every other bank does. They are pitching their visitors a commodity. It's like Exxon saying "Our Gasoline will Run Your Car!!!" Really? Wow, next time I need gas I'm going to hold out until I see an Exxon station.

*Adam rolls his eyes sarcastically*

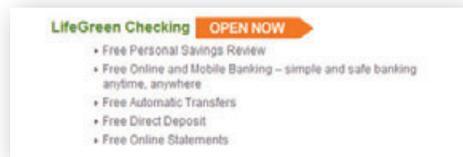
The headline needs to tell me why I should get this bank account instead of any of the

other ones out there. The Internet allows me to comparison shop within seconds. With the touch of a button, I can quickly see that BB&T is willing to give me \$100 just to sign up. Hmm, I can save time with Regions or get a c-note from BB&T for basically the exact same offering. I wonder which I will choose.

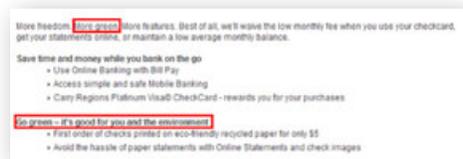
**Body copy – Are you differentiating?**

After the headline, the area that communicates the most value is the body copy. This is your opportunity to differentiate. It's your chance to tell me about the company, establish credibility, and clearly explain why I should entrust my hard-earned dollars with you.

What do I get instead? Five little, teeny-weeny bullet points that only make me say to myself, "That's it?"



First of all, the name of the account is a little bit confusing. I'm not sure if "Green" is a reference to Regions Bank's branded color or if this account is good for the environment. This is not made clear. If I dig a little deeper by going to the main website, I see that it's a reference to both more money and the environment, neither of which is clear on the landing page.



**Bullet points – Are your bullet points just empty shells or do they hit the target?**

Below the account name, Regions Bank fires off several rounds of bullets before they've even taken aim at the customer. You can't just list a few bullet points and expect that to sell somebody. You must lead them into the bullet points with a headline that piques

their interest and an introductory paragraph that engages them with your offer. This is called [“Sequence of Thought.”](#)

Even if you effectively control your visitor’s thought sequence, holding their hand as you guide them through the page, you won’t have much luck firing empty shells. Look at these bullet points and let me know one that just makes you want to run kicking and screaming into a Regions Bank to open an account.

*Adam stands there waiting for the audience to respond*

You’re right, there is not one. A free personal savings review? I’ll take the \$100 cash. Free online banking and online statements? Doesn’t everyone have that?

I’m not trying to bash this page too much, but rather just trying to get my point across that there is just not enough meaningful information to make me execute on such a big decision as opening a new bank account. The truth is that Regions Bank does have some great benefits that are specific to this account. Unfortunately they are not on the page. Looking at the main site, I would recommend using some of the following features in place of or in addition to the current bullet points:

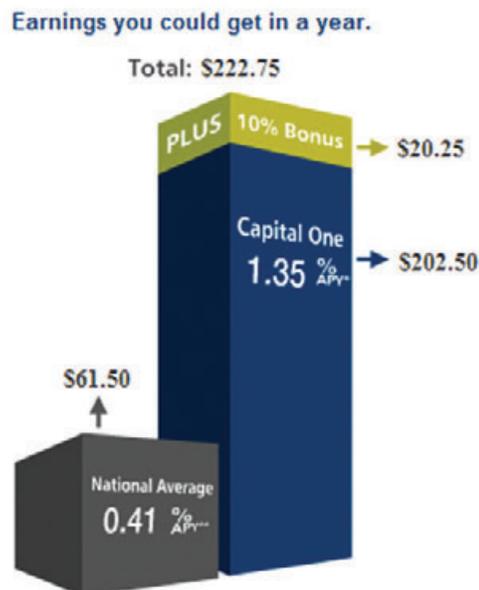
- “Platinum Visa Check Card with rewards including gift cards, fine-quality merchandise, and travel”
- “Access to over 2,300 ATMs (this can be really important as visitors consider the \$2.50 charge they will have to pay for each withdraw with a bank having fewer ATMs)”
- “Overdraft protection”
- “First order of checks printed on eco-friendly recycled paper”

Let’s assume this page effectively sells the visitor on the value of the LifeGreen account. Should this be the only value on the page? I’m not sure, but it’s definitely something I would recommend testing.

This test concept would broaden the focus of the page which is usually not a good practice for landing pages. However, I know that if I were to look for a new bank, I would not only consider the primary checking but also the home and auto loans, credit cards, and investment services. Many consumers are going to want to go to one place for all of these services, so it may be wise to provide just a little bit of information about them.

**Supporting images – Are they adding value?**

Last but not least, this page could definitely benefit from a better supporting image. You don’t only communicate value in copy, but also in logos, colors, tone, and images. Once you’ve tested your way into effective copy, I would recommend an image test. You need to find an image that not only supports your main content, but also has inherent meaning. Visitors should be able to look at an image and immediately perceive value. For example, Capital One has a graphic on their landing page that clearly explains the earnings you will get in a year by choosing to bank with them.



I hope this feedback gives you new test ideas on trying to communicate value. If you try any of them, be sure to let us know the results.



### Related Resources

[Live Optimization: What we've learned from the last 200 experiments distilled into three basic principles – plus live-optimization examples](#)

[Clarity Trumps Persuasion: How changing the first seven seconds of user experience drove a 201% gain](#)

[The Five Best Ways to Optimize Email Response \(Part 2\): How to craft effective email messages that drive customers to action](#)



# Optimizing Landing Pages:

## The four key tactics that drove a 189% lift

In a previous Research Article, we talked about [three key principles to help marketers get immediate results in their optimization efforts](#). While we deliberately discount the idea of uniform “best practices” in favor of continuous testing in order to determine what indeed works in each case (and we have proven over and over again that what works for one page, site, company, customer segment, etc., does not necessarily work elsewhere), our knowledge base of past tests has allowed us to identify certain optimization opportunities that tend to be either overlooked or otherwise allow marketers to get a greater return on their optimization efforts.

In this Research Article, we will explore how we have applied the [MarketingExperiments](#)

[Conversion Sequence heuristic](#) to get significant results, but we will also discuss the broader framework of the [offer-response mechanism](#) focused on what happens in the mind of your Web page visitor. We will use this framework to explain how four specific tactics can be highly effective in swinging the balance of the emotional forces in the mind of the visitor from negative to positive—increasing the likelihood of conversion.

We start with an experiment where we applied all four of these tactics to achieve a 189% increase in conversion. We will also use other examples throughout the article to provide additional illustrations of more complex points.



By Daniel Burstein  
and Boris Grinkot

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July 29, 2010

### EXPERIMENT #1



**Experiment ID:** Macquarie Telecom  
**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library  
**Test Protocol Number:** TP1341

**Industry:** Telecommunications

**Country:** Australia

#### Research Notes:

**Background:** Macquarie Telecom is a supplier of Information and Communications Technology solutions – including voice, mobile, data and hosting – and specializes in business-to-business and government markets. They formed a Research Partnership with MarketingExperiments to explore how to increase conversion on their site.

The first experiment in the Research Partnership was a landing page that gathered leads for dedicated hosting solutions for critical Web applications.

**Goal:** To increase the amount of leads

**Primary research question:** Which page design will produce the greatest lead generation rate?

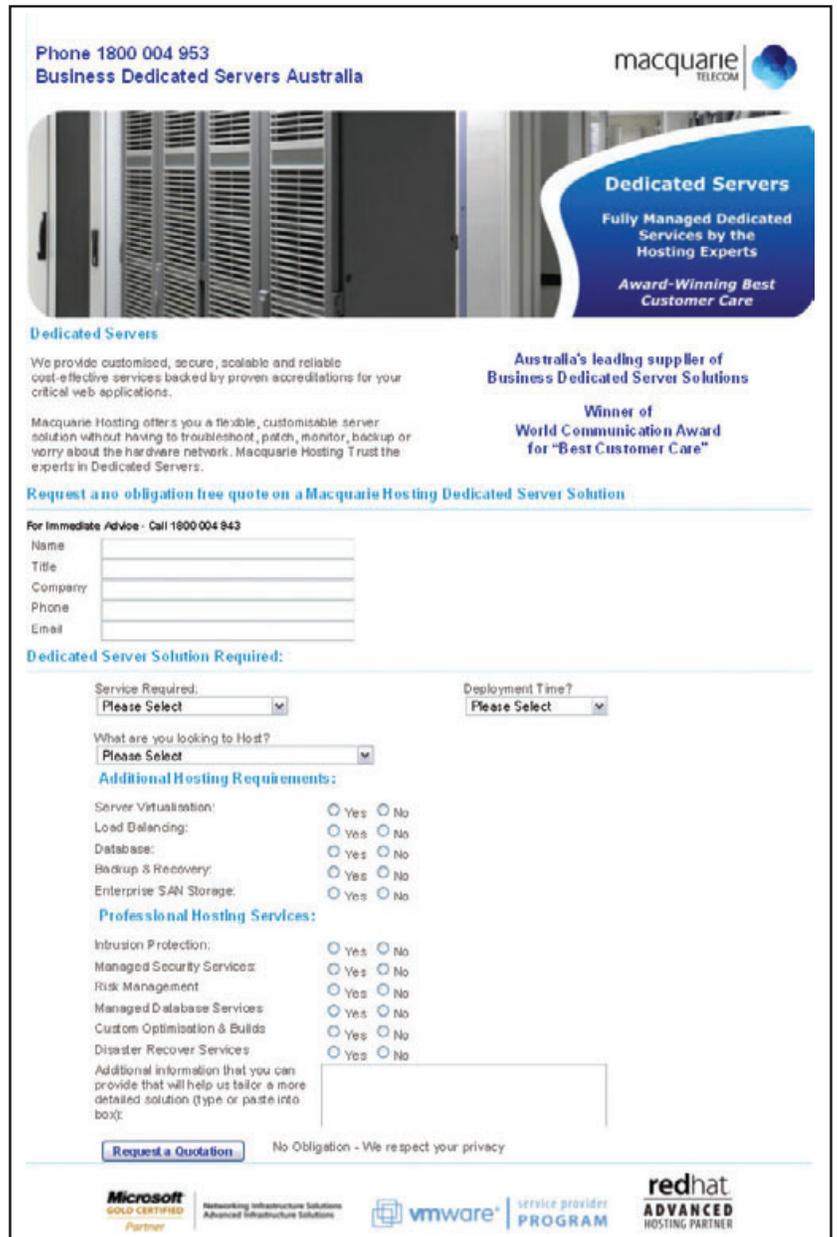
**Approach:** A/B multi-factor split test (radical redesign)

### Original:

Here is the original page for this Australian company...



The primary goal of this page was to get the visitor to request a quote. These quotes were essentially leads that were then followed-up with and nurtured. While this page was delivering leads, the Macquarie Telecom team saw room for improvement.



MarketingExperiments Research Manager Adam Lapp and Research Analyst Nathan Thompson were the key researchers on this project. They analyzed the page using the MarketingExperiments Conversion Sequence heuristic:

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

They identified the following three conversion threats:

- 1) There is significant friction due to the volume of questions (many not necessary for a sales follow-up) posed in the form.
- 2) There is not enough value being communicated with headlines, images, copy and call to action.
- 3) The overall low aesthetic quality of the design may be creating anxiety as to the actual capabilities of this company.

**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**

**Treatment:**

To address these hypotheses about possible conversion threats, the MarketingExperiments and Macquarie Telecom teams created a treatment to test against the original.

The page that the teams created significantly reduced the number of form fields required on the first step, from 20 to four. Once users completed the form they became a lead. However, to mitigate the loss of information from reducing the number of fields, the next page in this sequence displayed optional form fields along with a headline to let visitors know that providing additional information would result in a better experience for them (*page not shown since it did not affect lead conversions, only lead quality*). In this way, the team ensured that the lead was captured and that visitors didn't bounce because of the friction in a long form, while offering the sales force additional information from the optional second form.

On the treatment page, the team also removed the distracting banner image, strengthened the visibility of the headlines to communicate the value better, added testimonials, utilized more modern-style images, and included a six-point expandable/interactive display of value proposition copy...

**Box #1**  
The Macquarie support team becomes an extension of your team increasing the ability to support complex infrastructure on a 24 / 7 basis. At any time, you have immediate access to our engineering teams with specialist experience in supporting mission critical application infrastructure environments.  
- 24/7 Technical and Customer Support

**Box #2**  
We are the only data centre to hold the ISO27001, AS/BS7799, SunTone, RedHat, ASIO and DSD certifications. This provides you with peace of mind that the people, processes and the physical location are secure and always running.  
- Highest Level of Global Accreditations

**Box #3**  
All our solutions are backed by stringent Service Level Guarantees with cash rebates for under performance:  
• 99/9% uptime guaranteed  
• Guaranteed response time  
• Guaranteed time to repair  
- 99.9% Uptime Guarantee

**Box #4**  
Macquarie Hosting provides multiple layers of security protection so you can confidently and cost-effectively tackle your ongoing security challenges:  
• Managed firewalls and Intrusion Detection Services  
• Web Content Filtering  
• Antivirus and antispam  
• End-to-end network security  
- End-to-End Security Solutions

**Box #5**  
Many of our clients need to scale their infrastructure, storage and bandwidth rapidly due to the success of their application. Macquarie can quickly develop and deploy new infrastructure in a controlled, cost-effective, and risk averse fashion.  
- Flexibility to Meet Every Need

**Box #6**  
In addition to having the highest level of global accreditations, Macquarie Telecom is the world leader for customer care, winning the World Communication Award for "Best Customer Care." With a support team that is genuine, stable and able to build long-term relationships, we can ensure that our customer experience is second to none.  
- Most Trusted Hosting Company

The above boxes were expandable and offered more information once clicked. This solution was, in a sense, the best of both worlds. The team could create a simpler design than if all the information was included as copy right there on the landing page, yet visitors did not have to navigate away from the page for more information.

Since there was no click-through, the team used event tracking to measure on-page clicks to determine what information visitors found most useful. They can now use this data in future tests to create landing pages that better tie into customer motivation.

In addition to these specific changes, the teams focused on addressing the design-induced anxiety by creating a more aesthetic design that improved the perceived credibility of this company. The hypothesis was: if a potential B2B client is looking for a partner with professional online capabilities, then a more professional design would generate better response.

**Results:**



Metric	Control	Treatment	Relative Difference
Original Page	2.00%	-	-
Treatment	5.77%	188.5%	95%



**What you need to understand:** The optimized page improved conversion by 189%, not because it was based on marketing intuition, expert advice, or a list of common best practices. Instead, this page was designed through an optimization methodology (or framework) developed through years of experimentation. At the core of this framework are the metatheoretical principles represented in the MarketingExperiments Conversion Sequence heuristic.

As mentioned above, MarketingExperiments researchers Adam Lapp and Nathan Thompson used this heuristic to analyze the original page, develop hypotheses, and create a treatment that significantly increased conversion. Let's take a look at what they saw...

## MARKETINGEXPERIMENTS CONVERSION SEQUENCE HEURISTIC APPLIED

### Original landing page

The largest real estate on this page is given to an image that doesn't communicate any real value and creates a moment of disorientation (v + f)

Personal info (phone, title) is being asked without any justification (a)

Many unnecessary form requirements (f)

No justification given for these form fields (a)

Page layout makes the forms seem longer than they should (f)

Request a quote CTA is action oriented instead of benefit oriented (v)

**Phone 1800 004 953**  
**Business Dedicated Servers Australia**

macquarie TELECOM

**Dedicated Servers**  
 Fully Managed Dedicated Services by the Hosting Experts  
 Award-Winning Best Customer Care

**Dedicated Servers**  
 We provide customised, secure, scalable and reliable cost-effective services backed by proven accreditations for your critical web applications.

**Australia's leading supplier of Business Dedicated Server Solutions**  
 Winner of World Communication Award for "Best Customer Care"

**Request a no obligation free quote on a Macquarie Hosting Dedicated Server Solution**

For Immediate Advice - Call 1800 004 943

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Title: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Company: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Dedicated Server Solution Required:**

Service Required:  Deployment Time?

What are you looking to Host?

**Additional Hosting Requirements:**

Server Virtualisation:  Yes  No  
 Load Balancing:  Yes  No  
 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  
 Disaster Recover Services:  Yes  No

Additional information that you can provide that will help us tailor a more detailed solution (type or paste into box):

No Obligation - We respect your privacy

Microsoft GOLD CERTIFIED Partner | Networking Infrastructure Solutions Advanced Infrastructure Solutions | vmware service provider PROGRAM | redhat ADVANCED HOSTING PARTNER

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Qualitative language is used throughout the copy (v)

The most powerful statement "Winner of Best Customer Care Award" is out of the main eye-path (v)

Differing colors of text are difficult to read and disrupt the eye-flow (f)

Images and overall aesthetic quality of the page seems to imply a lack of technical capabilities or not up-to-date services (v + a)

Treatment landing page

**Annotations on the left:**

- Banner image has been replaced with a headline that better orientates the visitor to where they have landing (f)
- Interactive expandable copy that supports the value with specific quantitative claims. (v)
- Phone number has been made more prominent (f)
- The form fields have been reduced from 20 to 4 (f)
- Request a quote CTA is still action oriented, but focuses on the conversational element (v)

**Annotations on the right:**

- Single column design (f)
- More modern and professional images are used (v)
- Again, more modern and professional imagery has been added (v)
- Testimonials have been added near point of anxiety (a)
- Overall cleaner more professional design supports the value of this company (v + a)

Analysis

By applying the MarketingExperiments Conversion Sequence heuristic to a business-to-business landing page, the MarketingExperiments and Macquarie Telecom teams were able to create a treatment page that improved the amount of leads generated by 189% (with a statistical confidence level of 95%).

The teams used a radical redesign, multi-factorial experiment to test their hypotheses. There were many factors being tested at once, and no doubt the results reflect that.

Just reducing the friction by decreasing the form length to four fields (from the previous 20) likely made the most significant difference in conversion. But the success of this redesign is not

just because of the hefty reduction of form fields; the MarketingExperiments and Macquarie teams also used previously tested persuasive design techniques within the copy:

- Increased emphasis on the headline
- Specific statements that back up the claim in the headline, such as:
  - “We have the highest level of global accreditation. We are the only data centre to hold the ISO27001, AS/BS7799, SunTone, RedHat, ASIO and DSD certifications,”
  - “Macquarie Telecom is the world leader for customer care, winning the World Communication Award for ‘Best Customer Care.’”
- Six expandable boxes of copy referring to customer service and using words such as “guarantee” and “flexibility”
- Adding a testimonial
- Making the phone number more prominent

When combined with reducing form fields and only asking the questions that are absolutely required to conduct business, these optimization changes helped to gain customer trust.

All of these optimization changes happened within the context of a purposefully and strategically more aesthetic Web design, and the more graphically appealing page was the clear winner.

Even a page like this, which has produced significant conversion gains can see additional improvements through continued use of the testing-optimization cycle – running a valid test with a hypothesis, learning from that test, optimizing based on that new knowledge, testing again, and then repeating.

The MarketingExperiments and Macquarie Telecom teams have gained new knowledge about what works for Macquarie’s prospects, but have already identified opportunities for future optimization – for example, using quantitative statements in the headline.

### Optimizing Landing Pages:



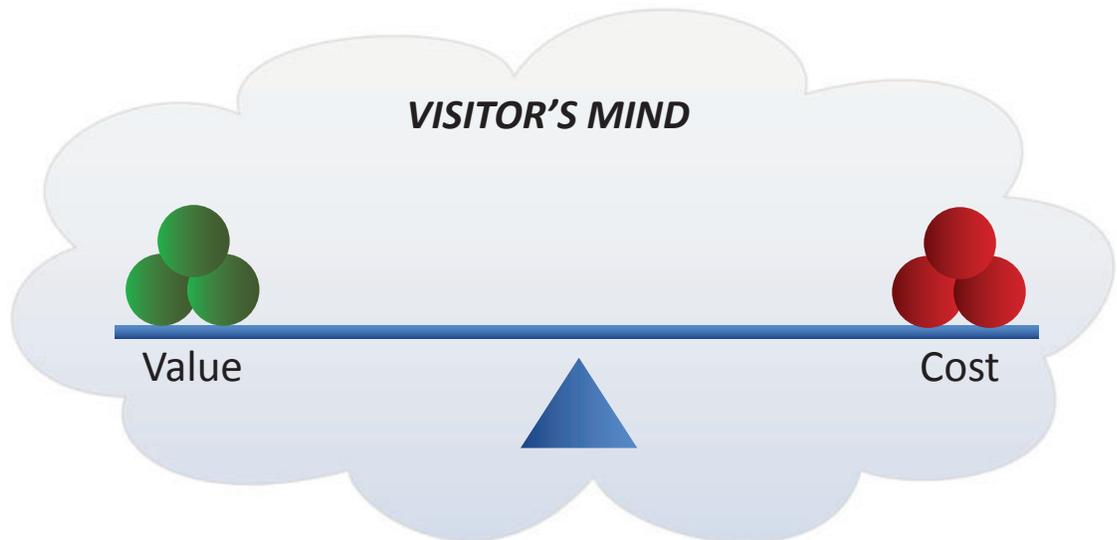
1. We do not merely optimize words or images on a page. Rather, we are optimizing sequences of thought. We are engaging in a conversation that is going on in the visitor’s mind and then leading the visitor to an exchange of value.
2. This means that the value of every action you desire to lead your visitor to make must outweigh the perceived cost.

### The Value Exchange Fulcrum:

When a customer makes a purchase, there is an obvious value exchange: a product or a service is exchanged for money. However, to understand the broader offer-response mechanism, we should look at the entire experience of the visitor interacting with the Web site as a value exchange.

Visitors exchange their valuable time, attention, physical and mental exertion (to interact with the site), and personal information (when submitting a form) for the value of the information offered by the site and the opportunity to do business with it. This exchange occurs in addition (and typically prior) to the purchase transaction. In fact, this *must* occur





for the purchase transaction to become a reality. If the visitor is not willing to interact with the site, the purchase — at least one occurring on or triggered by the Web site — becomes an impossibility.

This presents the marketer with a specific objective for the Web site: to orchestrate the value exchange in such a way that the visitor is willing to agree to it. How can the marketer achieve this objective? It's simple: the perceived value to the visitor must exceed the perceived cost.

Note that the word "perceived" is a critical qualifier. We are not dealing with market prices, dollars, and cents. We are dealing with emotional forces in the mind of the visitor that amount to either negative (cost) or positive (value) perceptions of the interactive process. The balance of these forces determines the viability of the interaction. When the perceived value exceeds the perceived cost, the process can move forward. When the cost exceeds value, the process is extinguished, which is a fancy way of describing a click on the little "x" in the right corner of the browser window.

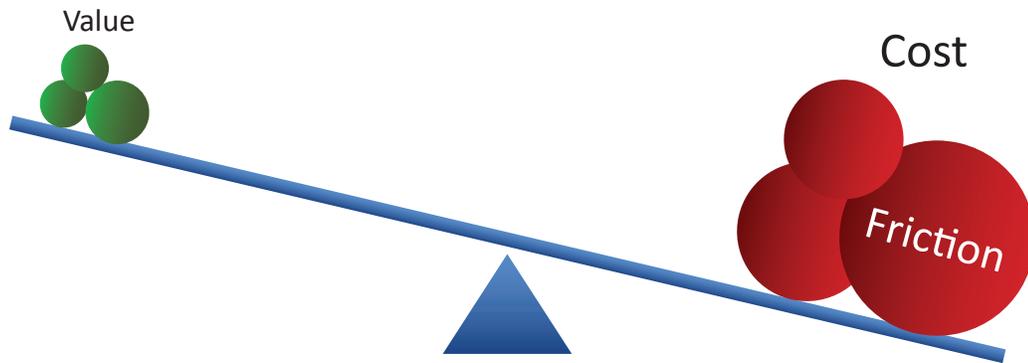
The following is a tactical approach to achieving a positive balance of these emotional forces — that is, for making perceived value outweigh the perceived cost — by focusing on two distinct aspects of value and cost, respectively: appeal and friction. We start with the latter ...

MarketingExperiments defines "friction" as psychological resistance to the difficulty, length, complexity, or annoyance aspects of a page. Friction impedes the interaction between the visitor and a page, therefore increasing the perceived cost of the interaction for the visitor. The more friction, the more we are asking the visitor to invest into the interaction, making conversion less likely.

Friction, ironically, is a necessary evil. We must put at least some work on the visitors: they have to read copy, click on links, enter information into forms, and so on. A page with no friction is a blank page — but it can't communicate any value or produce a conversion. Therefore, the objective cannot be to eliminate friction, but it should be to minimize it to a point where value can still be communicated and the conversion process can take place.

In our experiments, we have found that during the early iterations of optimization testing, friction can often be reduced significantly with the following two-pronged approach.

**Reducing Friction**



**1. Length and difficulty**

First, we look for the most elementary causes of friction — length and difficulty. A thorough understanding of the objective of a page and how all elements on the page contribute to that objective typically reveals that many of them in fact are unnecessary. Copy, banners, and form fields often make it into the page simply because they “fit” the layout, because of organizational politics (turf wars), or because nobody stopped to ask whether the information each form field collects is indeed going to be used (or can be collected after the conversion has happened). More egregiously, elements are added to a page when there is a lack of clarity about the very objective of the page, and therefore the visitor is presented with multiple objectives. These forms of friction are easy to reduce with simple layout changes, mostly through elimination of the “offending” elements.

The following examples illustrate how this simple paring down can have a dramatic effect on the conversion rate.

**Example 1: Reducing friction caused by unnecessary form fields**

The original form contained 20 different form questions requiring response:

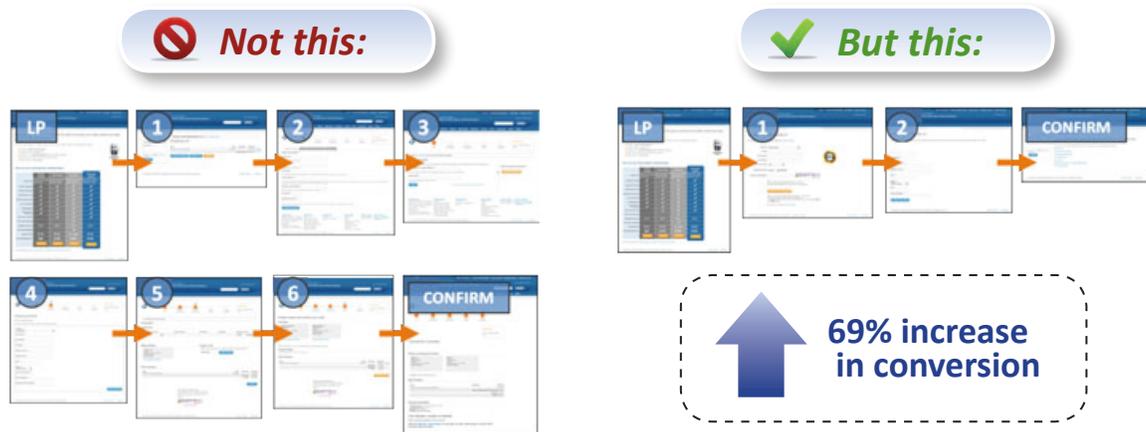
1. Personal information
2. Server requirements
3. Hosting requirements
4. Service requirements

Some of these fields are not necessary at this step and are creating unnecessary length and difficulty

The optimized page reduced the form fields to four, significantly reducing any unnecessary length and/or difficulty in the process.



Example 2: Reducing friction caused by unnecessary process steps



The original process after the visitor selected the “buy” button was made up of 6 steps, many of which were redundant or requested information that was not essential to completing the purchase. Furthermore, the process-step indicator at the top of the page clearly signaled to the visitor that the process was going to be long. By eliminating unnecessary form fields and consolidating the remainder into only two steps, the optimized process was shorter and more intuitive, not even requiring a process bar at the top.

Example 3: Reducing friction caused by competing objectives

**Not this:** A landing page for a CRM system with multiple competing objectives. It features a large headline, a video player, a list of features, and a testimonial. The layout is cluttered with various elements competing for attention.

**But this:** A streamlined landing page for the same CRM system. It focuses on a single objective: getting the CRM. The layout is clean and clear, with a prominent headline and a clear call to action.

**78% increase in conversion**

In the original page, the visitor was presented with three equally weighted buttons, each leading to a similar form. Analysis showed that the page truly had only one objective — to collect lead information from the visitor, so that a sales engineer could get in touch with them. However, legacy forms had existed for the purpose of different sales activities, even though the information they collected was essentially the same. Because the forms already existed, the page left it to the visitors to decide what to do next, even after they already decided — based on the information above — that they wanted to engage in the process. In the optimized version, we simply reduced the number of choices to one. We are achieving the same objective; except now the visitor didn't have to do the additional work to figure out which button is the best one to click next.

## 2. Confusion

Second, we look more closely at the initial questions that typically arise in the minds of the visitors as they enter the page. Two

simple, yet crucial, questions that arise — whether consciously or unconsciously — within the first moments of any transition are:

- 1) Where am I?
- 2) What can I do here?

In working tirelessly to improve our pages, it's easy to forget that the visitor doesn't have as much information about the content or the process as we do...since we are creating and constantly working on these pages. Therefore, visitors are often left to fend for themselves in figuring out just where they are or what they can do. Answering these questions immediately on the page using content and design elements — as opposed to letting the visitor figure out the answers by doing some investigative work — is what often makes the difference between the visitor staying and bouncing.

The following example illustrates how answering these questions can keep the visitor continuing to engage:

### Example 1: Where am I?



The original page greeted visitors with an image that doesn't clearly say much about where they have landed. This creates confusion.



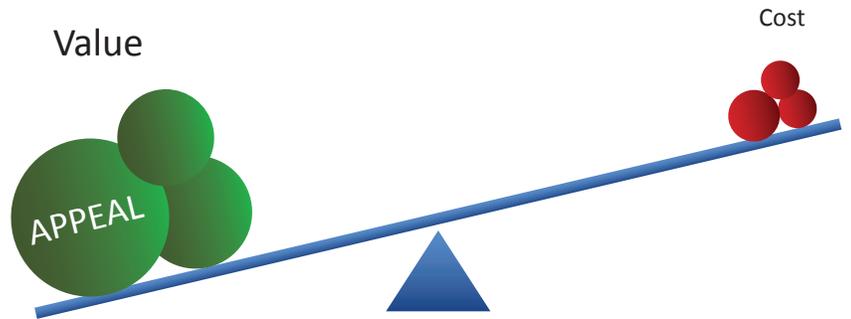
The optimized version uses a strong headline that clearly communicates where the visitor has landed.



**Increasing Appeal**

It's not enough to have a product or service that's better than the competition. It's critical to be able to communicate that the product or service is better. This is the distinction between quality and appeal: quality is intrinsic to the product or service, but appeal is a measurement of how this quality is perceived by the potential customer. This perception is created by many factors, some of which relate to the benefits of the offer itself, while others to the credibility of the company that is making the offer. Ultimately, the optimization objective of increasing appeal is about effective communication from the page to the mind of the visitor.

The challenge is that the visitor is simultaneously exposed to the appeal of many competing offers. It is common for online users to open multiple search engine results at the same time to go through them for the purpose of narrowing down their choices. Therefore, appeal must be expressed in such a way that — for the right customer segment — it is greater



than the appeal of competing offers.

Creating appeal is typically more difficult than reducing friction, but our past experiments have revealed two sets of tactics that tend to produce positive results by using the information we already have.

**1. Differentiation**

Appeal in a competitive environment must necessarily be aware of the other offers. It must be clear to the visitor not only that your offer has value, but that its value to that particular visitor is greater. The idea of differentiation is certainly not new in marketing, but communicating it clearly on a page is often overlooked. We must identify and communicate the key factors that differentiate our offer from the competitors

**Example 1: Increasing appeal using competitive differentiation**



We are the only data centre to hold the ISO27001, AS/BS7799, SunTone, RedHat, ASIO and DSD certifications. This provides you with peace of mind that the people, processes and the physical location are secure and always running.

– Highest Level of Global Accreditations

The Macquarie support team becomes an extension of your team increasing the ability to support complex infrastructure on a 24 / 7 basis. At any time, you have immediate access to our engineering teams with specialist experience in supporting mission critical application infrastructure environments.

– 24/7 Technical and Customer Support

In addition to having the highest level of global accreditations, Macquarie Telecom is the world leader for customer care, winning the World Communication Award for "Best Customer Care." With a support team that is genuine, stable and able to build long-term relationships, we can ensure that our customer experience is second to none.

– Most Trusted Hosting Company

In the optimized version, key value differentiators for this company and service are highlighted in pieces of the copy clearly positioned in the primary eye path. Each differentiator is stated succinctly as a bullet point, and then also explained in detail on click.

## 2. Credibility

Communicating value has one major obstacle: distrust on the part of the visitor. Consumers are highly aware of sales and marketing, and therefore are always suspect about claims that are provided with the offer. This means that even if the value is communicated clearly, the appeal may still not be affected because the visitor may be unsure about the truth of the message, or discount it completely.

There are many ways to increase credibility. One is related to the concept of “social proof” that has been heavily researched by psychologists. Applying it to Web pages, we have found that statements of value made by third parties (testimonials, magazine reviews, etc.) are more powerful than statements made by the company itself. Likewise, credibility can be derived from third-party accreditation (academic degrees, compliance certifications, awards, etc.), rather than direct endorsements.

However, these third-party credibility indicators may not be readily available. Our testing has also shown that even when we have to make a statement about ourselves, we can increase its credibility by being as specific as possible. Using statements that quantify any benefits of the offer (“takes 5 minutes to assemble” rather than “easy to assemble”) or cite specific qualitative attributes (“developed by engineers at MIT” rather than “advanced engineering”) has been shown through testing to increase the likelihood of conversion.

In the Macquarie Telecom experiment, we used these tactics to convert general statements on the page into instantly credible, clear expressions of value.

### Example 1: Increasing appeal using third-party credibility indicators

The image shows a comparison between the original and optimized versions of a landing page section. On the left, the original copy is presented in a box: "Fully Managed Dedicated Services by the Hosting Experts" followed by a paragraph: "Macquarie Hosting offers you a flexible, customizable server solution without having to troubleshoot, patch, monitor, backup or worry about the hardware network. Macquarie Hosting. Trust the experts in Dedicated Servers." Below this is a blue button with the text "Request a no obligation free quote on a Macquarie Hosting Dedicated Server". On the right, the optimized version is shown in a box: "We are the only data centre to hold the ISO27001, AS/BS7799, SunTone, RedHat, ASIO and DSD certifications. This provides you with peace of mind that the people, processes and the physical location are secure and always running." Below this is a blue button with the text "Highest Level of Global Accreditations".

The original statement certainly communicated value, but saying that accreditations are “proven” immediately raises a red flag in the mind of the visitor: “Why should I believe that they are proven?” Rather than subjectively assert that these accreditations are proven, the optimized copy spells out exactly what these accreditations are. Even if the visitor is not familiar with each of them, the very presence of these third-party elements creates the perception of an indirect endorsement, and therefore increases the appeal of the offer.

### Example 2: Increasing appeal using specificity

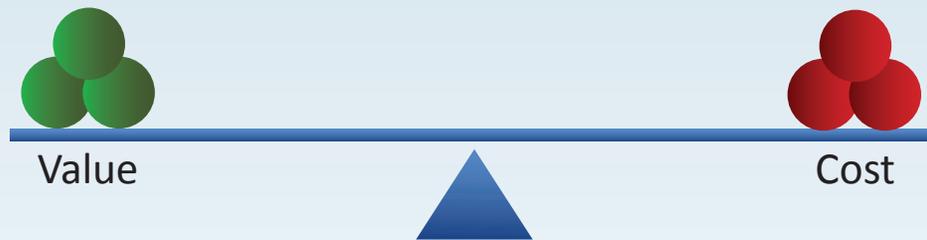
The image shows a comparison between the original and optimized versions of a landing page section. On the left, the original copy is presented in a box: "We provide customized, secure, scalable and reliable cost-effective services backed by proven accreditations for your critical web applications." On the right, the optimized version is shown in a box: "All our solutions are backed by stringent Service Level Guarantees with cash rebates for under performance:" followed by a bulleted list: "• 99/9% uptime guaranteed", "• Guaranteed response time", and "• Guaranteed time to repair". Below this is a blue button with the text "99.9% Uptime Guarantee".

Reliability is a critical factor in choosing a dedicated hosting solution. The problem is that *everyone* says “we provide reliable services.” Naturally, the visitor is not easily swayed by such a generic statement. In the optimized version, we made it crystal clear what is meant by “reliability” from Macquarie Telecom, using numbers wherever possible, and pointing to specific guarantees that are part of the offer.



### Bottom Line:

## The Value Exchange Fulcrum



### Four steps to reducing cost and increasing value:

- 1 Eliminate any unnecessary length or difficulty in the process.
- 2 Answer two crucial questions within the first moments of any transition:
  - 1) Where am I?
  - 2) What can I do here?
- 3 Identify and communicate the key factors that differentiate you from your competitors.
- 4 Use specific, quantitative, and instantly credible language.

The four tactics outlined above certainly far from exhaust the optimization opportunities for marketers. However, they provide some of the most efficient starting points in your optimization and testing. To make these tactics work, you must do some work as well. They require a precise understanding of the objective of the page, of the truly required elements in the transaction process, and of the mindset of your customers, to build the most effective user experience. At the same time, these tactics make use of the information you already have at your disposal — perhaps even hidden somewhere on the page — to craft a more effective communication of value.



For examples of how to apply these discoveries on your website, feel free to [watch the replay of “Optimizing Landing Pages: The four key tactics that drove a 189% lift” in the Research Directory of the MarketingExperiments website](#). At the end of this Web clinic, Flint McGlaughlin and the MarketingExperiments team conducted live optimization on audience submissions.





# **EMAIL OPTIMIZATION**

# Email Testing Pitfalls: 7 Common Mistakes That Can Hurt Your Test Strategy



by Corey Trent,  
Research Analyst

August 9, 2010

*Editor's Note: In a recent interview with MarketingSherpa Editor Sean Donahue, Research Analyst Corey Trent outlined errors even experienced email marketers make when conducting tests. (My personal favorite – #5). We thought this information was valuable, and wanted to share it right here on the blog for those who do not have a [MarketingSherpa membership](#). Special thanks to our sister company for allowing us to republish the below article...*

**SUMMARY:** Before you conduct your next email test, make sure you're not falling into a trap that can muddy your results or limit the gains you might otherwise achieve.

We spoke with an email testing expert from our sister company, MarketingExperiments, to uncover common mistakes marketers make when running email tests. Read why good analytics and segmentation are crucial forerunners to testing, and why a blockbuster discovery from one test actually can be a risky thing for a marketing team.

by Sean Donahue, Editor, MarketingSherpa

Testing is an essential component of a strong email marketing strategy. But only if the tests are conducted and analyzed properly to ensure you're helping – not hurting – your email performance.

"There is a cost for bad testing," says Corey Trent, Research Analyst, MarketingExperiments. "Bad assumptions based on bad tests can cost you a lot of money and cause you to lose out on a lot of business." Trent routinely conducts email tests as a member of the MarketingExperiments sales and marketing optimization research team. Through this work, he's seen how mistakes, misconceptions and simple oversights can

derail a well-meaning marketer's testing strategy.

We asked him to share his advice for avoiding testing pitfalls, so you can achieve your goal of improving email performance. Here are seven common mistakes he's observed:

## Mistake #1. Not having the right analytics behind your tests

Sometimes marketers must recognize they are just not ready for email testing, says Trent.



In particular, he says, marketers often don't have the processes or the analytics systems in place to capture a complete data picture — you must be able to tie your email metrics to business goals, such as revenue.

For example, if you're only measuring email metrics, you might test a new subject line

treatment that increases open rates by a few percentage points. Sounds exciting, but without tying subsequent clicks from those messages to website sales, you might not notice that you're actually decreasing conversions and total revenues because the subject line is creating the wrong expectations about your message.

The good news is that it is now relatively easy to track email activity through to website metrics using tools such as Google Analytics. This program offers marketers ways to track email messages through specific goals on your site, such as product pages viewed or time spent on site (see Related Resources below).

"Email tracking all the way through to business goals is available for everyone, and doesn't take a long time to set up or require having an IT team to do a lot of programming for you," says Trent.

So make sure your analytics systems are robust enough to support your objectives before you begin email testing.

### **Mistake #2. Not segmenting email lists for tests**

Many marketers have large email databases, but don't know a lot about the records held within. In these cases, they may conduct an email test using their entire database – and create a muddy results picture.

"Without segmented lists you don't get good test results," says Trent. "You get all these people responding differently to your emails, which pulls your results in all different directions."

Spend the time to segment your database and understand the different characteristics of the segments before you embark on email testing. The more you know about unique segments within

your database prior to testing, the better chance you'll have of finding the right messages to appeal to them.

### **Mistake #3. Stopping tests after one big win**

"With email more than anything, we see people get a big win and stop testing," says Trent.

As exciting as those big wins may be, they shouldn't be the end of your testing process. The makeup of your email lists is constantly changing; external factors, such as the economy, also impact subscriber behavior; and your competitors' campaigns and tactics are always changing as well.

This constant state of change means you must routinely work on the messaging, layout, calls-to-action and other elements of your email messages to ensure you're getting the full benefit of a testing program.

### **Mistake #4. Testing too often**

The flip side of stopping tests too quickly is falling into a pattern of repeated testing, to the point that you simply can't keep up with all the data you're generating.

When finding the right pace for testing new email treatments, think critically about the tests you want to perform and their potential impact. Focus on the ones that have the greatest potential impact on your specific business goals.

Trent suggests researching your current email strengths and weaknesses: Examine your own email and website metrics and study industry research to benchmark your own performance against your industry peers. This process can uncover where your email programs are delivering weak performance – and where you have



a bigger chance of improving your company's bottom line through testing.

"Those deep dives into the data you have available help you prioritize that list of potential tests," says Trent.

## **Mistake #5. Overlooking email copy tests**

Today's email messages are so versatile that marketers have a wealth of options to test: Layout changes, images, fonts, colors, social media integration and so on.

But the ability to tweak these elements can make marketers forget about the old standby: copy tests.

"What often gets left out is how important the copy and communication pieces of an email are," says Trent.

Copy changes can deliver surprising results, so keep them on your list of test options. You can try using a different voice for your message, long copy vs. short, different copy layouts, or even a personal letter from someone in your company.

## **Mistake #6. Always testing additions, rather than subtractions**

The pressure to generate more engagement with subscribers can push marketers to continually test new additions to their emails: More images, more buttons, more links or more colorful text.

Too many additions can actually confuse recipients, making it hard for them to decide what to do with your message.

Instead, Trent has seen marketers achieve strong performance gains by eliminating elements from an email and reducing the number of decisions a recipient has to make.

By focusing a message on a single goal — such as inviting recipients to an event or generating sales within a specific product category

— you can see whether there are extraneous elements that might be distracting recipients from the desired action. You can then test the impact of removing those distractions.

## **Mistake #7. Not asking other customer-facing teams for test ideas**

Great test ideas don't always come from the marketing team. It's likely you have other sources within your company whose insights can shape a good email test.

Trent recommends talking to sales people or customer service representatives to learn what they're hearing from customers. The feedback these teams receive from customers about your products and services — or why they chose to buy from you — can spark ideas for new subject lines, email copy, or specific products to feature in email promotions.

"Don't be scared to go down and talk to those people to get some good ideas."

## **Related Resources**

[The Magical Metrics Tour: Demystifying the secrets behind analytical "tricks" to help you drive ROI](#) (describes how to track email clicks with Google Analytics)

[What Else Can I Test...To Increase Email Click-through?](#)

[Discover the Best Time to Send Email: 4 Test Ideas](#) (for MarketingSherpa members)

[Improve Your Email Programs: 5 Test Ideas](#) (for MarketingSherpa members)

*Photo attribution: [michperu](#)*

# Email Marketing Trends Toward Integration

Despite the rocky environment for marketing budgets during the last two years, a much larger percentage of organizations increased their email marketing budgets in 2009 than decreased them, according to [MarketingSherpa's 2010 Email Marketing Benchmark Report](#).

We spoke with several marketers this week to uncover a few more email marketing trends. We asked for their impressions on this vital tactic's role in today's marketing. Here are the highlights we found:

## *Deeper Integration with Digital Channels*

Email marketing is becoming less of an isolated silo and is taking on a more cohesive role as marketing channels further integrate. Email has long tied directly to companies' websites, but lately it has expanded to connect with audiences via:

- Social media

Click-to-share buttons added to email messages with strong, relevant content are expanding the reach of marketing campaigns.

- Mobile

Mobile devices are frequently used to read email, and marketers are formatting messages to ensure they render clearly.

- And others

Companies are asking for customers' email address as the points-of-sale, and they're linking emails to videos on YouTube.

The next step, says Blaine Mathieu, CMO, [Lyris](#), is that companies should develop an integrated mindset and plan how marketing channels could be best combined to achieve the most effective results.

## *Tactical Advances from Technology*

- More Sophisticated Segmentation

Email marketers have long segmented their audiences to deliver customized content to increase relevancy and response rates. In the beginning, segments were often broadly determined, such as by product category or topic of interest.

Now, behavioral segmentation is more common. Marketing teams are studying their subscribers' actions and timing and crafting messages based on their positions in the buying cycle. This technology has been around for several years, but more marketing teams are taking advantage.

- Automated messaging

"There is no way any company can interact one-to-one in a relevant manner with thousands, tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of people," says Dylan Boyd, VP Sales & Strategy, [eROI](#).

The increasing need for relevance and volume in email communication has driven the rise of automated email marketing. More teams are establishing automated email series based on events, such as abandoned shopping carts and white paper downloads. The growing sophistication of product suggestion and other personalization technologies has given these messages a personal, tailored touch.



by Adam T. Sutton  
Senior Reporter,  
Marketing Sherpa

September 23,  
2010

## *Less Tactical, More Strategic Planning*

Digital marketing has witnessed a boom in third-party solutions over the past few years. The growing lists of targeting and analytics platforms have outpaced many market teams' abilities to leverage them, especially since many require a high-level of technological expertise to establish. However, the adoption process is simplifying.

"Especially in the last year, the tools of an email marketer and an online marketer are finally becoming simple enough to use and connected enough to each other across channels that the marketers no longer have to be a technologists – they can be marketers again," Mathieu says.







## Email Summit 2011

January 24-26, 2011  
Las Vegas, NV



- **New Location** – Caesar’s Palace in Las Vegas
- **Keynote Speaker** – David Meerman Scott, sponsored by ExactTarget
- **Bonus** – All attendees to receive copy of David’s book, *Real-Time Marketing & PR*
- **Attend Pre-Summit Workshops** – Advanced Email Marketing & Social Marketing
- **Your Questions Answered** – Sign-up to meet email experts in one-on-one Consultation Clinics
- **Dual Sessions** – B2B and B2C learning tracks will provide specific examples and takeaways

There are plenty of great reasons to come to Email Summit ‘11. Here are just a few of them:

### **Keep Up with the Evolution of Email Marketing**

Our Email Summit continues to adapt to the ever-changing email marketing landscape. Social media integration, mobile, list growth strategies, winning test ideas and leveraging technology for results are just a few of the topics to be covered during three days of information-packed sessions.

### **Programming Laser Focused on Top Email Challenges**

Based on all-new MarketingSherpa research, we are finalizing the agenda to address the top email challenges:

- 1) Targeting recipients with highly relevant content
- 2) Getting people to opt-in to email lists
- 3) Quantifying email marketing ROI
- 4) Improving email deliverability
- 5) Lack of an effective email marketing strategy
- 6) Inability to engage social marketing audiences

### **More than 20 All-New Case Studies**

Every Sherpa case study is chosen because of its results and superior ROI. You can bookmark these tactics without worrying about whether or not they’ll work - they’re already proven.

## Online Certification Courses

### Email Marketing Certification

Get Certified Today!  
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[marketingexperiments.com/certification](http://marketingexperiments.com/certification)



Enroll in our online course today and:

- Download free templates designed by our optimization experts including email capture forms, outlines for body copy and layouts for landing pages.
- Learn to optimize your email message and design envelope fields that improve deliverability and increase open rates.

In this course you will learn how to analyze several key areas of your e-mail campaigns:

**Email Capture:** Learn how to build strong lists by creating e-mail capture forms that maximize the quality and quantity of your leads.

**Email Messaging:** Discover how to optimize email messages for deliverability, open rate, and click-thru.

**Email Landing Pages:** The ultimate goal of most email campaigns is conversion. Learn how to design email landing pages that turn clicks into sales.

### Landing Page Optimization Certification



During the course you'll learn proven techniques you can begin implementing immediately, including:

- How to identify and express an effective value proposition
- How to reduce your website abandon rate
- How to increase page relevance
- How to test and track metrics and analyze results
- How to prioritize messages and optimize your own landing pages

The fastest, least expensive way to increase your sales is to optimize your webpages. But optimization can be difficult. The challenge isn't developing a way to test. The challenge is discovering what changes to test.

This course is carefully designed to help you discover exactly what you need to change on the key landing pages from your ecommerce, subscription, or lead-gen paths. Receive more than 307 pages of actionable content – all carefully arranged to for easy application to your own website.

## **MarketingExperiments Resources**

### **Community**

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### **Training**

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[Letter to the Editor](#) – Editor@MarketingExperiments.com



# Call for Research Partners

MarketingExperiments is a research laboratory with a simple (but not easy) seven-word mission: To discover what really works in optimization.

MarketingExperiments empirical research focuses on real-world Internet marketing challenges and opportunities. By conducting experiments with actual commercial offerings, we uncover relevant, practical insights that enable our Research Partners to discover what works – for their products, with their target customers, in today's ever-changing marketplace.

To that end, we are currently looking for Research Partners with real-world challenges, deadlines, and budgets in the following areas:

- Social media marketing
- Mobile marketing
- Email marketing
- Website and landing page optimization
- Search marketing
- Online marketing (subscription, lead generation, and ecommerce)



## Current and Past Research Partners include:

To learn more about Research Partnership opportunities, please visit [MarketingExperiments.com/Partners](http://MarketingExperiments.com/Partners) or call 904-339-0068.

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