

Top Lessons from 2010: What worked – and what didn't – in the last 365 days of experimentation .....	<u>23</u>
Images vs. copy: How getting the right balance increased conversion by 29% .....	<u>57</u>
Website Optimization: The five most common pitfalls of homepage design .....	<u>85</u>
Analyzing Test Results: How to further improve performance and find your next test .....	<u>113</u>



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Table of Contents

## MARKETING OPTIMIZATION

### Major Experiment Briefing

**Top Lessons from 2010: What worked – and what didn't – in the last 365 days of experimentation . . . . .**[23](#)

By Austin McCraw, Daniel Burstein, Gaby Paez, Dustin Eichholt, Corey Trent, Jon Powell, Adam Lapp

**Marketing Career: You must be your company's corporate conscience. . . . .**[44](#)

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

**Uh oh. It's budget time. Do you know where your metrics are? . . . . .**[46](#)

by Dave Green, Director of Best Practices

**Database Marketing: Is Someone Examining You Right Now? . . . . .**[47](#)

by Dave Green, Director of Best Practices

**New to B2B Webinars? Learn 6 steps for creating an effective webinar strategy . . . . .**[49](#)

by Justin Bridegan, Marketing Manager

**Public Relations: The best press release is no press release . . . . .**[51](#)

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

**Better Window Than Door: A Transparent Marketing primer . . . . .**[54](#)

by David Kirkpatrick, Reporter

### Major Experiment Briefing

**Images vs. copy: How getting the right balance increased conversion by 29% . . . . .**[57](#)

by Austin McCraw, Daniel Burstein, Dr. Flint McGlaughlin Nathan Thompson

**Marketing Webinar Optimization: Five questions to ask yourself about webinars. . . . .**[73](#)

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

**Content Marketing: How to get your subject matter experts on your corporate blog. . . . .**[75](#)

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

**Value Prop: Is there true value in your marketing proposition? . . . . .**[78](#)

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

**SEO: Is an obscure product name hurting your organic traffic? . . . . .**[81](#)

by Adam T. Sutton, Senior Reporter



## SITE OPTIMIZATION

### *Major Experiment Briefing*

#### **Website Optimization: The five most common pitfalls of homepage design .....85**

by Brad Bortone, Boris Grinkot, Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, Adam Lapp, Nathan Thompson,  
Austin McCraw, Daniel Burstein

#### **Maximizing Optimization Opportunities: 3 Simple Visitor Types .....99**

by Boris Grinkot, Associate Director of Product Development

#### **Internet Marketing: Landing page optimization for beginners .....101**

by Dustin Eichholt, Research Analyst

#### **Solving for a Conversion Lift: To get to the right answer, change the question .....104**

by Boris Grinkot, Associate Director of Product Development

#### **Online Testing Optimization: Learn from test suggestions for David Weekley Homes .....107**

by Spencer Whiting, Research Analyst

#### **Online Marketing Conversion: “Free” is a Pretty Strong Incentive .....109**

by David Kirkpatrick, Reporter

## ONLINE TESTING

### *Major Experiment Briefing*

#### **Analyzing Test Results: How to further improve performance and find your next test .....113**

by Adam T. Sutton, Jimmy Ellis, Pamela Markey, Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, Jon Powell

#### **Marketing Research: Cold, hard cash versus focus groups .....123**

by Todd Lebo, Senior Director of Marketing and Business Development

#### **Marketing Research and Surveys: There are no secrets to online marketing success on this page .....125**

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

#### **Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Adobe Test&Target .....128**

by Gina Townsend, Director of Operations

#### **Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer .....130**



by Gina Townsend, Director of Operations

**Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Unbounce . . . . .132**

by Gina Townsend, Director of Operations

**Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Internal Proprietary Tools . . . . .134**

by Gina Townsend, Director of Operations

**Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Content Management Systems . .136**

by Gina Townsend, Director of Operations

**Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to SiteSpect . . . . .138**

by Gina Townsend, Director of Operations

**Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Liveball . . . . .140**

by Gina Townsend, Director of Operations

**Lead Generation: Shouldn't B2B companies have a sales and marketing research and development lab? . . . . .142**

by Dave Green, Director of Best Practices

## EMAIL MARKETING

**Email Marketing Optimization: Email messaging 101 . . . . .147**

by David Kirkpatrick, Reporter

**Internet Marketing for Beginners: Email marketing optimization 101 webinar strategy . . . .150**

by David Kirkpatrick, Reporter

## SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

**Social Media Marketing: How enterprise-level social media managers handle negative sentiment . . . . .155**

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

**Social Marketing: Twitter contest boosts followers 43%. . . . .158**

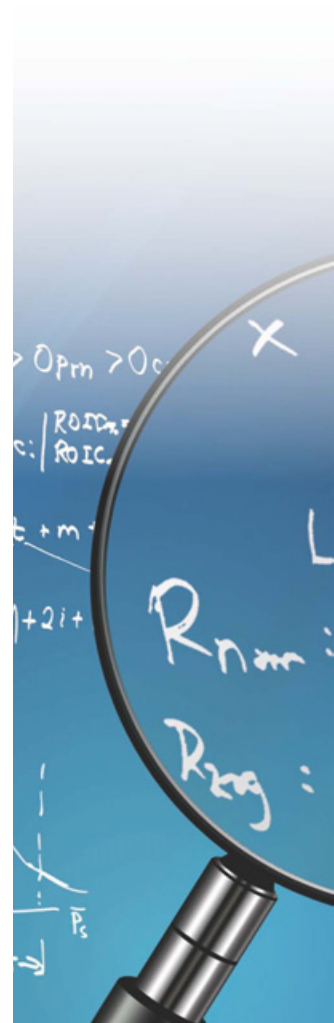
by Adam T. Sutton, Senior Reporter

**Social Media Marketing: Interview with Kodak's Chief Listening Officer. . . . .160**

by Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

**Facebook Marketing in Six Steps: How to successfully manage your fan page . . . . .162**

by Zuzia Soldenhoff-Thorpe, Research Analyst





Dear Readers:

The number one hindrance for our next great win is our last great win.

Most marketers who profit from an email send, an e-commerce site, or a lead generation landing page stop there. Why mess with success, as the saying goes.

But how much money are you leaving on the table by settling for what worked yesterday? Through our research with consumer and B2B marketers the world over, we've learned that companies are letting billions of dollars leak out of their sales and marketing funnel.

In the latest edition of our *MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal*, we share some discoveries that will help you challenge your current model and find new gains for your marketing efforts. Here are a few of the discoveries that were most interesting to me:

- In the marketing world, there is often a tension between words and images. It's human nature. People have different psychological predispositions to the way they would like to communicate. To help you create the most effective marketing communications, we share a systematic approach to utilizing words and visuals that helped a well-known news organization increase conversion by 29 percent. See **"Images vs. Copy" on page 57.**
- Testing should do more than help you get a result – it should teach you invaluable insights about your customers that you can use to optimize campaigns across your marketing department. To help you interpret your tests' results to extract insights that provide value well beyond the results themselves, we share a methodology that helped an accounting and payroll management software solution company drive a 24 percent increase in revenue per visitor. See **"Analyzing Test Results" on page 113.**
- Your homepage URL is likely directly connected to every dollar that flows out of your marketing budget. It's on TV commercials, business cards, even the side of a city bus. But is it optimized to meet your marketing goals? Or is your marketing campaign leaking revenue every time someone lands on your page? In this article, we discuss the five most common homepage pitfalls revealed by our research, and how to overcome them. See **"Homepage Design" on page 85.**



- If there is one thing consistent about online customers, it's that they are consistently changing. As our researchers discover again and again, it's often our biggest assumptions that are the biggest hindrances to conversion. This past year (2010) was no different, as new tests revealed what worked and what didn't – with a few surprises. So we round out our final Research Journal edition from 2010 with six overarching lessons that can help all of your 2011 efforts, lessons that helped one of our Research Partners achieve a 124% increase in conversions. See **"Top Lessons from 2010" on page 23.**

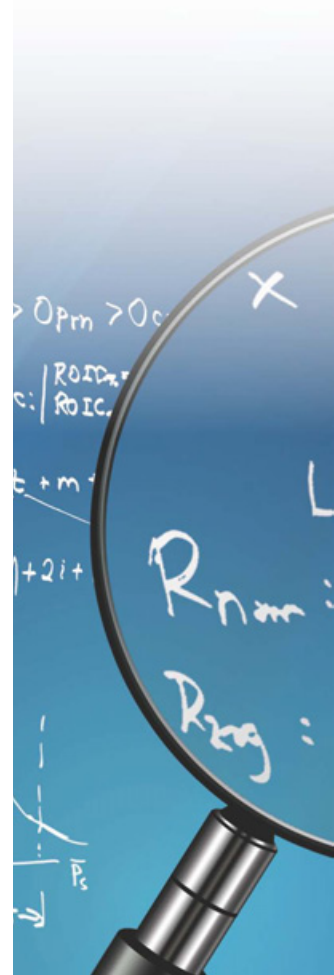
Thank you for taking the time to read this issue. While you may have received a complimentary copy of this *Journal*, it represents a significant research investment. If you find it useful, please pass along this research to colleagues to help us build a community of evidence-based marketers that we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



# Creative Swipe File

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

## LESSON #1: Do not underestimate the effect offline media can have online



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** TP1321

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Well-known news publication offering home delivery services via online registration

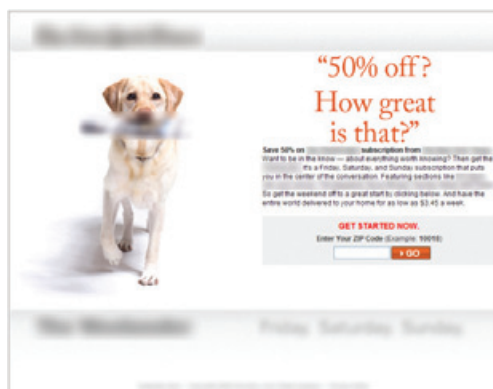
**Goal:** To increase the amount of home delivery subscriptions

**Primary research question:** Which page/process will generate the most subscriptions?

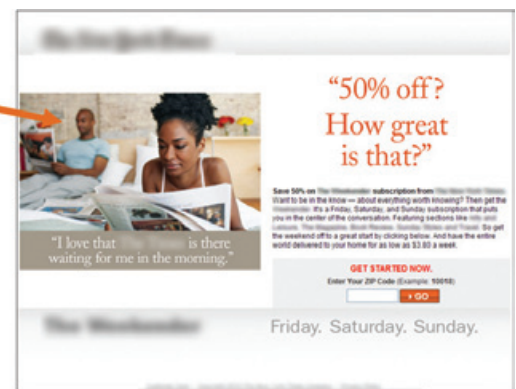
**Test Design:** Which page/process will generate the most subscriptions?

*Read more on page [23](#)*

### Control



### Treatment



- The treatment uses an image directly tied to the direct mail campaign.

- The treatment path also includes stylistic changes similar to the DM campaign



## LESSON #2: Do not assume the “marketing masses” are going in the right direction



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1355

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

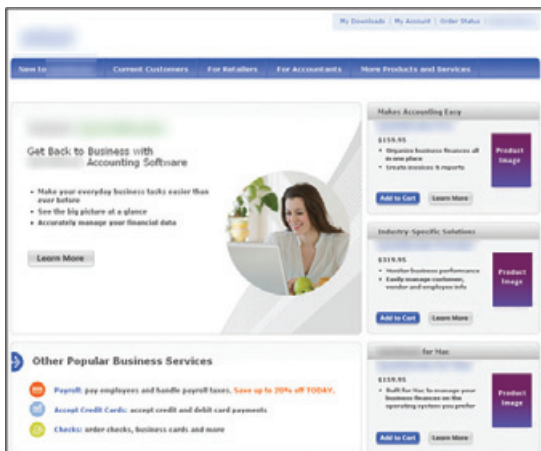
**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

**Primary research question:** Which product page will generate the most revenue?

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

Read more on page [23](#)

### Control



### Treatment #1



### Treatment #2





## LESSON #4: Channel motivation is still the most predictive force of offer response



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Consumer service provider that has both a significant online and offline presence

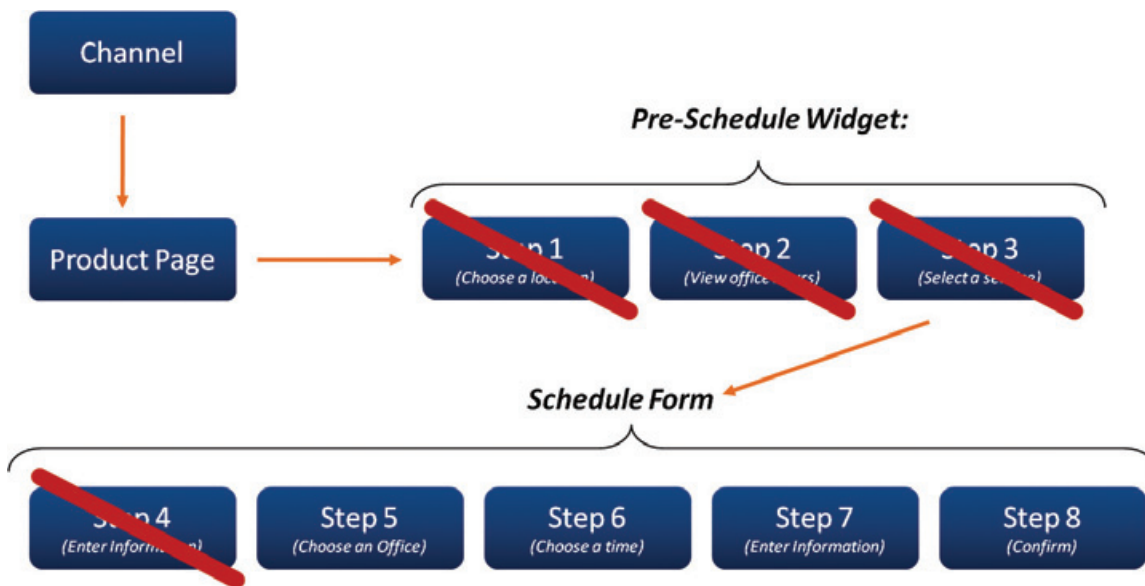
**Goal:** Increase retail appointment conversions from paid search traffic

**Primary research question:** How do paid search visitors respond to a significant reduction in process friction?

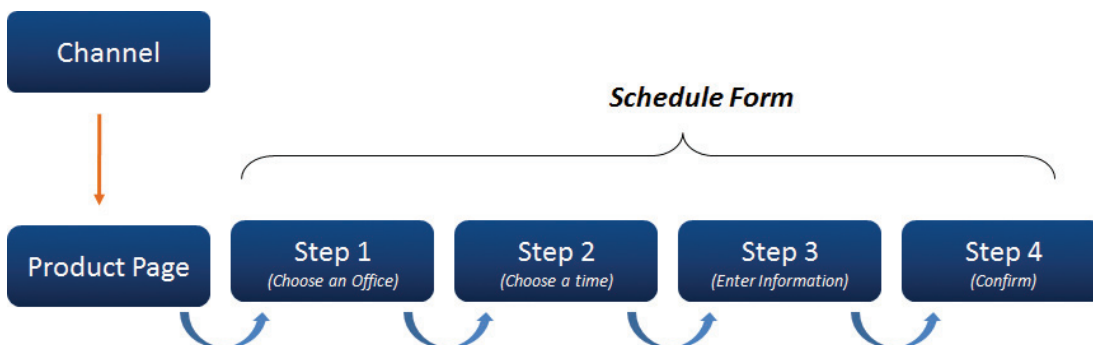
**Approach:** A/B split test (variable cluster) of the conversion process

Read more on page [23](#)

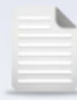
### Control



### Treatment



## LESSON #5: Strategy over style



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1323

## Research Notes:

**Background:** Provides end-to-end market solutions for small and medium-sized businesses.**Goal:** Increase the amount of leads from an online form.**Primary research question:** Which page will obtain the most form submissions (i.e. leads)?**Approach:** A/B multi-factorial split test that focuses on graphic design changes.Read more on page [23](#)

## Control

**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, **QUALYS** 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**.

**Get 500 FREE Leads added to your purchase!**

**Why choose **QUALYS**?**

- ▶ 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 **QUALYS****

- 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

First Name:   
Last Name:   
Email:   
Phone:

**QUALYS**  
Secure Site

**Get Free Access**

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

**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 **QUALYS** 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.  
**Ruhner 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

## Treatment

**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!**

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

**Setup your FREE access to **QUALYS****

- 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

First Name:   
Last Name:   
Company:   
Email:   
Phone:

**QUALYS**  
Secure Site

**Get Free Access**

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

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It's a **powerful tool** for small businesses to market like the big guys.  
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Sparta, New Jersey

I would recommend **QUALYS** 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.  
**Ruhner 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



## LESSON #6: You may know more than you think about optimizing social media campaigns



**Experiment ID:** California State Parks Foundation

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** Adams Hussey & Associates

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Nonprofit organization raising support for state parks in California during a time of significant budget cuts.

**Goal:** To attract new activists for California state parks through Facebook.

**Primary research question:** Which Facebook landing page will generate the most fans?

**Approach:** Sequential split test (variable cluster)

Read more on page [23](#)

### Control



### Treatment



## EXPERIMENT #1: IMAGES VS. COPY



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1353

## Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

**Primary research question:** A/B split test (variable cluster)

Read more on page [57](#)

## Control

## Landing Page

## Form Page

## Treatment #1

## Landing Page

## Form Page



### Control Form

With home delivery, you'll start each day with the world at your fingertips.

Order now to take advantage of these introductory rates. Each offer represents **50% off the regular subscription rate.\***

**Start a new subscription**

- ☒ **Daily Delivery (7 days)** - just \$7.40 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **The Weekender (Friday-Sunday)** - just \$5.20 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **Sunday Only** - just \$3.75 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **Weekday (Monday-Friday)** - just \$3.70 per week [More Details](#)

**Delivery information**

First name

Last name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Phone

E-mail address

**Sign up to receive subscriber e-mails.** Be the first to learn about exclusive subscriber discounts and new merchandise at [The New York Times Store](#), upcoming events, special features in the newspaper and more.

☐ Yes, sign me up for exclusive subscriber e-mails. ☐ No, please do not send me subscriber e-mails.

**Billing information**

☐ Billing address, if different from delivery address

☒ Pay by credit card and get your first **12 weeks** at 50% off

☐ Pay by mail and get your first **8 weeks** at 50% off

Credit Card

Card Number

Exp. Date

Card ID Number

**Submit**

### Treatment Form

**1. Select the New Subscription That's Best For You.**  
Each offer represents 50% off the regular subscription rate.\*

- ☒ **Daily Delivery (7 days)** - \$7.40 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **The Weekender (Friday-Sunday)** - \$5.20 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **Sunday Only** - \$3.75 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **Weekday (Monday-Friday)** - \$3.70 per week [More Details](#)

**Included in all subscriptions** - [The New York Times Store](#) and discounts at [The New York Times Store](#)

**2. Delivery Information**

First name

Last name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Phone

E-mail address

**Sign up to receive subscriber e-mails.** Be the first to learn about exclusive subscriber discounts and new merchandise at [The New York Times Store](#), upcoming events, special features in the newspaper and more.

☐ Yes, sign me up for exclusive subscriber e-mails. ☐ No, please do not send me subscriber e-mails.

**3. Billing Information**

☐ Billing address, if different from delivery address

☒ Pay by credit card and get your first **12 weeks** at 50% off

☐ Pay by mail and get your first **8 weeks** at 50% off

Credit Card

Card Number

Exp. Date

Card ID Number

**COMPLETE ORDER**

## Treatment #2


### Landing Page

**Save 50% on home delivery of [The New York Times](#)**

**Check Availability**

Enter your ZIP code:  **GO**

- ☒ **Monday**  
Media
- ☒ **Tuesday**  
Science Times
- ☒ **Wednesday**  
Dining
- ☒ **Thursday**  
Technology, Styles & Home
- ☒ **Friday**  
Weekend, Arts, Escapes
- ☒ **Saturday**  
Personal, Finance
- ☒ **Sunday**  
The Magazine, Travel, Week in Review, Book Review & More



### Form Page (same as Treatment #1)

**1. Select the New Subscription That's Best For You.**  
Each offer represents 50% off the regular subscription rate.\*

- ☒ **Daily Delivery (7 days)** - \$7.40 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **The Weekender (Friday-Sunday)** - \$5.20 per week [More Details](#)
- ☐ **Sunday Only** - \$3.75 per week [More Details](#)
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**Included in all subscriptions** - [The New York Times Store](#) and discounts at [The New York Times Store](#)

**2. Delivery Information**

First name

Last name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Phone

E-mail address

**Sign up to receive subscriber e-mails.** Be the first to learn about exclusive subscriber discounts and new merchandise at [The New York Times Store](#), upcoming events, special features in the newspaper and more.

☐ Yes, sign me up for exclusive subscriber e-mails. ☐ No, please do not send me subscriber e-mails.

**3. Billing Information**

☐ Billing address, if different from delivery address

☒ Pay by credit card and get your first **12 weeks** at 50% off

☐ Pay by mail and get your first **8 weeks** at 50% off

Credit Card

Card Number

Exp. Date

Card ID Number

**COMPLETE ORDER**

## EXPERIMENT #1



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

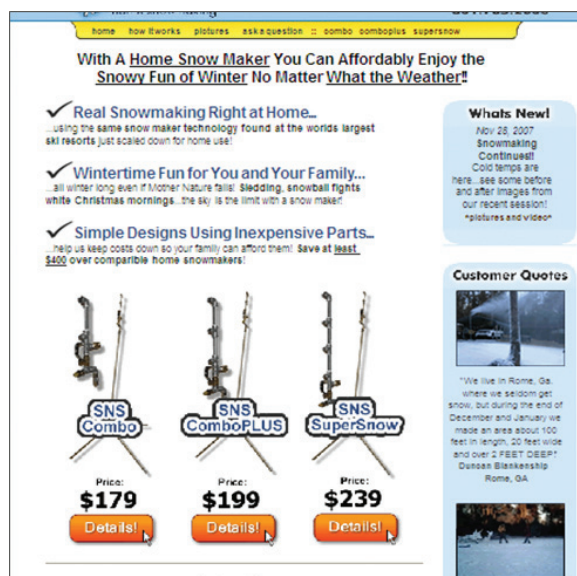
## Research Notes:

**Background:** Audience-submitted experiment for a small business offering home snow makers.**Goal:** To increase product sales.**Primary research question:** Which homepage will generate the highest conversion rate?**Approach:** Multi-factorial A/B split test (radical redesign)Read more on page [85](#)

## Control



## Treatment



## EXPERIMENT #2



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

### Research Notes:

**Background:** A consumer credit counseling service offering free debt consolidation.

**Goal:** To increase the amount of free debt consolidation leads without additional traffic.

**Primary research question:** Which product page will generate the highest form start rate?

**Approach:** A/B/C/D split test of three different versions of the homepage.

Read more on page [85](#)

### Control

The Control version of the homepage features a blue header with a 'Call Now!' button and a 'Log In' link. Below the header, a yellow banner reads 'Live Debt Free, We Can Help You!' with bullet points: 'Lower your monthly payments', 'Reduce your interest rates and late fees', 'Avoid bankruptcy and rebuild your credit', and 'Learn better financial habits'. A sidebar on the left lists various services like 'Credit Counseling', 'Debt Consolidation', and 'Financial Education'. The main content area includes a form to 'Get a Free Debt Consultation' with fields for First name, E-mail, Phone, State, and Estimate Total (with a dropdown for '\$0.000'). A 'Get a Free Debt Consultation' button is prominently displayed. Below the form, there's a section titled 'Lower Your Payments by up to 80%' and a 'Find how much you can save today, call' button.

### Treatment #1

Treatment #1 features a similar layout to the Control but with a more prominent 'Services' section. The 'Live Debt Free, We Can Help You!' banner is present. The 'Get a Free Debt Consultation' form is slightly repositioned. A new section titled 'Services' is added, stating 'Helps consumers through credit counseling, debt management and financial education.' and 'is a non-profit credit counseling agency that helps consumers deal with the alluring credit, debt, and financial issues. Through credit counseling and debt management, our agency helps consumers get out of debt faster.' Below this, there's a 'Lower Your Payments by up to 50%' section with a form for First name, E-mail, Phone, State, and Estimate Total (with a dropdown for '\$0.000'). A 'Get a FREE Debt Consultation' button is shown. The 'Find how much you can save today, call' button is also present.

### Treatment #2

Treatment #2 features a more prominent 'We Can Help You Lower Your Payment by up to 50%' section. The 'Live Debt Free, We Can Help You!' banner is present. The 'Get a Free Debt Consultation' form is slightly repositioned. A new section titled 'We Can Help You Lower Your Payment by up to 50%' is added, stating 'Get your FREE debt consultation with no commitment or obligation.' Below this, there's a form for First Name, Last Name, E-mail Address, Phone Number, Zip Code, and State. A 'Get a FREE Debt Consultation' button is shown. The 'Find how much you can save today, call' button is also present.

### Treatment #3

Treatment #3 features a more prominent 'We can help you lower your payments by up to 50%' section. The 'Live Debt Free, We Can Help You!' banner is present. The 'Get a Free Debt Consultation' form is slightly repositioned. A new section titled 'We can help you lower your payments by up to 50%' is added, stating 'Get your Free debt consultation with no commitment.' Below this, there's a form for First name, E-mail, Phone, State, and Estimate Total (with a dropdown for '\$0.000'). A 'Start your FREE Debt Consultation' button is shown. The 'Find how much you can save today, call' button is also present.



## EXPERIMENT #1: FINDING THE BEST PRODUCT PAGE



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1355

## Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

**Primary research question:** A/B split test (variable cluster)

Read more on page [113](#)

## Control

The Control page features a clean layout with a blue header. The main content area is divided into sections: 'Get Back to Business with Accounting Software' (highlighting features like easier tasks, big picture view, and accurate data), 'Makes Accounting Easy' (listing benefits like organizing finances and creating reports), 'Industry-Specific Solutions' (for payroll, credit cards, and checks), and 'Other Popular Business Services' (payroll, credit cards, checks). A 'Product Image' placeholder is visible on the right side of the main content area.

## Treatment #1

Treatment #1 features a more prominent 'Product Image' placeholder. The headline 'New Time Savers to Keep You Organized' is at the top. Below it, a paragraph describes the software's benefits. A '60 Day Money-Back Guarantee' badge is prominently displayed. The 'Add to Cart' button is highlighted with a '20% off' discount. The footer includes a 'TRUSTe' logo.

## Treatment #2

Treatment #2 features a more detailed 'Product Image' placeholder. The headline 'New Time Savers to Keep You Organized' is at the top. Below it, a paragraph describes the software's benefits. A '60 Day Money-Back Guarantee' badge is prominently displayed. The 'Add to Cart' button is highlighted with a '20% off' discount. The footer includes a 'TRUSTe' logo.

## Treatment #3

Treatment #3 features a more detailed 'Product Image' placeholder. The headline 'New Time Savers to Keep You Organized' is at the top. Below it, a paragraph describes the software's benefits. A '60 Day Money-Back Guarantee' badge is prominently displayed. The 'Add to Cart' button is highlighted with a '20% off' discount. The footer includes a 'TRUSTe' logo.

## EXPERIMENT #2 and #3: COMPOUNDING LIFTS IN PERFORMANCE



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1306, TP1323, TP1324

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Provides end-to-end market solutions for small- and medium-size businesses

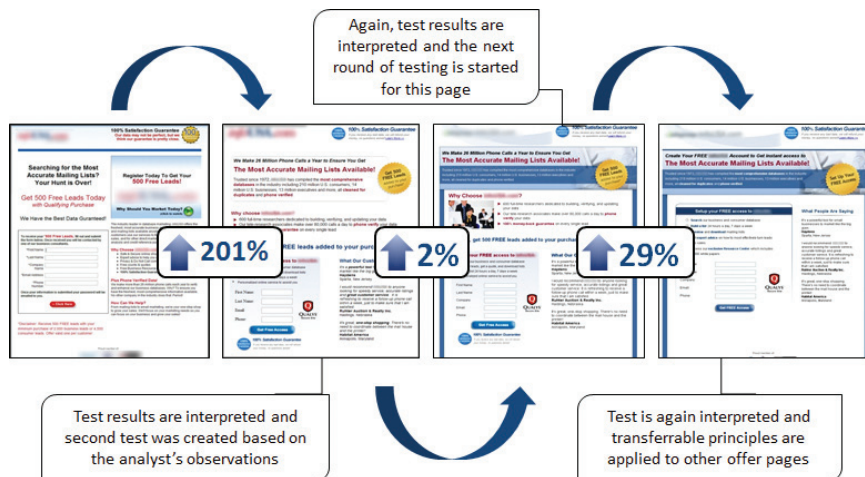
**Goal:** Increase the number of leads from an online form

**Primary research question:** Which page will obtain the most form submissions (i.e. leads)?

**Approach:** Series of variable cluster split tests

Read more on page [113](#)

### Experiment #2



### Experiment #3



## EXPERIMENT #4: WHEN A TREATMENT BECOMES THE CONTROL



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: (Unassigned)

#### Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

**Primary research question:** Which product page will generate the most revenue?

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

Read more on page [113](#)

#### Control



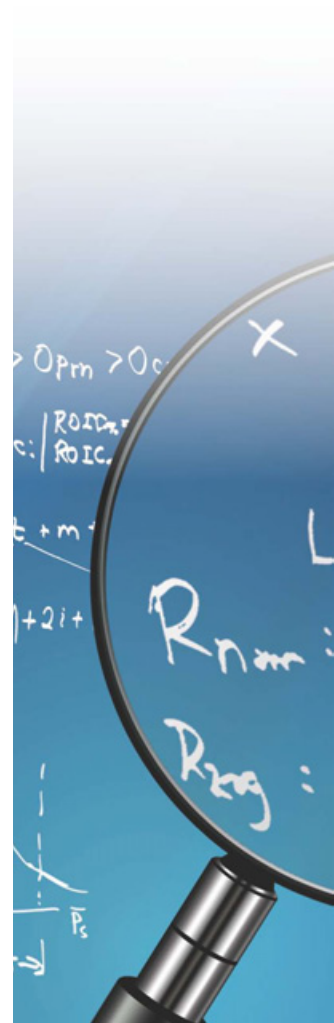
#### Treatment #1



#### Treatment #2

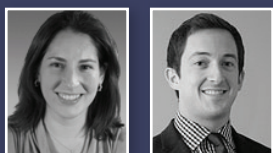








# **MARKETING OPTIMIZATION**



By Austin McCraw

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December 2010

# Top Lessons from 2010: What worked – and what didn't – in the last 365 days of experimentation

If there is one consistent aspect of online customers, it's that they are consistently changing. Trying to pin down marketing tactics that work from year to year can be a daunting task. This is why it is essential to always be testing – especially testing those “best practices” that are commonly accepted across the Web. As our researchers discover again and again, it's often our biggest assumptions that are the biggest hindrances to conversion. This year (2010) was no different, as new tests revealed what worked and what didn't – with a few surprises.

So, in this article, we will review the top marketing lessons that our researchers took away from their research this year. We will focus specifically on experiments that reveal key insights within the following areas of digital marketing:

- Offline and online marketing integration
- Product page designs
- Differences in traffic source quality
- The role of graphic design
- Proper use of metric tools
- Social media strategies

This article's approach is slightly different than seen in previous editions, as we will be focusing on the broader implications of multiple experiments rather than drilling down deeply on a single experiment.<sup>1</sup> We believe this overview of our past year of research will serve you by providing up-to-date insights into the motivations of today's online users and how you can best engage them in the coming year.

With that said, we turn our attention to the top lessons from 2010 and the implications they could have on your own marketing campaigns.

## LESSON #1: Do not underestimate the effect offline media can have online



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** TP1321

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Well-known news publication offering home delivery services via online registration

**Goal:** To increase the amount of home delivery subscriptions

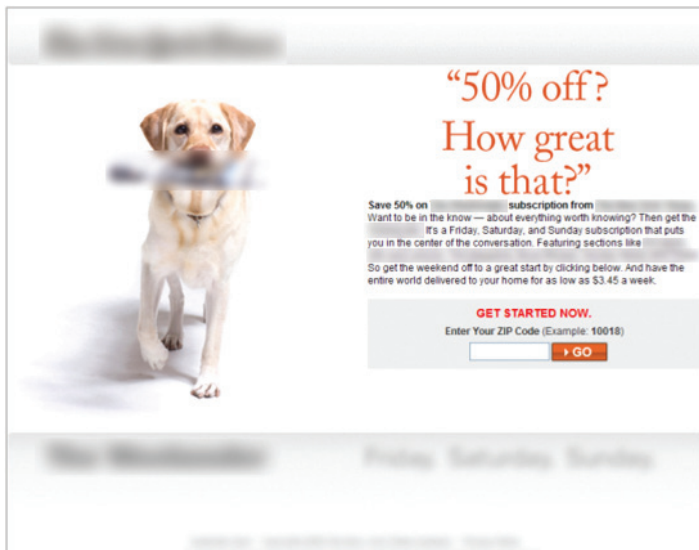
**Primary research question:** Which page/process will generate the most subscriptions?

**Test Design:** Which page/process will generate the most subscriptions?

There is often mystery surrounding the ways in which online media and offline media affect each other. However, during the past year some tests began lifting the veil and revealed the significant conversion potential of tightly integrating offline and online messaging. No test demonstrated this more clearly than the following.<sup>2</sup>

**Control:**

The company is a well-known news publication offering home delivery services via online registration. Our researchers tested a page that offered a weekend-only edition of the company's product (as seen below). This page had already been through a series of tests that greatly improved conversion rates. However, due to the frequency of offline marketing campaigns produced by this company, the researchers at MarketingExperiments began to see this as a possible window into further conversion gains.

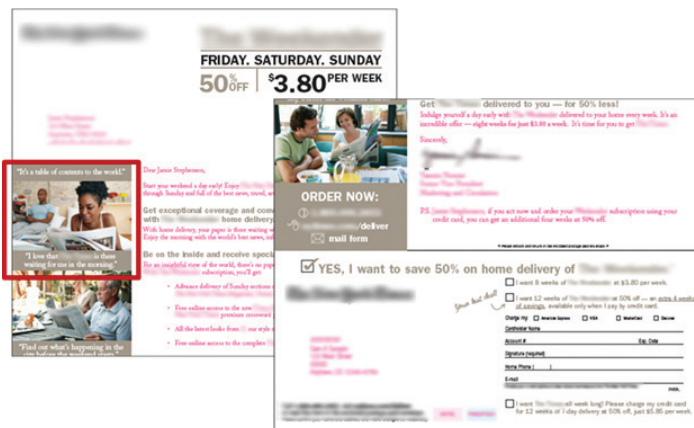


We hypothesized that by adjusting this Web page to closely match the direct mail initiatives, we might increase the relevance of the page to specific channel motivations.<sup>3</sup> It all depended on how many people that arrived at this page were influenced by the direct mail piece.

It is important to note here that this page was not part of the sales funnel utilized by the direct mail campaign. In fact, each direct mail campaign had its own unique, campaign-specific URL that could be tracked and measured. Despite this, there remained the possibility that people who received the direct mail piece might ignore directions, go straight to the highly branded website, and find their way to this generic product page. This was a possibility worth testing.

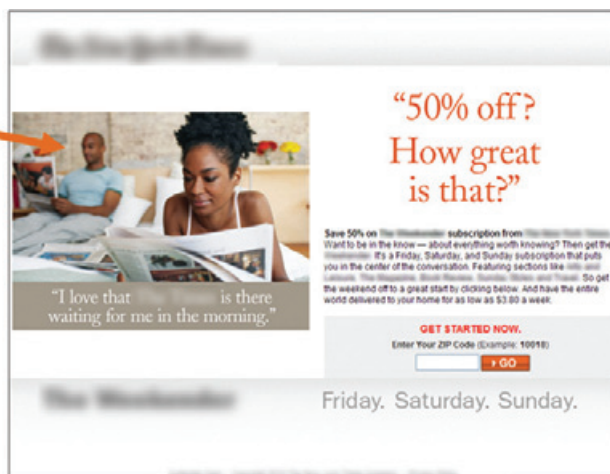
## Direct Mail Example:

To begin, we first tested this hypothesis by integrating design elements of the direct mail creative (as seen below) with the design elements of the Web page.



The most significant change made to the Web page was swapping the dominant image of a dog with images taken from the direct mail campaign. We also integrated minor graphical elements on the Web page that more closely matched the currently distributed mail piece (as seen below). Though these changes are small, they still created enough relevance and continuity between the campaigns to generate more visitor response.

- The treatment uses an image directly tied to the direct mail campaign.



- The treatment path also includes stylistic changes similar to the DM campaign



**Results:****124% Increase in Conversions**

*The highest performing treatment outperformed the control by 124%*

Metric (rates), first 2 weeks	Control	Treatment	Variation
Clickthrough	20.99%	20.26%	-3.5%
Conversion	1.23%	2.76%	124%



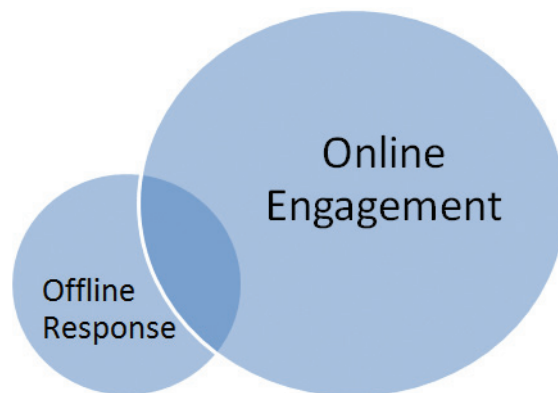
**What you need to understand:** For the two-week duration of the direct mail efforts, the treatments outperformed the control by 124%. This is a significant increase and clearly demonstrated the potential impact and effect of offline efforts on Internet campaigns.

After the direct mail sends concluded, the results reverted to an insignificant difference. It was only during the direct mail efforts that the impact of the treatment was felt. This underscored the impact that offline efforts can have online.

**What does this test mean for you?**

This test underscores the important lesson that the online effect of an offline campaign can be greater and more far reaching than we would naturally accredit. As this test illustrates, a significant portion of the traffic coming to this Web page had seen the direct mail piece. And though this page was not a part of the direct path provided by the offline campaign, it clearly affected the average visitor.

The implication of this discovery is that marketers should consider testing the impact that their offline campaigns have online. For many, there will be significant conversion potential in making a direct connection between the two.



## LESSON #2: Do not assume the “marketing masses” are going in the right direction



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1355

## Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

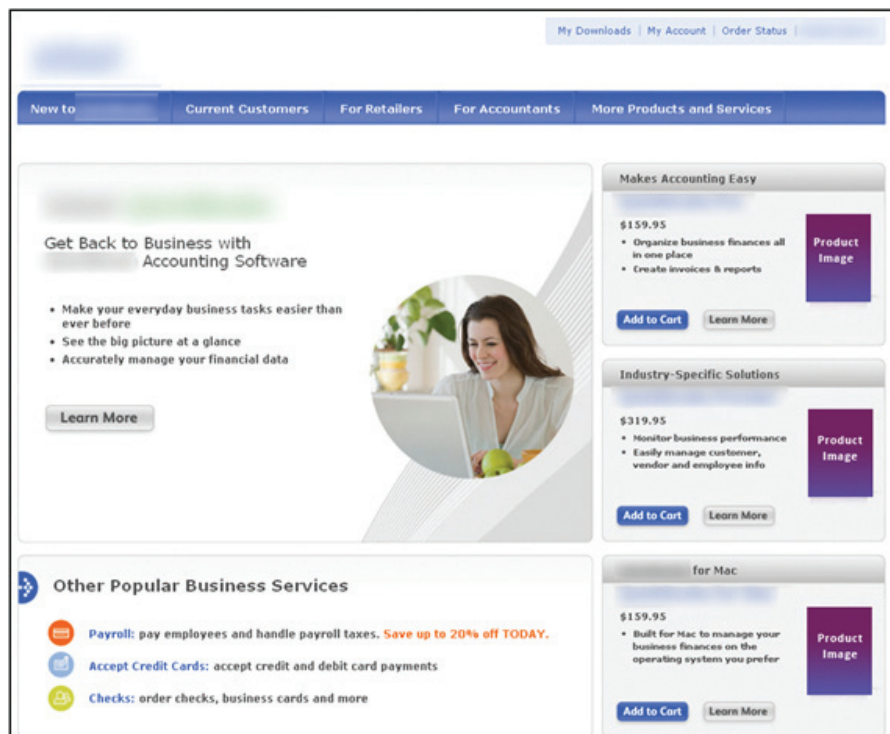
**Primary research question:** Which product page will generate the most revenue?

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

Web pages should never be developed in a vacuum. Keeping in touch with current marketing practices, and learning from the marketing strategies of those around us can serve as invaluable guides to our own efforts. But, common practices are never a fool-proof solution for marketing campaigns. And often, as discovered in our next experiment, efforts of the marketing masses might be misleading, if not completely incorrect.<sup>4</sup>

## The Original Page

The company we worked with offers financial software in both the B2B and B2C markets. The particular product page we tested featured accounting management software for small businesses (as seen below). The primary objective of the test was to increase the amount of revenue generated by the product page.



After analyzing the original page, we identified the following potential areas of improvement:

1. The original page layout included unnecessary Friction due an undirected eye-path<sup>5</sup>
2. The existing images and copy did not emphasize the value proposition as clearly as it could<sup>6</sup>
3. The product selection process included multiple calls-to-action without any prioritization, increasing the amount of “unsupervised thinking” by the visitor.<sup>7</sup>

In order to address some of these concerns, our researchers developed multiple treatments to be tested against the original page. We will look at two of these treatments below.

## Treatment #1

The first design tested against the original featured a completely new page layout. It had a simple, single-column flow aimed at decreasing Friction. This treatment also included more copy (intro paragraph with bullet points), had a strong product image with a 60-day, money-back guarantee, and utilized a drop-down box for additional product options and add-ons.

Most of the tactics used in this design were classic optimization practices which had produced significant results over years of testing – reducing Friction, improving Value Proposition, etc.



Treatment #2

One of the other treatments was a version of the page that employed a popular tabbed layout design. It was a radical redesign that displayed the page information via three organized tabs. Though this design had some potentially inherent Friction, the design had proven popular for similar product pages, so we decided that it was worth testing the effectiveness of such a layout.<sup>8</sup>



Results



**13% Increase in Conversion Rate**  
*Treatment 1 increased the conversion rate by 12.97%*

Design	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	2.39%	-
T1 – Single column, dropdown	2.70%	12.97%
T3 – Tabbed layout	2.31%	-3.34%





**What you need to understand:** By eliminating the competing objectives, simplifying the flow, and adding copy and images that emphasized value, Treatment 1 not only increased conversion rate by 13%, but also increased revenue per visitor by 23.91%.

Also, the popular tabbed layout decreased conversion rate by 3%, underscoring the need to test and not assume common practices are always effective.

### What does this test mean for you?

Marketers should not assume that a popular page design will be effective for every situation. The problem with “best practices” or “best designs” is that they rarely work across the board.

It is more important to move beyond understanding the “what” of page layout, and use testing to attain the deeper understanding of “why.”



## LESSON #3: When it comes to metrics, relying on tools alone is never enough



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** TP1368

### Research Notes:

**Background:** B2C company offering package vacations. In this test, we focused on improving the checkout process.

**Goal:** To increase cart completions

**Primary research question:** Which cart page will generate the highest completion rate?

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

Properly installed metrics tools (free or paid) are essential for any marketing campaign. But, as we witnessed multiple times this year, tools have their blind spots which, when unaccounted for, can lead to erroneous conclusions.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, one of the top lessons taken from this past year is that relying solely on tools can be problematic, and ensuring the effective use of a tool involves personal engagement from a human being. This point is clearly demonstrated by the next experiment.

## The Original

The company is one of the largest UK travel sites, offering vacation packages to various American amusement parks. For this experiment, we focused on improving an already highly optimized shopping cart process.

As you can see below, this shopping cart had implemented some fundamental optimization strategies. Much of the unnecessary Friction and Anxiety in the process has been eliminated by removing unnecessary form fields, condensing multiple steps, and adding clearly expressed section headings and easy-to-understand instructions. Overall, this process was cleaner than the average shopping cart page.

**LOGO** ✓ No credit card fees ✓ Lowest prices, guaranteed ✓ Real tickets, not vouchers Orders & Enquiries: 0800 077 777

[Home](#) [Contact Us](#) [About Us](#) [Customer Services](#) [Shopping Basket \(1 Item, £672.00\)](#)

[Attractions](#) [Trips & Tours](#) [Dinner & Shows](#) [Plan your holiday](#)

### Choose an Attraction

- Aquatica
- Busch Gardens
- Discovery Cove
- Catoland
- Halloween Horror Nights
- Kennedy Space Center
- Makuhiki Lanes
- Orlando FlexTicket
- Richard Petty Driving
- SeaWorld
- Universal Orlando Resort
- Walt Disney World Resort

### Shopping Basket

[CONTINUE SHOPPING](#)

**Your basket contents**

Ticket Description	Date	Adults	Children	Total	Remove
Dinner 14 days for the price of 7 days	11 Aug 2010	3	0	£672.00	<a href="#">Remove</a>
				<b>Sub Total:</b> £672.00	

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

### Select a delivery method

<b>Special Delivery</b>	Your tickets are guaranteed to be delivered within 2 working days – great if you need your tickets as soon as possible. <a href="#">More Info</a>	<input type="radio"/> £5.00
<b>Standard Delivery</b>	Your tickets will be delivered within 7 working days.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> £0.00

### Protect your tickets:

<b>Cancellation Protection</b>	Protect your tickets against cancellation fees. <a href="#">More Info</a>	<input type="radio"/> £20.00
<b>No Protection</b>	I do not require ticket protection.	<input type="radio"/> £0.00

### Booking Information

Booking Name:  First Name:  Surname:

Sign me up! I'd like to receive occasional promotional material. ☒  
 I confirm that I have read and agree with the [terms and conditions](#). ☒

If you wish to pay using **paypal express** or **Maestro**, click the paypal button. Otherwise, please enter delivery and payment details in the form below and click "Book Tickets" below.

[Check out PayPal](#) The safer, easier way to pay

### Enter your payment details

Title:  Mr ☒

First Name:  Surname:

Address:

Town/City:

County:  Post Code:

Country:  UK ☒

Telephone:  Email Address:

<b>Special Delivery</b>	Your tickets are guaranteed to be delivered within 2 working days – great if you need your tickets as soon as possible. <a href="#">More Info</a>	<input type="radio"/> £5.00
<b>Standard Delivery</b>	Your tickets will be delivered within 7 working days.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> £0.00

Payment Type:  Mastercard Credit Card ☒

Cardholder's Name:

Credit Card No:

Issue No:

From Date (If Applicable):

Expiry Date:

Card Security Code:  [What is this?](#)

**Book With Confidence**  
 256-bit Encrypted bookings  
 You are safe and secure with FloridaTix

**Grand Total: £1028.00**

[BOOK TICKETS](#)



## Treatment #1

With this in mind, we developed a treatment with a handful of unique strategies. First, we integrated imagery into the shopping cart. Since vacations are typically an emotional purchase decision, we hypothesized that adding visuals that increase the communication of value will also increase conversion.<sup>10</sup> This was probably the most significant change.

Other changes our research analysts made include (not all are visualized in the image below):

1. Added hover-over pop-ups that included specific ticket details to minimize the anxiety a customer might feel about having chosen the correct product details
2. Made minor alterations to the copy for further clarification over special features
3. Removed orange separator bars for increased ease of readability
4. Added step indicators to minimize anxiety over the length of process

**LOGO**

Home | Contact Us | About Us | Customer Services | Shopping Basket (1 item, £470.00)

**Choose an Attraction**

- Adventure
- Beach Gardens
- Discovery Cove
- Golf Course
- Halloween Horror Nights
- Howl 2 Screams Beach Gardens
- Kennedy Space Center
- Makuhari Lane
- Orlando PlayTicket
- Richard Petty Driving
- SeaWorld
- Universal Orlando Resort
- Wild About World Broom

**Why buy from us?**

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

**Shopping Basket**

Your basket contains:

Ticket Description	Date	Adults	Children	Total	Remove
Discovery Cove Ultimate Swim	21 Oct 2010	2	0	£470.00	Remove
\$50 Planet Hollywood Voucher with any booking*	---	---	---	FREE	

\*Make a booking on Discovery Cove and automatically receive 1 FREE \$50 Planet Hollywood voucher. Not valid with any other offers or discounts. One voucher per party/booking. Valid at Planet Hollywood Orlando. Expires December 2010.

**Sub Total: £470.00**

Worried you might have to cancel or move the dates of the trip?

Cancellation Protection Plan	Insurance against cancellation fees if you need to move or cancel your trip. <a href="#">View info</a>	Price
No Protection Plan	I do not require ticket protection.	£ 60.00

Sign me up! I'd like to receive occasional promotional material. ☒

I confirm that I have read and agree with the [terms and conditions](#).

**Grand Total: £490.00**

**Booking Details** (Step 1 of 3)

Hotel Name:  (the name of the hotel you will be staying at)

Please tell us about the people who are using the Discovery Cove Ultimate Swim Promotion tickets:

Ticketholder 1:  First name:  Surname:

Ticketholder 2:  First name:  Surname:

If you wish to pay using PayPal express or Maestro, click the paypal button. Otherwise, please enter delivery and payment details in the form and click "Book Tickets" below.

**Payment Details** (Step 2 of 3)

Payment Type:  (Mastercard Credit Card)

Cardholder's Name:

Credit Card No:

Issue No:

From Date (if Applicable):  -  -

Expiry Date:  -  -

Card Security Code:  [What is this?](#)

**Delivery Details** (Step 3 of 3)

Title:

First Name:  Country:

Surname:  Post Code:

Address:  Country:

Town/City:  Telephone:

Email Address:

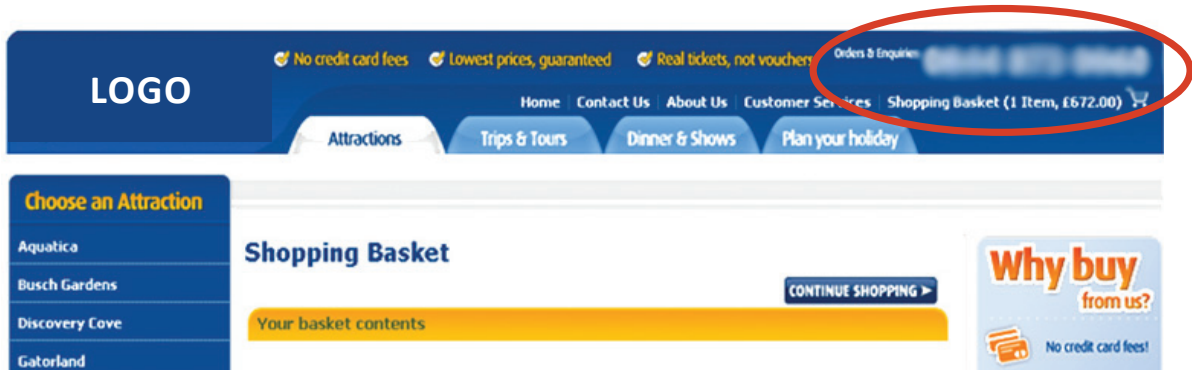
**Special Delivery** Your tickets are guaranteed to be delivered within 2 working days - great if you need your tickets as soon as possible. [View info](#) £ 65.00

**Standard Delivery** Your tickets will be delivered within 7 working days. £ 60.00

**Grand Total: £490.00**

**BOOK TICKETS**

It is important to note that both pages included a phone number customers could use to complete their order during any part of the process. Many customers who sought to avoid the anxiety of making mistakes during the process would begin their order online and then transfer offline to complete the order. As we will see from the results, tracking external factors like this can play a big role in your test conclusions.



The Results

What we want to show you in this experiment is the difference in the results between two different metric scenarios: Total conversion WITH and WITHOUT factoring for conversions made by phone.

If we had not tracked the calls coming from these shopping cart pages during the test, we would have concluded that the conversion rate increased 14%. This is a substantial increase for being so deep in the conversion funnel, and would most likely justify the investment of implementing the new cart design across the entire site.

Results (without Call-Center Data)

Design	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	18.73%	-
T1 – Single column, dropdown	21.32%	13.83%

However, this 14% increase is misleading. For, when we factor in visitors who converted over the phone, the difference in conversion drops significantly. With the call-center data factored in, the conversion rate increase is closer to 6%. The result may still be positive, but 6% might call into question the ROI of implementing the new shopping cart design across the entire website.

**Results (with Call-Center Data)**

Design	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	22.63%	-
T1 – Single column, dropdown	24.04%	6.25%



**What you need to understand:** The way you track the metrics of your experiment can greatly impact the conclusions you draw from a test. Improper test data is a rampant problem across the Web, and miscalculations have led to the loss of many dollars. In this test, it meant a difference between a 6% and 14% increase. For others, it could be much more.

**What does this test mean for you?**

Marketers should not rely solely on metric tools, because the data can be misleading if not properly collected and/or analyzed. Tools are full of “blind spots” due to default settings (for example, visits vs. visitors, vs. unique visits, etc.) and the practical limitations of artificial intelligence. If you don’t fully understand what you’re measuring, you cannot learn or draw accurate conclusions from your tests.

It’s the people behind the tools that make them effective. Yet marketers often invest more in the tools than in those using the tools.

**LESSON #4: Channel motivation is still the most predictive force of offer response**

**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Research Notes:**

**Background:** Consumer service provider that has both a significant online and offline presence

**Goal:** Increase retail appointment conversions from paid search traffic

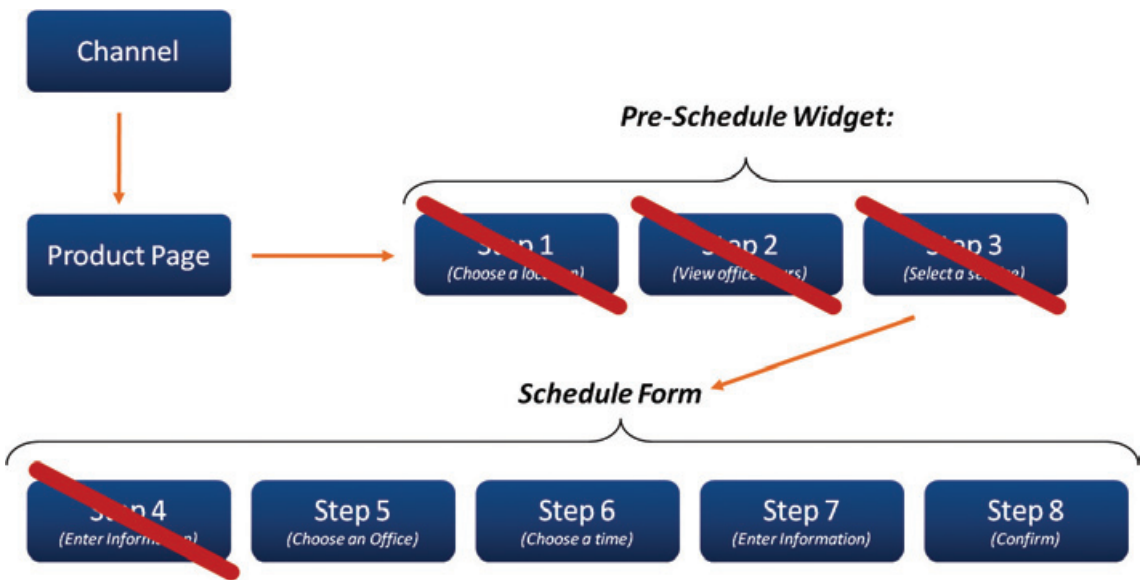
**Primary research question:** How do paid search visitors respond to a significant reduction in process friction?

**Approach:** A/B split test (variable cluster) of the conversion process

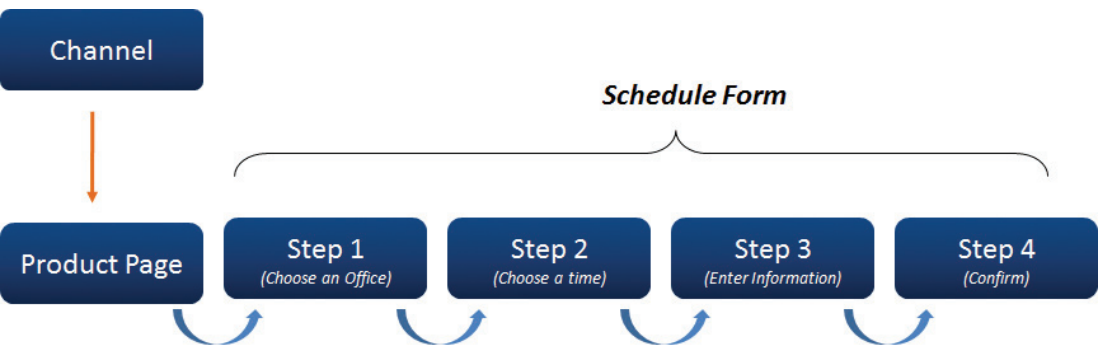
According to the [MarketingExperiments online training and certification courses](#), the motivation of the visitors coming to a Web page will have the greatest impact on the conversion rate of that Web page.<sup>1</sup> But does this principle hold true today? Is channel motivation still a factor to consider? Let’s take a look at a recent experiment from our team.

The original

The company we worked with is a consumer service provider that has both a significant online and offline presence. The goal of their website is to have visitors schedule onsite appointments with a brick-and-mortar store located nearby. This included choosing a store, choosing a time and filling out some basic information. It was this process we were specifically seeking to optimize.



Immediately, we noticed that the original online scheduling process had a significant amount of Friction. As the process stood, each visitor went through a series of eight steps to make an appointment. Many of the steps were redundant and even confusing. So, we restructured the process and removed four of the unnecessary steps (as seen below).



We tested this new four-step online scheduling process across three of the primary channels of traffic coming into the conversion funnel: Main site traffic, PPC traffic, external banner ad traffic.



## The Results

### Channel: PPC

↑ 534%

Design	Conversion Rate
Control	0.34%
Treatment 1	2.16%
<b>Relative Difference:</b>	<b>533.51%</b>

### Channel: Main Site

↑ 357%

Design	Conversion Rate
Control	2.14%
Treatment 1 (single action, fewer steps)	9.77%
<b>Relative Difference:</b>	<b>357.36%</b>

The first two channels – main-site traffic and PPC (pay-per-click) traffic – increased conversion, as one would expect when reducing so many steps of a process. The process change increased conversion for main-site traffic by 357% and PPC ad traffic by 534%. We were very excited about what we deemed a very successful test.

However, this is where the results get a bit interesting. When testing the new online scheduling process with the Research Partner's banner ad traffic, we noticed a remarkable difference in results. The banner ad traffic did not perform nearly as well as the other channels. Though the new four-step process increased conversion, the gain was comparatively dismal to the other channels, especially when considering the change made to the process.

### Channel: Banner Ads

↑ 28%

Design	Conversion Rate
Control	0.09%
Treatment 1	0.12%
<b>Relative Difference:</b>	<b>28%</b>



**What you need to understand:** Though cutting the amount of steps in a process increased the conversion rate for every channel tested, there was a significant difference in gains made from channel to channel.

Looking deeper into the numbers, our analysts attributed the large swing in results to the differing motivation levels of the traffic sources. As we have taught, not all channels will convert at the same rate because they represent different demographics at different places in the conversation.<sup>12</sup> The PPC traffic was considerably more motivated than the external banner traffic, and though the new process significantly lowered Friction in the process, there was not much to address the specific motivations of incoming visitors.



What does this test mean for you?

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

As shown in the MarketingExperiments Conversion Index, the motivation of your visitors is the highest impacting factor in the conversion of a page or process. This motivation level will vary from channel to channel.

But, marketers don't need to "stand on the sidelines" when it comes to user motivations. Marketers can craft their messages in such a way as to harness the full potential of channel motivation.

First, marketers must seek to understand the magnitude and nature of the visitor's motivation. Secondly, they must strive to craft relevant messaging that connects to the underlying motivations of the visitor. In our [training courses](#), we have taught this process in depth.<sup>13</sup>

## LESSON #5: Strategy over style



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** TP1323

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Provides end-to-end market solutions for small and medium-sized businesses.

**Goal:** Increase the amount of leads from an online form.

**Primary research question:** Which page will obtain the most form submissions (i.e. leads)?

**Approach:** A/B multi-factorial split test that focuses on graphic design changes.

On the Web there is often a false dichotomy between aesthetics and optimization. Some marketers desire a site that "looks nice" but is not necessarily optimized for conversion. Other marketers care less about design and just want a "site that sells." But, as is usually the case with such marketing tensions, the answer is not one of competition, but cooperation.<sup>14</sup> Solving this tension is a matter of assigning priority, and as the following experiment clearly illustrates, strategy should take priority over style.

### Control:

In this experiment, we worked with a company that provides end-to-end marketing solutions for small and medium-sized businesses. The control page in question had been the winner from a previous experiment in which it had increased lead generation rate by 201%.<sup>15</sup>

However, despite being a very successful page, one will notice that it is aesthetically plain. The page was mainly white with simple, unadorned text, and very few eye-catching images. Some might argue (as did the business leaders of the company) that the page was rather unattractive.

**100% Satisfaction Guarantee**  
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- 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

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Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

**QUALYS**  
Secure Site

**Get Free Access**

**100% Satisfaction Guarantee**  
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It's a **powerful tool** for small businesses to market like the big guys.  
**Haydens**  
Sparta, New Jersey

I would recommend **LeadPros** 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

In this experiment, we tested the integration of more aesthetically appealing elements into the Web page to see how it would affect visitor response.

#### Treatment:

The treatment (as seen below) maintained all the strategic optimization changes made from the first round of testing, but for this test, stylistic changes were incorporated:

- The use of branded colors
- A banner-like header
- Stock imagery

Overall, the treatment only added a new layer of style to the existing optimization strategy.

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, [\[redacted\]](#) 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.

Get 500 FREE Leads added to your purchase\*

Why Choose [\[redacted\]](#) ?



- ▶ 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!

Setup your FREE access to [\[redacted\]](#)

- 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

First Name:

Last Name:

Company:

Email:

Phone:

Get Free Access

100% Satisfaction Guarantee

If you receive any bad data, we will refund your money, no questions asked!

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 [\[redacted\]](#) 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

Results:

The increase in conversion was only a 2% gain, with not enough traffic and variation to be statistically valid.<sup>16</sup> Despite the weak results, we concluded that the treatment design did not negatively impact conversion. For a company that desired more stylistic pages, this actually came as good news. Essentially, they could have the more attractive page they desired without negatively impacting the actual results.



2% Increase in Total Leads

Treatment 1 increase visit-to-lead conversion by 2%

	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	12.24%	-
Treatment 1	12.53%	2%

39

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**What you need to understand:** The redesigned treatment did not significantly increase conversion enough to establish one page as better than the other. The value of this test came from learning that increasing the aesthetic appeal of this page did not have a negative effect on conversion.

### What does this test mean for you?

Marketers must understand that an aesthetically appealing page does not necessarily convert better than an aesthetically unappealing page. Optimization strategy will almost always trump style when it comes to visitor response.

This does not mean that aesthetic design has no place in optimization. Branding, images and the like can help conversion when used appropriately, but there is often a disproportionate emphasis placed on the style of design. Marketers would be better off initially focusing on strategy and then focusing on style.<sup>17</sup>

## LESSON #6: You may know more than you think about optimizing social media campaigns



**Experiment ID:** *California State Parks Foundation*

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** Adams Hussey & Associates

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Nonprofit organization raising support for state parks in California during a time of significant budget cuts.

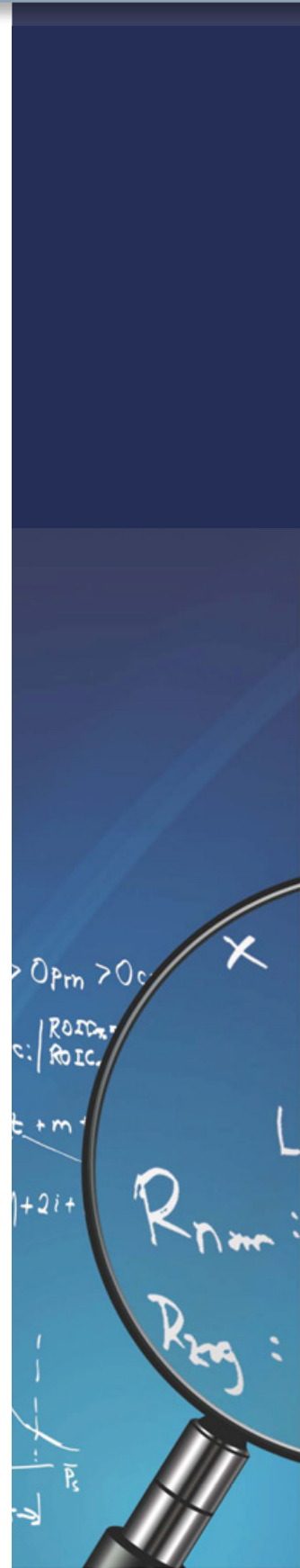
**Goal:** To attract new activists for California state parks through Facebook.

**Primary research question:** Which Facebook landing page will generate the most fans?

**Approach:** Sequential split test (variable cluster)

The final lesson chosen from 2010 deals with the ever-growing realm of social media. Because of the constant buzz and frequent changes this new medium brings to the table, marketers can often feel like a fish out of water. But what we have seen over this past year is that many of the optimization principles discovered in testing landing pages and email apply just as much, if not more so, to social media. We turn our attention to a case study from [our sister research company](#), MarketingSherpa, which clearly illustrates this lesson.<sup>18</sup>

To begin, it is important to note that this organization was dealing with some major obstacles. The California State Parks Foundation (CSPF) was facing massive cuts in state funding that threatened to close 220 California state parks. In response, this nonprofit organization quickly launched a multichannel effort with its agency, Adams Hussey & Associates, that included direct mail, telemarketing, email and social networking. In this article, we will focus primarily on what they did with their Facebook page to overcome these challenges.





### The original page

If you are familiar with Facebook, you are probably familiar with “the wall.” This is what visitors would see if they landed on the California State Parks Foundation Facebook page. But the wall, though important in engaging conversation, had no clear call-to-action for the visitor to respond (as seen below).



### The optimized page

To direct the new visitor more effectively, this organization used some basic principles of optimization and created a unique landing page for incoming visitors (as seen below). This new page stated the core value through a headline and bulleted copy, while reducing confusion with clear calls-to-action. The goal was to get visitors to become “fans,” which this new landing page made clear and simple.





## Results

This organization generated more than 30,000 fans in two weeks. This increase was so significant that the San Francisco Chronicle reported, “The California State Parks Foundation, the lead public organization advocating keeping the parks open, had its fan base on Facebook increase from 500 to 33,000 in the past two weeks.” This campaign became a media proof point to demonstrate that people did care about California state parks. For an advocacy organization such as CSPF, this is a very impressive success metric.



### Over 30,000 Fans in Two Weeks

*The CSPF page went from 517 fans to 33,000 in two weeks.*



**What you need to understand:** What you need to understand: Prior to the Facebook campaign, this organization’s fan page had 517 fans. After the new optimized Facebook landing page was implemented, the number of fans reached 33,000 in just two weeks

## What does this mean for you?

What marketers need to remember in dealing with social media is that people still buy from people. People do not buy from websites, emails or even social media networks. They are always looking for a genuine conversation with people, regardless of the medium.

This means that many of the basic optimization principles such as reducing friction, increasing the clarity of the value proposition, addressing anxiety, etc. will apply to social media. In fact, because of the conversational nature of social media, testing in 2011 may prove that the principles of optimization are even more applicable to social engagement.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Your customers are changing; they will always be changing. If you don’t keep up with them, there is a good chance you will lose their attention. Especially in a medium that terminates a conversion with one slight movement of a finger – click, close, goodbye conversion. It’s for this particular reason that marketers must continue to test year after year to discover what works right now.

These six overarching lessons taken from MarketingExperiments research in 2010 should provide valuable insights as you optimize your marketing campaigns in the coming year:

**LESSON #1:** Do not underestimate the effect offline media can have online

**LESSON #2:** Do not assume the “marketing masses” are going in the right direction

**LESSON #3:** When it comes to metrics, relying on tools alone is never enough

**LESSON #4:** Channel motivation is still the most predictive force of offer response

**LESSON #5:** Strategy is more important than style

**LESSON #6:** You may know more than you think about optimizing social media campaigns

After all is said and done, remembering these few lessons will not only help you better serve your potential customers, but will also significantly impact your bottom line.

From all of us at MarketingExperiments, we wish you a very successful 2011.

<sup>1</sup> Many of the experiments in this article have been the focus of previously published research articles as referenced in the endnotes throughout.

<sup>2</sup> This experiment was released originally and with fuller analysis in [Integrate Your Marketing - How one company combined offline and online marketing to increase subscriptions by 124%](#).

<sup>3</sup> Connecting the value of a Web offer to the specific motivations of the source of traffic (channel) through relevant messaging is one of the most effective ways to increase conversion. We teach a “Channel Mapping” methodology to help marketers learn how to do this effectively in our [Landing Page Optimization Certification Course](#).

<sup>4</sup> This experiment was originally released, with deeper analysis in [Double the Value of Your Online Testing: Don't just get a result, get the maximum customer insights](#).

<sup>5</sup> A misdirected (or undirected) eye-path is a common source of what we call Difficulty-Oriented Friction. It creates Difficulty that the visitor must overcome. To learn more about Friction and its causes, see Session 4 in our [Landing Page Optimization Certification Course](#).

<sup>6</sup> An image is only as valuable as the value it communicates. Too often, as in this case, stock images are utilized when they have no inherent value to communicate. Every element of a Web page (even images) must either state or support the value proposition. For more on the use of images to communicate the value proposition, see [Images vs. Copy: How getting the right balance increased conversion by 29%](#)

<sup>7</sup> The term “unsupervised thinking” was coined by Dr. Flint McGlaughlin to describe 1) the obstacle created when offering a visitor multiple evenly-weighted options and 2) the lack of guidance provided on the part of the Web page – both of which tend to diminish response. For more, see [No Unsupervised Thinking - How to increase conversion by guiding your audience](#)

<sup>8</sup> What potentially causes Friction in this kind of layout is the effort required of the visitor to hunt for information within the hidden tabs. It is important that the tabs are clearly visible and intuitively labeled to be effective.

<sup>9</sup> See [Technology Blind Spots: How human insight revealed a hidden \(and almost missed\) 31% gain](#)

<sup>10</sup> Images can bring reality to a product offer that helps communicate the value more effectively. For more on this, see [Images vs. Copy: How getting the right balance increased conversion by 29%](#)

<sup>11</sup> See sessions 1 and 2 of the [Landing Page Optimization Certification Course](#).

<sup>12</sup> For more on how and why differing sources of traffic represent differing levels of user motivation, see session 2 of the [Landing Page Optimization Certification Course](#)

<sup>13</sup> Again, the concept of connecting the value of a Web offer to the specific motivations of the source of traffic (channel) through relevant messaging is taught through a methodology we call “Channel Mapping” in our [Landing Page Optimization Certification Course](#).

<sup>14</sup> A really good example of this cooperation is found in [Images vs. Copy: How getting the right balance increased conversion by 29%](#).

<sup>15</sup> This experiment originally released, with deeper analysis, in [The Business Case for Testing: How one marketer convinced her business leaders to start testing and drove a 201% gain in the process](#)

<sup>16</sup> A gain that small would need an immense amount of traffic for us to confidently conclude that there is an actual difference in the performance of the two treatments. If you're interested in learning how to determine what constitutes a valid sample size, see the [Fundamentals of Online Testing Course](#).

<sup>17</sup> This experiment is also a great example of how even “unsuccessful” tests can still teach us something about our customers. See [The Business Case for Testing: How one marketer convinced her business leaders to start testing and drove a 201% gain in the process](#).

<sup>18</sup> This experiment was originally released, with deeper analysis, in the blog post [Facebook Case Study: From 517 to 33,000 fans in two weeks \(plus media coverage\)](#)

# Marketing Career: You must be your company's corporate conscience

Marketing is a company's face to the world. As such, it is increasingly taking on a leadership role in many companies. But with that power comes responsibility.

At [MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit '10 in San Francisco](#), I had the distinct pleasure of moderating a session by Cynthia Phillips, Director of Marketing at Rivet Software, where she discussed not only how to harness marketing's growing leadership role...but also what to do with it.

For those heading to the [MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit '10 in Boston on October 25 and 26](#), you'll get to hear it all directly from Cynthia and other industry experts along with your marketing peers providing real-life results.

However, for our blog readers who are not able to attend either location of the B2B Summit, I wanted to share just one of the points she made that really stuck with me. Here's a quick interview with her about what I think is one of marketer's biggest responsibilities going in to 2011...

**One role a marketer should play that I think isn't discussed enough is being an advocate for your audience – whether that audience is customers, potential customers, or any other stakeholder.**

**I like the way you discussed this advocacy role in your presentation, calling it the "corporate conscience." So how can we be a corporate conscience for our organizations?**

*Cynthia Phillips:* The nature of marketing and the position that it takes in organizations naturally causes us to become this "corporate



conscience." This is driven by the collaboration that we lead and participate in within matrixed companies/teams, and by the fact that we are heavily focused on how the outside world perceives and receives our organizations/products/services/brands.

We have the difficult task of acting as a "filter" for what gets communicated both internally and externally. It is an honor that comes with great responsibility and reward when we do what is right for our constituents. We can be this "corporate conscience" by being proactive, strategic, focusing on delivering valuable results while building lasting relationships, and by doing what is "right" over what "works."

Today, thanks to social media and just the Web itself, everyone is a publisher. We work so hard and invest so much in building our brands that we need to make sure our company does right by its stakeholders, or that brand equity can quickly collapse under a weight of negative tweets, Facebook comments, and blog posts.



by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

October 15th, 2010

**As part of that leadership role, how can marketing deal with negative social media, both in terms of what messaging to use to address it, and how to work internally in the organization to address these problems as well?**

CP: The most important point would be to ensure that we and our organizations have an appropriate presence on the social media platforms that are relevant to our business (not all are right for everyone) and to be actively “listening” as well as participating in them.

I also think we need to help our companies demonstrate authentic leadership by acknowledging and addressing issues that come up, as appropriate, head on. We need to bring them to the attention of the right people within our organizations (Customer Service and Support, HR, sales, etc.) and suggest how to respond in a way that takes ownership when necessary and the high road when offering a solution or answer.

We may also need to follow through to make sure an action was taken. Being proactive, honest, and taking action when needed will help marketing leverage social media to show value and communicate both the success and significance of the company to its constituents (customers, employees, stakeholders, etc.).

**According to the [MarketingExperiments Optimization Sequence](#), when approaching an optimization initiative, you should first optimize the product factors of your offer – ensure you have the best product available for at least one significant, describable customer segment.**

**How can marketing use that leadership role to help shape, not just how the product is marketed, but the very product itself?**

CP: This really goes back to fundamentals – it’s not about selling a widget, it’s about solving a problem. As someone mentioned at the B2B Summit, we should always keep the end in mind. Marketing should not be about selling a product/service, it should be about identifying, finding and engaging the people who are in most need of your solution.

We have to balance the business needs of our company (most likely revenue) with providing the best solution to the market. I think our role is often being the ones to bring the needs and perspectives of current and potential customers to the table so that they are considered as something is being developed – this avoids trying to market or fit a square peg into a round hole.

We are often the ones to get everyone internally involved (Sales, Service/Support, Development, etc.) together and lead a discussion about the current and future direction of a product so that all perspectives can be shared and heard. This will help ensure a more well-rounded solution. This is the proactive, collaborative leadership role we often, and should, play.

### Related Resources

[MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit '10 in Boston on October 25 and 26](#)

[B2B Marketing Summit '10 San Francisco Wrap-up: Seven takeaways to help you engage potential customers, generate high-quality leads and more](#)

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

[Transparent Marketing and Social Media: Twitter and Facebook are the new Woodward and Bernstein](#)

Photo attribution: [orangachang](#)



# Uh oh. It's budget time. Do you know where your metrics are?

It seemed like everyone had one thing on their mind at this year's first MarketingSherpa [B2B Marketing Summit](#): metrics. Well, a few people had shopping and cocktails on their mind too, as we were minutes from the shopping Mecca known as Union Square in San Francisco, not to mention a million great restaurants.

My own sidebar conversations and those of my MarketingExperiments, MarketingSherpa and MECLABS colleagues circled around a basic belief that 20 to 30 percent of the sales pipeline should come from marketing leads.

For the most part, we can all thank SiriusDecisions for this advancement in our collective understanding of funnel metrics. Everyone at budget time has a "[Demand Waterfall](#)" funnel model.

That percentage of revenue issue raises two questions for me. The first one is why 20 to 30 percent should be the correct answer.

First of all, there is a wide, wide disparity in how companies attribute revenue to leads. For some, there has to be unequivocal causality. For others, the slightest influence counts. Guess what? The more stringent the criteria, the lower the percentage contribution. And vice versa.

Of course, there are other mitigating factors:

Is outbound tele-prospecting contributing to the marketing lead pool (that will make a big, big difference)

How commoditized is the product or solution? Do you think Microsoft needs to generate 30 percent of the B2B demand for Office? No, it's a classic cash cow. Lots of us just get it when we get new computers. We often don't even have

a choice. Others have IT dictate the desktop decision, based upon computer refreshes and who knows what.

On the other hand, a start up enterprise SaaS firm has no installed base. For them, the percentage of revenue from leads should be higher. Usually much higher.

Then there is the second question – is revenue contribution even the right thing to measure? I don't think so. But more about that next week.

## Related Resources

[MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit heads to Boston next – October 25-26](#)

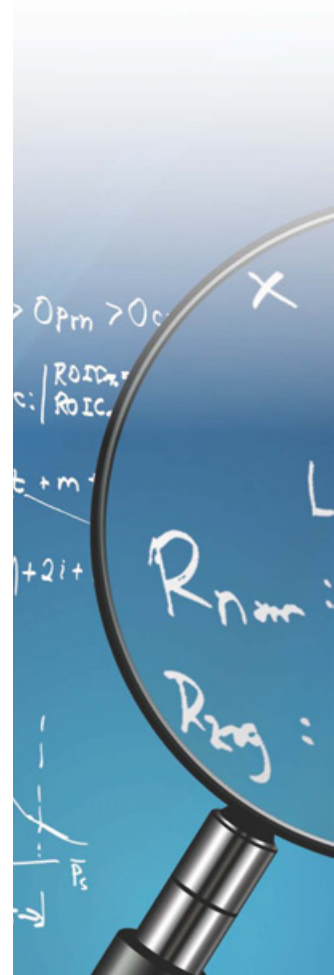
[Essential Metrics for Online Marketers](#)

[Measuring What Matters: How simplifying your metrics can increase Marketing ROI by up to 75%](#)



by Dave Green,  
Director of Best  
Practices

October 10th, 2010





# Database Marketing: Is Someone Examining You Right Now?



by Dave Green,  
Director of Best  
Practices

October 4th, 2010

Today, someone somewhere probably wrote down your name and/or captured or updated your phone number, email address, mailing address, and so on. You may not have even spoken to the person. Perhaps they heard your name on a conference call or in some meeting that you did not attend. Maybe they Googled you or looked you up on Facebook or LinkedIn or who knows where.

And it's not just your identity information. People are tracking your behavior. Google has built a multibillion dollar business this way.

## Privacy? Forget about it

People have been capturing information since the invention of writing. What's different is the tidal wave of change that this data capture activity is just starting to have on the Big Iron world of database marketing.

Obviously, sales people and business people in generally are leveraging tools like LinkedIn to learn about people they would like to speak to or have recently met. But database marketers have new possibilities on the horizon as well.

The old approach of buying lists now and then from publishers and compilers who gather the information now and then is still practical. But it's terribly inefficient. People get married, promoted, fired, hired, and moved in an endless loop. So much of what is true right now is untrue tomorrow and far less true next year.

## The Web has made this problem much worse

This sad fact has been the bane of sales and marketing people and the basis for the business models of venerable companies like D&B and Axiom. But a database marketing revolution

is coming, and the implications for buyers and sellers are profound. Companies like JigSaw, InsideView, BroadLook and five companies I've never heard of are just beginning to leverage these vast oceans of data. It's the database marketing version of Facebook.

Obviously, early adopters are appending names and other contact information on customer accounts or updating existing names and accounts. But smart database marketers have been doing that sort of thing for years. There are just more and increasingly better options.

## Predictions

Two new possibilities could threaten traditional players and create significant opportunities for greater relevance:

1. **Trigger event marketing** – With Web crawling technology, you can target firms based upon very specific, and meaningful events that have occurred to or in their business. And you can do so shortly after these events have occurred. For example, a computer company could send an email, a personalized letter, etc. to any newly hired CIO. Or to the key people on the current IT staff whose priorities may change as a result of new leadership. The potential for these trigger event possibilities are endless.
2. **Account and industry behavior** – As companies like JigSaw reach critical mass, mathematicians should be able to look at the aggregate data and extrapolate a variety of predictive factors. For example, marketers should be able to spot companies that are adding or subtracting a lot of employees over some meaningful period of time. So HR recruitment service providers could

prioritize industries that were just starting to grow right now and the companies within that industry that were growing the fastest. There are many possibilities.

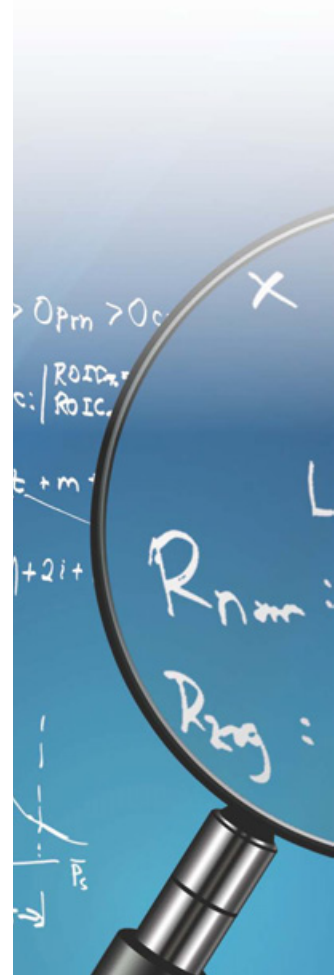
Some database marketing service providers are already offering services in this area. Companies standing on the sidelines do so at their peril.

### Related Resources

[One-to-One Marketing at Four Levels: Strategic ways every marketer can enter into an online conversation with customers](#)

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

[Reaching Decision Makers: Four biggest sales challenges Internet startups and entrepreneurs face](#)



# New to B2B Webinars? Learn 6 steps for creating an effective webinar strategy



by Justin Bridegan,  
Marketing Manager  
November 17th, 2010

Fellow marketing managers, commiserate with me for a moment. I'm sure you've been in a similar situation. You're given a new marketing initiative that you know little to nothing about. For some it might be [Twitter](#). For others, maybe [landing page optimization](#). My intimidating hill to climb, was the webinar.

While preparing for today's MarketingSherpa webinar about [email relevance and deliverability](#), and researching for the past couple of months on webinar creative practices, it became more evident to me that a clear marketing strategy was needed in order to produce better webinars in the future.

Highlighted below are the six tactics that I found successful for creating a clear webinar strategy and currently impact the way I plan, create, and promote MarketingSherpa webinars. And if you're a MarketingSherpa member, we even have a [complimentary Sample Webinar Plan](#) that you can download.

## Step #1: Know your deadlines and deliverables

Early communication with the sponsors, clients, and presenters is key. Email them and introduce yourself laying out a timetable for future meetings and deadlines. Once you know the key dates and information (webinar date, presenters, and topic), work backwards from the date of the webinar and set up target dates for completion. Important dates to remember include:

- Landing page setup and review
- Launch calls
- Presentation deadlines
- Dry runthrough

I highly recommend you set up a launch call to review these deadlines and discuss any concerns as well as present an overall webinar outline for a suggested topic.

## Step #2: Map out an effective marketing plan

Once you have confirmed the target dates and deliverables, you can begin to create a marketing plan. This plan should include your plans on promoting the event (emails, banner ads, social marketing) along with key dates and deadlines. The difference between a good plan and much better plan is in the details. The more specific you can be with target audience, goals, and call to action, the more effective your plan will be. When this is completed, send it to all the parties involved (including your sponsors and presenters if applicable) so they can see the plan details and discuss plan specifics.

## Step #3: Create relevant webinar copy for target audience

Relevancy is the key. If your audience feels that the webinar subject and email copy is relevant to their needs then you will be more successful in engaging prospects. As Flint McGlaughlin, Managing Director (CEO), MECLABS always says, "[Clarity always trumps persuasion.](#)"

Shy away from vague statements like "leading," "best" and "most." Be specific. For example, "[Homepage Design: The five most common pitfalls and how to overcome them](#)" Subject titles and copy that are specific may be enticing to a smaller audience, but most of the time this audience is highly interested and therefore a better lead. Always include a good call to action and use this line of thinking when creating copy, "If I am the ideal prospect, why should I attend your webinar?"

## Step #4: Apply marketing promotions across all channels

Using a number of highly targeted email blasts from in-house and sponsors lists, along with banner ads, you can bring in a significant amount of attendees. However, when marketing

for our last webinar [2011 Top B2B Marketing Practices: From Lead Generation to Marketing Automation](#), it was the social media activity (Twitter, LinkedIn, and blogs) that drove an additional 200-250 attendees within a week of the webinar. When tweeting, make sure to begin to establish the Twitter hashtag you plan to use to live tweet during the webinar.

Many companies do a number of webinars a month and using every avenue possible to create buzz is crucial to a webinar's success. I've found that the sweet spot for marketing is two weeks to the day before the event.

#### **Step #5: Preparation precedes power – practice and execution of the webinar**

No matter what webinar platform you use (GoToWebinar, WebEX, ON24) it is imperative to learn the basics of these programs before you begin using them. Spend some time watching the “best practices” training presentations, and reading the FAQs and how-to sections many of these platforms offer.

Knowing the tips and tricks of how each of these platforms function will be critical to avoiding “Uh oh” moments. Familiarize yourself with the important functions, like polls, registration questions, follow-up emails, and reminders.

Also, familiarize yourself with Twitter. Establishing a Twitter hashtag, and having at least one person from your company live tweeting during the webinar, is a great way to drive conversation and interaction and also gauge the sentiment of your audience in real-time.

*Bottom Line: Your preparation will give you the power you need to execute the webinar and the practice will give you the peace of mind.*

#### **Tactic #6: Follow up and review – continuing the conversation**

Once the webinar has concluded, it's important to keep the conversation going. Sending a follow-up email containing the slide presentation and any special offer material you

promised is only one part of the conversation. The second important part is keeping them engaged with other webinars, articles, books, classes, and events that apply to the topic of the webinar. Think of Amazon, “Those who attended a webinar like you also found this interesting...”

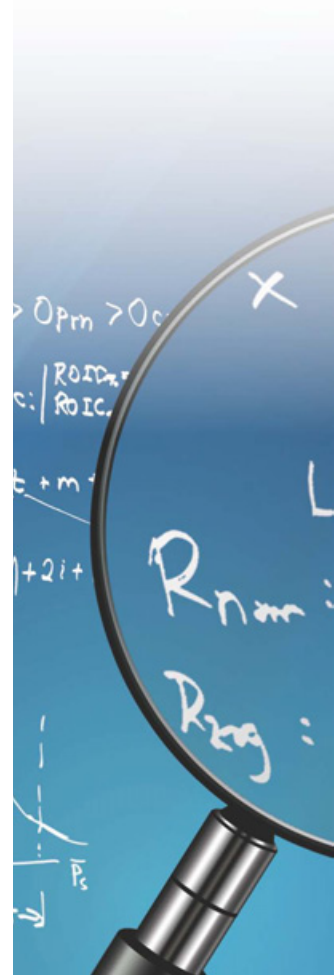
It's also important to review how the webinar went. Spend an additional five to ten minutes getting feedback from the speakers and monitoring the Twitter hashtag after the webinar concludes. This feedback will help you in making improvements in future webinars.

#### **Related resources**

[Marketing Webinar Optimization: Five questions to ask yourself about webinars](#)

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

[Members Exclusive: Download your complimentary Sample Webinar Plan](#)





# Public Relations: The best press release is no press release



by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

November 5th, 2010

*Here's a recent question I received via email that I'd like to address. This is a common question, and I think there is a lot of value in the answer for anyone seeking to gain earned impressions in the media for their brand...or even their personal brand.*

## QUESTION:

Congratulations on your new post handling editorial concerns for MarketingSherpa.com. Would you be so kind as to give a short primer on the best way PR folks, who represent marketing companies, can work with you moving forward? Do you like to be kept abreast with news releases and whatnot? We've done some work with MarketingSherpa in the past but it appears things have changed on your end and we certainly don't want to waste your time. Thanks in advance for your help.

Best regards,

Kevin Johnson  
Manger of Media Relations  
TechImage

## ANSWER:

Thanks for the question, Kevin. My short answer is – the best press release is no press release. Just [tell me why your proposed case study](#) or article will have value for MarketingSherpa's 225,000 marketers specifically. You can do this by reading and understanding what we publish on MarketingSherpa, you can not do this by randomly inserting the term "MarketingSherpa" into a canned pitch. Let's dive into this a little...

### Man bites dog

At MarketingSherpa, we receive no shortage of canned pitches and press releases every day. And not to be too harsh, but much like spam, they are sorted appropriately.

Now, I'm sure working in PR is a tough job. And to be fair, I have limited experience in my career on the press-release-writing side of things, but the few times I have been involved, usually the client's perception on the purpose of a press release was way out of whack with reality (one client didn't even know what a press release was, just that they wanted one...no joke).

So what is a press release? Wikipedia's description ends with the clause, "...for the purpose of announcing something claimed as having news value." That's right, even if you're just making a "claim," find the "news value." In case you didn't take Journalism 101, news value is "Man Bites Dog" and not "My client has an ad campaign."

### Talk to me like I'm your older brother, not your mother

Here's the analogy I like to use. When you talk to your mother, she's likely excited and proud about almost anything you have done. "Oh, Jimmy, you have a new ad campaign, how exciting!"

However, try the same pitch with your older brother and see how well that turns out. "Loser. You're only in advertising because you couldn't

hack it in medicine.” To grab the attention of your older brother, you need something really newsworthy, “The ad campaign we launched six months ago increased revenue by 372% because I did these three innovative things. So I booked a charter flight to the Super Bowl. Want to come, big bro?”

Well, media people are your older brother. I could care less about your new ad campaign. But if you got real results from a client that you’re willing to share that could benefit my audience...well, that’s as valuable to me as a 50-yard-line seat to watch the Jaguars play the Giants in the next Super Bowl.

So don’t even bother with the darn press release. Just send me a personal note and tell me why your specific story should be published on MarketingSherpa. I know, I know, it’s so much easier to do a big PR blast and get picked up somewhere and get some impressions and some SEO. But if you’re looking for quality earned impressions, just send me a note...the canned pitch goes straight in the trash anyway.

In writing this blog post, I’m a little worried I’m being a too harsh on PR people. And, really, I’m trying to help. So I sent my colleague, Andrea Johnson, the above paragraph and asked her opinion. She has more than two decades of public relations experience under her career belt, so her response surprised me. She was even more emphatic than I was. To quote directly from our Skype conversation, “YES!!! Absolutely.” Here’s what else Andrea had to say about news releases...

### “Publicity is nothing but sales

Your target market is the editor, blogger or reporter, your product is your news. Your goal is to make it very easy for them to say “yes” to whatever you’re selling; editors simply don’t have the time to figure out why they should care, especially in a marketplace that’s absolutely flooded with thousands of news releases every day.

If you want meaningful coverage, pay attention to what they’re writing about, what they care about, and the trends they’re tracking. With that in mind, start a personal conversation about what’s in it for them if they cover your news – that could be, for instance, a fresh, juicy angle on a topic they write about a lot.

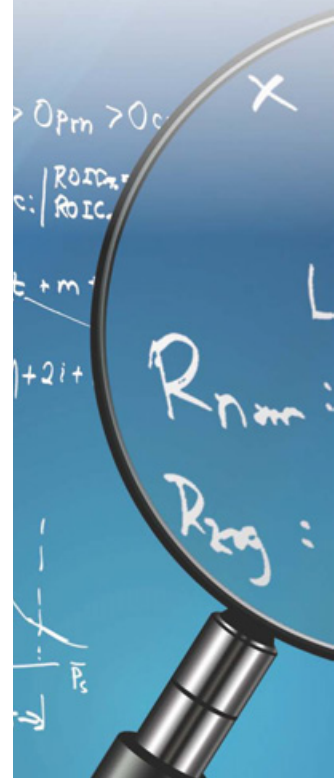
News releases make reporters work way too hard to figure out what’s in it for them, but releases can support the conversation. Instead, begin with a simple, thoughtful email referencing what they care about most and how your news perfectly addresses it. You’ll be surprised by your success, especially with B2B trade publications; editors there are absolutely starving for relevant material.

– Andrea Johnson, Editorial Manager, MECLABS Applied Research

### You can write it in a letter, babe

To summarize, press releases are not helpful. What is most helpful is [a personal letter](#) letting us know why the story you’re seeking to pitch has value for the MarketingSherpa audience. One thing we are always looking for is real case studies with real numbers that we can publish.

Also, [here is some boilerplate from our site](#) that might be helpful. But, again, a personal letter as to why this specifically would be a good article for MarketingSherpa is key. Most press releases just end up in the (virtual) trash...



“ However, be aware that we are *\*not\** a news organization but rather a publisher of Case Studies, benchmark data and how-to instructions.

Our researchers would love your help in identifying client-side (aka brand-side) marketing executives who would make good subjects for our Case Studies. We'll ask them specific questions about marketing tactics they have personally used, and we'll expect them to be able to speak to results in some meaningful way.

Yes, agencies and vendors are invited to talk about campaigns they have completed for clients, as long as some sort of results information is included, and the client can be contacted for a quote.

You don't have to write any case studies for us – we do all our own research and writing. Just suggest folks for us to interview.

## Related resources

[Landing Page Optimization: Takeaways from Entrepreneurship, PR, and Social Media](#)

[How to Get 350 Positive Media Mentions for a Business Services Firm in Six Months](#)  
(Members' Library)

[How to Optimize Press Releases & Get Higher Search Ranking and 75% Clickthrough Rate](#)  
(Members' Library)



# Better Window Than Door: A

## Transparent Marketing primer

If you've spent any time reading content here at MarketingSherpa, or at our sister company, MarketingExperiments, I bet you are familiar with this mantra – "People don't buy from companies. People buy from people." That very intuitive idea is a big part of a concept – Transparent Marketing – that is the heartbeat driving everything we do. We even [offer an article](#) that explains in detail what we mean by Transparent Marketing.

If you just want Transparent Marketing boiled down to the base essentials, here are the five key principles:

1. Tell (only) the (verifiable) Truth
2. Purge all vague modifiers
3. Let someone else do your bragging
4. Substitute general descriptions with specific facts
5. Admit your Weaknesses

All five concepts are simple, direct and make a ton of sense. And you know what else? They are harder to implement than you think. Much too often marketers talk to the target audience in the "marketer" voice, and not the "person" voice.

Do you enjoy being spoken down to from up on high by some corporate entity you may or may not even want to engage with in any fashion at all? I know I don't. Now when that same corporate entity comes at me with little more human-sounding message, suddenly I'm a lot more receptive to donating a bit of my valuable time (and/or cash) to whatever proposition I'm being offered.

### Hype is a door, the truth is a window

Here are some daunting figures taken from that article I linked to up there in the very first graf. The numbers are from 2003, but the lesson is timeless:

**“The average person is assaulted with a barrage of 577 new marketing messages per week.**

If we could somehow wire the mind of the consumer as they sift through the conundrum of emails, snail mails, banners and commercials... we would probably hear a resounding response:

"I don't have time to listen, and I don't believe you anyway."

Indeed, experts tell us that people sort their mail in order to find an excuse to trash it. And even if by chance a message somehow escapes this ruthless purge... it probably won't be remembered.

**Statistics indicate that we retain less than 1% of the marketing messages we encounter.**

That means that this very week, your company's pitch is just one of another 577 being hurled at the prospect. You may be #11 or you may be #450, but whatever number you are, it is imperative to win a place among the fortunate 1% that are actually "heard" and remembered.

And this is only half the battle... somehow you must be believed.



by David Kirkpatrick,  
Reporter

November 11th, 2010



The lesson here? If you can avoid churning out the typical jargon and meaningless hype, you have an opportunity to create a very high level of credibility. And credibility leads to trust. Trust builds a bridge to a relationship and that relationship translates into sustained sales. This short thought sequence is also taken directly from our Transparent Marketing article. Did I mention it'd be a great idea to invest in a click and read the whole document?

Here is my editor, and Associate Director of Editorial Content, Daniel Burstein on this topic:

## “ In an age of social media, all marketing is transparent

Flint McGlaughlin's seminal article, Transparent Marketing: How to earn the trust of a skeptical consumer, was written seven long years ago, and it has never been more prescient. Think of all that has changed since 2003 in the world of digital marketing. The rise of Facebook, Twitter, blogging, and other forms of social media has turned everyone with a device (you don't even need a computer any more) and a connection into a publisher. So if you produce marketing that isn't transparent, don't worry, it soon will be.

From @BPGlobalPR to YouTube songs about broken guitars, you are no longer just up against your competition to grab mindshare about a product or service, you are essentially competing with your audience as well. They are also diligently working to shape perception of the brand. So let a little sunlight in ... before someone breaks your window.

## What does Transparent Marketing mean to you?

I posed this question at our [MarketingSherpa](#), [MarketingExperiments Optimization](#) and [B2B Lead Generation Roundtable](#) LinkedIn groups.

Kirsi Dahl offered this response at the MarketingSherpa discussion:

“ In brief, to me, transparent marketing is a term we industry types have created to summarize a growing trend among consumers related to their skepticism of sales and advertising.

Consumers migrate towards brands that authentically engage in meaningful relationships with them. Brands can demonstrate this authenticity through listening and engaging in two-way conversations in places and spaces where their consumers are hanging out (online and in store).

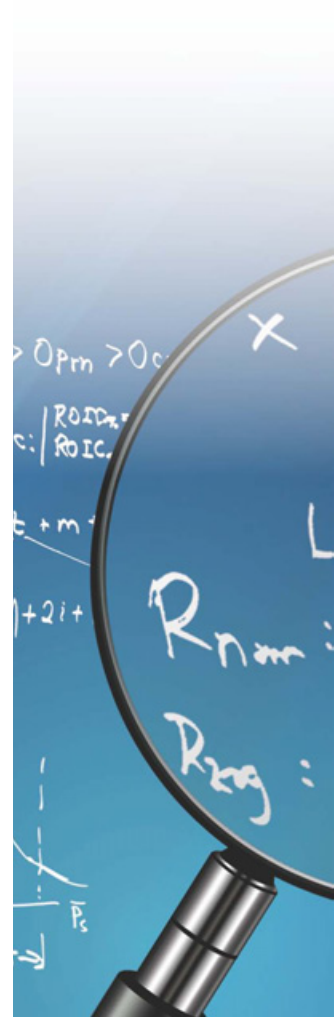
First, I want to thank Kirsi for taking the time to share her thoughts with the group, and second, I want to invite everyone to join the conversation at one of the three LinkedIn groups, or in the comment section for this blog post. What does Transparent Marketing mean to you?

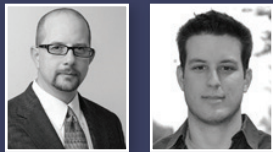
## Related resources:

[MarketingExperiments article on Transparent Marketing](#)

[Blog Case Study: Three Lessons Learned from a 232% Increase in Visits over Eight Months](#)

[Transparent Marketing and Social Media: Twitter and Facebook are the new Woodward and Bernstein](#)





by Austin McCraw

### Contributors

Daniel Burstein

Dr. Flint McGlaughlin

Nathan Thompson

November 2010

# Images vs. copy: How getting the right balance increased conversion by 29%

## THE TENSION BETWEEN IMAGES AND COPY

In the marketing world, there is often a tension between words and images. This is due to two inescapable factors of any goal-oriented communication. Whether you are a marketer trying to sell the newest smartphone, or a ninth grade teacher trying to sell the first law of thermodynamics, you will most likely experience at least one of these core challenges in communication.

The first challenge is that people have differing psychological predispositions for communication.<sup>1</sup> Simply stated, there are differences in the way people learn. Some best receive information through words, while others would learn best through visuals, or even through sensory experience. Often, marketers are caught between these competing worlds of communication, and though they may espouse concern for the customer, what really lead the decisions are attempts to stay as close to home as possible.

The second, and probably more prevalent challenge faced today (especially by marketers), is that people have such little time and trust. For the post-modern consumer, marketing messages have a scant few seconds to start a conversation.<sup>2</sup> Even if more time was available, the average person responds to any claim of value with a skeptical mindset. Getting the right message at the right time has never been more important; and it's never been more difficult.

In terms of the tension between the use of copy and/or images, these two challenges raise critical questions for any online marketer:

- Do images resonate with my customers more than copy? How do I know?
- With what products/markets should one use an image rather than copy (and vice versa)?
- Is there an optimal balance for using images with copy?
- How do I go about choosing between words or images?

The purpose of the following article will be to help marketers navigate through these key creative decisions based on data-driven research. This article will also seek to lay the groundwork for a systematic approach to the use of images and copy online. To that end, we immediately turn our attention to a real-world experiment.

## EXPERIMENT #1: IMAGES VS. COPY



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1353

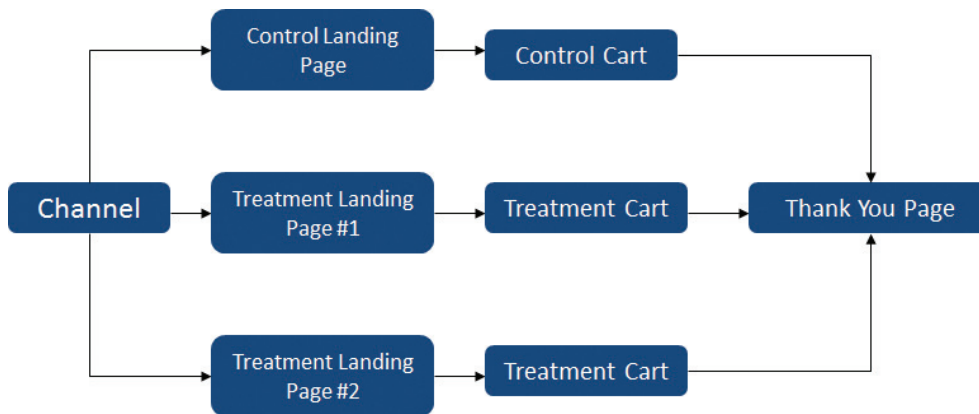
### Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

**Primary research question:** A/B split test (variable cluster)

To begin, this test features the offer page of a well-known news publication offering home delivery services via online registrations. The specific goal of this test was to increase the amount of home delivery subscriptions. The test featured two treatment offer pages, and one new cart page treatment (visualized below). For the scope of this article we will focus primarily on the offer page.



### Control:

The original offer page was the current best performer for home delivery sign-ups. It already had an optimized flow, as it had been through a series of previous tests. However, the original page predominantly relies on copy to communicate the value, and the question of images arose as our analysts began to consider improving the communication of value.

**Landing Page**

**Some Promise You the World. We Deliver.**  
Act now and save up to 50% on home delivery.

We've got your world covered — from global issues to national concerns, from business to the arts, science to travel. No other news source brings you the breadth, depth and insights you'll find in *The Times*.

- **Daily** — Unsurpassed coverage of the news that matters most to you, plus the renowned *Times* columnists
- **Tuesday** — Science (astronomy to zoology, *Life* on health)
- **Wednesday** — Dining (recipes, reviews, features)
- **Thursday** — Technology (iMac, Croux) plus Thursday Styles, the Home section
- **Friday** — Weekend Arts (influential reviews, extensive listings)
- **Sunday** — The Magazine, Travel, Week in Review, Book Review and more

Order *The Times* at 50% off the regular subscription rate. Discover how much it can add to your life.

**CHECK DELIVERY AVAILABILITY**  
Enter Your ZIP Code (Example: 10010) **GO**

**Form Page**

**Home Delivery**

With home delivery, you'll start each day with the world at your fingertips.  
Order now to take advantage of these introductory rates. Each offer represents 50% off the regular subscription rate.\*

**Start a new subscription**

- ☒ **Daily Delivery (7 Days)** for just \$7.40 per week [Details](#)
- ☐ **The Weekender (Friday-Sunday)** for just \$5.20 per week [Details](#)
- ☐ **Sunday Only** for just \$3.75 per week [Details](#)
- ☐ **Weekday (Monday-Friday)** for just \$3.70 per week [Details](#)

**Delivery information**

First name   
Last name   
Address   
City, State, ZIP  JACKSONVILLE, FL 32256  
Phone     
E-mail address

**Sign up to receive subscriber e-mails.** Be the first to learn about exclusive subscriber discounts and new merchandise at [The Times](#) Store, upcoming events, special features in the newspaper and more.

☐ Yes, sign me up for exclusive subscriber e-mails. ☐ No, please do not send me subscriber e-mails.

**Billing information**

☐ Billing address, if different from delivery address

☒ Pay by credit card and get your first 12 weeks at 50% off  
☐ Pay by mail and get your first 8 weeks at 50% off

Credit Card  Discover  
Card Number   
Exp. Date  MM  YY  YY  
Card ID Number  What's this?

**Submit**

It is important to note that if you analyze this page based upon the results of our previously published tests, you would conclude that this page is following some of our most effective optimization principles. The page has a two-column layout, with the primary value proposition statements in the main column, and supporting secondary information in a smaller right-hand column. There is minimal navigation, a strong headline and a clear call-to-action at the bottom of the page. And even though the page relies on copy, the copy is not overly lengthy. Also, the layout of the text is optimized with an introductory paragraph and key bullet points. Overall, this page performed well because it is optimized, and remained the highest performing page for an entire year, prior to the creation of the treatments we will look at next.



## Experiment #1, Treatment #1

The first treatment was a more image-rich version of the original page. Strong images of icons and newspaper covers were used to communicate value. This design also featured a more horizontal layout, a more specific headline and a call-to-action located higher on the page.

### Landing Page

**Stay 100% informed, for 50% less.**

New Subscribers: **Save 50% on home delivery of** **Know more. Save more. Start now.**

Enter your ZIP code:  [GO >](#)

**Monday**  
Media

**Friday**  
Weekend  
Arts, Escapes

**Tuesday**  
Science Times

**Saturday**  
Personal  
Finance

**Wednesday**  
Dining

**Sunday**  
The Magazine, Travel, Week  
In Review, Book Review & More

**Thursday**  
Technology, Styles & Home

Also Included in Your Subscription:  
The New York Times Electronic Edition and discounts at The New York Times Store

### Form Page

**Home Delivery**

**1. Select the New Subscription That's Best For You.**  
Each offer represents 50% off the regular subscription rate.\*

☒ **Daily Delivery (7 Days)** - \$7.40 per week [More Details >](#)  
☐ **The Weekender (Friday-Sunday)** - \$5.20 per week [More Details >](#)  
☐ **Sunday Only** - \$3.75 per week [More Details >](#)  
☐ **Weekday (Monday-Friday)** - \$3.70 per week [More Details >](#)

Included in all subscriptions - The New York Times Electronic Edition and discounts at The New York Times Store

**2. Delivery Information**

First name

Last name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Phone

E-mail address

**Sign up to receive subscriber e-mails.** Be the first to learn about exclusive subscriber discounts and new merchandise at The New York Times Store, upcoming events, special features in the newspaper and more.

☐ Yes, sign me up for exclusive subscriber e-mails.  
☐ No, please do not send me subscriber e-mails.

**3. Billing Information**

☐ Billing address, if different from delivery address

☒ Pay by credit card and get your first **12 weeks** at 50% off  
☐ Pay by mail and get your first **8 weeks** at 50% off

Credit Card

Card Number

Exp. Date

Card ID Number

**COMPLETE ORDER >**

The treatment form page contains the same amount of fields as the control, yet with a slightly different layout and a stronger call-to-action.

### Control Form

**Home Delivery**

With home delivery, you'll start each day with the world at your fingertips.

Order now to take advantage of these introductory rates. Each offer represents 50% off the regular subscription rate.\*

**Start a new subscription**

☒ **Daily Delivery (7 Days)** for just \$7.40 per week [Details](#)  
☐ **The Weekender (Friday-Sunday)** for just \$5.20 per week [Details](#)  
☐ **Sunday Only** for just \$3.75 per week [Details](#)  
☐ **Weekday (Monday-Friday)** for just \$3.70 per week [Details](#)

**Delivery information**

First name

Last name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Phone

E-mail address

**Sign up to receive subscriber e-mails.** Be the first to learn about exclusive subscriber discounts and new merchandise at The New York Times Store, upcoming events, special features in the newspaper and more.

☐ Yes, sign me up for exclusive subscriber e-mails. ☐ No, please do not send me subscriber e-mails.

**Billing information**

☐ Billing address, if different from delivery address

☒ Pay by credit card and get your first **12 weeks** at 50% off  
☐ Pay by mail and get your first **8 weeks** at 50% off

Credit Card

Card Number

Exp. Date

Card ID Number

**Submit**

### Treatment Form

**Home Delivery**

**1. Select the New Subscription That's Best For You.**  
Each offer represents 50% off the regular subscription rate.\*

☒ **Daily Delivery (7 Days)** - \$7.40 per week [More Details >](#)  
☐ **The Weekender (Friday-Sunday)** - \$5.20 per week [More Details >](#)  
☐ **Sunday Only** - \$3.75 per week [More Details >](#)  
☐ **Weekday (Monday-Friday)** - \$3.70 per week [More Details >](#)

Included in all subscriptions - The New York Times Electronic Edition and discounts at The New York Times Store

**2. Delivery Information**

First name

Last name

Address

City, State, ZIP

Phone

E-mail address

**Sign up to receive subscriber e-mails.** Be the first to learn about exclusive subscriber discounts and new merchandise at The New York Times Store, upcoming events, special features in the newspaper and more.

☐ Yes, sign me up for exclusive subscriber e-mails.  
☐ No, please do not send me subscriber e-mails.

**3. Billing Information**

☐ Billing address, if different from delivery address

☒ Pay by credit card and get your first **12 weeks** at 50% off  
☐ Pay by mail and get your first **8 weeks** at 50% off

Credit Card

Card Number

Exp. Date

Card ID Number

**COMPLETE ORDER >**

## Experiment #1, Treatment #2

The first treatment was a more image-rich version of the original page. Strong images of icons and newspaper covers were used to communicate value. This design also featured a more horizontal layout, a more specific headline and a call-to-action located higher on the page.

The second treatment is similar in approach to the first, only it further reduces the amount of copy. This page has a more vertical layout in comparison to the first treatment, and the imagery is actually expanded on this treatment to fill the majority of the page. Overall, this page – as well as the first treatment – leans on images to communicate the product value.

## RESULTS

**21% Increase in Clickthrough Rate**  
*Treatment 2 also increased the overall conversion rate by 29.26%*

Design	Clickthrough Rate	Relative Difference	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	23.41%	-	3.23%	-
Treatment #1	24.27%	3.67%	3.69%	14.07%
<b>Treatment #2</b>	<b>28.41%</b>	<b>21.35%</b>	<b>4.18%</b>	<b>29.26%</b>



**What you need to understand:** As the above results reveal, both image-heavy versions outperformed the copy-rich version control of the offer page. Also, the new form page significantly outperformed the control form page in conversion rate.

This might come as a surprise to our *Research Journal* readers, especially those familiar with our research on initiating conversation online.<sup>3</sup> Yet, we must constantly challenge our own findings and rigorously question everything we teach. As it has been said, “The greatest hindrance to the next big move in science is the last big move.”<sup>4</sup>

However, before you start scrapping the copy on your Web pages, there are a couple caveats to be noted about this test:

1. **The nature of the product:** The product is, by nature, very experiential because it is held and read in someone’s hands. Therefore, images are already in a good position to bring an emotional intensity to the offer value.
2. **The nature of the test methodology:** The treatments are radical redesigns<sup>5</sup>. Though a predominant change was moving from copy to images, there are still other factors that contributed to the success of the treatment. We may hypothesize that images played a significant role in the increase, but the only way to know for sure would be to run secondary tests that focus more closely on the specific variables.
3. **The nature of the page design:** Copy is still utilized to communicate crucial information in the treatment versions. In fact, if you were to remove the copy, it would be difficult to determine what the actual offer is. The goal is not to pick images over copy or vice-versa; rather, the objective is to strike a balance between the two, ensuring that every element of the page is communicating value with optimal impact.

So, even with these three caveats, there are still significant questions to be answered. Why did this page – which would seemingly contradict basic offer response optimization principles – perform better? What was it about the use of images and copy in the treatment designs that lead to the lift in responses? How did a page cut 90% of its copy and still get across enough value to increase sales?

### BALANCING IMAGES AND COPY

In our online certification course session on communication of the value proposition, we teach The Principle of Congruence.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, this principle states that for a value proposition to be effectively expressed on a Web page, each element of that page must either state or support the value proposition.<sup>7</sup> This means that not only do headlines and copy need to communicate value, but images, buttons, navigation, and even the site functionality must be saying something about the value of the offer.

If we agree to this as a foundational principle of optimization, then we must ask the next question of application – How do I identify which potential page element will most effectively communicate value?



#### Key Principle:

The effectiveness of any given Web page element’s communication of the value proposition can be categorized into 1) The ability to communicate value with *Force* 2) The ability to communicate value with *Precision*.

First, to start to answer this key question, it is helpful to categorize the effectiveness of any given Web page element's communication of the value proposition into two distinct, yet at times overlapping, capabilities:

**1) The ability to communicate value with Force**

**2) The ability to communicate value with Precision**

When speaking of force, we are referring to the intensity of appeal that a value proposition has to the visitor. When speaking of precision, we are referring to the level of clarity that is used when communicating a value proposition. To some degree, every page element can be measured by these two capabilities. However, it is particularly helpful to think within these categories when balancing images with copy, because our research finds that images are tied closely to the force of the communication of value, and copy closer to the precision of that communication.

As we first turn our attention to images, we must note that it is somewhat intuitive that they would be associated with force. Think about the difference between seeing the name of a childhood friend written on a sheet of paper, versus seeing a picture of them at your high school graduation. With images, we are brought closer to experiencing (or feeling the emotion) of the things we value. The challenge is always finding the most impactful image.

**USING IMAGES THAT GENERATE THE MOST FORCE**

If images have a greater potential of communicating the value with force, marketers must learn to use this to their advantage. Too often, images are chosen without any thought of the communication of value, let alone the force of the communication. But if a page is going to effectively use images, marketers must be focused on finding the images that will generate the most force for the specific appeal of their offer.

Though there is no magical "silver bullet" image out there that will provide optimal value regardless of marketing scenario, there are a few predictive hallmarks of an effective image:

**1) How relevant the image is to the offer**

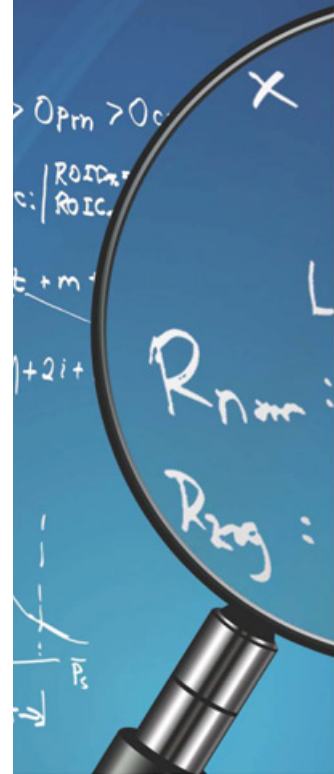
**2) How much reality an image brings to the offer**

**3) The relative graphical weight an image has on a Web page**

Let's look at these individually.



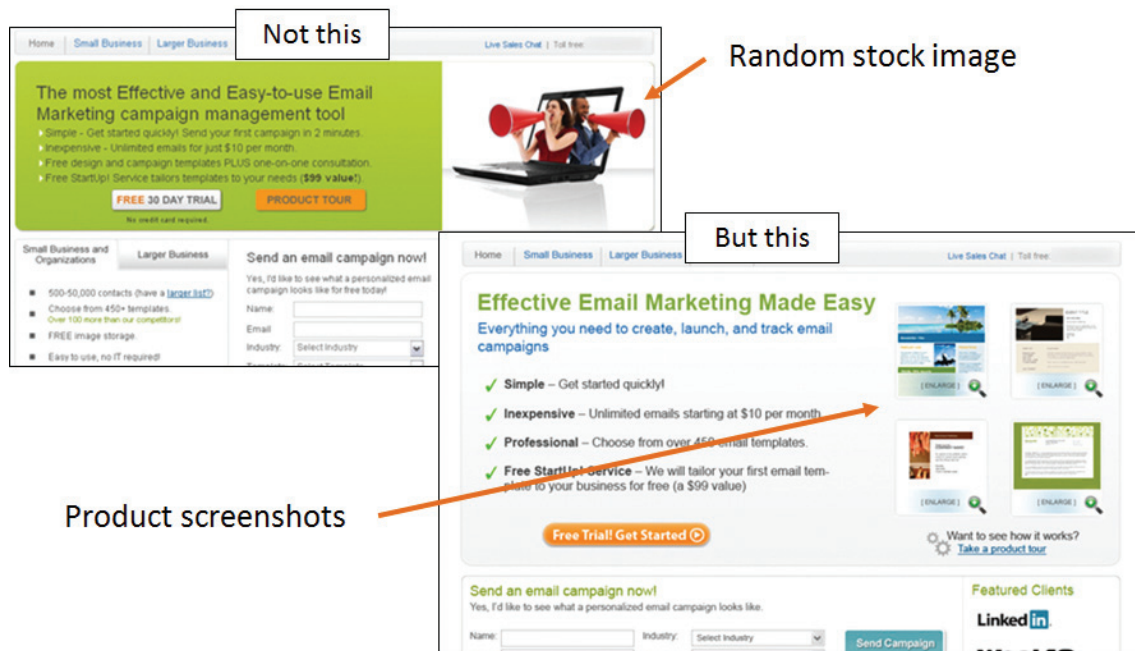
The force of an image increases as the connection between the image and the perceived value becomes clearer.





## Relevance

The force of an image increases as the connection between the image and the perceived value becomes clearer. What this means is that marketers must attempt to find images that will have a direct implication of value for the actual product or service they are trying to sell.



For instance, there can be great force with good stock imagery used in the right places (as seen in the example above). Marketers often use stock images that imply nothing about the value of the offer, settling for “pretty” images that make no clear connection to the offer’s core value. Remember, images that say nothing are worth nothing.

So, what kind of image would be relevant in the above example? In this case, our research team swapped the generic stock image with screenshots of the software being offered. These images, though they may or may not be the best ones available, say something about the value of this offer and – as was recently published – contributed to a significant increase in conversion.<sup>8</sup>

So, the first step in finding images that communicate the value with force is finding images that are relevant to the offer value.



The force of an image increases with its authenticity. Images can bring a realism that reduces the “virtual distance” between an offer’s value and the recipient’s perception of that value.

## Reality

The force of an image increases with its authenticity. Images can bring a realism that reduces the “virtual distance” between an offer’s value and the recipient’s perception of that value. Therefore, marketers must attempt to find images that help the visitor see and experience the core value of the product.

“Comprehensive 32-Volume  
Online Encyclopedia”



“14 Days of Unlimited Access to  
both Universal Studios and  
Universal’s Island of Adventure”



For instance, showing the actual 32-volume encyclopedia set will make a digital version of those volumes more real and tangible to the potential subscriber. Likewise, featuring images of families enjoying their vacations at the Universal Studios theme park provides a tangible and even emotional reality to the purchase of park tickets. Images have the unique capability of immediately helping your potential customer see the value of the product.

Therefore, in increasing the force of an image, marketers must find images that successfully bring reality an offer.



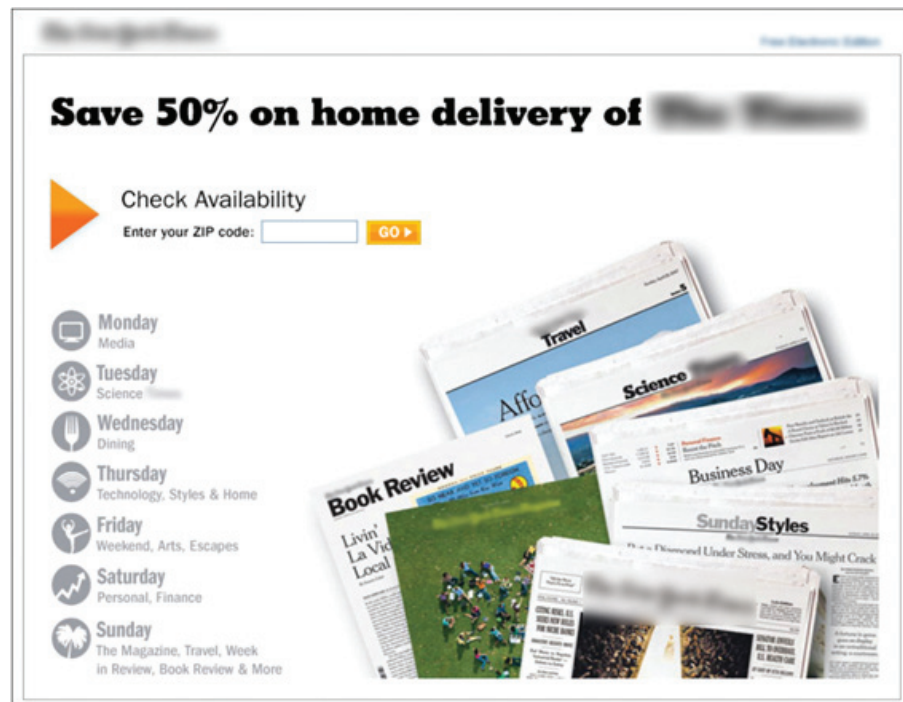
The force of an image increases as its relative graphical proportion increases

### Relative Weight

Finally, the force of an image increases as its relative graphical proportion increases. By nature, images draw the natural eye-path of the visitor in varying degrees based on their size, shape, color and position. The more relative weight an image has, the more force the image brings to the value communicated by the image. Keep in mind that using graphical weight assumes that the image is already providing both relevance and reality.

One of the things to avoid when using graphical weight is the overemphasis of images and multimedia on a single page (which is prevalent across the Web). If everything is emphasized, nothing is emphasized. This is why we say the force is dependent upon relative weight – relative to the other elements on the page.

Now, before we move on to addressing the use of copy, let’s return to the experiment with which we started this article. How did we utilize these three elements (Relevance, Reality and Relative Weight) to increase the force of the offer’s value proposition?



**Relevance** – Much of the value of this newspaper is in its well-known brand and the content it offers throughout the week. So, images are being primarily used to leverage the value of the brand with classic front-page images of the paper. Also, note that each of the newspaper images specifically relates to the content listed on the left side of the Web page.

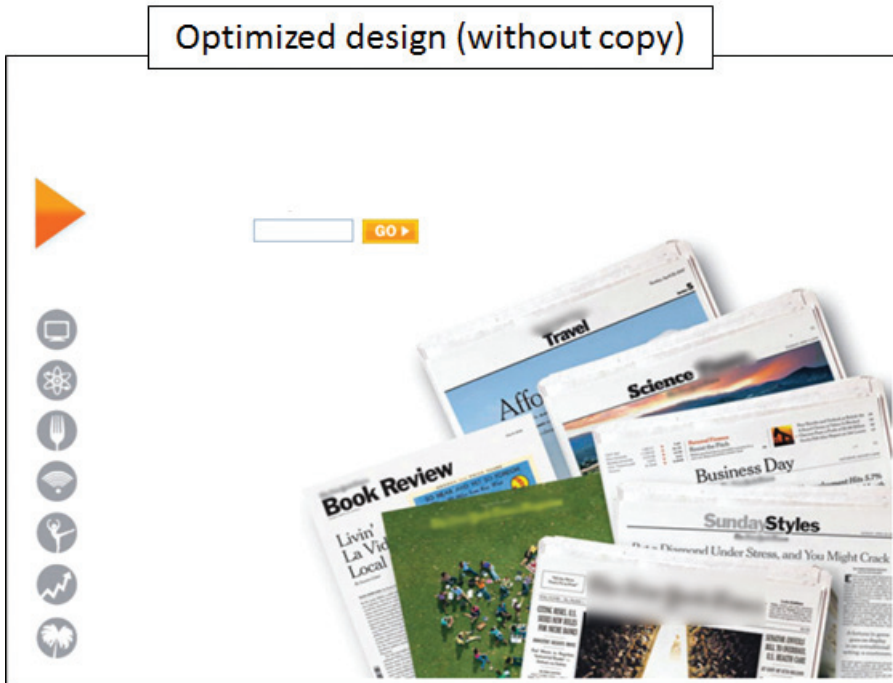
**Reality** – Using images of the actual newspaper adds a dimension of tangible reality to the offer. Potential customers who desire to read the newspaper from the convenience of their kitchen tables can now better visualize the product they will be holding.

**Relative Weight** – The graphical weight of the newspaper image page is significant due to its size, shape, color and position. The image, by far, is the most eye-catching feature of this Web page.

### THE STRENGTH OF COPY OVER IMAGES

After all the emphasis on the potential force of an image, one might wonder if we think copy plays a lesser role on the Web page. On the contrary, copy is vital to most marketing campaigns. As we pointed out earlier, the unique strength of copy over images is its ability to communicate value with precision.

For example, take the optimized page we've reviewed throughout this article and ask, "What would this page say if there was no copy?"



Quickly you discover that though this page heavily leans on images, it still balances copy to communicate precise information about the offer. For instance, without copy you would not know that: 1) the product is a home delivery newspaper service 2) one can save 50% by ordering this product online 3) the specific news features of the specific weekdays 4) the offer may or may not be available in your area. The copy on this page is providing some of the precise value that images cannot provide.

What must be understood is that the results of this experiment do not support the idea of pitting images against copy, but rather support the notion of finding the optimal balance between the two in order to most effectively communicate the value proposition. Both copy and images have their unique strengths and weakness. Marketers must always ask these questions in regards to striking this balance:

1. Can what I am saying through images be better stated through copy?
2. Can what I am saying through copy be better stated through images?
3. How can I use these two elements together?





The use of copy has two strategic advantages over the use of images on a Web page: 1) the ability to include specific quantifiable details and 2) a tone that matches the visitor's motivations

Now, when it comes to the unique advantage copy has over images, there are two fundamental benefits copy provides to most marketing campaigns:

1. **The ability to include specific quantifiable details.**

Copy enables you to include quantifiable information about your value proposition. This not only strengthens the clarity of the offer, but also the credibility. Contrary to today's common marketing practices, people no longer trust qualitative claims. You cannot tell your customer that you are "The Best" or "The Cheapest" or "The Fastest." You must give them specifics about how fast you are, how low your prices are, and why you are "the best," if you want them to believe you. Copy, more than images, enables marketers to provide this specificity.

2. **The ability to include a tone that matches the visitor's motivations.**

The tone of your copy enables your site to have personality. Whether you like or not, people will personify your website. This is because people desire to buy from people, not from websites; therefore, every visitor to your site is looking to engage in a conversation with you.<sup>9</sup> If your site is not intentional in its tone, there is no telling what voice a visitor will associate with it. And again, whether you like it or not, the appeal of your voice will have significant impact on the appeal of value. This is why a significant strength of copy is in its ability to create a voice.

To translate these principles into action, below you will find a before-and-after landing page example that illustrates the proper usage of copy to more precisely communicate the value proposition. The key difference in the copy of this page is found in both its specificity and tone.

**Not this**

**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!**

To receive your **500 Free Leads**, fill out and submit the form below. Once received you will be contacted by one of our business consultants.

\*First Name

\*Last Name

\*Company Name

\*Email Address

\*Phone Number

Once your information is submitted your password will be emailed to you.

[Click Here](#)

**Why Should You Market Today?** (Click to watch)

The industry leader in database marketing, [redacted] offers the freshest, most accurate business and consumer sales leads and mailing lists available anywhere. Nearly 4 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 [redacted]?**

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

**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!

- **Specificity** – Statements like “Most Accurate Mailing list...We have the best data...Industry leader in database marketing” are all prominent vague qualitative statements throughout original copy
- **Tone** – “Your hunt is over” language has an arrogant, braggadocios tone
- **Tone** – Form has an intimidating tone that emphasizes that once a visitor fills out the form, they will be incessantly contacted by sales

But this

- **Specificity** – Previous vague statements have been replaced with quantitative statements like “We make 26 Million calls...Trusted since 1972...210 million U.S. consumers...600 full-time researchers”
- **Tone** – Form tone now has a benefit tone that states “Set up your free access”
- **Tone** – Boastful tone has been replaced by customer testimonials

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

Trusted since 1972, **QUALYS** 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**.

**Get 500 FREE Leads** added to your purchase!

**Why choose **QUALYS**?**

- ▶ 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 **QUALYS****

- 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

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

**Get Free Access**

**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 **QUALYS** 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

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

An additional advantage of copy is that it is one of the least resource-intensive ways to improve conversion. For example, tweaking a headline will take less development work than simplifying a page layout. Even better, our research has found that the conversion impact of simple copy changes is often very significant.

### WHAT ABOUT SEO?

For many, a discussion about optimizing copy for conversion will (and should) immediately bring up concerns about search rankings. Will making changes to copy negatively impact your SEO? How do you remove quantitative copy on your page and avoid hurting your keyword rankings? The challenge of these questions is only exacerbated for established websites with significant portions of their traffic coming from online search.

It's unfortunate, but marketers are often held hostage by the fear of search rankings. Optimization strategies are sometimes even ignored just to maintain a good keyword ranking. Marketers in these situations are often trying to find a side, rather than a solution. However, like the tension between images and copy, the solution is one of cooperation, not competition.

### So how do you balance search strategies with optimization strategies?

Before we provide tactics for striking an optimal balance, an important principle about the most effective sequence of optimization must be understood.

As we teach in our online courses, there is a priority in optimization <sup>10</sup>. Not all optimization is equal. Yes, we would love to live in a world in which everything could be fully optimized all at once, but unfortunately we live in a world of tradeoffs. These tradeoffs could be something as simple as time and/or resources. You may only have the resources to optimize a single step in a conversion process. Where will you start? Or as in the case of SEO and LPO (landing page optimization), you may be dealing with optimization strategies that contradict one another.

### The MarketingExperiments Optimization Sequence

$$\text{Opr} > \text{Oprn} > \text{Ocn} \text{®}$$

Opr = Optimize Product Factor

Oprn = Optimize Presentation Factor

Ocn = Optimize Channel Factor

The MarketingExperiments Optimization Sequence shown above is a simple expression that provides some foundation for the priorities in optimization. In short, it states that the optimization of the product (Opr) has priority over the optimization of the presentation of that product (Oprn). This means that one must ensure that essential aspects of a product (pricing, purchase model, value prop, etc.) are optimized prior to optimizing the presentation of that product (Web pages, shopping carts, etc.).

This formula goes a step further in giving the optimization of the presentation (Oprn) higher priority than the optimization of the channel (Ocn). A channel is the means by which a visitor arrives at your website (email, PPC, banners, SEO, etc.); therefore it is essential to optimize your product and presentation prior to optimizing any channel. You do not want to increase your channels' effectiveness, only to send all this new traffic to an underperforming Web page that offers a mediocre service.

Now, how does this formula inform the way we approach SEO? In essence it states that the optimization for presentation (LPO) will, in most cases, supersede the optimization for channel (SEO). Therefore, the primary goal of optimization will be to increase conversion, while the necessary, but secondary goal will be to increase search ranking. Once we grasp this sequence of optimization, we can begin to form a balanced SEO strategy.

### Two Fundamental Strategies for SEO

Because LPO takes priority and will, in many situations, go against best practices in SEO, it is important to minimize any unnecessary overlap of search and non-search traffic on your Web page. This enables you to avoid many tradeoffs forced by the balance of rank and conversion.

All Traffic



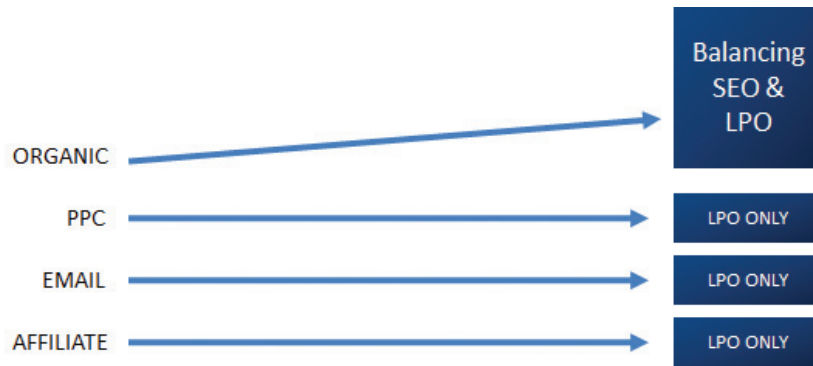
Balancing  
SEO &  
LPO

Accomplishing this can be challenging and slow-go for many sites that are currently directing all of their web traffic to a single Web page (illustrated above). However, there are two simple strategies that can help marketers minimize this unnecessary overlap of traffic: Segmentation and extension.

#### 1. Segmentation

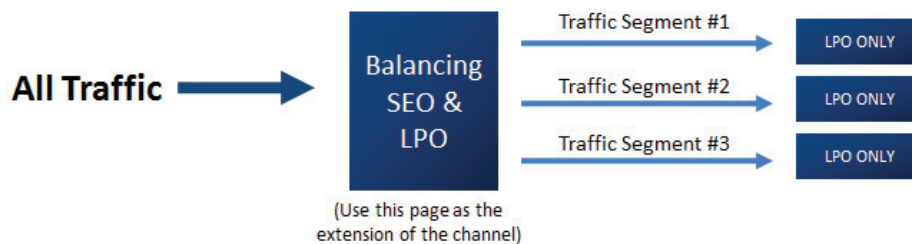
Many websites use a single page for the bulk of their visitors. This not only decreases the level of relevance a Web page can obtain with the motivations of the visitor, but can also create unnecessary overlap between search traffic and non-search traffic. As in the illustration below, sending your independent channels to a series of relevant landing pages that do not require a high level of organic traffic will help you to minimize this overlap.





## 2. Extension

Another strategy for Web pages that, by nature, receive multiple sources of traffic, including SEO, is to use a page as an extension of the channel. This means that the page must connect with different traffic sources and drive these sources into conversion paths which can focus primarily on LPO strategies. It is less important that these directory-style pages sell than that they get the visitor to the next step in the process.<sup>11</sup>



Despite the strategies, marketers will never be able to (or want to) completely eliminate the overlap of SEO and LPO on a website. At some point, you will have to deal with actually balancing these two strategies, and this balance will be different from website to website. Some will need to maintain a more rigorous keyword strategy due to their ideal customer profile; and others will have more freedom to optimize a Web page for conversion. The balance for your website rests on your answer to four key questions:<sup>12</sup>

### 1. Where does your traffic originate?

The level of focus you will want to dedicate to SEO should be directly tied to the percentage of traffic you receive from organic search. If your traffic comes from a source other than SEO, treat it with less priority. Also, how well does your organic traffic convert? Do the terms you rank provide good prospects or just junk traffic? If you receive little to no quality traffic from organic search, do not waste your efforts on them.

### 2. What are the LPO needs and potential impact?

Are the changes you need to have your page convert better minor or radical? Obviously, for SEO, minor changes will be safer and easier to balance. But depending on the potential business impact, radical changes might be the best option. Will the increase in sales that come from more response offset the reduction in traffic that might occur?



### 3. What contributes most to your SEO ranking?

If the primary contribution to your page ranking is page authority, then you will have more flexibility when it comes to making page changes. If your page is a relatively new page, and relies mainly on content for rankings, then there is less room for adjusting the page content.

### 4. Can you measure the impact of your page changes?

Are you tracking the impact that page changes have on your search ranking? You must be able to measure both your conversion rate and page ranking in order to truly know the optimal balance of LPO and SEO.

## BOTTOM LINE

In summary, images and copy are two of the most effective means of communication on a website. When strategically balanced, they enable you to powerfully communicate the value of your offer to your customers. However, this is not always simple. In many marketing departments, there is a tension between the two – a battle for supremacy. Many are left unsure of the “how,” “when,” “where” and “why” concerning these essential webpage elements.

To help identify the optimal balance between images and copy, and to alleviate some of these common tensions, marketers must understand three key principles:

1. Page elements have unique strengths, and the solution is not to pick images over copy, but to use these elements together to most effectively communicate the value proposition of an offer.
2. Images have the unique strength of being able to communicate the value of an offer with force. And the most effective images for this purpose, are ones that are relevant to the offer, realistic to the customer experience, and weighted strategically with the other elements on a Web page.
3. Copy has the unique ability to communicate with precision. By communicating specific quantifiable information with a tone that is synchronistic to the visitor’s motivations, copy can significantly improve the communication of the offer value.

By understanding these principles and letting them impact the way you employ different elements of a Web page, we have found that our Research Partners’ online marketing efforts have not only served their potential customers, but also had a great impact on the effectiveness of their campaigns.

<sup>1</sup> This understanding of communication is taken from concepts first espoused by Neil D. Fleming of Lincoln University. For more information see “I’m different; not dumb: Modes of presentation (V.A.R.K.) in the tertiary classroom”

<sup>2</sup> In measurements of time, we estimate that marketers have about seven seconds to engage a visitor once they have landed on a Web page. For more on how to engage the user in the few crucial seconds, see the research article entitled, “Clarity Trumps Persuasion: How changing the first seven seconds of user experience drove a 201% gain”

<sup>3</sup> As seen in the recent research article, “One-to-One Marketing at Four Levels: Strategic ways every marketer can enter into an online conversation with customers”

<sup>4</sup> Source of quote unknown

<sup>5</sup> By radical redesign we mean an experimental treatment that is testing multiple variables for the purpose of achieve a greater difference in performance within an A/B split test. For more on radical redesigns, see our Fundamentals of Online Testing Professional Certification Course

<sup>6</sup> See the Landing Page Optimization Professional Certification Course, particularly session three concerning the clarity of the value proposition.

<sup>7</sup> We define an organization’s value proposition as the primary reason why the ideal prospect should buy from them rather than their competitors. This definition can be applied to individual offers as well. For more on value proposition, see, “Powerful Value Propositions: How to Optimize this Critical Marketing Element – and Lift Your Results”

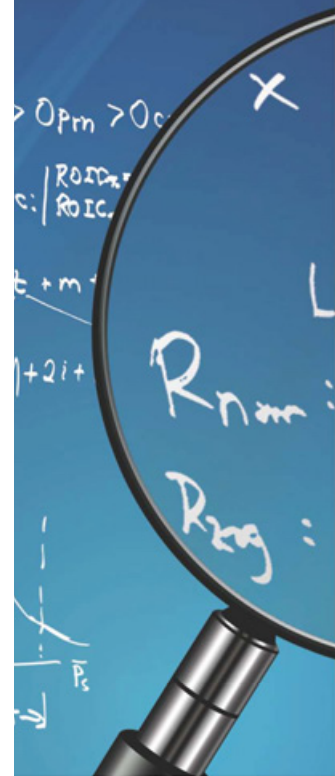
<sup>8</sup> See Homepages Optimized: How using the homepage as a channel led to a 59% increase in conversion

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the way people relate see the “Offer Response Optimization Meta-Theory” in the Landing Page Optimization Professional Certification Course. There we discuss in depth the notion that people engage a website much in the same way they would engage in person, and it is the website’s job to connect a person (the visitor) to another person (the seller) in genuine conversation.

<sup>10</sup> The Optimization Sequence ( $Opr > Oprn > Ocn$ ) is taught in depth in the Landing Page Optimization Professional Certification Course.

<sup>11</sup> Homepages are a good example of this, and for more research on how to effectively drive visitors deeper into a process, see Homepages Optimized: How using the homepage as a channel led to a 59% increase in conversion

<sup>12</sup> The source of these four questions is Nathan Thompson, Research Manager, MECLABS Conversion Group.



# Marketing Webinar Optimization:

## Five questions to ask yourself about webinars



by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

October 6th, 2010

What's the difference between a webinar and a website? The last four letters.

At first, this seems like a bad joke out of the "1,001 Wacky Jokes for Children of Marketers" (which I believe is out in paperback now). But take a step back from your website and webinar, look at the big picture, and you'll quickly find that they both have the same goal – a [conversion](#).

At MarketingExperiments and MarketingSherpa, not only do we research and publish information about the most effective marketing practices – the "what really works" – we also conduct [webinars](#) ourselves.

With that in mind, here are five questions we ask ourselves when staring in the mirror on the morning of a webinar...

Are you providing value?

According to [MarketingExperiments research](#), the most important positive element to conversion is [motivation](#). A negative element that hurts conversion is [friction](#). Not to be overly simplistic, but given this paradigm, the ideal situation to use a webinar is when you have customers motivated enough to overcome the friction of having to take an hour or so out of their day and spend it with you.

Of course, this is why so many B2B companies conduct webinars. They have complex knowledge and products that customers are, at some level, motivated to find out more about. But let's drill a little deeper into that thought, and perhaps address that second question as well. For any conversion to happen there must be a value exchange, and webinar attendance, while not a final sale, is a mini-conversion. So the best kind of customer to reach is the one you can truly provide value for.

Your knee-jerk reaction might be, "I provide value to every possible customer." However,

it will better serve your efforts if you take an honest self-assessment of your possible content, and decide who (if anyone) would give something for this content. Because attendees are paying with their time.

**Are you communicating that value?**

Every activity that happens before the webinar is your chance to make this sale. Remember, this is essentially a sale and the price is your audience's time.

Your title, the description of your webinar, promotion blog posts, tweets, social media conversation – these all must be focused on a challenge or objective the customer has, not on your product's features and functions.

All of your pre-webinar activity must create a solution to that challenge on three levels.

- **It must be relevant.** If your audience is mid-level warehouse managers, telling them how to recreate an entire manufacturing process over which they have no control is not relevant to their challenge of meeting their production goals within the current process.
- **It must be urgent.** Your customers will not spend an hour with you to solve a problem that is 15 months away. They have to meet this quarter's goals and numbers and that is where their greatest motivation lies. In the long run there is no long run if they don't fix short-term problems. Or, as noted economist John Maynard Keynes has said, "In the long run we are all dead."
- **It must be important.** Your audience likely has many challenges in their job. But if you are only addressing something minor, why should they spend an hour with you? Put another way, would you try to sell better tires for an airplane that has no wings?

Take an unbiased look at your efforts and make sure you truly are addressing your customer's most pressing issues, and not just, like many companies, putting new wrapping on the same sales pitch.

### **Are you constantly engaging your audience?**

For the host, the key is value, value, value. Why start the webinar with an ad for yourself, as so many do? What is the value for the customer? Every minute they remain on the webinar is a micro-sale to get them to stay on for the next minute.

As Flint McGlaughlin, the Director of MECLABS Group, teaches, "Dazzle me gradually." Continuously provide value to your audience, to overcome the inherent friction of staying on any webinar.

From a technology standpoint, have a conversation with them using polls and answering submitted questions throughout. Have staff on hand to conduct Q&A through your platform since you won't likely have the time to address every question on the call. Encourage them to have a conversation with each other by using a Twitter hashtag.

Again, your focus is not the sale, its helping and providing value to your audience.

### **Are you listening to your audience?**

Once you have dazzled your audience, give them a way to learn more about how your company can help them. Over time, you can start to measure the value of these leads with your sales team and then discern how many leads you get per webinar and how much these leads are worth. Are they more likely to close than a bought list or other cold lead? Do they end up being higher-value deals since they are from more motivated, more engaged customers? Answers to these questions will help you determine ROI.

Beyond ROI and independent of leads, make sure you keep a finger on the pulse of your

webinars themselves by making sure your audience has a way to provide you feedback and let you know how much value and help you provide through them. By keeping an eye on this soft metric, you can use your webinars to help educate a community instead of alienating potential customers.

### **Are you building a community?**

Before, during and after a webinar, social media and other content marketing is an excellent fit to building a community around your solution (and, as the name suggests, your solution is not your product but rather the value you provide to customers).

Before a webinar, solicit feedback through LinkedIn to understand what topics your customers want more information about. Then, perhaps release a juicy whitepaper that you can dissect live on the webinar. During the webinar, use a Twitter hashtag to facilitate conversation with (and between) attendees. After the webinar, write follow-up blog posts (with audio and video replays) to share information with those who couldn't attend, and interest them in attending your next webinar and further feeding the virtuous value cycle.

Remember, a webinar – just like social media – is a channel. It has no inherent value. Your job is to provide that value.

### **Related Resources**

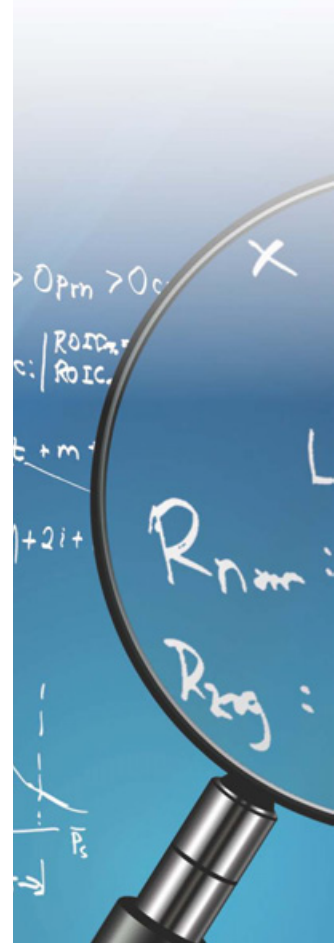
["Double the Value of Your Online Testing: Don't just get a result, get the maximum customer insights" Web clinic](#)

["Top Five B2B Marketing Practices For 2011" webinar](#)

[How to Promote Your Webinar Via Google News](#)

[The Art of Inventing Must-Attend Webinar Topics: Real-life Inspiration](#)

[Marketing With White Papers and/or Webinars](#)





# Content Marketing: How to get your subject matter experts on your corporate blog



by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

December 17th, 2010

At MarketingSherpa, we've noticed that inbound marketing is a growing tactic that is starting to show consistent results for marketers, which is why we're launching an [Inbound Marketing newsletter](#) in 2011. For example, according to the [MarketingSherpa 2011 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report](#), the majority of B2B organizations are increasing their marketing budgets for inbound tactics like social media and SEO.

So, I was a little surprised by a recent statistic that came across my desk. Out of 534 Fortune 1000 CMOs surveyed by Blog2Print, only 23.2 % utilize corporate blogs. As a content marketing insider, I thought everyone and their sister (well, my sister is at least) is blogging. But that's my problem. As a content marketing insider, I get all tingly when I see my blogs' names up in lights on a tree (no, that's not a Christmas reference. For a creative interesting inbound marketing tactic, check out [The Blog Tree](#) by Eloqua and Jess3. And thanks, Joe!)

So I pulled another Sherpa book off my shelf (the [2010 Social Media Marketing Benchmark Report](#), for those keeping score at home), and noticed that while marketers find blogging to be one of the most effective social media tactics (behind only blogger relations and microblogging), it is also one of the most difficult (second only to blogger relations).

So, to help you kick start your blog in the new year (or kick start the new year with a new blog), here's a three-part answer to a question that I find marketers often struggle with: How can I get subject matter experts onto my corporate blog?

## Step #1: Make it easier

While I have the luxury of a highly talented team of reporters and writers here on the MarketingSherpa blog, over on the



[MarketingExperiments](#) blog we rely on subject matter experts who have better things to do than write blog posts. Their time is valuable. And one way they don't want to spend it is figuring out a blog platform.

Yet, when I first started with that blog, our research analysts were publishing their own posts. They were going into Wordpress, wrestling with picture layouts, the whole nine. We quickly removed that impediment. All we require is a poorly written Word document. Sometimes just an interview. Heck, once I even received a blog post written in Excel from a data analyst.

We don't need their writing (or blog posting) skills. We can do that for them. We just want their subject matter expertise. Because these guys (and gals) are smart, and there is no way we can replicate their years of research and experience.

You might not have the exact same infrastructure, **but ask yourself this – is there any way I can make the entire process easier?** Ask them to forward an email they've already written. Take them for a walk and pick their brain. Heck, check out what they scribble on whiteboards throughout the day. After all, while they may be engineers or architects, they certainly aren't writers. And they don't need to be.

## Step #2: Show them what they know

Another thing I've found with subject matter experts is that they are, as the name implies, experts. That means they have extremely deep knowledge. So, sometimes they set too high a bar for themselves. They don't realize that their likely audience is not...well, experts. So when it comes to putting themselves out there in the world, they want to write a deep, knowledgeable post that will take them three weeks to compose and possibly will only be understood by three people.

Or they could swing in the other direction. They assume that everyone knows what they know and they would be mocked for even thinking about writing about such a simplistic topic. "Pssshhh. Everyone knows a 3.89-meter transducer couldn't stand up to the shock of multiple neutron bomb strikes with a 12 parsec velocity" Substitute the word "transducer" with "server specs" or "mortgage regulations" and you'll likely face the same challenge.

It's something we wrestle with on our blogs as well. Where is the sweet spot? We don't want to write content that is too elementary or too advanced. But sometimes I overshoot as well and forget that simple blog posts can be very helpful, as we've found with recent blog posts about [email marketing](#) and [landing page optimization](#).

So challenge your SMEs (I love that abbreviation...so Peter Pan-esque) with this question – **if I was new to our industry, what are the first three things you would want me to know?** A treasure trove of blog post lies in the answer to that question.

## Step #3: Reward them (differently)

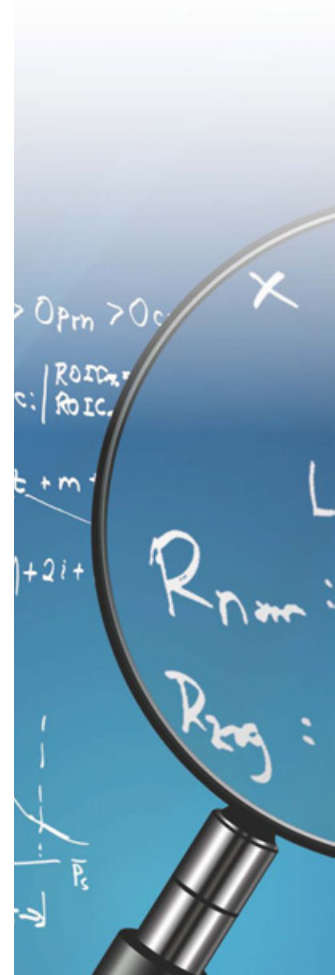
While doing good is its own reward, writing a blog post is not. It's one more task you're throwing onto an already too big heap. After all, they (like you) are busy.

And, essentially, what you're trying to do here is make a sale. Getting a subject matter expert to write a blog post is a conversion. So work up some of your marketing mojo and make sure there is a true [value exchange](#). You are buying some of their precious and scarce time, and what do you have to offer in return?

While it is part of everybody's job to help make the company more successful, in fairness, you will be getting more than you're giving. Still, it's important to reward your SMEs (more than Captain Hook did for Mr. Smee, that's for sure) for the time and effort they put in to help grease the wheels for you as you try to get future blog posts from that subject matter expert.

But there is no one-size-fits-all solution that makes a good reward for a blog post. So, you must ask yourself – **what motivates my subject matter experts?** Here are a few types of subject matter experts and the rewards that might be most helpful to them (most people are a combination of the below archetypes):

- **The Aspiring Industry Rock Star** – Show them all the recognition they're getting around the Web and particularly in your industry. Show them how their post was tweeted or quoted by an industry luminary.



- **The Plumber** – As Eddie Vedder said, “I want to be the plumber of rock stars.” Some people just like helping others and making a difference. For these people, share feedback you’ve received from your audience showing them how they helped move the needle in people’s careers and in their lives.
- **The Ladder Climber** – For these people, it’s all about career growth. So, do what you’re doing for the plumbers and the rock stars, just make sure that their boss (and their boss’s boss) knows about it as well.
- **The Bottom Liner** – It’s all about the Benjamins, baby. One of the reasons we all work, we all leave our loved ones and head out on that 6:35 train, is for filthy lucre. Try to work with your management in getting a little something extra for bloggers. A \$25 Starbucks gift card for the blogger with the most tweets every month. A small year-end bonus for the person with the most comments. If it’s worth doing, it’s worth properly incenting.

And always, always, always give credit where it’s due. Speaking of which, thanks to Ruth White-Cabbell of Cisco for a conversation that inspired this post, and our own Joelle Parra for copy editing and Sean Kinberger for designing and posting what you just read.

## Related resources

[Create and Manage a Team-Authoried Blog: 8 steps to reap SEO gains](#)

[How to Keep Your Blog Out of a Courtroom – Advice from a Legal Pro on Providing, Creating Content – Member’s Library](#)

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

photo by: [Mai Le](#)

# Value Prop: Is there true value in your marketing proposition?

“Value prop” and “value proposition” are two of our top inbound keywords from Google. It’s also a key component of our [online Landing Page Optimization training course](#). And with good reason.

Marketers really struggle with crafting an effective value proposition. Hey, it’s quite hard. In our training course, we teach that the *perceived* value must outweigh the *perceived* cost of your offer. Because, as the famous line goes, “perception is reality.”

But, unfortunately, reality is not perception. In other words, you might craft the most seemingly effective value proposition ever, but if your product is a piece of junk, are you really being effective? Editorial Analyst [Austin McCraw](#) brought this issue to my attention the other day and suggested that marketers must also be concerned with *true* value.

## Some of the people some of the time...

According to the MarketingExperiments Optimization Sequence, you must optimize the **Product** factor before you optimize the **Presentation** factor.

**Opr > Oprn > Ocnn®**

Opr = Optimize Product Factor

Oprn = Optimize Presentation Factor

Ocnn = Optimiza Channel Factor

The **Product** factor includes the Value Proposition of the product, as *well* as its quality and usability.

Now I know what you may be thinking, “Not my problem! I’ve got enough on my plate. Let customer service deal with it. Besides, caveat emptor.”

## Caveat Twitter

No longer must only the buyer beware, now the marketer must as well. There is a New World (Wide Web) Order and your customers have just as much power to influence purchases as your marketing campaigns, if not more. [Transparent Marketing](#) is a fact of life in 2010...and if you won’t shine a light with an open window, your (now disgruntled) customers will be more than happy to kick in the door.

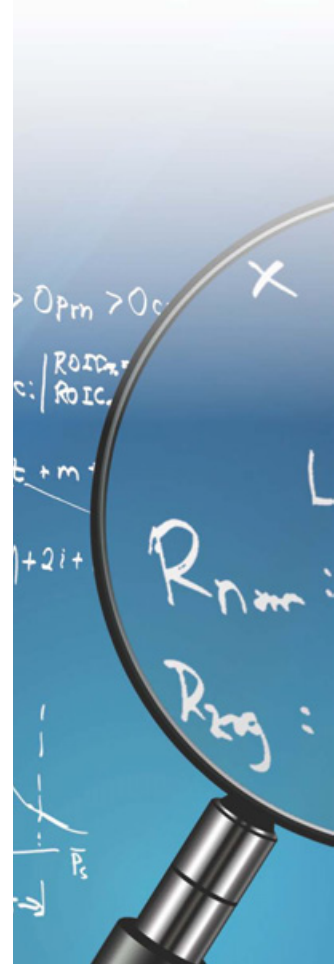
[The MarketingSherpa 2010 Social Media Marketing Benchmark Report](#) found that 62 percent of responding consumers use social media to learn about new products, services and features. And who do you think your potential customer trusts more? Their college roommate who had a bad experience with your product or your corporate marketing department?

As Danielle Sacks puts it [in this month’s issue of Fast Company magazine](#), “But the dark side of a transparent marketplace is that marketers have never had more of an opportunity to rub consumers the wrong way and be publicly skewered. The days of lathering on a brand message that a product may not live up to are long gone.”



by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

December 3rd, 2010





## No thanks, I prefer the headache

Take Children's Tylenol as an (admittedly extreme) example. It was one of 43 over-the-counter drugs recalled by Johnson & Johnson due to the following **manufacturing problems**: "inadequate laboratory facilities and untrained staff, as well as grime, dust, a hole in the ceiling, clutter and bacteria-contaminated raw ingredients."

Here's why this problem should cause marketers to reach for some (hopefully not Johnson & Johnson) antacid. Children's Tylenol and generic acetaminophen are the exact same thing, except the generic is cheaper. According to [Euromonitor International](#), a London-based marketing research company, Children's Tylenol is a \$695 million business globally. That revenue, the brand's entire value prop, is based on trust. As a parent, I reach for the generic cheaper stuff, but when I do, in the back of my mind I think that the unknown company making it might have "inadequate laboratory facilities and untrained staff, as well as grime, dust, a hole in the ceiling, clutter and bacteria-contaminated raw ingredients."

And Johnson & Johnson's marketing department realizes that. Which is why, [according to The Wall Street Journal](#), "The grape version's red-and-purple packaging appears similar to the box before the recall. It pictures smiling mothers and children, and says that mothers have 'trusted' the medicine for 50 years."

Of course, parents aren't stupid and know that a more transparent statement would be, "Trusted by mothers for 49 of the last 50 years." And slick packaging won't change that opinion. Which is why, according to the above referenced WSJ article, "In general, loyalty to Tylenol's pain pills, a strong indication that customers will buy the product, dropped 7 percent in the past year, according to an annual survey in August of 35,000 Americans by marketing consultant Brand Keys Inc. Among over-the-counter pain medicines, Tylenol ranked behind rivals Advil, Aleve and Excedrin in terms of customer loyalty

after trailing only Advil in 2009."

## Protect true value by any means necessary

As marketers we should protect true value like worker ants protect the queen. And I mean no disrespect to any of the marketers at Johnson & Johnson, some of the finest in the business, who have created some of the most respected brands worldwide.

My point is to raise this question in your head: do you have to be really good at more than just marketing in order to be really good at marketing?

The impact you can have on your product's true value varies, based on whether you're a sole proprietor or work for a multi-national conglomerate. And in fairness, when it comes to the Johnson & Johnson manufacturing problems cited above, marketers have an extremely limited (but not nonexistent) ability to influence, infiltrate, and/or inspire manufacturing to improve product quality.

But, as a marketer, you must battle to the hustings when any possible action (or inaction) your company takes could damage the trust customers place in your brands.

"But I am just a simple marketer in this small company. What can I do to make sure the products I sell have true value?" Glad you asked. You're clearly the introspective type. So here are a few more questions to ask yourself (and I'd love to hear your advice as well):

- **What's best for the customer?** Sounds simple. And odds are that someone, somewhere in your company is thinking about this, right? Sales. Customer Service. Definitely Product Development. Must be. Sorry, buddy, that's not good enough. YOU are the one convincing the customer to part with his/her hard-earned money to buy your company's product with your debonair language. So YOU must be the advocate for the customer

- **What influence do I have?** Likely greater than you think. After all, your campaigns are the public face of the company. Marketers have turned a pair of glowing arches into “Over 99 Billion Served.” So don’t think you can’t convince Product Development to fix that bug in the next release.
- **Would Mom be proud?** Could be your mom...could be anyone’s mom. My point is, if every internal challenge you know about were plastered on the front page of a newspaper tomorrow a la “Thank You for Smoking,” how would you feel about it? I had this experience recently because I’m not only the Associate Director of Editorial Content here, I have a second title as well – Dad. It’s one I’ve been very proud of since I was promoted a few years ago. So when a press release came across my desk bragging about six-year-olds’ brand affinity for Facebook (you can’t even “officially” create an account until you’re 13) and 20 other brands, I wasn’t too happy. And after all, I’m the one with the wallet. You can read the [Young Love study](#) for yourself, creepy name and all.
- **Have I stormed the barricades?** You can’t win every, or probably even most, of these battles. But that shouldn’t stop you from trying to put in every effort you possibly can. Don’t settle for “It’s not my fault” because that prospective customer doesn’t care whose fault it is, only that they’ve lost trust in your brand’s true value.

To end on a high note, and remix Margaret Mead, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, marketers can change the company. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

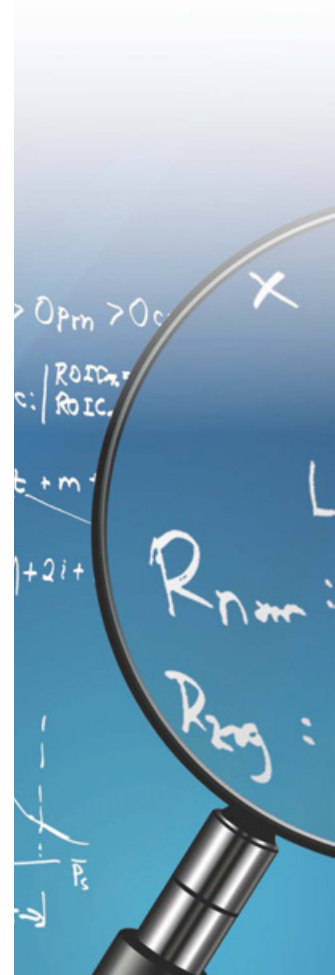
## Related Resources

[Ask the Scientist: MarketingExperiments Optimization Sequence](#)

[Powerful Value Propositions](#)

[Optimizing Your Landing Pages](#)

[Email Optimization](#)



# SEO: Is an obscure product name hurting your organic traffic?



by Adam T. Sutton,  
Senior Reporter  
November 16th, 2010

Product naming and branding can get out of hand. Sure, it's important to differentiate your product names — but you can differentiate yourself right into obscurity.

Technology products seem susceptible to this. The “XQ330 Plus” is a completely plausible name for a phone, camera, latte machine, or some type of hybrid. Other than being original, the name does not offer any marketing benefit.

This is a problem for [SEO](#) marketers. The XQ330 may be able to capture traffic for branded search terms, particularly if the company has a strong advertising budget. But it is vulnerable to a complete lack of non-branded organic traffic — and non-branded traffic is SEO's money maker.

“Many times a marketer will come up with a name or way to describe a product in a vacuum, and that doesn't always translate well to the Web — especially in search,” says Brad Beiter, Account Director, SEO, [Performics](#).

I recently interviewed Beiter and Performics SEO Account Manager Matthew Holly about some work they've done for retail marketers. The methods they use offer good insight into what marketers can do when — for whatever reason — they're stuck with obscure product names.

## When you're stuck with an obscure product name

If you can't change a product's name, one good method is to change its description. Say, for example, your company sells socks. On your website, socks are referred to as “shoe liners” and one in particular is called the “white fuzzy warmer.”

Due to the inflexibility of your website or some other factor, you cannot change these terms. But what you can do is change your product descriptions. Re-write them to emphasize high-traffic, non-branded keywords. For example:

“These soft white cotton socks keep you warm whether you need a boot, athletic or dress pair.”

You can also optimize other on-site factors for non-branded terms, including:

- Internal links
- Image and video metadata
- Sub-headlines

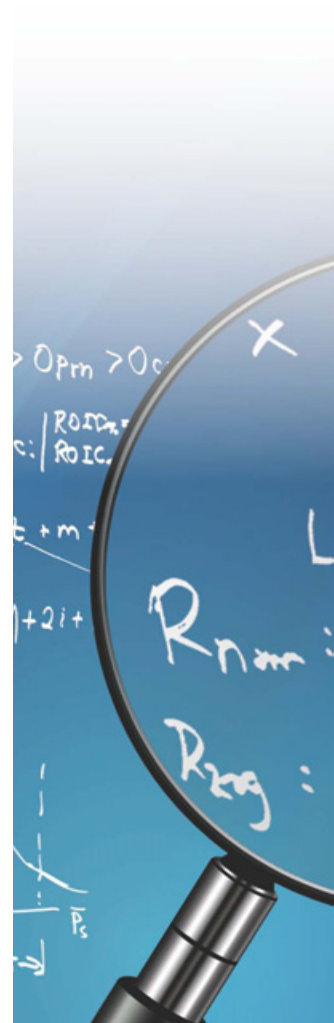
Do not let cumbersome product names hold your SEO hostage. There are many on-site factors you can optimize to pull in more traffic. And from now on, when your team is naming products, make sure you're at that meeting.

## Related resources

[MarketingSherpa 2011 Search Marketing Benchmark Report](#)

[New Chart: SEO Tactics for the B2B Marketer](#)

[MarketingExperiments: Use Social Media and Quality Content to Get a Jolt for Your Site](#)







# **SITE OPTIMIZATION**

# Website Optimization: The five most common pitfalls of homepage design

Many, if not most, marketers have recognized a need for best practices for homepage design. In keeping with MarketingExperiments' sometimes counterintuitive research findings, it should be noted 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 a new scenario.

In a previous *Research Journal* (please see “Homepages Optimized: How using the homepage as a channel led to a 59% increase in conversion” in [The MarketingExperiments Quarterly Research Journal for the Third Quarter of 2010](#)), we covered five steps to help you optimize your company's homepage. We intentionally left one key aspect of optimizing homepages out of that clinic because we felt it deserved special attention:

**Step 1:** Identify all homepage objectives

**Step 2:** Prioritize the objectives into three categories: primary objective, major objectives and minor objectives

**Step 3:** Connect key success metrics to each objective category

**Step 4:** Design the homepage to strategically weigh objectives according to priority

**Step 5:** Test the effect of competing objectives

This article is focused entirely on Step 4. Specifically, it addresses not how the creative process or design workflow should be structured, but instead, how design should reflect the work you have done in steps 1, 2 and 3.

In this Research Article, we will cover the five most common pitfalls of homepage design and how to overcome them.

## PITFALL #1: Trying to achieve too many objectives

*Example #1: Overloading the visitor with options*



Many websites have homepages that are inundated with an overwhelming number of objectives and items that can serve to distract visitors from an intended call-to-action. It is critical that you use visual elements on your homepage to focus visitors on a small number of initial objectives, so that they aren't confused about what they can do on your site. You also need to control what they are getting in terms of stimulus.

This homepage represents an all-too-common practice of overloading the visitor with options, images and calls-to-action. The user has no single path in which to focus attention, and the prioritization of options

is also unclear. There are simply too many branching paths to which the user can go, with no clear demonstration of value in any one direction.

Homepages must be designed to weigh multiple objectives by priority. This requires a clearly sequenced eye-path, directed by six graphical elements: size, shape, color, motion, position and direction.



Homepages must be designed to weigh multiple objectives by priority. This requires a clearly sequenced eye-path.

### Example #2: Size

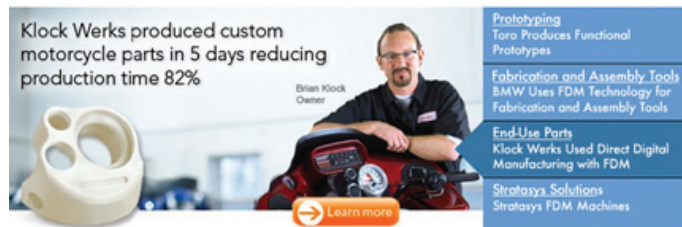


Putting aside the subdued gray tones and indistinct design, this would typically be one of the most important buttons on any Web page. But its relatively diminutive size will do little to distinguish this action from any others that appear on a page. Whether this is for a newsletter opt-in, or sending valued financial information to a secure destination, a button of this size does little to instill confidence or encourage a user's action.



This second button is clearly more noticeable, due to its use of color and inviting, action-oriented language. When used properly on a homepage – that is to say, a homepage that isn't cluttered with numerous busy design elements – its size will allow it to draw the user's eye and encourage them to complete the intended action.

### Example #3: Shape



Adjusting the shape of an object can bring attention to specific elements. In this image, the irregular shape of the product on the bottom left, triangular menu treatment in the right-hand column, and brightly colored button in the center all work to attract the eye because of shape.

One must be careful when incorporating elements of shape into a design, as shape can also serve to "hide" important elements of an ad, such as important text. If your key messages do not stand out against your use of shape elements, they could be lost in the design.



*Example #4: Color***1.) Set up your free account**

- **Fast** - sign up in 30 seconds
- **Unlimited access** - take as many surveys as you want
- **No commitment** - you can stop participating at any time

The proper use of colors can draw attention to elements such as banners, buttons, images or text. In this example, the text color drives viewers to key parts of the offer, followed by supplementary information displayed in more subdued colors. This benefits visitors who scan a page to look for key information. Without the red treatment, the text would likely blend together and the key selling points could be overlooked.

Also, it's important to note that like any other emphatic treatment, color must be used carefully, so as not to overwhelm the viewer. Much like using too much capitalization or bold font treatments, using too much color on a page actually emphasizes nothing. Only the most important elements of your message should receive this treatment, to ensure they stand out from the rest of the page.

When choosing colors, be sure they fit your overall design scheme, and that they allow the treated text to be easily legible. For example, yellow text on a white background is not a strong choice when trying to emphasize a value statement.

*Example #5: Motion*

Adding motion to your page, such as the pictured animated Flash image or a video, will immediately grab your user's attention. In this example, the motion draws the visitor's attention, but the messaging isn't revealed until the final frame. You must engage your visitor from start to finish; otherwise the key messages will be missed.

While video is engaging, this element must either open or continue a conversation with your audience. If the motion element takes too long to convey a message, or is too cryptic to efficiently deliver that message, it likely will not maintain user attention. Once you've engaged visitors with a compelling headline and text that offers value, the video can be useful in providing supplementary information.

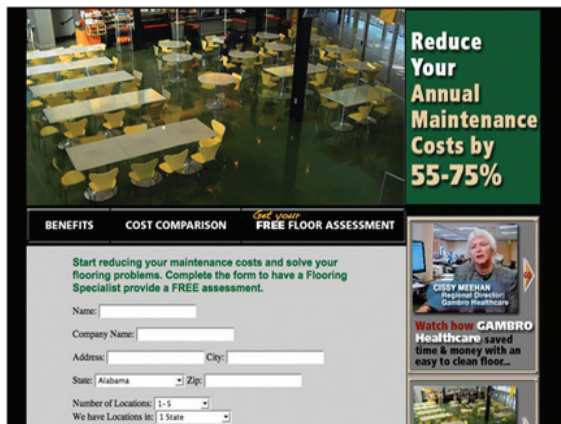
*Example #6: Position*

Where you place elements on a Web page will determine if and how they catch the visitor's attention. Both of these treatments accomplish the goal of delivering a compelling headline and value proposition.

The first example, while the more visually compelling of the two, causes a fair amount of friction due to an unclear path for the visitor to follow. The headline is in the right-hand column, and the eye is naturally drawn to supporting elements below it in the right-hand column, such as a video, that distract from the main conversion objective – form completion.

Supporting elements can be helpful to, for example, reduce anxiety in the mind your potential customer. But they should be just that...supporting. When they are in the main eye-path, they are competing with, not supporting, the primary conversion objective.

However, the second treatment, while using less imagery than the first, demonstrates better use of position, as it more easily captures the visitor's attention through a vertical eye-path, delivers the value statement (and supporting info) and efficiently directs the visitor to the opt-in form.



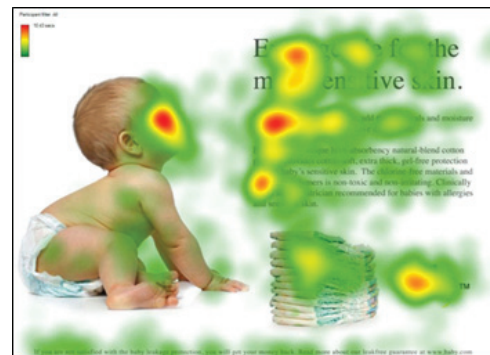
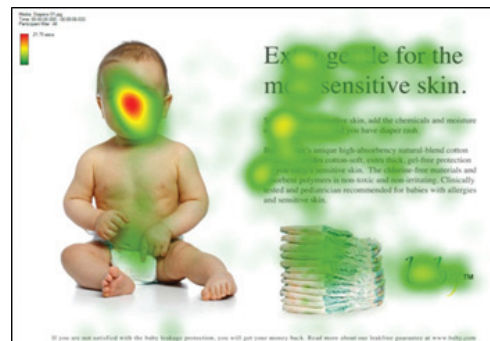
### Example #7: Direction

In terms of Web pages, direction is, just as is implied, the way in which the user's eye is drawn. Successful use of direction creates a clear path for the user to follow, capturing interest with a strong headline, leading to supporting information, and ultimately driving toward some form of action.

In the following examples, you will see the idea of direction taken one step further, as these two seemingly similar pages led to significantly different results due to the images themselves.

If you look carefully at the first heat-mapped image, the viewer's eyes follow the direction the baby is facing. You will notice by looking at the red area of the heat map, that more user attention is directed at the child, with only passing attention focused on the headline and copy.

On the second image, similar attention is given to the baby's face. However, the baby's positioning in the direction of the copy resulted in more attention focused on the text, as viewers' eyes followed the baby's positioning, and flowed from the image to the copy instead of staying static on the child.



## PITFALL #2: Failing to start a conversation

When a person comes to your Web page, what is their motivation? They likely have a specific need, or a problem that they are trying to solve. If you want to engage your visitors, so that you can guide them towards an exchange of value, then you have to start by beginning a conversation based on that motivation.

Though the homepage is naturally where you start a relationship with your visitor, many sites don't seize this opportunity to start the conversation. This is the most natural way to introduce yourself and get the visitor interested in what you have to offer within the first few seconds after arrival.



**Key Principle:**

Homepages should engage a conversation at three basic levels. They should meet, connect and direct each visitor.



First, you must **meet** the visitor by answering, "Where am I?" Consider why visitors came to your URL in the first place. Regardless of whether they arrived via search or by typing a URL, their arrival either answered a need(s) or created an expectation(s). This is where the conversation can begin.

Secondly, you must **connect** with visitors by answering, "What can I do here and why should I do it?" A Web page must lead visitors toward a specific objective. When people browse through search results, they are not only trying to understand what your site has to offer, but also trying to eliminate your site from consideration. To assure them of your site's value, you need a clear, unbroken eye path that leads from content to the call-to-action.

Finally, you must clearly **direct** the visitor by answering, "How do I move forward?" Both in terms of trust and ease of use, your site must immediately establish credibility with visitors so they know that not only is your site a safe, reassuring destination, but also one that offers an efficient, productive experience, encouraging them to return.

Only once this conversation begins can the visitor start the conversion process.

### Example #8:

In this example, one must ask, "Is there any person-to-person conversation on this page?" The layout of this page is more akin to that of a magazine advertisement. Visitors should arrive at your homepage, and be greeted with a brief conversation of no more than three to four sentences, comprised of a key headline, a subhead, a paragraph and bulleted text.

The following is another typical kind of Web page. Again, there is little, if any, person-to-person communication going

### Not This





on, as there are clearly too many elements on this page competing for the user's attention. This visual noise makes it difficult for the visitor to determine what the page's purpose is supposed to be, and more importantly, whether or not the visitor's needs can be met at this location.

#### Example #9:

By engaging visitors, you increase their perception of value. While any page will have negative inhibitors such as [friction](#) or [anxiety](#) – perhaps from requesting personal data or credit card information – it's important that your page welcomes and eases this burden. The visitor needs to know that you are there to help them find an answer or solution. Homepages should engage your conversation at three basic levels. They should meet, connect and direct each visitor to the information they need.

#### Example #10:

In this example, you see how this company created a space that “introduces itself” to the visitor, through use of calming imagery, a strong tagline incorporated into an appealing layout, and a headline that reinforces the page's value. Once visitors scan down to the copy and the various link options beneath, they are confident that they've arrived at a destination that may be able to meet their needs.

There is very little friction on this welcoming page, allowing visitors a clear path from introduction to the “moving forward” options below.

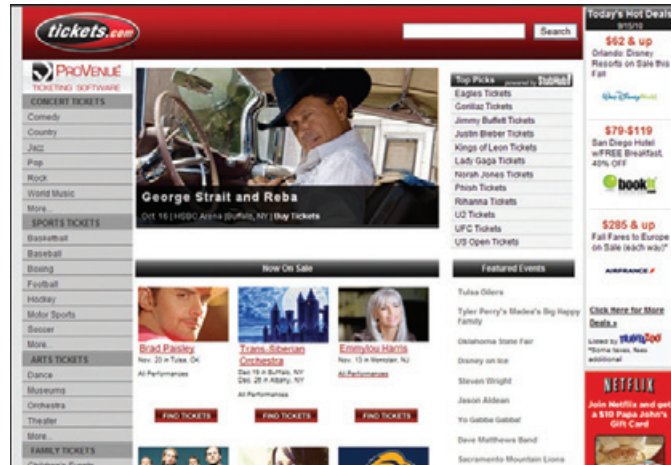
### PITFALL #3: Over-reliance on multimedia to communicate value

We have finally entered a point where we can communicate rapidly by video, Flash and other technologies. Yet, like any new tool, it is being overused – often without understanding of how it fits into the context of building a conversation. In short, multimedia could be interfering with the development of relationships.

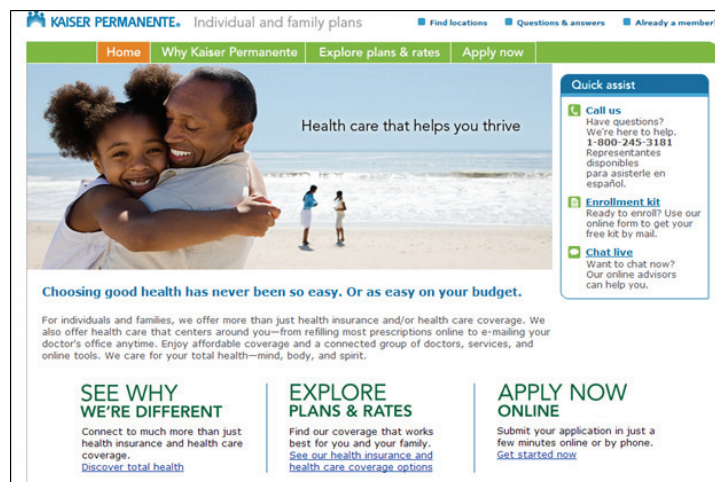
Though use of video or audio can be engaging, it's often more efficient to say it with text. Visitors don't have to hit play, possibly wait for buffering, and then wait until they get seven, or 17 or 27 seconds into the video to hear the information that connects with them. You can just communicate it with text in the third bullet point on the homepage.

Multimedia can accent and support your ideas, but during those first critical seconds with your visitor, it may be best to use text and deliver a more direct message.

#### Not This



#### But This





## EXPERIMENT #1



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

## Research Notes:

**Background:** Audience-submitted experiment for a small business offering home snow makers.**Goal:** To increase product sales.**Primary research question:** Which homepage will generate the highest conversion rate?**Approach:** Multi-factorial A/B split test (radical redesign)

## Control:

This page features a prominent multimedia presentation on the homepage. But, while there is a strong headline, there is no actual conversation occurring here. Without this engagement or clear statement of value, the user has little, if any, motivation to click the video and proceed further.

Likewise, if the video is set to auto-run, then the page forces itself on visitors without establishing a conversation.

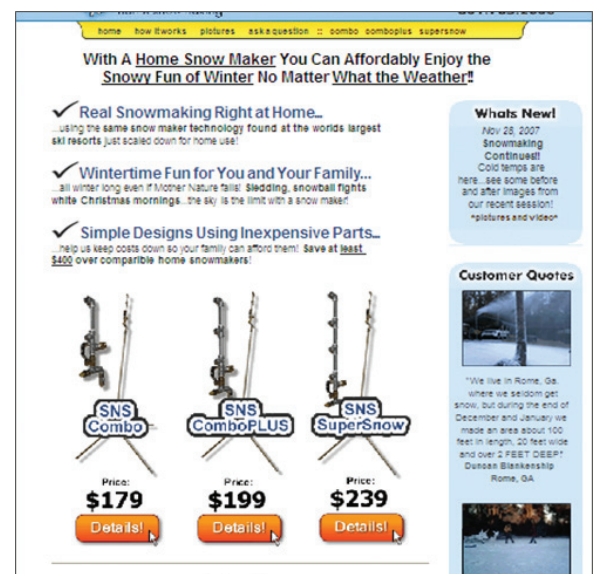
The headline – which is critical to engagement – speaks at the audience, rather than opening a line of dialogue. There is also no supporting copy to add value to the headline, requiring the user to play the video or click a link to learn more about this company/product.



## Treatment #1

In this example, there were considerable changes made to the page without relying on superfluous video or other multimedia elements. The user is now greeted with a strong, scannable headline, followed by three bulleted (in this case, check marks) statements that add value to the headline and are strengthened by their own supporting text.

Another notable improvement was in the use of the space in the right-hand column. Rather than the static images used in the control, this space now includes an interactive element in the upper right-hand corner that invites users to see recent photos and video of the product in action. This is a stronger use of video, as the



user is neither forced to view the video to understand the product, nor does it affect any elements of this particular page.

The photos in the right-hand column are now supported by testimonial copy, immediately adding weight to the value proposition.

### Results:

While this page was optimized by a member of the MarketingExperiments audience – and we would recommend a number of additional revisions, should we have the opportunity to work on this Web page – the fact remains that the removal of the unnecessary multimedia element notably improved conversion for this company.

This marketer achieved a 93% increase in conversions over the control with the new treatment.



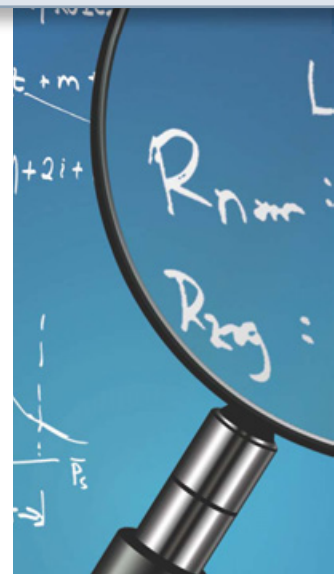
***What you need to understand:*** Multimedia is only as valuable as the value it communicates. In this case, and in many cases we've seen, multimedia does a much better job as a supporting element and text is more effective at communicating the main value proposition.

While it may seem counterintuitive to many marketers to replace a colorful, dynamic YouTube video, this is a perfect example of why you need to test. While flashy (and Flash) technology naturally catches our interest, does it help the bottom line?

At first, this may seem counterintuitive, especially to the many marketers who flock to the latest technology. But when you start to think about the motivations of your customers, it makes more sense.

Most of your visitors will spend just a few seconds trying to figure out what your page has to offer. They may even have your competitors' pages open in different tabs at the same time, and are quickly clicking through. In those few moments that you have their attention, you must begin a conversation with them with information that is relevant and important to them.

If you wait for that information to come on the fourth frame of a Flash animation, or eight seconds into a YouTube video, most visitors will bounce off your page before they ever get that far.



## PITFALL #4: Making the homepage a landing page

The homepage can help to establish your brand, but not at the expense of effective communication with an audience that has limited patience and time to figure out what you have to offer on your website. Once your visitor has engaged in unsupervised thinking, you've lost him. Therefore, your homepage must quickly engage your visitors and then move them forward through a series of actions based on their individual motivations.

If you have only one offer, then your homepage is essentially a landing page, and you can read our extensive [landing page optimization research](#) to learn more about increasing conversion.

However, most companies have more than one product or service, often many more. So the homepage cannot look like a targeted landing page; its job is to essentially act like a channel and direct the visitor to the most relevant landing page as quickly and efficiently as possible, and then let the subsequent pages do the selling.

### Driving traffic to the homepage

There are many times the homepage is the best choice to drive traffic to. For example, much of your branding, such as business cards and email signatures, will drive traffic to a homepage. Also very general branding ads, perhaps as part of a nonprofit sponsorship or stadium naming deal, will list your homepage as well.

However, for all other times you seek to drive traffic to your website, you should choose a specific landing page tied directly to the motivations of that specific audience segment.



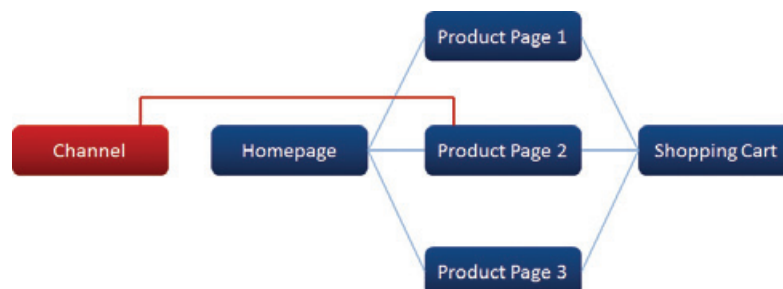
### Key Principle:

A homepage should not be designed for channel-specific traffic when a more channel-specific landing page can be used.

You don't want to send traffic from a specific channel to an unspecific homepage. Often, we see companies send PPC traffic to the homepage when they could have sent it somewhere much more relevant. The visitor then lands on your homepage with a very specific motivation from the PPC ad, only to get lost, unsure of the connection between the offer in the PPC ad and the necessarily general information provided on the homepage.

By sending traffic to specific landing pages instead of a homepage, you are able to make the content as specific as possible to this segment of traffic and ease the process for the visitor, thereby increasing conversion

Relevance to the motivation of a channel increases the chance of conversion.



**Example #11:**

In this first example, we can see that this Web page is directly related to the television commercial advertising debt consolidation services. However, other than the use of a similar color scheme and the logo, there is very little connecting the two entities.



In this case, such a design could create unnecessary anxiety to the visitor, as there is an air of uncertainty about whether or not this is the correct destination advertised on television. There is no conversation with the user that indicates they arrived as a result of seeing the ad on television.

Other anxiety factors on this page include the overwhelming collection of links, the form in the center of the page that asks for extensive personal information, numerous calls-to-action, and even the fact that the actor from the commercial is nowhere to be found on the page.

While this page clearly offers considerable value to those familiar with the products or services offered here, it is likely too intimidating for a visitor who arrived after seeing a television ad.

**Example #12:**

The revised landing page is much more clearly connected to the television ad, as the actor seen on the commercial immediately “greet”s the visitor. The page headline likely mirrors the one used in the ad, and also presents a clear, inviting value statement that is much more concise and less intimidating than that of the control page.



Also, strong use of well-recognized logos as testimonial points and a much clearer call-to-action allow this page to eliminate excess anxiety or friction.

This page serves to ease unnecessary tensions and invites the visitor to explore the company’s services further. Strong headlines and subheads allow the value statements to be scanned, as do the supporting bullet points and less-involved form fields.



## PITFALL #5: Assuming best practices will work for you

Citing best practices as a common pitfall likely seems like an oxymoron. How can best practices be a pitfall? They're called "best" practices for a reason, aren't they?

Well, yes, because they are the best practice for most or perhaps just many websites. This is reassuring, but it doesn't answer the question you should really be asking – not, "What works for most websites?" but, "What works for *my company's* website?"

After all, best practices, even those that work in most cases, don't work in every case. You must test your pages, including homepages, to determine whether any change or intended "optimization" actually had a positive effect. Industries, products, and traffic channels are different in each situation, and the results may surprise you.

So, while best practices are a good place to begin, and are a good place to get some testing and optimization ideas, if you begin and end by simply implementing best practices, you may be selling your site short.

The following experiment takes another look at the consumer credit counseling service offering free debt consultation shown in Example #11 and Example #12. Again, the goal is to increase the amount of free debt consultation leads without additional traffic.

## EXPERIMENT #2



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

### Research Notes:

**Background:** A consumer credit counseling service offering free debt consolidation.

**Goal:** To increase the amount of free debt consolidation leads without additional traffic.

**Primary research question:** Which product page will generate the highest form start rate?

**Approach:** A/B/C/D split test of three different versions of the homepage.

## Control

The control page utilized a design that centered on the call-to-action form in the middle of the page. There was a fairly strong banner design atop the page; however, use of yellow text muted the headline, lessening the initial impact of the value proposition.

Additionally, both the right- and left-hand columns were inundated with links, secondary calls-to-action and testimonials. Likewise, the center column underneath the primary call-to-action was equally inundated with large blocks of text. The layout was effectively "smothering" the primary goals of the page – to have users complete the form and move forward.



## Treatment #1

The first treatment incorporated a slightly different banner design, with revised color schemes that allowed the text to stand out more distinctly from the control. The addition of a graphic arrow directed the visitor eye path to the value statements and call-to-action form below. This created a more natural flow for the user, moving from headline to call-to-action.

A more open layout, with less dense use of text, also helped the treatment to guide the user eye-path.



## Treatment #2

The second treatment integrated the form into the top banner. The bright color scheme and imagery helped draw visitors' attention while creating a new, more immediate place for them to complete the action. Note that the original form remained in its current location, giving visitors two distinct places in which to take action.

As you can see, the treatment offered improvements over the control by better directing eye path, offering more clear and concise value statements and improving the page flow toward the call-to-action. However, our research team tried a third, more radical variation as well that went against established best practices.

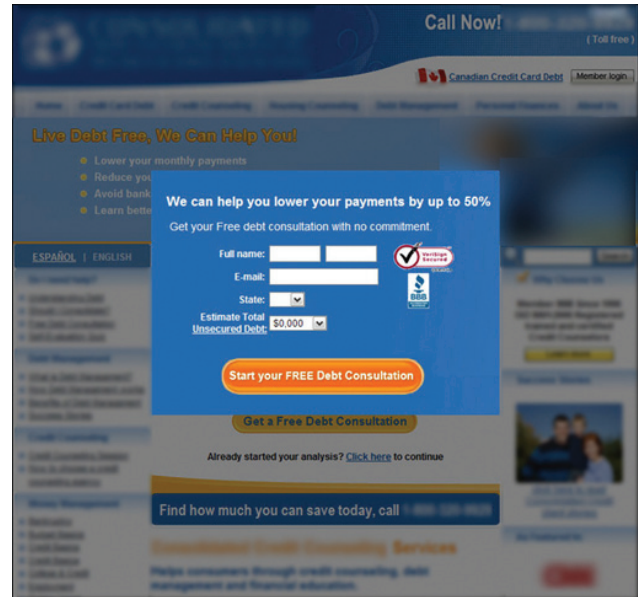


## Treatment #3

You have likely heard “pop-up ads don’t work” and, therefore did not want create any pages on your site that remotely resembled a pop-up ad.

When it comes to the traditional pop-up ad that opens an annoying new window, or the even more heinous pop-under ad, we will not disagree. These are often seen by your audience as sneaky, and the opposite of Transparent Marketing. We can all agree that these tactics have been abused by nefarious marketers.

However, our researchers stepped back from the rhetoric surrounding pop-up ads and asked a simple question – how can we best focus the attention of the visitor to the main conversion goal. They came up with the above treatment.



Now, if they had created this idea in a traditional marketing department, where all they had was the force of their argumentative powers to convince a business leader that this was the correct treatment, they would have likely lost the battle.

Their approach, however, was much less controversial. They simply sought to test it, as one of many treatments.

That is why this treatment takes a dramatically different strategy, which aims at eliminating all distractions to focus visitors on the key goal/value statement. In this design, the homepage remained unchanged, but was grayed-out behind the call-to-action “pop-up.” Like the first treatment, the form still appeared in its original spot.

### Results:

Our first two treatments actually produced lesser results than the control, despite past successful experiments dictating our course of action. Though we followed proven tactics in improving user experience, there was a considerable drop in conversions for Treatment #1 and a less-dramatic, but still noticeable drop for Treatment #2.

The third treatment served as a major surprise. Though it isn’t common for us to employ the use of pop-up windows, this treatment generated a 63.19 percent relative increase in conversion.



## 63% Increase in Conversion

*Treatment 3 outperformed the control by 63.19%*

	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	14.06%	-
Treatment 1	12.18%	-13.37%
Treatment 2	13.79%	-1.92%
<b>Treatment 3 (Radical Design)</b>	<b>22.95%</b>	<b>63.19%</b>



**What you need to understand:** By testing a unique idea that went against commonly accepted best practices, we were able to generate 63 percent more form starts on the homepage. Though the incorporation of pop-up windows is not a typical practice for our team, a 63.19 percent increase supports the idea that even the most radical redesigns are test-worthy.

### THE BOTTOM LINE

This Research Article highlighted five major pitfalls in homepage design. Because of the wide range of functions a homepage can serve, we cannot offer an all-encompassing, foolproof homepage design strategy. But, while it's near-impossible to magically create a strategy that guarantees ROI, it is possible to create one that maximizes your return on time and resources for optimization.

Homepages vary widely in terms of function, form or target audience, and avoiding the pitfalls noted in this article can help you fine-tune your testing and approach to design, allowing you to create a homepage that greets and engages visitors, establishes your page as one that offers them value, and efficiently directs them to an appropriate next step.



# Maximizing Optimization Opportunities: 3 Simple Visitor Types



by Boris Grinkot,  
Associate Director of  
Product Development  
October 27th, 2010

*"It's right there, just click on Company, then About the Team, and then Areas of Expertise."*

*"We need the form to capture the Social Security number, because then our phone reps won't have to ask for it when they call."*

*"All they have to do is set up the domain name first, and then they can complete their Web hosting order."*

Our analysts hear this all the time—how marketers justify not immediately and clearly communicating their company's value proposition to the visitor, requesting personal information that stops the visitor from submitting the lead form, or requiring full account setup before the sales transaction can be completed.

Those marketers are right. Not just because the value statements are indeed there or because the personal info will be provided by phone, or because account setup will be completed later anyway. They have hard numbers to show that **visitors do jump through these hoops** and conversions do happen.

The problem is that they are right only a tiny fraction of the time—measured by a metric we know and love: the conversion rate.

## Climb every mountain

Yes, 0.5% of your visitors figured out a reason and a way to buy from you. Maybe it's 10% or 30%. Whatever that number is, it may only represent what we call **highly motivated** visitors. But what about the rest? That other 99.5% that didn't convert?

This brings us to a communication gap. The marketers and the optimization analysts are talking about two different types of visitors; they are making two different sets of assumptions. To explain what we mean when we say "a visitor isn't given a reason to buy from you, as opposed to your competitor" or "this form creates too much anxiety for a visitor to complete it," I wanted to put together a simple diagram, which can be found on the next page.

Of course, for each site and traffic source, the relative size of each segment is going to be different. However, the "maybe" group is typically the largest, and is the primary focus for optimization.

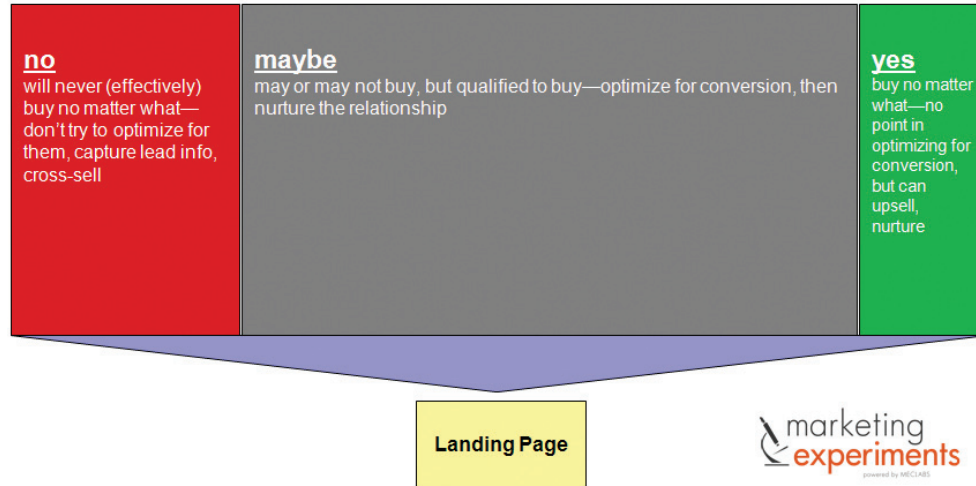
The green segment? They're already converting. Yes, there are things to optimize for them—engagement, re-marketing, even immediate upsells. However, all of these things happen after they converted or made an unequivocal decision to convert: the typical optimization objective has been achieved.

## Wrong turn

The "no reason to be here" red segment? Your ads might be leaking serious money because they're bringing you visitors that will never convert within a realistic time frame. You need to optimize how you get traffic, not the page, to fix this. Trying to optimize a page for this group is not only a waste of resources, but can mess up the page for the "maybe" folks—the bigger and better opportunity. One example of this is trying to squeeze every product you have into your landing page and praying that visitors will bite on something.

## Conversion Opportunity Framework

Traffic quality and corresponding optimization objectives



By default, **optimization is all about the gray “maybes.”** The huge segment of your site visitors that are in the market for what you’re selling, but they have not made a decision to buy from you. You have to give them a reason and make it easy, or at least manageable, to convert. How well you do this is going to be reflected in the conversion rate, and all the subtle—or not so subtle—changes that can sway these grays to convert or to click on the “x” button is what optimization methodology delivers.

### Meet them halfway

So, next time someone tells you “well, we have all these testimonials in the fourth sub-section under the Company page that’s in the footer”—don’t get angry. Just explain that people that figured out where to find this information either have too much time on their hands or are your Aunt Sophie.

They want to buy from you already, and no matter how difficult you make it for them, they’ll figure out how. If you want the rest of the visitors to buy, you’ll need to do some work too.

### Related Resources

[Conversion Rate Optimization — How our test site improved its overall conversion rate by 41.8%](#)

[Optimizing Your Landing Pages](#)

[Ecommerce Holiday Playbook: 13 ways to maximize revenue and beat the downturn](#)

# Internet Marketing: Landing page optimization for beginners



by Dustin Eichholtz,  
Research Analyst

October 6th, 2010

I feel there should be a support group..."Hello, my name is Dustin, and I'm an Internet marketing newbie." I recently joined The MECLABS Conversion Group as a Research Analyst and up until a few months ago I gave little thought to Internet marketing. I've bought a few (dozen) things online, signed up for some newsletters, even subscribed to a blog or two, but did I think about the why behind my decisions? Not really.

That's not to say I've never thought about marketing at all. I did my undergraduate work in multinational business and economics and my graduate degree is in finance. So, I have some exposure to marketing, but I've always been more focused on an analytical approach to business decision making – so I've never thought marketing, which seems to be the antithesis of analytical, would be a good fit for me.

However, that is exactly what MarketingExperiments does. Our tests and experiments are aimed to be able to analyze data, read through the hype and trends, and find some truth buried in the numbers in order to create long-term value.

## My time with the CIA

As much as I would love to hang by the landing skid of a helicopter, the CIA I'm talking about is the Conversion Index Analysis. This CIA is a thorough examination we provide to our Research Partners, which uses our conversion heuristic, just one part of our [methodology](#) to improve conversions and other Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

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

Wherein:

C = Probability of conversion

m = Motivation of user (when)

v = Clarity of the value proposition (why)

i = Incentive to take action

f = Friction elements of process

a = Anxiety about entering information

By dealing with the heuristic piece by piece, you're able to get in the mindset of your visitor/potential customer and deal with the page as they would.

So far, some work I've done with the CIA includes analyzing [motivation](#) of visitors – are they getting what they're expecting? Does it match what they're looking for at that point in time?

Clarity of the value proposition is a very important part of any landing page. It's important to not only state it clearly but ask yourself if the other elements support that value proposition. The customer wants to know not only why they want a product, but why they should get it from you.

[Friction](#) can be pretty straightforward– are you asking too much of your visitor? Is it difficult to navigate or are you asking them to enter a lengthy signup process? In addition to length, you must also ask yourself if there is any field or informational request that causes concern or anxiety. Do you explain that the visitor's email address will not be used deceitfully?

You can think of all the elements of the conversion heuristic working together as a fulcrum or scale. Positive elements, such as matching visitor motivation and communication of value, are on one side of the scale. Negative elements, such as friction and anxiety, are on the other.

On a particular landing page, does the balance of the scale tip too much towards the negative or positive? If it's tipped towards the negative elements, what steps can you take to tip it the other way? Would an incentive such as a free gift or free shipping help offset some of the friction you can't get rid of?

All of these questions can be daunting. Writing, designing, and building a website is hard, a successful one even harder. However, at MarketingExperiments, we look at these questions as opportunities for testing. The team I've been working with in the labs is very good at looking for opportunities, even on already successful sites.

### The approach

By analyzing the factors that lead to conversion to create a scientific hypothesis and testing against that hypothesis – not leaving it up to speculation, but actually testing (real time, real environment) for a lift, we are able to...keep conducting ever more effective tests!

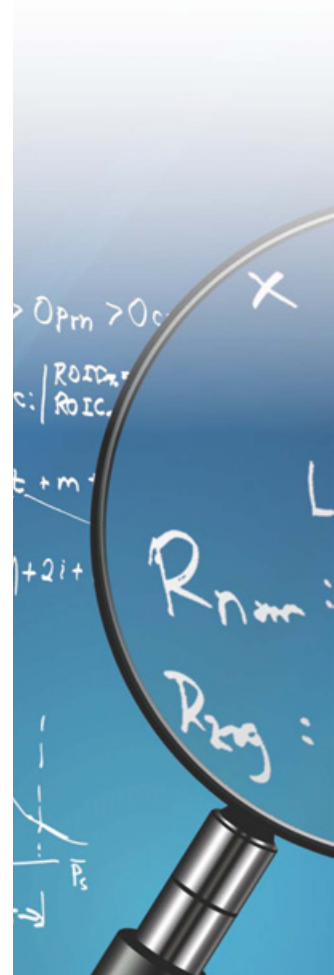
Or stop. But you would be shocked at what [gains can be made when others would be satisfied with stopping](#).

The methods are not hard to begin to grasp either, there are [articles](#) and [training programs](#) available and it takes about a week or so of free time to begin to understand and apply the principles in your own business, including distractions (for me: workout breaks and Bloomberg on mute in the background). So is it worth it? [Is it worth doubling your conversions?](#)

### So...now what?

OK, so you're like me, you're new to Internet marketing. You have some tools: Google Website Optimizer, Adobe Omniture Test&Target, Google Analytics, etc. So...now what? Based on what I've learned so far, here are some great first items, using your tools along with our conversion heuristic, to keep an eye on:

- **Motivation**
  - This has to do with the channels of your customers
    - Where are they coming from?
      - Does your plan assume you are treating your PPC customers the same as those coming directly?
      - Do all visitors have the same motivation? Are they looking for the same thing?
  - It can make a big difference for a given landing page if you take a look at your traffic in segments of motivation based on the channels they come from.





- **Friction**
  - It has more to it than just length, also look at the difficulty of your page in the mind of the visitor
    - Of course you know how to navigate it, but does everyone?
  - Try some alternate layouts or put more focus on your objective call to action and test for a lift
  - Looking at past experiments and working with current partners, I've seen a lot of room for improvement in regards to friction – try to really spend some time thinking conceptually and pragmatically about how your visitor navigates the page
- **Clarity of the Value Statement**
  - You might think you have the best product, newsletter, webinar, etc. but if you can't articulate that – simply and concisely to your visitor– you're doing yourself a disservice
    - You need to answer the “why?” that is in the mind of your visitor
      - Remember to talk – don't sell
    - Try some different copy in your headline and/or sub-headline
    - If you have lengthy body copy but good points to get across
      - Bullet them

This might be a lot to take in at first, but it's not a one-step process. These are just the top three areas that are pretty easy to spot for someone new to Internet marketing while trying to use the new tools at your disposal. You have to keep testing to make sure you're getting the most out of your pages.

Don't fret if you feel you're not an Internet marketing veteran. It's important to remember to use the knowledge you've gained in other areas and put it to work for you in Internet marketing. In my case it's a love of data analysis and a small obsession with Excel.

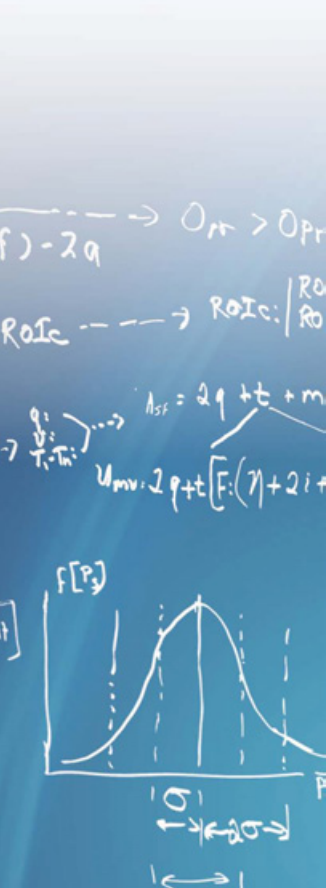
The world of Internet marketing is constantly evolving and growing. New perspectives on old problems makes this industry so exciting to work in. So, welcome aboard and good luck!

## Related resources

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

[Double the Value of Your Online Testing: Don't just get a result, get the maximum customer insights](#)

[Landing Page Optimization on-demand training and certification course](#)



# Solving for a Conversion Lift: To get to the right answer, change the question

Working under the weight of business objectives and cutting our way through the jungle of organizational politics as we perform applied research for our clients, often makes me long for the good old university days of participatory action research.

That was the hot trend in anthropology at the time, and though it has given way to other methodologies, in my memory it lives on as an almost innocent form of inquiry; one that possessed both transparency and openness to what might be discovered.

That is not to say that landing page optimization research that we perform is closed-minded or pre-determined. After all, producing real business results for our client means that the research must be effective. In the business world, this is the measurement of being right. However, it is easy to overlook parallel developments in the academia, in particular in applied Psychology, where design and user experience is treated with no less of a scientific rigor.

Attending the [Fifth Design for Conversion Conference \(DfC\) in New York City](#) was an informative and entertaining way to reconnect with some of the top academics in the field. I will share what I have learned in a mini-series of blog posts that will follow, but today I wanted to share how, as part of the event, I was on a team that solved a specific optimization challenge for The Ladders (yes, that one).

## What is the objective?

What I hope you will learn, or reinforce in your mind, as I did, is that some problems in marketing—as elsewhere—can benefit from the simple question “What is the objective?” before you launch headstrong into solving the most obvious problem, or one that was handed to you. The simple procedure of asking explicitly “What is the objective?” was one of the first tenets I learned in the [MarketingExperiments research methodology](#), and I repeatedly find that it is as powerful as it is simple.

DfC organizers made the entire event workshop-driven, so that the attendees may apply the principles they learned from the speakers immediately, through alternating presentations and working sessions. They invited marketers with specific problems that they wanted to solve, and asked the teams made up of conference to develop and then present the solution to the “clients.”

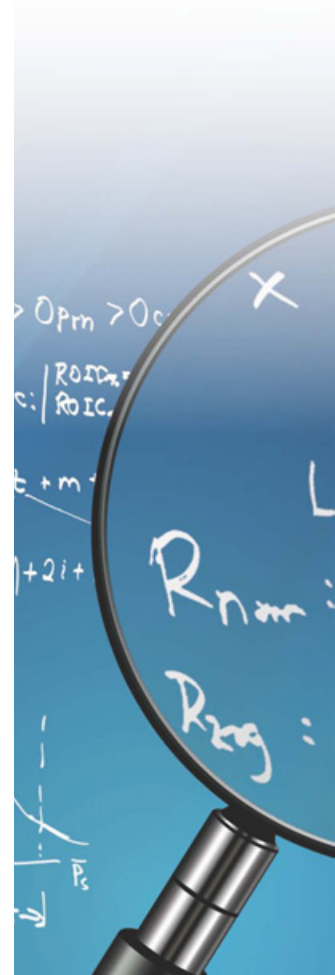
The whole thing was organized as a contest, and running ahead (just in case you quit reading sooner), I just wanted to point out that my team beat the other six for the top prize.

## The challenge

My team’s client was The Ladders. Their challenge was that a large fraction of their job seekers were setting their profiles as private, making contact information invisible to recruiters. Through surveys, they knew that recruiters were less likely to contact those users—meaning that the perceived effectiveness of this paid site would be lower. It appeared that not making one’s contact information immediately visible signaled lower motivation to the recruiters, so the latter would be less likely to bother trying to reach such accounts.



by Boris Grinkot,  
Associate Director of  
Product Development  
December 15th, 2010



The way The Ladders approached this problem—and the way they positioned it for our team to solve—was to get more of the job seekers to set their contact info visible; making them appear more motivated, and therefore more likely to be contacted by the recruiters.

We did provide a number of tactical recommendations to get more job seekers to open up their profiles. The site's language was creating [anxiety](#) about making one's contact information visibly by means of offering something like “reasons not to dread opening up your contact info” and “why you shouldn't worry that your current boss will find your resume here and fire you.”

Also, setting one's profile as searchable was not the default or obvious thing to do—what we call [friction](#) at MarketingExperiments. There was no mention of this negative signaling to recruiters, which might have moved many of the [“gray area”](#) visitors to change their contact preferences.

### The best way to win is to change the scorecard

However, these and other tactical recommendations were not addressing the real problem, as we realized from the very beginning. They also weren't going to get us to the contest victory! As our assigned team coach Andrew Chak (author of *Submit Now: Designing Persuasive Web Sites*) reminded us, the best way to win is to change the scorecard. And so we did.

What was the objective? The Ladders is not in the business of getting as many job seekers as possible to make their contact information visible to recruiters. This is merely an intermediate step, which appeared to be a bottleneck in the overall conversion process.

The overarching business objective is to get as many users—both on the seeker and the recruiter ends—**to pay to use the system**. This means that both sides need to be able to get what they want—which happens to be the same thing: a connection of a job seeker with the right job.

To achieve that end, the recruiters need to be able to assess the job seeker as quickly as possible, and the current system was not making it as easy as could be. Without being able to qualify job seekers better, the recruiters were left with a large pool of potential matches, and it was simply easier for them to cut down that pool to a manageable number by only going for the applicants that had provided their contact information immediately (as opposed to the ones that had set it private, which required a few extra communication steps to get in touch).

So, again, what was our objective? Our objective became making it easy for recruiters to find the right candidates. That meant changing the process, so that the recruiter could get the information about the applicant that they really needed and allow them to narrow down the applicant pool by meaningful criteria, rather than contact info visibility. At the same time, the process for the job seekers could be changed to allow them to demonstrate career move “readiness” more explicitly, rather than through the indirect, tongue-in-cheek signal of contact info visibility.

This meant giving the job seekers a few questions to answer, and explaining clearly why these questions are being asked to help them find a job quicker. The MarketingExperiments meta theory of value exchange applies here well: for the value of higher likelihood of finding a job, the users are willing to do a little more work in completing their profile.



## What is the real objective?

With the presentation skills of my teammates being no small factor, our solution got us the top prize. As both Eric Burd, VP, Product, from The Ladders and our esteemed judges (Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab's director BJ Fogg, London Business School Assistant Professor of Marketing Dan Goldstein, and Vice Chairman of the Ogilvy Group-UK Rory Sutherland) agreed, fundamentally re-examining the problem (that is, asking "What is the real objective?"), rather than simply answering the question, was key to their decision.

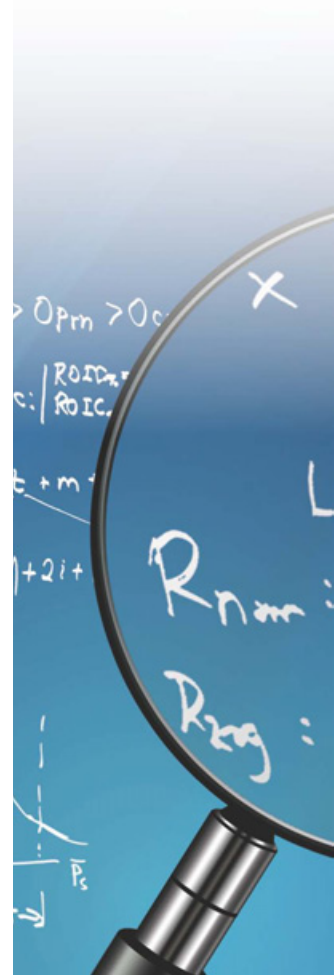
*I would be most curious to hear how other marketers have creatively avoided jumping over the obvious hurdles and instead re-defined their path altogether, to get outsized returns. Please use the comment feature to share your successes!*

## Related Resources

[Online Marketing Conversion: "Free" is a pretty strong incentive](#)

[Conversion Rate Optimization Tested](#)

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





# Online Testing Optimization:

## Learn from test suggestions for David Weekley Homes



by Spencer Whiting,  
Research Analyst

November 15th, 2010

In a recent Web clinic – [Double the Value of Your Online Testing: Don't just get a result, get the maximum customer insights](#) – Dr. Flint McGlaughlin and the MECLABS Conversion Group team conducted the first-ever “Test Strategy Recommendation Session” of audience-submitted campaigns. Looking at the test history of audience-submitted online Web pages, we recommend future test strategies based on a decade of optimization research.

But there was one page on the clinic that we did not have time to get to, so Flint asked the audience for their take on some test suggestions.

After reviewing all of the great ideas that participants offered to the optimization of this page, I have selected a small group that demonstrate some best practices to optimizing your own landing pages.

The first step in any optimization process is identifying the primary purpose of the page. It is important to limit the number of secondary purposes. In this instance, the David Weekley Homes page submitted for optimization is the “Contact Us” page.

Original page

### Optimizing secondary objectives

In this example, the primary objective of the page is very clear – to have the potential customer contact the sales department to get more information and start the sales process. However, the secondary objectives for this page are counterproductive. With this in mind, Wayne from Washington state suggested “the left hand navigation be removed or simplify it leaving more focus on the call to action – contact the Internet advisors.” This would decrease the confusion of the customer. It is always a good idea to give a few options as necessary.

## How do visitors want to be contacted?

The next question that must be answered is: How do visitors want to be contacted? On this page there are two options. I would want to prioritize the contact method that is more effective. Again, this is a strategy to give visitors fewer options, therefore directing their actions towards the option that is most effective.

The primary contact method seems to be 866-493-3553, especially with the notice that **“Our Internet Advisors will reply to emails within one business day.”** In this case, D Bnonn of New Zealand commented that “My eye totally skipped over ‘From the first step etc’ ...looks like a banner ad.”

The yellow highlighting used in this page element does separate it from the rest of the page suggesting that it is a banner ad. Simply revising the element to have the yellow along the bottom with a strong call to action would be a good test to run.

## Call-to-action location

A number of participants, including Craig from California, mentioned a weak or non-existent call to action (CTA). He identified the issue as “too much space given to the header graphics, shoves CTA below the fold.” Getting rid of the contact “banner” would be one good way to address the problem of having the CTA below the fold. It may however change the look and feel of the page enough to cause [anxiety](#) within visitors (i.e. am I still on the same page?)

Shan offered an alternative solution for the CTA location. Shan suggested to “put the form up on the top left blue section, under ‘contact us, please,’ and put some content in the current form section.”

This would be a radical redesign and would be an excellent option to test. It places the primary objective of the page in the highest priced “real estate” (Editor’s note: nice pun, Spencer) on the page. This is a

reasonable option that would not be an option on all pages. In this case, visitors have already clicked on a menu item that reads “Contact Us.” This creates [continuity](#) which can significantly reduce [friction](#).

I would include a testimonial quote prominently on this page. Remember to continue to build value throughout your visitors’ experience on your site. It is much too easy for a visitor to become distracted and disinterested. The process never stops.

## Simple and direct

In conclusion, creating a simple, direct page to maximize the visitor’s experience and optimize conversions is the goal.

On a contact page, such as this, example

- stripping out all non-critical elements

While keeping in

- personal touches, such as the “Internet Advisors” images
- clear primary and secondary calls to action

Along with continuing to

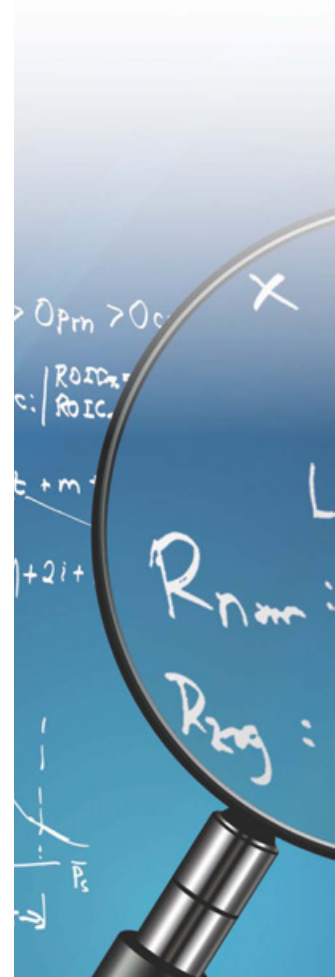
- build your value proposition on all pages in the process.

## Related Resources

[“Double the Value of Your Online Testing: Don’t just get a result, get the maximum customer insights”](#) Web clinic replay

[Testing and Optimization: What is the most valuable customer insight you’ve gained from a marketing test?](#)

[Become a Certified Online Testing Professional](#)



# Online Marketing Conversion:

## “Free” is a Pretty Strong Incentive



by David Kirkpatrick,  
Reporter

November 18th, 2010

I recently ran across a somewhat informal, but interesting none-the-less, [study on the power of “free”](#) to drive a conversion. Behavioral economist, [Dan Ariely](#), heard that a New York nightclub was promoting an event featuring “free tattoos,” so he sent a research assistant to see if this incentive led to a conversion in the form of a tattoo.

### The power of “free”

The resulting research isn’t scientifically or statistically rigorous, but it does offer a little insight into the command that the simple incentive of “free” adds to an offer.

- The average age of “participants,” that is club-goers at that establishment on that night, was 26
- Of the people in line to get a free tattoo, 68 percent said they would not be getting the tattoo if it wasn’t free
- 90 percent of those in line were aware of the free tattoo promotion
- Only 15 percent made the decision to get a tattoo after arriving at the nightclub
- 85 percent arrived that night planning on getting the free ink

The results of this informal test:

“The results indicate that the power of “free” is surprisingly influential. When we face a decision about a tattoo, one would hope that the long term permanency of the decision, coupled with the risks of getting different types of infections would cause people to pay little attention to price, and certainly not to be swayed one way or another by the power of free. But sadly, the reality (at list in the nightclub scene in New York) suggests that the power of free can get us to make many foolish decisions.

([From danariely.com](#))

### The big incentivized picture

Okay, not scientific. And plenty of test subjects were likely fairly impaired by chemicals in the decision process, but the raw numbers show that 68 percent of the people made their conversion decision (getting a tattoo) based on the incentive alone.

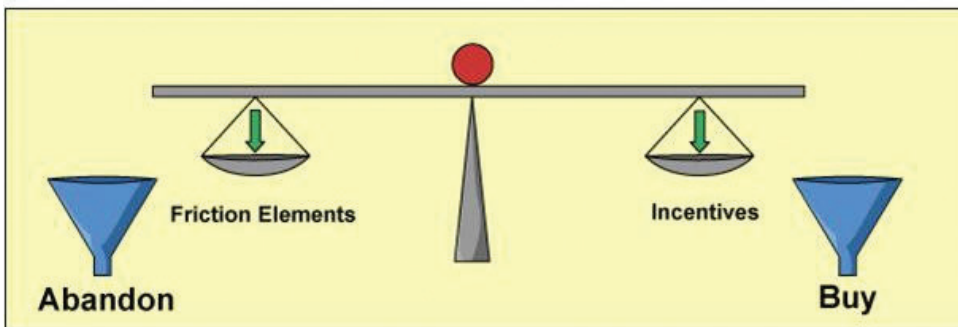
Where does that fit in the larger world of marketing? In the [Landing Page Optimization training course](#) found at our sister company, MarketingExperiments, incentive is defined as an appealing element you introduce to stimulate a desired action. That action might be a clickthrough, or to fill out an online form, or even an actual sale.

And the incentive has a key objective – to “tip the balance” of emotional forces from negative friction elements to positive to achieve conversion.

Here's a chart from the MarketingExperiments Landing Page Optimization course illustrating that concept:

## Incentive – principles

The objective of Incentive is to “tip the balance” of emotional forces from negative (exerted by Friction elements) to positive.



Here's the thing with incentives, even if they are free – some are better than others. Depending on the goal of the offer, the incentive might be a free webinar, or a free computer mouse, or \$100 off of a training session. The possibilities are practically limitless, so the key is to test incentives. All too often companies will try one incentive offer then quit. For any offer, an “ideal incentive” probably exists – you just need to keep testing until you find it.

### Related Resources

[Become a Certified Professional in Landing Page Optimization](#)

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

[Landing Page Optimization: Clean air or a free backpack? \(Which is the bigger incentive for Sierra Club members?\)](#)

[Internet Marketing: Landing page optimization for beginners](#)





# **ONLINE TESTING**



by Adam T. Sutton

#### Contributors

Jimmy Ellis

Pamela Markey

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Jon Powell

October 2010

# Analyzing Test Results: How to further improve performance and find your next test

Optimization testing can improve landing page performance, but a single test is much more valuable than the lift in response it provides. A single experiment can teach you more about your audience, reveal new opportunities and point to your next high-impact test.

Unfortunately, marketers are extremely pressed for time. They often accept a test's incremental benefits and quickly start another project. This results in an inefficient application of testing resources and a tremendous amount of wasted insight.

Uncovering insights from optimization does not require an unreasonable amount of time – but it does require a thorough understanding of results interpretation. Improved results must be achieved as well as understood.

This research article will illustrate how to analyze your test results to extract insights that provide value well beyond the results. We first present a successful landing page test and explain how to pull insights from its results. Then, we illustrate how to apply those insights to further improve performance and design your next experiment.

## EXPERIMENT #1: FINDING THE BEST PRODUCT PAGE



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

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** TP1355

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

**Primary research question:** A/B split test (variable cluster)

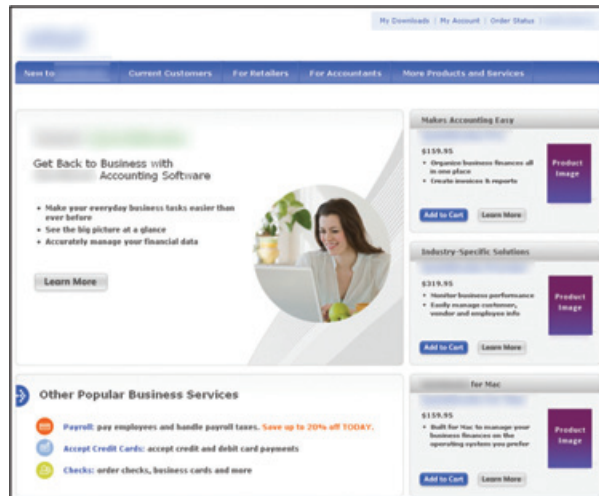
## Experiment #1: Control

This landing page accepted traffic from pay-per-click advertising for an accounting and payroll management software company. The goal was to increase total revenue generated.

After an analysis using our conversion methodologies, our researchers identified several problems with the page and categorized them into three areas:

- Page layout (friction)
- Page copy and images (value proposition)
- Product selection process (friction)

Three entirely new treatments, or test versions, of the landing page were created to experiment with different solutions to these challenges.



## Experiment #1: Treatment #1

One of the test's central goals was to reduce friction – also known as the “aggravation factor” – which is psychological resistance to the conversion process. Simplifying the conversion processes greatly reduces friction.

Our research team simplified this page by employing a single-column layout. They also added a single introductory paragraph with three bullet points to highlight the product's key credibility indicators.

Although not shown, the page included a high-quality product image and highlighted the company's 60-day money-back guarantee program. The guarantee program was available but not featured on the control page.

Lastly, the team added a drop-down menu to simplify the number of competing objectives on the page. This left users with two decisions:

- Which software version interested them?
- Did they want to purchase?





## Experiment #1: Treatment #2

The experiment's designers were unsure if the page gave users enough product information to make a purchase. They tested by providing an abundance of information in this treatment.

This page included a list of frequently asked questions that attempted to address all the questions a user might have before adding the product to a cart. A two-column layout was used to reduce friction. This treatment also included a strong product image that highlighted the money-back guarantee.

The radio buttons on the right-hand side differentiated the two products offered, and allowed the experiment's designers to succinctly describe their differences without an abundance of copy.



## Experiment #1: Treatment #3

The third and final treatment attempted to provide more information to potential customers using a tab-based layout. The tabs were designed to provide the necessary information without overwhelming or confusing the user.

The four tabs across the bottom of this treatment provided additional product information. Instead of highlighting the money-back guarantee in the product image, this treatment featured and explained the guarantee on the first tab.

Images of the product and graphs were included, and the page offered a minimal number of product options.






## Results:



**24% Increase in revenue-per-visitor**

*Treatment 1 increased the conversion rate by 12.97%*

Design	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference	Statistical Level of Confidence
Control	2.39%	-	-
T1 – Single column, dropdown	<b>2.70%</b>	<b>12.97%</b>	 96%
T2 – FAQ long copy	2.57%	7.53%	 80%
T3 – Tabbed layout	2.31%	-3.34%	 9%

Treatment #1 provided nearly a 13% increase in conversion rate, and is the clear winner in this experiment. Furthermore, the single-column layout and drop-down options used in treatment #1 helped increase the page's revenue generated by 23.91%.

Treatments #2 and #3 provided users with more information, but were not as effective. A key takeaway from the experiment is that users arriving to the page likely either had enough information to purchase, or were comforted by the 60-day money-back guarantee.

### INITIAL INCREASES ARE ONLY THE BEGINNING

The nearly 24% increase in revenue generated from this landing page was welcome news to the company's marketers, but it would have been a mistake to settle for this increase alone.

### Test Interpretation: 3 questions to find insights

As mentioned, optimization provides a wealth of information from which you can pull insights to increase performance in other areas. By systematically learning from your experiments, you can extract more value from each dollar spent on research.

### Key Principles

1. Though a test may improve a page's performance, its greatest gain often comes from what it teaches you about your visitors. This is because the value of customer insights extends far beyond a single test.
2. Consequently, to assure the greatest long-term return on research investment, one must maximize the value of insights from experimentation by becoming adept at test interpretation.

At a basic level, proper test interpretation answers three questions. You can use these questions as a filter to remove the noise associated with data analysis and focus on the valuable information the test provides.

**QUESTION 1:** *What does this test say about my visitors?*

Most tests will show a difference in the response rates between the control and treatment pages. Compare the difference in the pages' response rates and designs. Use this information to make inferences about user behavior.

**Key Principles**

1. For insights about your visitors, you are looking for answers to questions such as:

- *What motivates my customers?*
- *Where are they in the conversation?*
- *What do my customers value?*
- *What causes them the most anxiety?*
- *Why are they falling off at a certain point?*
- *What is their response to specific elements?*

For example, we can make several inferences from the above experiment:

- Since the call-to-action "Add to Cart" performed well, we might conclude that our visitors are motivated enough at this stage of the conversation to purchase.
- The treatment with one call-to-action outperformed the version with several, so we might conclude that our visitors find multiple offers on a page more difficult to understand than one.
- Since the treatments featuring a 60-day money-back guarantee outperformed the control, we might conclude that visitors have some anxiety concerning the value of the product.

***Can reliable insights be drawn from a test that compares multiple variables?***

The most precise experiments measure changes in a single variable while holding all other factors constant. Although this scientific approach is the most accurate, it is not the most efficient approach to landing page optimization.

In our experiments, a variable is a single page element that is changed, such as background color, button shape, image content or other factor.

A variable cluster is a group of variables that is treated as a single variable for the purpose of answering a given research question. Many marketers test landing page buttons and assume they are isolating a single variable, when they are actually isolating a variable cluster.

Here is an example:

Version A

Submit

**Variable Cluster**

button copy  
button color  
button text color  
button gradient  
button shape

Version B

Start Your Free Trial



An experiment that tests button A versus button B would alter no fewer than six variables. Although this test isolates the button, the button is a cluster of many elements.

The results of such a test would enable marketers to infer why button A or B is superior, but they would not have scientifically proven those inferences as facts. The only method for achieving such precision is to isolate single variables, such as the button's shape, and to test them one at a time – which would require a significant investment.

Single-variable testing typically achieves incremental gains that gradually accumulate into useful results. Due to marketers' budgets and timelines, this approach is too impractical to consistently pursue.

Testing variable clusters is a much more efficient use of marketers' resources. Doing so enables companies to glean enough insight to make better decisions and be comfortably sure that their decisions are well-supported.

Furthermore, testing variable clusters is more likely to achieve substantial gains in performance when compared to testing single variables. Both require nearly the same level of resources, however testing variable clusters is more likely to provide a higher return on investment.

### **QUESTION 2:** *Where else might these insights apply?*

The insights you pull from test results are applicable to other portions of your website and marketing. They can be tested and applied to achieve further gains and additional insights – which create a cycle of improving results.

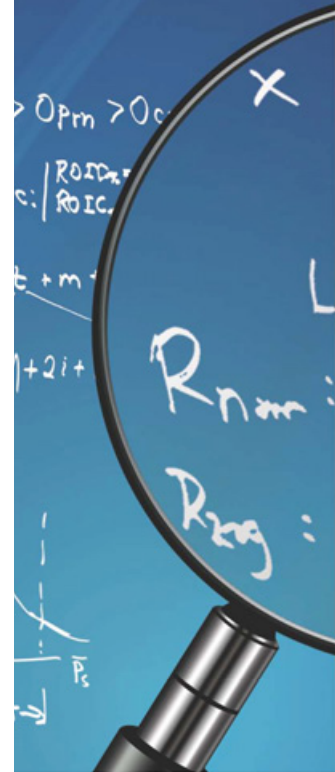
### **Key Principles**

Test insights can be split into two distinct categories:

1. **Context-Specific Insights** - Insights that are applicable to scenarios similar (in identifiable ways) to that of the test environment.  
  
(e.g., similar product offerings, order processes, channel sources, market demographics, etc.)
2. **Meta-Theoretical Insights** - Insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the cognitive psychology of human nature. These generally contribute to a systematic methodology for optimization.

By analyzing the results from Experiment #1, described above, we can extract a potential context-specific insight. We can propose that single-column templates, shorter copy, larger product images and drop-down selections will perform better for software offers in this market. This insight can be tested in relevant portions of this company's marketing.

Meta-theoretical insights provide information on how people think and interact with your marketing, and their application can have deep, long-term impacts. An example of such an insight from Experiment #1 is that psychological friction is a significant inhibitor to conversion, and simple, vertical page layouts with an uninterrupted eye-path to the call-to-action can reduce this friction.





## EXPERIMENT #2 and #3: COMPOUNDING LIFTS IN PERFORMANCE



Experiment ID: (Protected)

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: TP1306, TP1323, TP1324

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Provides end-to-end market solutions for small and medium-size businesses

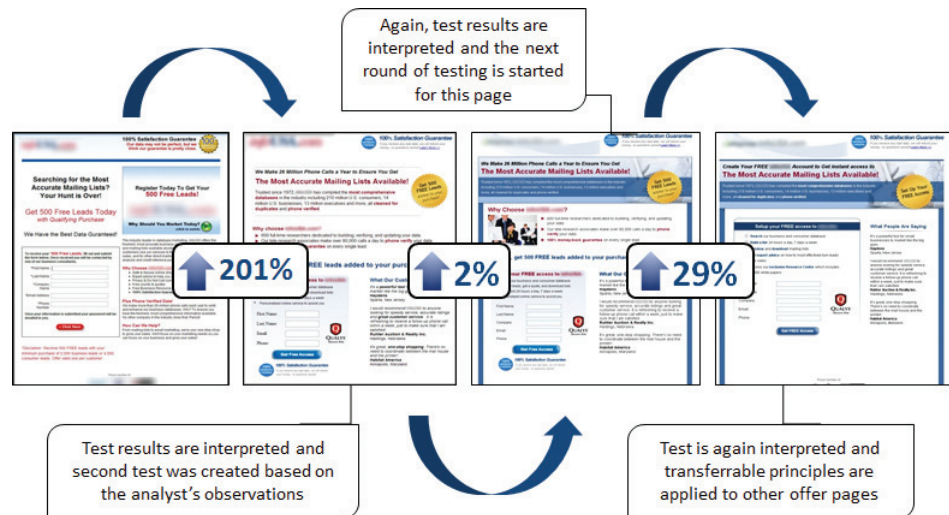
**Goal:** Increase the number of leads from an online form

**Primary research question:** Which page will obtain the most form submissions (i.e. leads)?

**Approach:** Series of variable cluster split tests

### Experiment series #2: Sequential conversion increases

In this series of experiments, the company started with a single test from which it dramatically improved lead generation (201%) and pulled insights for later tests. Later experiments based on those insights further improved the company's initial gains.



### Experiment series #3: Applying insights to additional areas

The discoveries and insights about customer motivation from the three prior tests in series #1 were applied by our research managers to other landing pages and used to optimize PPC campaigns. The purposeful effort to identify and selectively apply these transferrable insights led to widespread and high-impact optimization gains.



This approach becomes a cycle:

1. The company conducts experiments that provide gains and insight.
2. Those insights help the company refine theories about its audience, adjust its testing strategy and improve its other marketing assets.
3. This provides further gains and insight, which continues the cycle.

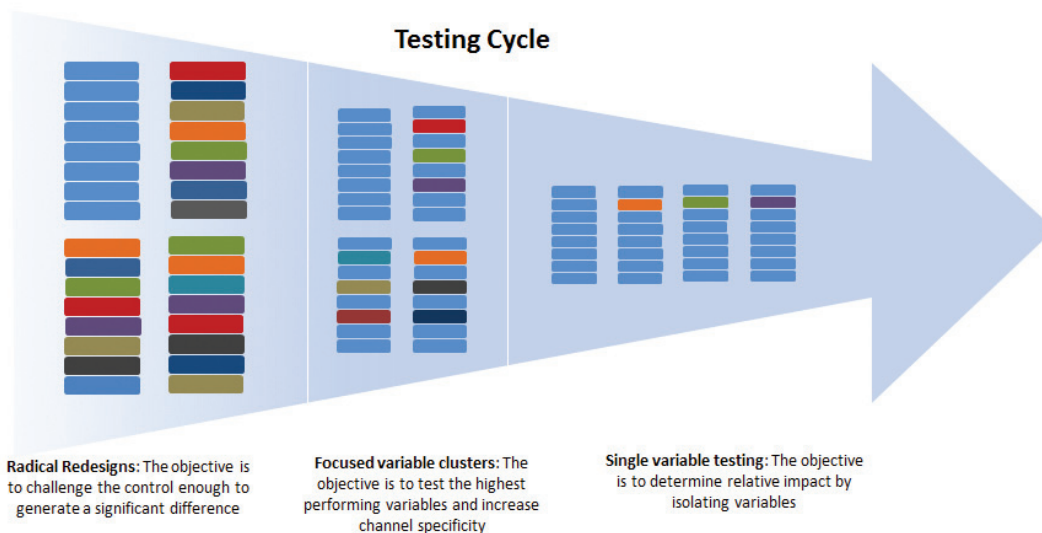
**QUESTION 3:** *What do these results imply we should test next?*

The ability to identify which experiments will generate the greatest lifts in performance is a skill that is refined through continuous optimization and analysis. This skill is vital to efficiently using experiment resources to achieve the best possible results.

### Key Principles

1. Future tests will be directly dependent upon the degree of precision with which you can identify the elements that generate the greatest favorable variation.
2. In most cases, testing should progress from variable clusters (more variation) toward single variable experiments (more precision).

To achieve the best results when initially optimizing a page, you will often test design clusters that result in radical page redesigns. Later tests on the same page gradually focus on increasingly specific details, until you are ultimately testing single variables to achieve smaller gains.



## EXPERIMENT #4: WHEN A TREATMENT BECOMES THE CONTROL



**Experiment ID:** (Protected)

**Location:** MarketingExperiments Research Library

**Test Protocol Number:** (Unassigned)

### Research Notes:

**Background:** Company offering accounting and payroll management software solutions for all types of businesses.

**Goal:** To increase the revenue generated by this page.

**Primary research question:** Which product page will generate the most revenue?

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

This experiment brings us back to the accounting and payroll management software company first described in the article. The company took the insight from its analysis, learned from it, and used it to design subsequent tests.

By analyzing the results of the prior experiment, the marketers hypothesized that many page visitors were prepared to convert without an abundance of additional information. Therefore, they tested changes to the bottom portion of the page, which describe additional product attributes. They hoped to increase the page's incremental revenue.

[Note: These experiments are in-progress. No results are available. However, the experiments themselves illustrate how test results can guide future tests.]

### Experiment #4: Control

The winning design from earlier experiment became the control. The content in the bottom row displayed product features related to the specific software version.



### Experiment #4: Treatment #1

Treatment #1 featured additional (slightly more expensive) software versions related to the page's main product. Our research team hypothesized that users were motivated enough by the 60-day money-back guarantee to make a purchasing decision without the additional information at the bottom of the page.

The test attempted to capitalize on this space to showcase additional products being offered as opposed to hiding them in the drop-menu. The intent was to increase total sales and revenue-per-purchase.



## Experiment #4: Treatment #2

Treatment #2 featured a social media feedback option that gave visitors the ability to post questions regarding the product to their Facebook or Twitter accounts. The feature gave the test's designers the ability to control the messaging by listing default phrase-options.

This treatment tested whether visitors would use the feature to ask friends questions and whether that action would attract additional traffic and conversions to the page.



### BOTTOM LINE

Optimization is a learning process, and marketers should learn from every test. Whether their results go up or down, well-designed experiments always yield insight.

The three questions to ask when analyzing test results:

**QUESTION 1:** What does this test say about my visitors?

**QUESTION 2:** Where else might these insights apply?

**QUESTION 3:** What do these results imply we should test next?

There are two insight categories:

- Context-Specific Insights
- Meta-Theoretical Insights.

Both reveal more about your visitors' behavior, and both can be applied to improve results in other marketing areas.

The insights you glean will also help identify subsequent high-value experiments. In most cases, testing should progress from variable clusters (more variation) toward single variable experiments (more precision).

For examples of how to apply these concepts to 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.



# Marketing Research: Cold, hard cash versus focus groups



by Todd Lebo,  
Senior Director of  
Marketing and Business  
Development

December 9th, 2010

*"The best research is when individuals pull out their wallet and vote with cold, hard cash."  
– my first boss*

My first experience in marketing was working with a specialized publishing company. I had the privilege to work on exciting products with sexy topics such as "human resource compliance regulations." Trust me when I tell you there is no better ice-breaker at a party than talking about a ground-breaking court ruling that will change how your company meets compliance of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

As a publisher, we used direct-response marketing to drive sales, with an aggressive program of direct-mail, email and telemarketing. And when it came to new product development, we were big believers in research. From customer surveys to industry research to focus groups, we used it all to make the best possible decision. At least, that was the general assumption...

## Out of focus

You always have to test because many research tactics just help you achieve a best guess. And while a best guess is often closer to the truth than a random guess, it's sometimes widely off the mark. In fact, I learned a valuable lesson one day when our company performed a focus group.

The members of this particular focus group were subscribers of a paid newsletter, and we knew that each person had subscribed by responding to a specific direct mail piece. That mail piece was extremely effective, with a powerful but somewhat provocative subject line

and letter. Many people loved that direct-mail piece, but many hated it, so we wanted to get the opinion of the focus group members. When we showed the group the direct-mail piece and asked them if they would respond to that piece, 40 percent said they would never respond (if they only knew what we knew). Wow, we were shocked!

So, should we conclude that those 40% were bold-faced liars? Not necessarily. What we can conclude is that what people say they will do and what they actually do may be totally different. That is why research is only part of the equation, but if you want to sleep well at night, you have to take the next step...

## Voting with their wallets

At the end of the day, the best research was when we tested the product and let the customers in the marketplace determine with their wallet if it was a viable product. We would test critical elements, like book title and price, and very quickly we would know if we had a winner or not.

Yes, all of the surveys and research were necessary to get started, but the most critical research was in our testing program. Testing is an amazing research tool. Regardless of the conversion you are trying to achieve, when your prospect takes (or doesn't take) an action, you have a valuable piece of information. Your conversion goal may be an event ticket sale, a white paper download, an email newsletter signup, or hundreds of other possible actions, but one thing never changes – the action you are seeking to drive can be tracked.

And if you're ready to measure when your prospect engages with you, that is when the learning begins.

So, I'm thankful for that boss early in my career telling me repeatedly that the best research is when individuals pull out their wallet and vote with cold-hard cash. Over the years, I've had many experiences when individuals tell me they are going to do something but until they actually do it, I'm a little skeptical.

*(Editor's Note: It's true. Todd told me he was going to write a blog post for quite awhile. Now, I believe it.)*

So gather as much research as possible, but always remember that cold, hard cash is a pretty sweet piece of research.

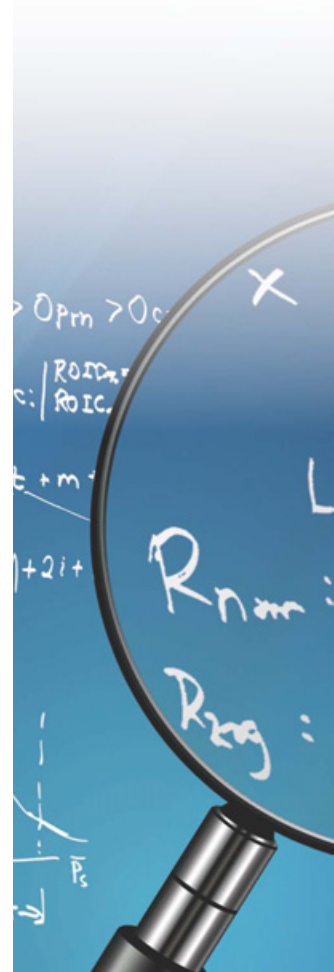
### Related resources

[Are Surveys Misleading? 7 Questions for Better Market Research](#) (Members Library)

[Marketing Research and Surveys: There are no secrets to online marketing success in this blog post](#)

[Focus Groups Vs. Reality: Would you buy a product that doesn't exist with pretend money you don't have?](#)

[Never Pull Sofa Duty Again: Stop guessing what your audience wants and start asking](#)





by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

November 23rd, 2010

# Marketing Research and Surveys:

## There are no secrets to online marketing success on this page

“Would you like to hear a secret? Do you promise not to tell?” John, Paul, George and Ringo knew how powerful secrets are, as does every Internet marketing “expert” who has ever written a blog post.

Well, I’m sorry, but MarketingSherpa and MarketingExperiments don’t have any secrets to share with you. The only effective strategy I’ve ever seen is hard work and experimentation. Not only do we not have secrets for you, we don’t really even have any answers. But, we can help you ask the right questions.

### Question everything

“My mother made me a scientist without ever intending to. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school, ‘So, did you learn anything today?’ But not my mother. ‘Izzy,’ she would say, ‘did you ask a good question today?’ That difference, asking good questions, made me become a scientist.”

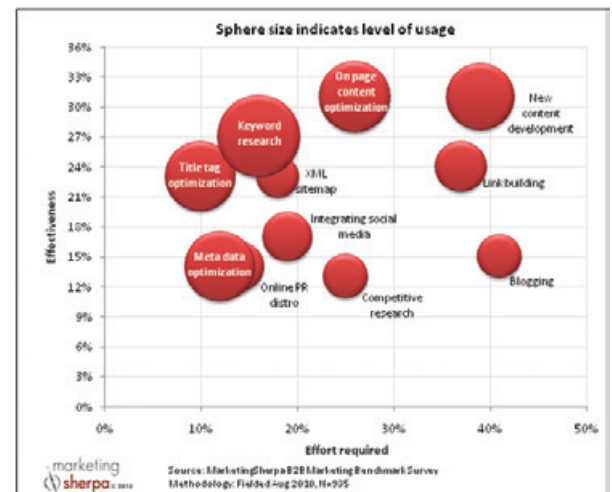
— Nobel laureate Isidor Isaac Rabi, discovered nuclear magnetic resonance

And do we ever raise those questions. Like a recent article by Senior Reporter Adam T. Sutton, [Are Surveys Misleading? 7 Questions for Better Market Research](#). When Adam first showed me the article, I knew it would be a little controversial, so I pushed him a little harder than normal in the editing process. Look at the results, and I think you’ll agree that Adam delivered. (If not, [I want to hear about it.](#))

I was a little surprised that the biggest challenge came from within my own company, though. MECLABS Director of Research, Sergio Balegno, questioned the article’s affront to online surveys. Sergio’s a smart guy, so when he says something I listen. And I think he’s right. Well, kinda...

### When online surveys are effective

For the kind of surveys Sergio’s team conducts, I believe surveys to be very effective. I use his team’s research all the time in trying to decide what content would be the most helpful for MarketingExperiments’ and MarketingSherpa’s audiences.



The above referenced article, from a recent [Chart of the Week email newsletter](#), questions B2B marketers about the SEO tactics they are currently using. Sergio and his team are not asking about a vaguely potential and highly personal decision somewhere down the road; they are simply asking which SEO tactics B2B marketers use, which were the most effective and which required the greatest level of effort? And here's where you can learn from Sergio.

I believe surveys can be effective for:

- Gaining insights into current actions
- Deciphering opinions on specific subjects that the audience has a high-level knowledge about
- Getting some new ideas (essentially, [crowdsourcing](#))

#### When online surveys are not effective

[“Would you buy a product that doesn’t exist with pretend money you don’t have?”](#) Yeah, there’s the rub...

Online surveys do not accurately predict actual customer behavior. Or, do they? Frankly, it's just a shot in the dark. Your goal should be to try to truly gain knowledge about real-world situations that require complex, often counterintuitive decision-making processes that your subject may not even understand. Would a few questions on a Web page really help you gain that knowledge?

Online surveys are not effective when you're trying to decipher:

- Potential consumer actions (such as a purchase)
- Potential B2B marketer purchase decisions very early in a sales cycle (too many variables)
- Highly sensitive information (if you disagree with this statement, please share your past three sexual experiences in the comments section of this blog)
- True sentiment on a complex topic that the survey respondent does not have

expertise in. For example, 58 percent of Americans favor repeal of the new health care law, according to a recent [Rasmussen Reports](#) survey. Meanwhile, in a [CBS/New York Times Poll](#), 41 percent of Americans favor repeal (stop and think about that for a second); and when people were actually told what features would be given up if the law is repealed, that number dropped to 25 percent.

Let's do a little thought experiment, shall we?

Write the answer to this question down on a piece of paper and bury it in your backyard...

“How likely are you to buy each of the following in the next 12 months: regular mayonnaise, light mayonnaise, mayonnaise with olive oil, canola mayonnaise, low-fat mayonnaise?”

Now go leave yourself a reminder on Outlook for November 23, 2011 that says, “Dig up mayonnaise survey.” So, how accurate were you Carnac the Magnificent?





## Only you can discover the marketing tactics that work best for your company

OK, I was a little too fresh up there, sorry about that. But I'm trying to help you understand this simple point (to annotate MasterCard)... there are some things in marketing that can't be observed, for everything else try an online survey.

If you can't observe the information you seek to obtain and there is a strong likelihood that your subjects know the answer, then a survey could be very helpful. In the example chart above, you likely could not observe the SEO tactics of 935 marketers and see into their brains to determine the effectiveness and effort required. Those respondents also likely know what SEO tactics they used, how well they worked and how much effort they required.

However, when you're looking at potential customer actions, don't try to ask prospective customers to predict what they might do under fictional, hypothetical circumstances. From the number of times I've asked my wife why she bought those shoes, believe me when I say she likely doesn't know the answer herself.

Instead, simply observe their actual actions. And you can do that with real-world, real-time online testing.

After all, that is the real goal of all the information we provide. Again, we don't write about secrets to Internet marketing success on MarketingExperiments and MarketingSherpa, and very rarely even give you any answers.

But we do help you ask the right questions and then do the experimentation (and hard work) necessary to determine what works best for your organization.

## Related resources

[2011 Email Marketing Benchmark Report](#)

[2011 B2B Marketing Benchmark Report](#)

[Ask the Scientist: Price testing methods and practices](#)

[Anti-Crowdsourcing: On \(not\) getting marketing ideas from your customers](#)



# Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Adobe Test&Target

What really sets Adobe Test&Target (powered by Omniture) apart is both its reporting and support. While it can be expensive, what you get is a professional/polished, customizable tool that's great for in-depth, multi conversion tests. And even better, you have an assigned support rep that can help you quickly overcome any stumbling blocks before or during a test.



by Gina Townsend,  
Director of Operations  
October 8, 2010

To illustrate the level of reporting, with one of our Research Partners, we setup 35 success metrics for just one test. In the second in our [blog series about testing solutions](#), here's a quick guide to Test&Target...

## Key benefits

- Transaction- and product-level reports
- Revenue tracking can be added to any campaign
- "Push winners" functionality – with a single click, pushes winning test scenarios to standard content for all audience segments
- Option for Omniture to host images, HTML or you can use your own server
- Tracking within Test&Target – ability to setup any metrics within tool; can change conversion metric during test (on the fly)
- Reports on a daily level
- Can track pretty much anything you want (links, buttons, etc)
- Behavior targeting – serve landing pages based on user defined segments (traffic sources, etc)
- Test&Target segmentation for reporting – can report on different campaign codes, offer IDs, etc
- Data privacy due to contractual relationship with a company
- Support – includes testing ideas, test implementation, report setup

- Ability to tack on other data-mining tools (i.e., Discover can track on the visitor level)
- Increased capabilities for segmentation and tagging of actions on a page – can get extremely granular in what you track, i.e. different content for different segments at different times
- If you don't want to send all traffic to the page, you can set a tool to only receive a certain percent of traffic (would have to write custom code for Google Website Optimizer)

## But keep in mind...

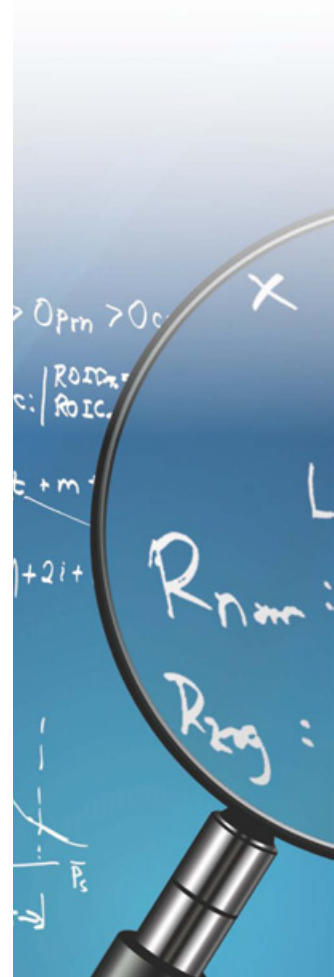
- Cost of tool and cost for additional support
- IT requirement for setup

## What types of elements can you test?

- A/B and multivariate testing

## How does it validate?

- Adobe Test&Target provides running status during data collection of statistical level of confidence, and will supply the bounds of the confidence intervals for the difference in sample means between each test treatment and the Control. It is up to the individual managing the experiment to decide what level of confidence they feel



comfortable with...we recommend a 95% statistical level of confidence ( $p=0.05$ ).

- Adobe Test&Target appears to use the presumption of a Gaussian distribution (the Student's T) rather than the computed variance for a series of intervals for each treatment in estimating the test significance. Under the best conditions, for most testing situations, this should be a perfectly sensible assumption. It is, though, important to know that the presumption has been made so that if the test results appear to fluctuate significantly over time, you can dig more deeply to search for potential sources of fluctuation such as seasonality (in the statistical definition, meaning time-dependent patterns of difference like day/night, weekday/weekend, etc.).

*We'd love to hear some customer reviews as well. Use the comments to share your experience with Test&Target. And stay tuned to this blog as we provide quick guides for more online testing solutions to help you choose a platform that is best for your individual situation.*

### Related Resources

[Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer](#)

[MarketingExperiments methodology](#)

[Fundamentals of Online Testing training course](#)

### Cost

- Range of costs
- Depends on server calls

### Support

- Contract includes access to an account rep

### Technology / Development

- Implementation – similar to Google Website Optimizer, couple of lines of JavaScript code
- Functionally, very similar to Google Website Optimizer

### Reporting

- Tracking on Test&Target – Has the ability to setup any metrics within the tool; can change conversion metric during test (on the fly)
- Integrates with Adobe SiteCatalyst (powered by Omniture) for Web analytics



# Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer

I just flew back from the Googleplex and boy is my brain tired. It's exciting to see the growth of Google Website Optimizer and the online testing and optimization community in general.

Tasked with writing a blog post about my trip, at first, I just wanted to focus on the Googleplex itself (yes, it's that cool). Then I thought, a fawning post about Google Website Optimizer might be apropos.

But given the number of questions we receive about online testing and optimization tools, I'm going to take a third, more aspirational path. Today I'll give you some info about Google Website Optimizer, but this will just be the first in a series of posts aimed at helping you answer that "Which testing tool?" question we often receive.

Of course, I can't answer that question for you per se (the real answer is, "It depends"), but hopefully I can provide enough info over this series of posts to help you make an informed decision.

And here's my promise to the vendors out there, even if you didn't invite me to your "-plex" and ply me with delicious locally grown organic food, I still may write about your tool (and if the FTC is reading, Google did, in fact, serve up quite a bounty).

Now all full disclosures aside, here's a quick look at Google Website Optimizer...

The biggest benefits for Google Website Optimizer are the obvious, it's free and it's Google.

But beyond the cost, Google is committed to making quality products and is continuously working on enhancements. Keep in mind that

Google doesn't offer much support, if any, so you'll need to put in some time researching if you come across any obstacles. Here's a quick overview...

## Key benefits

- Combine with Google Analytics for ecommerce product SKU tracking
- Robust tracking with Google Analytics and Adwords
- Testing a landing page setup is simple – just add a couple lines of JavaScript code and setup the test in Google Website Optimizer's interface (you will need the page URLs as well as the conversion page)
- Overall reliability of Google's servers (we've never heard of an outage of Google Website Optimizer servers)
- Open application programming interface (API) – you can draw data from the tool into your own environment without having to log into Google Analytics or Google Website Optimizer
- Large base of marketers have had exposure to the tool and, at a minimum, have some sort of expertise on the tool
- Google name brings credibility – May help get buy-in from others that might be unfamiliar with the tool but recognize the Google name
- With multivariate testing, once the JavaScript switching code is in place, you can add and rotate in elements without IT needing to alter the code for each test
- Active product development (constantly rolling out updates and bug fixes)

## But keep in mind...

- Google does not deal directly with clients for support – while Google does not offer support, they do have an exclusive group of Certified Partners that are screened by



by Gina Townsend,  
Director of Operations  
September 29th, 2010



Google and qualified to offer support with any Google Website Optimizer question or issue you may encounter

- Security of data is a concern – Google has access to all data
- Google Website Optimizer only provides aggregated data – you need to add Google Analytics to get reports on daily data
- If you only use Google Website Optimizer, tracking is limited – Google Analytics needs to be added to get tracking beyond visits and conversion metric
- For both Google Website Optimizer and Google Analytics, data is not real time – it can take a few hours (this can elongate quality assurance, or QA, time)
- Have to get creative when working with secondary conversions – i.e. use other tools like Google Analytics to measure secondary conversions/clicks like newsletter sign-up in a sales process
- Cannot add additional metrics collections points within the tool – for example, segmentation of conversion rates, elements that users interact with other than the conversion point (you will need to leverage Google Analytics for this additional tracking)

## What types of elements can you test?

- A/B and multivariate testing

## How does it validate?

- Reports – chance to beat original, chance to beat all
- Method – [Google Website Optimizer uses statistical significance](#) of the difference in sample means among the treatments based upon a Gaussian distribution presumption

## Cost

- FREE

## Support

- This is important enough to mention again – Google does not deal directly with clients for support, although there are Certified Partners that may be able to help you

- Step-by-step instructions and FAQ's
- [Google Website Optimizer blog](#)
- No contact person (unless you have one through AdWords)
- Forums – lots of great questions answered
- Instructional info available on Google Website Optimizer site

## Technology / Development

- For Google Website Optimizer implementation, will need to add JavaScript code – or have Apache Subversion (SVN) access to add JavaScript code
- Google Analytics /Google Website Optimizer moved to AJAX calls – speeds up loading to end user
- A/B testing – has to be hosted on your server (you only have to add hosted page URLs to tool)
- Multivariate testing – has to be hosted on Google's server

## Reporting

- Alone Google Website Optimizer only reports aggregate data
- With Google Analytics it can track daily

*We'd love to hear some customer reviews as well. Use the comments to share your experience with Google Website Optimizer. And stay tuned to this blog as we provide quick guides for more online testing solutions to help you choose a platform that is best for your individual situation.*

## Related Resources

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

[MarketingExperiments methodology](#)

[Fundamentals of Online Testing training course](#)

# Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Unbounce

[Unbounce](#) is a great tool for to create templated landing page tests, but this tool isn't built to test complex multi-step paths/carts. What's even better is as I was reviewing the tool I found that the guys and gals behind the tool are super committed and open to feedback. If there's a feature you'd like to see added, just ask and they'll do what they can to get it added.

In the latest of our [quick guide to online testing and optimization solutions](#) series right here on the blog, we take a look at Unbounce:

## Key Benefits

- Unbounce was designed for marketers who need an easy way to get new landing pages developed for ad campaigns
- Can build test variations with a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) editor – don't need to know HTML
- Can create a page from a selection of editable templates
- Can split traffic through the Unbounce platform, and in doing so have the option to change the URL to match you site (or could keep the unbounce URL). Keep in mind to change the URL you'll need IT to update your DNS and need to call Unbounce to request the change.
- Can easily add third-party tracking to test pages
- New feature – Web hook that lets you post form data to any URL you choose (for integration into CRM, email list management, your own system, etc)

## But keep in mind...

- It was not intended to be used to test existing pages on a website. Can really

only use for simplistic testing. Cannot test beyond a simple landing page. Unbounce even states: "Unbounce was designed for marketers who need an easy way to get new landing pages developed for ad campaigns, not to test existing pages on a website."

- Can only measure on-page interactions, such as clicks and form submissions – planning to build another feature so that you can measure a conversion at the end of the funnel
- To include your control in the test (which you should unless performing a sequential test), you have to replicate it in the tool using the WYSIWYG editor which can be cumbersome
- Can only set one conversion goal at a time per test
- Can't track anything beyond conversion goal
- Have to use templates within Unbounce, can't upload existing design templates

## How does it validate?

- Provides the results of a Chi-Square test for significance for each test. It's up to the user to choose an appropriate level for their test (say, 95% to 99%). For a test with more than two treatments, the Chi-Square test establishes only that there is "at least one" treatment that is sufficiently different from at least one other treatment such that the "null hypothesis" (i.e., that there is NO difference in performance) must be rejected.

## Cost

- Ranges from free trial (can try and plan for free for 30 days) to \$500/month (it



by Gina Townsend,  
Director of Operations

September 29th, 2010

depends on the number of visitors and custom domains that you'd like to include in your test)

- \$0 – 200 visits/month (it's not easy to validate with small sample sizes)
- Support
- They provide support for all plans, and response times are typically in minutes or hours

## Technology / Development

- Can use the Unbounce URL (in that case, no IT support would be needed)
- Or can point DNS (this would most likely require IT but should only take them a few minutes)

## Reporting

- Real-time reporting
- Can only have one conversion metric per page (i.e. if your conversion is a click on a CTA, you're not able to track other links on the page as well)
- Can integrate with third-party analytics systems

*We'd love to hear some customer reviews as well. Use the comments to share your experience with Unbounce. And stay tuned to this blog as we provide quick guides for more online testing solutions to help you choose a platform that is best for your individual situation.*

## Related Resources

[Online Testing and Optimization Solutions](#)

[Quick guide to Adobe Test&Target](#)

[Online Testing and Optimization Solutions](#)

[Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer](#)

[Become a Certified Online Testing Professional](#)



# Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Internal Proprietary Tools

We're often asked by our audience..."I know I should be testing, but which platform should I use?" There is no one right answer to this question, so I've been writing a series of blog posts with quick guides to online testing and optimization solutions. internal testing tools

This latest post will be our quickest quick guide because it is not about any specific branded tool, per say, but rather internal proprietary tools...which vary widely. That said, I wanted to cover a few basic considerations.

When does it make sense to use internal proprietary tools for testing?

Here are a few points to consider:

## Performance

- More effective when using your own tool, since with other tools you're calling a third-party server
- Ability for your own team to troubleshoot rather than waiting on support
- This will require servers and internal resources to build/manage

## Safety/privacy of data

- Must secure internal servers and encrypt data
- Encryption may take longer development time

## Can develop the platform in whatever code development feels most comfortable

- Prevents the need for purchasing only



by Gina Townsend,  
Director of Operations  
September 29th, 2010

- product X due to its development language
- Ability to support/build tool with resources already on staff
- Control over added features and functionality

## More likely an option when there's an established Content Management System (CMS)

- Adding extra features to an established CMS is sometimes easier than also purchasing and installing an additional testing platform
- The CMS will provide a pre-created administration side to display reports and control permissions
- Adding features to a CMS for testing ability is quicker than building an entire testing platform



*We'd love to hear some customer reviews as well. Use the comments to share your experience with internal proprietary tools. And stay tuned to this blog as we provide quick guides for more online testing solutions to help you choose a platform that is best for your individual situation.*

## Related Resources

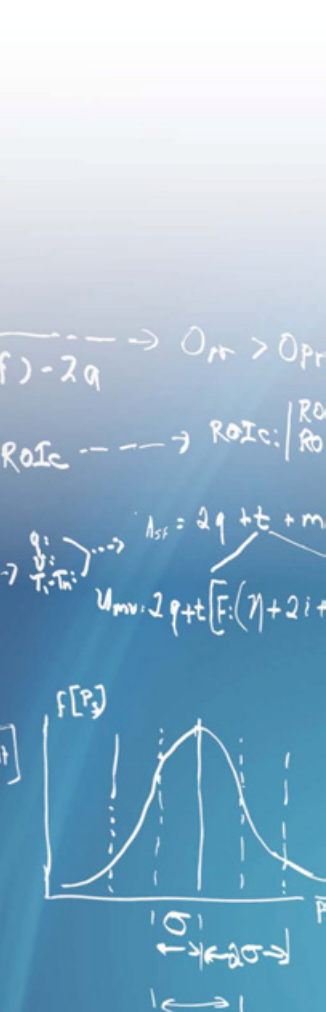
[Quick guide to Content Management Systems](#)

[Quick guide to Adobe Test&Target](#)

[Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer](#)

[Quick guide to Unbounce](#)

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# Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Content Management Systems



by Gina Townsend,  
Director of Operations  
September 29th, 2010

Whenever one is evaluating a testing tool – or any tool that claims to help “non-IT” people post Web pages of any kind – the key question becomes, “What do these pages do?” In other words, is it just a static page that asks the user to simply click a link and then move on to other parts of the site? Or is there detailed functionality in the site?

This is a key question because all online testing and optimization tools have limitations, at least from the marketer’s perspective. Many tools will allow you to post content without IT involvement. But these tools will not allow you to magically create significant functionality without IT involvement. By “functionality,” I mean things like login/logout features, the ability to capture and transmit data, or the ability to display data on the page from within the company’s database.

Marketers need to ask themselves, “Am I trying to capture/transmit data (like form submissions) or am I trying to tie into interactive functionality that already exists on the rest of my site?” If the answer is, “Yes”, then all of the online testing tools we are covering in our [quick guide blog series](#) might require IT involvement.

Of course, that involvement varies from tool to tool. For this post, we reviewed the Drupal split testing plug-in. Some other content management systems (CMS) may have a testing plug-in as well.

## Key benefits

- One good thing about using a CMS plug-in is that, if you’re using this specific CMS for your site, then you can easily setup page tests using the templates already designed for your site.

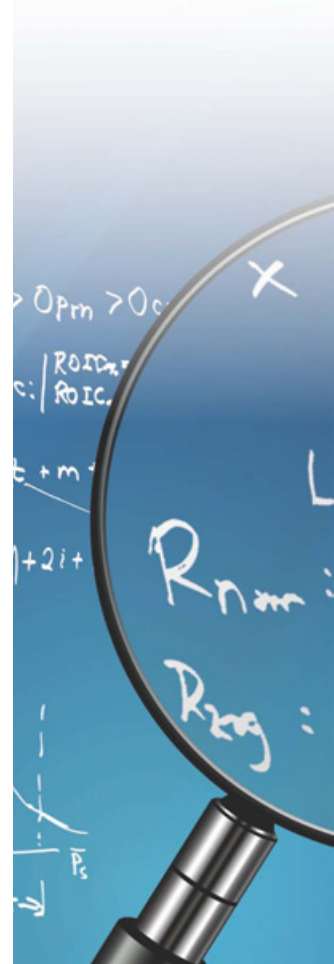
- You can integrate third-party analytics into your reporting interface by using the APIs for Google Analytics and Adobe SiteCatalyst.
- All CMS plug-ins have their own features – they’re all open source so it’s whatever has been coded and made available to public.

## But keep in mind...

- Requires more IT involvement than most possible testing tools. Typically, to add the plug-in you’re adding a chunk of code or a file to add to your directory/server.
- While the amount of technology and development time needed to build out the tool and direct traffic will vary depending on your CMS and available plug-ins, it most likely cannot be implemented without significant programming work. The plug-in is not an end-user friendly module (i.e. IT wouldn’t be able to hand it off to marketing to use).
- While the plug-in allows you to split-test, it’s not as simple as being able to test once the plug-in is added. The plug-ins typically do not have a user interface, so IT will need to build the interface for test setup (i.e. so someone other than IT can add page URLs, set the % of traffic, etc.). Without building a user interface, every time you’d want to set up/execute a test you need to have IT set it up – which can be time consuming and take away from other important projects.
- In addition, it is not feature rich. We would recommend you use something more robust.

## Cost

- However, it is free. So if you’re already invested heavily in your CMS, it might be beneficial.



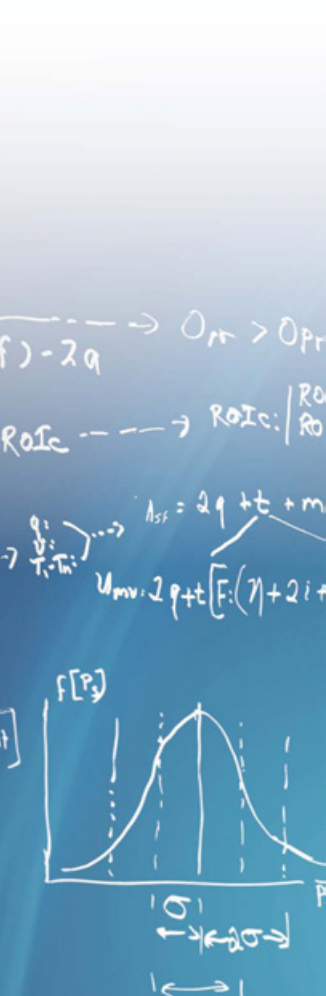
*We'd love to hear some customer reviews as well. Use the comments to share your experience with Drupal and other content management systems. And stay tuned to this blog as we provide quick guides for more online testing solutions to help you choose a platform that is best for your individual situation.*

## Related Resources

[Quick guide to Adobe Test&Target](#)

[Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer](#)

[Quick guide to Unbounce](#)



# Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to SiteSpect

[SiteSpect](#) is not a tag-based solution, which is perfect for non-intrusive testing. In other words, you don't have to add snippets of code to your site that a vendor claims won't (but we all know occasionally do) mess up your pages.

Also, no content is stored on the SiteSpect system itself, just `sitespect_logo_final` variations for testing. And soon, SiteSpect claims you will be able to store page variations within your own SiteSpect install.

SiteSpect can be a great solution, as long as you have the staff necessary to fully utilize it.

What's great is that this tool works for marketers with or without a designer, because for simple treatment variations you can use the WYSIWYG editor and even upload HTML designs.

Founded in 2004, some major marketers (Staples, Tivo, Walmart) trust SiteSpect with their online testing. Here are a few points to consider if you're thinking about implementing SiteSpect as well...

## Key Benefits

- SiteSpect is not a tag-based solution. This type of non-intrusive testing allows the user to work at network level; similar to a routing service. If you choose the hosted solution (there are two options), the traffic flows through the SiteSpect platform. An Enterprise-level service is available, where the functionality of the tool is identical to the hosted solution but the initial setup is different. With the Enterprise level, SiteSpect will send out one or more physical appliances that are installed within your own data center.
- Minimal IT involvement, a simple DNS change for the hosted solution and installing the appliance for the Enterprise solution



- SiteSpect only has to be implemented once, after that there is no incremental work to set up a new test on a different part of your site
- Has a web-based WYSIWYG editor interface to create test variations
- HTML can be copied and pasted into SiteSpect interface or the page can be hosted on your site and use SiteSpect to split
- Test metrics can be fed to a Web analytics platform in real-time
- Compatible with all content management systems (CMS)
- Everything with your website will work exactly the same as it does without SiteSpect, but with SiteSpect enabled, you're can modify some or all of the site for testing purposes

## But keep in mind...

- When implementing SiteSpect ASP, which is a hosted solution, you will have to change your DNS which is a relatively easy IT change.
- If you're testing a secure landing page or process, SiteSpect DNS allows you to reuse your existing certificate without the need of buying or installing a new one.

## What types of elements can you test?

- A/B tests
- Multivariate tests

## How does it validate?

- SiteSpect reporting engines compute and display the level of statistical significance for active, single-factor (A/B) and multivariable tests.



by Gina Townsend,  
Director of Operations  
November 19th, 2010



## Cost

- Hosted Solutions – starts at \$3000/month. Meters bandwidth (i.e. videos would eat up more bandwidth).
- Enterprise – \$8500/month (unlimited testing)

## Support

- Tech support – answer questions about using the product and/or during implementation
- Professional services – more consulting-oriented

## Technology / Development

- Can purchase hardware or point DNS for ASP solution
- There are two ways to implement SiteSpect:

1. Solutions (ASP): Update DNS, which should only take five minutes, so that users route to SiteSpect cloud (which will serve the page that is requested.) If the page user requested is not in test, SiteSpect will send them back to your site. If page user requested is in test, the content will be modified.
2. Enterprise (Hardware-based): Identical to the hosted solution, but the initial setup is different. SiteSpect sends out one or more physical appliances, like a Rackmount server, that is installed within your data center. There's no need to change DNS because it works within your network environment. Enterprise also provides real-time test reports. It costs more than Hosted Solutions, but testing and traffic is unlimited because it's hosted within your own data center.

## Reporting

- Built-in reporting engines (analysis tools)
- On-the-fly segmentation
- Can create new metrics

- WATTS – Web Analytics Tag Transformation and Segmentation
- Can integrate other analytics within SiteSpect

*We'd love to hear some customer reviews as well. Use the comments to share your experience with SiteSpect. And stay tuned to this blog as we provide quick guides for more online testing solutions to help you choose a platform that is best for your individual situation.*

## Related Resources

[Quick guide to Adobe Test&Target](#)

[Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer](#)

[Quick guide to Unbounce](#)

[Quick guide to Internal Proprietary Tools](#)

[Quick guide to Content Management Systems](#)



# Online Testing and Optimization Solutions: Quick guide to Liveball

[LiveBall](#) is a template-driven testing tool that allows users to set up a test in as little as three clicks. It provides great templates, but leaves little room for “out-of-the-box” testing.

Despite that drawback, based on our past experience with them, we can say that their team is very responsive and flexible when new templates or changes are needed. But, that’s a minor issue that can be solved if you have someone on staff who is HTML-savvy; since they’ll most likely be able to modify the templates themselves.

One the best features of this system is its advanced rules engine, which can be used to test different offers based on several factors, including location and campaigns. This form of routing or personalization is based on geolocation.

LiveBall was launched in 2007. Its clients range from Fortune 100 companies to small businesses. Here are a few points to consider if you’re thinking about implementing LiveBall...

## Key benefits

- Liveball is a hosted, software-as-a-service solution
- Can be used as a Content Managing System even though it was not designed for that
- Can build microsites and conversion paths (we’ve used it to build a microsite for a Research Partner)
- Has a point-and-click interface, which means there’s no code to write, no need for a designer and no involvement from IT
- Product is installed and ready to test within one to two weeks for most clients
- LiveBall builds 15 branded page templates at the start of the contract
- Can launch an A/B test in as few as three clicks
- Quick Start program offers auto-responder emails, forms, reports and data exports (LiveBall account manager will work with you to create two standard reports)
- Can create and upload new templates if you know HTML
- Auto-optimization feature will automatically route traffic to the best performing treatment
- Can create surveys and quizzes to gather data from your customers Advanced rules engine allows users to do 18 different actions based on 26 different conditions – this conditional landing page logic allows you to create dynamic content based on keywords or campaign codes, personalization based on user behavior, and geo target content based on location– (geo targeting feature is built into [Adobe Test&Target](#) but costs extra)
- Offers real-time reports with day parting (diving the day into different data sets) and automatic report setup
- Has a centralized library that stores all landing page assets
- Can setup data export to CMS
- Allows users to create tests and pages
- Creates a unique URL for testing or a subdomain
- Setup in tool – LiveBall provides an IP address and you point subdomain or unique URL to LiveBall
- Can upload video, Flash and images
- Can route traffic to the control page or LiveBall will help recreate the page
- Provides preformatted Excel files
- Can integrate third-party code
- Has tag clouds, visual for reporting

## But keep in mind...

- Everything is template-based, so to make many layout changes, you’ll need to have some HTML knowledge and alter the master layout



by Gina Townsend,  
Director of Operations  
December 22nd, 2010

- Interface takes a while to get used to due to naming conventions that are not typical
- LiveBall is not installed; instead all code is hosted at a third-party location. Can post data but not API for custom databases – would need to be a custom solution, which means more time and more custom code
- Can't be used for ecommerce because of inventory

## What types of elements can you test?

- A/B
- Multivariate

## How does it validate?

- Has a confidence interval and report that shows margin of error when manually optimizing
- LiveBall testing is technically a two-tailed t-test for both A/B and multivariate
- The Multivariate confidence intervals that the console displays on the elements and combinations tabs, and the ones used in multivariate auto-optimization use the basic 2-tailed t-test (with null hypothesis that the difference between the conversion rates of combination X and combination 0 is zero)

## Cost

- Price is based on unique visits:
- 1. Subscriptions start at \$1,295/month for 10,000 unique visitors to the pages you create and launch
- 2. Up to 2 million visits a month for \$16,895/month

## Support

- There's no charge for custom technical items, templates or training
- Dedicated account manager
- Available to help with questions in coaching package
- Available to help if you feel you're deficient in certain areas, such as data review

*We'd love to hear some customer reviews as well. Use the comments to share your experience with LiveBall. And stay tuned to this blog as we provide quick guides for more online testing solutions to help you choose a platform that is best for your individual situation.*

## Related Resources

[Quick Guide to Visual Website Optimizer](#)

[Quick Guide to SiteSpect](#)

[Quick guide to Adobe Test&Target](#)

[Quick guide to Google Website Optimizer](#)

[Quick guide to Unbounce](#)

[Quick guide to Internal Proprietary Tools](#)

[Quick guide to Content Management Systems](#)

# Lead Generation: Shouldn't B2B companies have a sales and marketing research and development lab?

Every day I hear a of some new-fangled thing that makes my head spin with all the implications. At [MarketingSherpa B2B Summit](#) in San Francisco, the attendees were electrified with technology-inspired buzz in spite of this terrible economy.

It reminded me of the time just before the tech bubble burst in the late '90s when everyone was giddy over the possibilities of the Internet. Only this time, the wild enthusiasm is tempered with the pragmatism and worry about the state of our economy. And no doubt some of us gray hairs remember the foolishness of the bubble from the '90s (well, and maybe even our own more recent home-buying exuberance).

I'm not sure if JigSaw or the Apple iPad is creating more buzz in the business world. I wrote about the coming [JigSaw tidal wave](#) a few weeks ago, so let me share my thoughts on Apple fever this week.

## Elegant simplicity

For me, the Apple story started way back in 1989 when I used my first Mac. I was one of those crazy early adopters who had bought what was once known as a "portable" computer (more like a luggable). It came with the thrilling Microsoft DOS C:\ prompt.

In about two minutes on the MAC, I realized that the Apple was about 45 years ahead of the PC. I couldn't understand how such an obviously better product got annihilated by the Microsoft Borg.

But Apple never lost faith. It stuck to its value prop: elegant simplicity. The iPod, the iPhone, and now the new killer business app, the iPad.

Google used the same playbook.

So you're probably wondering what all of this has to do with B2B lead generation. Well, lead generation is about as complex as our DNA.

## Mind-boggling complexity

Eloqua, Omniture, salesforce.com, and a million other companies are offering us the promise of not only accommodating that complexity...but actually adding to it.

Elegant lead scoring models based upon nuanced behavioral extrapolations, intuitive and scalable nurturing streams, automated and invisible data hygiene, intricate funnel metric dashboards, and on and on.

I love it all. But maybe we should hit the pause button.

Let's be honest. No one has figured this out yet. So maybe what we should do is start with the simplest design and then measure and improve it and iterate toward complexity and scale.

Choose one solution, one market segment, a small group of sales people, that sort of thing. Teeny tiny. Design rich, but operations poor.

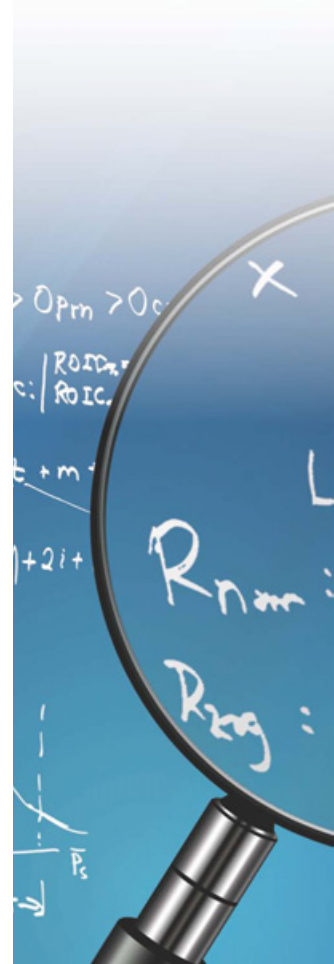
Apple does this everyday. It's called an R&D lab. They build prototypes and work hard to make things super simple.

Maybe what we need then is a sales and marketing R&D lab. We could go there to try the latest gizmos in a tightly controlled environment and make sure everything works before looking to scale. The output of the lab would be a playbook, ideally one as simple as the iPad, and as irrefutable.



by Dave Green,  
Director of Best  
Practices

October 22nd, 2010



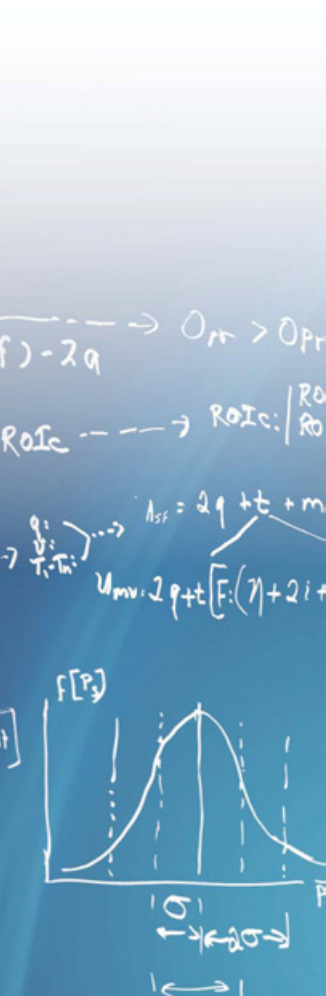


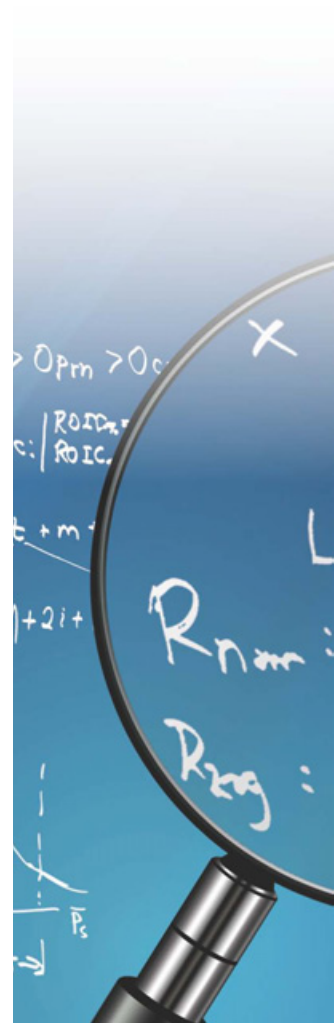
## Related resources

[MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit '10, Boston – October 25-26](#)

[B2B Marketing Summit San Francisco Wrap-up Webinar: Quick takeaways distilled from 211 marketers on lead nurturing, social media marketing, and more – November 4](#)

[B2B Marketing Summit '10 San Francisco Wrap-up Article: Seven takeaways to help you engage potential customers, generate high-quality leads and more](#)







# **EMAIL MARKETING**



# Email Marketing Optimization:

## Email messaging 101

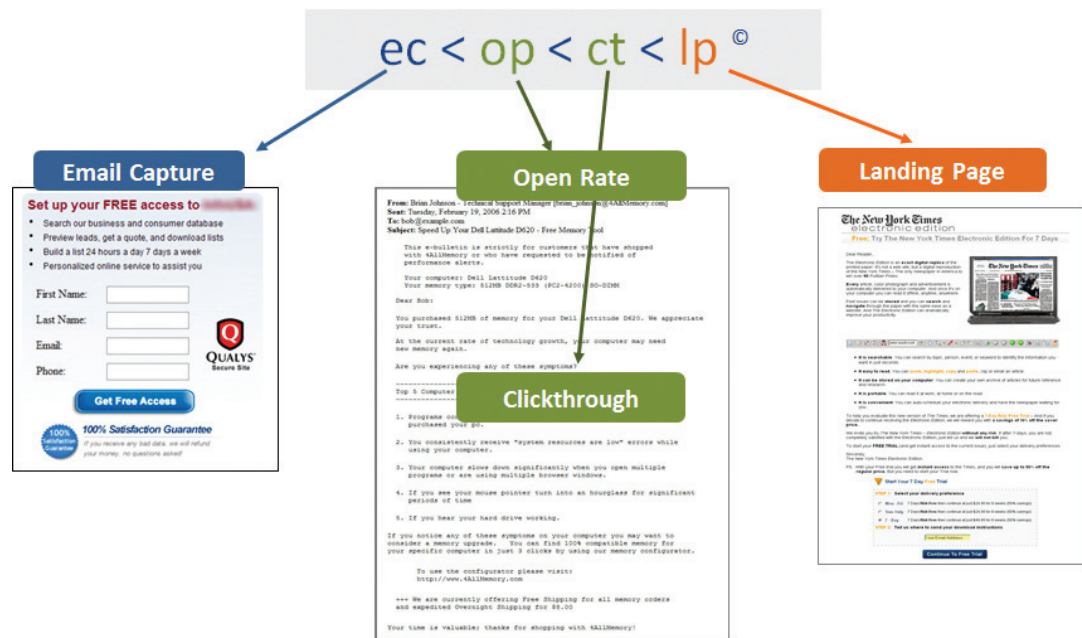


by David Kirkpatrick,  
Reporter

November 5th, 2010

Email marketing is a very popular topic and most likely you've read a number of articles covering different ways to improve email marketing campaigns. Whether you are an experienced pro, or relatively new to the subject, it never hurts to review the basics and think about the process of email marketing optimization from the building blocks on up. I recently joined MarketingSherpa as a reporter and I've been taking the [online certification and training courses](#) offered by MarketingExperiments. A couple of weeks ago I had a popular post at the [MarketingSherpa blog on email marketing optimization](#), looking at the process through the lens of email capture. This week I'm covering email messaging, the heart of email marketing.

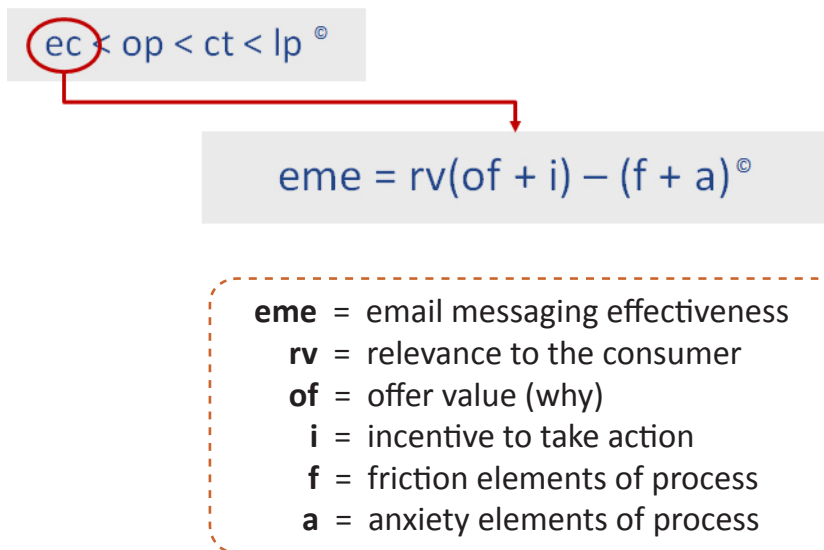
Here is the basic MarketingExperiments heuristic for email marketing optimization:



For this post we will be focused on the two middle elements, open rate and clickthrough.

And if you've already taken our course on email marketing optimization, this heuristic will also be familiar:

### Email Messaging Optimization Heuristic



This formula is applied to each of the elements in the first heuristic, and it is the key to understanding the psychology of your target audience.

#### Defining relevance

Take a look at the circled area in the above chart. Both the offer relevance and incentive relevance are on the positive side of the ledger, and if they are done correctly both are working for you in achieving email opens and clickthroughs to the landing page.

What is relevance? Relevance is the compatibility between the email message and the recipient's motivations. It can be based on both internal motivations (e.g. demographics, shopping habits) of the recipient and external events (e.g., seasonality, limited-time offer) surrounding the recipient. Essentially, relevance is showing up with the right offer at the right time.

To further define the two specific types of relevance in the heuristic, the offer relevance is the value you promise in your email in exchange for a click and the incentive relevance is an appealing element introduced in your email to achieve a desired action.

Keeping the email message simple and direct helps to optimize relevance:

- Use specific quantitative language, not fuzzy qualitative language, in both the subject line (to inspire an open) and body of the email message (to inspire clickthrough).
- Don't send a webpage as the body of the email. It may be tempting from a design standpoint with HTML email messages, but keep the email message simple. The goal is a clickthrough to the landing page. Which leads directly to the next bullet point ...
- Don't oversell in the email. The goal is to get a clickthrough to the landing page, not make your entire sales pitch. Your offer in the email message is the additional information the recipient will get in exchange for a click.

## The negatives

Now let's take a look at the other side of the ledger and the elements in the heuristic that are working against your success.

Friction is psychological resistance to a given element in the email. Three elements contribute to friction in email messages: length, difficulty and tone in the email body content.

Anxiety is psychological concern stimulated by a given element in the email process, and includes both legitimate concern and perception of concern. Both types of concern need to be addressed because if you don't account for the perception of anxiety, you will not achieve fully optimized results. In fact your goal should be to remove all anxiety from your email message.

Friction should be approached a little differently. According to our testing, reducing friction offers a very high return on those efforts and is one of the most effective ways to increase conversion. Keep in mind that some friction is necessary.

Requesting an email open and a clickthrough to the landing page is an element of friction, so for optimization purposes you want to reduce friction to the absolute minimum. The incentive (discussed above) can then remove the last bit of friction resistance to the offer.

## Learning to fish

When optimizing email messaging, take the time to think about each element from offer and incentive relevance to friction and anxiety, and remember there are no "best practices" that you can apply over and over again to achieve email message optimization. I like to think of the Chinese proverb, "Give someone a fish and you've fed them for a day. Teach them to fish and you've fed them for life."

Learning about best practices is similar to being handed a fish. If you don't eat it (use the best practices) immediately, it's going to go bad. Learning the building blocks of email marketing optimization is similar to learning how to fish. You can lean on that knowledge every day to catch a new fish — or make an email marketing campaign even better.

## Related resources

[MarketingExperiments Online Training and Certification Courses](#)

[MarketingExperiments Email Marketing Course](#)

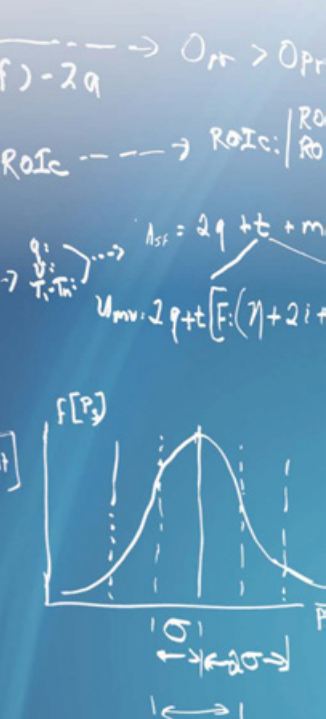
[Internet Marketing for Beginners: Email marketing optimization 101](#)

[Ten Numbers Every Email Marketer Should Commit to Memory](#)

[Email Marketing: "I am not dead yet"](#)

[MarketingSherpa Email Awards 2011](#)

[MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2011](#)



# Internet Marketing for Beginners:

## Email marketing optimization 101 webinar strategy

If you are new to email marketing this post should provide a framework to build on, and if you're an experienced pro it never hurts to think about the basics every once in a while.

Let me tell you what this blog post – and optimization in general – is not about: it's not about a set of "best practices" rules that you follow time and time again to achieve the best possible outcome. What this blog post is about is taking a look at the basic series of priorities in email marketing that are critical to optimizing any campaign, and how to better understand the psychology of your target audience in order to make continuing improvements to any email marketing efforts.

As a new reporter at MarketingSherpa, I'm currently taking the [online certification and training courses](#) offered by our sister company, MarketingExperiments. The first course I'm taking is about [email marketing optimization](#). Here are a few beginner tips I've noticed...

### Why should I give you my email address?

What are the basic priorities in email marketing? MarketingExperiments has developed a simple heuristic that puts the four critical optimization categories in order of importance:

### Email Messaging Optimization Sequence:

$$ec < op < ct < lp^{\circ}$$

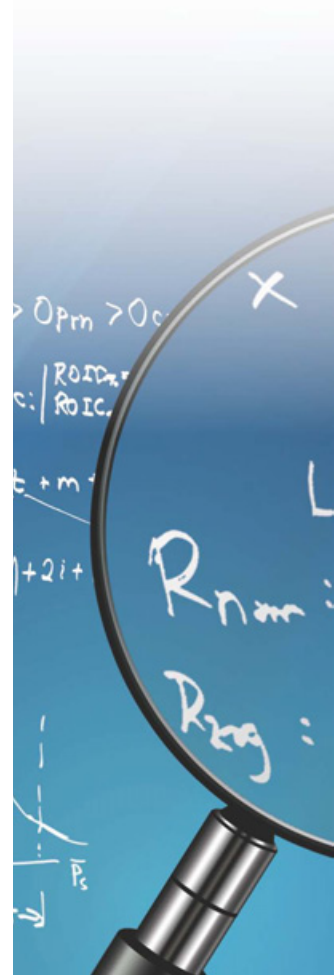
**ec** = Email Capture (Channel factor)  
**op** = Open Rate  
**ct** = Clickthrough  
**i** = Landing Page (Presentation factory)

The order of importance is probably pretty obvious – if you don't capture an email address there's no message to be opened. If the message isn't opened there's no possibility of clickthrough, and if there's no clickthrough then the landing page won't get visited.



by David Kirkpatrick,  
Reporter

October 24th, 2010



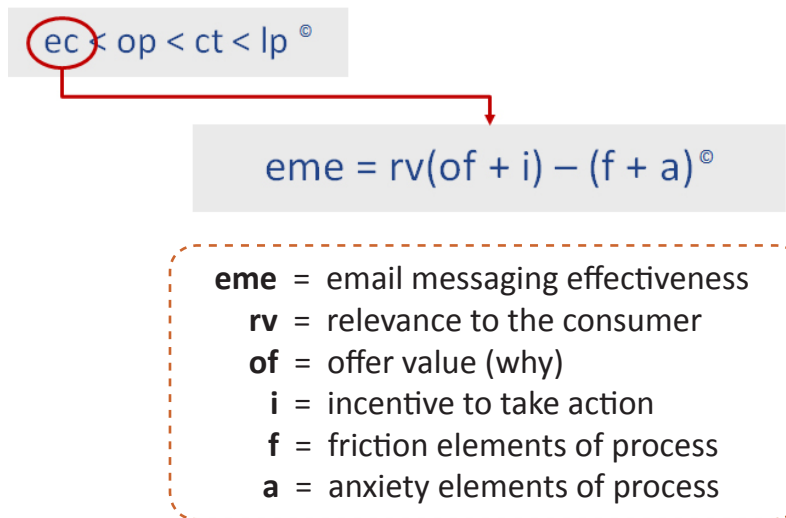


All of this leads to the single biggest issue in email marketing right now – email capture has become very difficult. The people in front of the other computer screen have become very wary about spam and privacy, and very reluctantly give out their email address.

I know this. In fact I have more than one free Web-based email address, and I bet you are no different. The same goes for the people we're trying to reach.

### The value prop of an email capture form

#### Email Messaging Optimization Heuristic



MarketingExperiments has developed a second heuristic that is applied to each of the four categories listed above:

Don't be put off by the possibly complex-looking formula. This heuristic is the key to understanding the psychology of your target audience. Since email capture has become something of an email marketing problem, and is the most important step in any campaign, let's look at this formula through the email capture lens, but keep in mind it should be applied to all four critical categories.

For effective email capture (eme in this example) your audience needs to see two kinds of relevance – the offer and the incentive. The offer simply answers the “why” question, as in, “Why should I give my email address to this person/company/website?” and is the value you promise in exchange for the address. The incentive is just what it sounds like – an appealing element in the process that helps you get an email capture. Both offer relevance and incentive relevance, done correctly, are working for you.

On the other side of the ledger, and working against your success, are friction and anxiety. Friction is psychological resistance in your audience and anxiety is psychological concern. You want to remove any concern your audience might have about providing their email addresses, but friction is a little different because you need to have some friction.

Just asking for an email address is an element of friction, and if you don't ask for it, it's going to be pretty tough to get that address. What you want to do is minimize the resistance in your audience and remove any concern they might have.

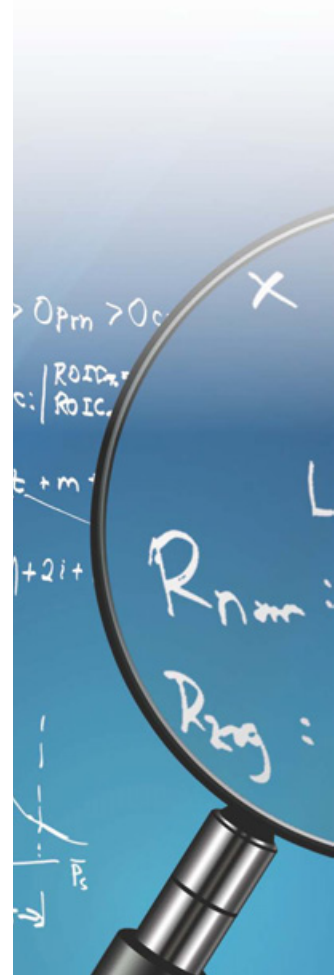
When you look at email marketing optimization in terms of four critical categories that can be broken down into a handful of elements shared by each category, it's obvious that no singular set of best practices rules will give you optimal results. But thinking about each element in each category, and repeating that process on a regular basis, will help you achieve continuing improvement. Now that's optimization.

### Related resources

[MarketingExperiments Online Training and Certification Courses](#)

[MarketingExperiments Email Marketing Course](#)

[Email Marketing: "I am not dead yet"](#)





# **SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING**



# Social Media Marketing: How enterprise-level social media managers handle negative sentiment



by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

November 3rd, 2010

At last week's [MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit in Boston](#), we had a very interesting panel of social media marketers sharing their experiences with everything from metrics to internally selling the business value of the practice.

One question that always interests me is...how should marketers deal with negative social media comments, postings, and the like? If you come across negative sentiment that is discovered during listening, or in general any type of negative blogs, blog comments, postings on Facebook, Twitter etc., how should you react?

Here at MECLABS, we follow the credo of [Transparent Marketing](#). Hey, we're not perfect and we don't have all the answers. We're always experimenting. And where we fall short, someone else might have a better idea.

At the expense of receiving a deluge of negative social media mentions, I like (clever Facebook pun intended) when we get some negativity coming our way. The overwhelming amount of social media attention we get is positive. When we get some negative feedback, it means professional marketers are passionately following our content.

And that's the other thing – its feedback. As I said, we're always experimenting and learning ourselves. We're also lucky to have a very savvy audience of experienced marketers. So those negative comments help us decide how to shape our content to most benefit our audience. As I've said before, our job is to help you do your job better. When you tell us what you don't need and what you do need, we get closer to hitting that mark.

(Of course, now that I've set myself up for all the negative comments, I also wanted to let you know that you can always [give me feedback in private as well.](#))

Enough from me, on to the experts from the [MarketingSherpa B2B Marketing Summit](#) that were kind enough to share their wisdom...

## Negative social media is a blessing and a curse

On one hand, it's important to ensure your brand is not denigrated unjustly; investigate the source to determine if it came from a customer, partner, competitor, etc.

In many cases we do nothing – it's sometimes the nature of the beast in social media. In other cases, we'll get a key blogger to post follow-up content that is also Tweeted and shared with our followers.

The upside is that it's a great opportunity to learn – about your customer's thoughts and opinions, how products are doing, what can be improved, and who is actually out there listening.

– [Alex Plant](#), Senior Social Media Guy at [NetApp](#)

## Assess, respond, integrate

Negative social media activity is a natural outcome of any effective social media program because it often suggests that the audience is listening and taking the time to offer their feedback and ideas. Even when there are negative outcomes, it is often a good opportunity for the organization to respond and address the issues being surfaced through social. In reality, the detractors are likely to be

expressing their negative opinions even without the social channel so there is a need to look at the patterns of information to determine the best nature of the response.

The US Air Force has created and shared a [social media triage program](#) that may provide a good example of a programmatic way to think through possible actions and outcomes and manage negative social responsibly. It is important to remember that not all negative feedback is bad, and it may provide insight into opportunities to improve customer satisfaction over time. In many cases the most vocal opponents can be turned into evangelists when managed effectively.

There are three steps that I recommend:

- **Assess the situation** – Is it an isolated event or indicative of a pattern or customer need? In both cases, it is best practice to respond to the detractor with either additional information, understanding or at the least acknowledging what they have to say. Unless the posting or social comment is slander, it is better to leave it out there and demonstrate a commitment to listening than it is to issue a take-down effort. In the event it is slanderous, do bring in legal counsel ASAP. In fact, it is better to involve them early in the formation of a social triage plan than wait for an adverse event. Be sure to assess how the negative feedback ties into your social strategy in order to identify if it is a cause worth fighting. Here is a [social strategy map](#) by Leader Networks that may help solidify the overarching strategic framework.
- **Respond authentically and formally** – It is always best to have a dedicated/trained staff member handle responses – especially in the case of large enterprise where, due to the sheer number of customers, there is bound to be regular detractors. This keeps information flow regular and consistent which is a lifeblood of good customer care. By issuing well vetted responses and pointing detractors back to any documented

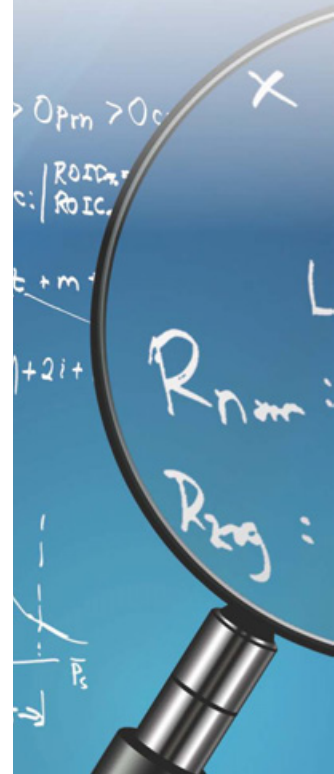
information (such as user manuals in the case of technology companies, or community forums that talk about new features or products forthcoming) the issues are often resolved through education.

- **Integrate the social channel into your CRM solution** – Too often marketing is placed in the position of playing the “voice of the customer” role but the back-end systems are not designed to capture and integrate the social channel so that the information can be used strategically. However, when social media channels (e.g. customer Twitter handles, etc.) are integrated into the CRM system, marketing and operations can utilize the information being offered – even the negative feedback – in context. Also, this allows the connection between customer information and social media to be used effectively. Think how powerful it is to know if a key client is engaged in social sharing of negative or positive positions about your company or product! This is much more effective than handling the social channel as an isolated event.

Orbitz is a company that does a great job of connecting customer data to the social channel. I once had a situation with Orbitz that I tweeted a negative comment about. I was frustrated with a travel situation. Within second they called me to try to resolve the situation! As an influential blogger and frequent traveler (good customer), they connected their CRM dots and realized that I needed to be helped. While my situation wasn't resolved, I was delighted with their customer engagement model and have become even more loyal because of it!

– [Vanessa DiMauro](#), CEO of [Leader Networks](#)  
**Channel that passion**

In general, the wisdom that an unhappy customer can be turned into a very happy customer still holds true. After all, a person participating in a “negative social media activity” is passionate enough to make the effort to voice their dissatisfaction. Obviously they care.



Negative sentiment is an opportunity to either improve a product or service, or to help correct the (hopefully incorrect) public perception by adjusting a company's messaging. Negative sentiment can simply be based upon a lack of information in the market. It should be seen as an opportunity, definitely not swept under the carpet, and responded to publicly where possible (while 1:1 conversations in addition can make sense, too).

If listening finds that your company has a low share of voice in your market, one strategy could be to see what your competitors are doing that you are not doing, e.g. offer certain types of blogs or activity in communities where your target audience is active. Again, this is an opportunity to improve, in this case your marketing and branding strategy. Look at it as a free "focus group" and testing. The important thing is to listen so you can make corrections and not miss what people are saying about you.

– [Natascha Thomson](#), Senior Director of Social Media Audience Marketing at [SAP](#)

## Related resources

[B2B Marketing Summit Wrap-up: Quick takeaways distilled from 478 marketers on lead nurturing, social media marketing, and more](#)

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

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

[Transparent Marketing and Social Media: Twitter and Facebook are the new Woodward and Bernstein](#)

[Community Managers in Social Media](#)



# Social Marketing: Twitter contest boosts followers 43%

Social media marketing often involves interacting with your audience and giving it what it wants — whether it wants high quality content, customer service or something else. Consistently meeting these goals helps build a following on the networks.

Neil Bhapkar, Online Marketing Manager, [Kobo](#), and his team had followings on Facebook and Twitter, but wanted to boost Twitter followers last August. The marketing team at the global e-book retailer had experimented with a Twitter contest earlier in the year, and wanted to give it another shot with a heavier marketing push.

Kobo had about 4,600 Twitter followers at the time. Although Bhapkar did not consider Twitter to be his team's most impactful channel, he felt that holding a contest on the network could help boost followers while further engaging Kobo's online audience.

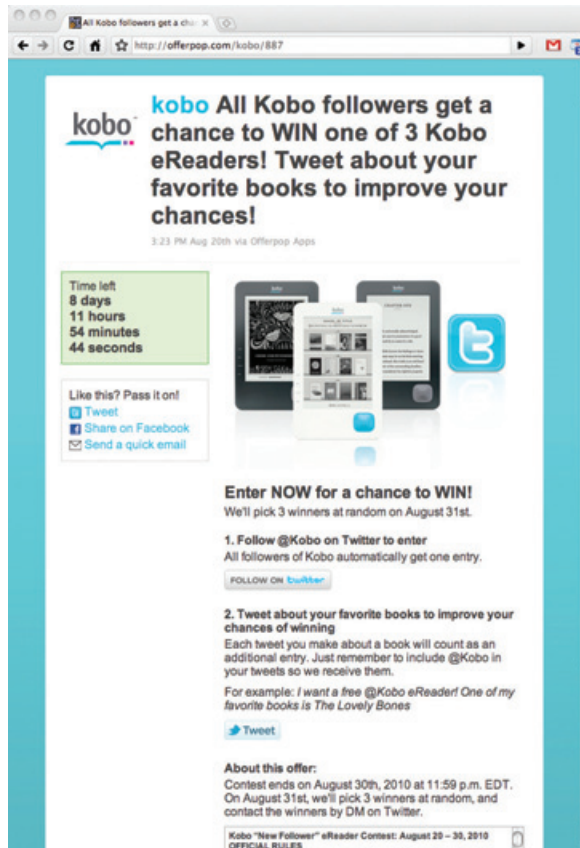
"I would call it efficient because it's not overly costly," Bhapkar says. "It's a unique way to push the envelope in how we're engaging with our customers and getting them to spread the word about Kobo."

## Promote contest through multiple channels

The team designed a contest to give away three of Kobo's eReaders. People who followed Kobo received one entry into the contest. Additional entries could be received by tweeting a book recommendation with the @Kobo tag. For example:

"My favorite books is Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain @Kobo"

The team explained these rules on a contest landing page (pictured here). The page also included:



- Picture of the eReaders
- Countdown clock
- Links to share the landing page via Twitter, Facebook or email
- Official contest rules.

The contest lasted 10 days, during which the team promoted the contest in the following channels:

- Email

Just a few hours after announcing the campaign on Twitter, the team sent an email to its house list describing the rules and linking to the landing page. This was the only email sent to its list for the effort. The team's parent company, Indigo Books & Music, also added a button in its email newsletter linked to the contest landing page.



by Adam T. Sutton,  
Senior Reporter  
December 7th, 2010



### - Homepage banner

The team posted a large image on its homepage, just below the fold, mentioning the campaign and linking to the landing page.

### - Social media

The team launched the contest on Twitter using software from [Offerpop](#), through which they also monitored its progress. The team reminded Twitter followers about the contest about five times over the 10-day span.

“Whenever the launch happens, there’s a first burst of activity and then it flattens,” Bhapkar says. “The best way to reinvigorate it is by tweeting to our follower base to remind them of what is happening.”

The team also mentioned the contests to its Facebook followers.

### - Paid search

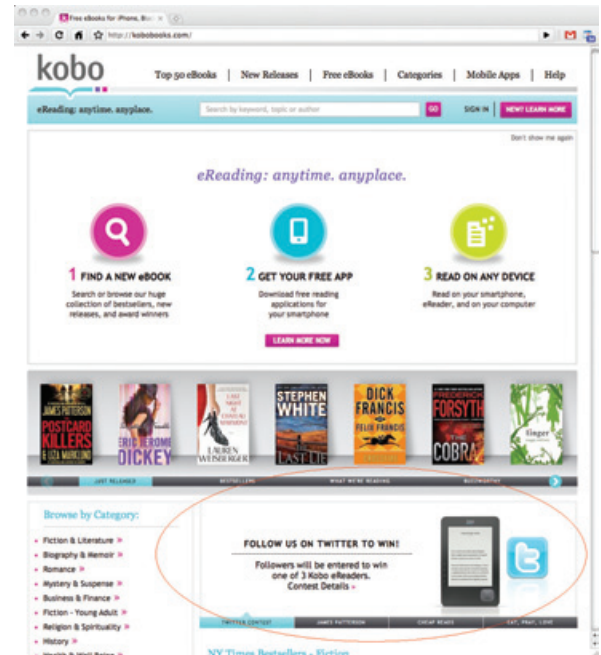
The team ran paid search advertising in Google for branded keywords such as “kobo ereader” and linked the ads to the contest landing page.

### More engagement from relevant offer

After 10 days, the team closed the contest, randomly picked three winners and reached out to them with direct Twitter messages. Results the team saw include:

- 43.5% increase in Twitter followers
- Reached about 500,000 Twitter users with tweets related to the campaign
- More engagement with Kobo’s audience

“It was surprising how engaged some of the most active followers were. Some people didn’t stop at having just one recommendation or two. They actually had double digits; 10, 20. They were really interested in pushing their recommendations...not just in spurts but throughout the duration of the contest,” Bhapkar says.



By crafting an offer sure to interest Kobo’s followers and by encouraging more engagement, the team concentrated more energy into its Twitter campaign and saw an appreciable lift in followers. Due to its low cost, the campaign proved to be an efficient means for increasing Kobo’s following online, Bhapkar says.

### Related resources

[Social Marketing ROAD Map Handbook](#)

[Social Media Marketing Benchmark Report](#)

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

# Social Media Marketing: Interview

## with Kodak's Chief Listening Officer

I read print publications pretty much the same way that I read digital media – keywords constantly pop out at me and help me decide whether an article is worth my time or not. So, I was flipping through BtoB Magazine, past the usual suspects...online ad spending, digital media, marketing automation...and then, a truly novel grouping of words stuck out to me – Chief Listening Officer.

That title was appended to Beth LaPierre of [Kodak](#). On [her Twitter profile](#), she describes herself as “Air traffic controller + advocate for the masses.” I’m a big fan of using social media for listening and anyone who advocates for their audience, so I just had to find out more. And Beth was kind enough to answer a few questions...

**I’m so intrigued by your title. I have some preconceived notions about what your responsibilities might be, but I’d like to hear it straight from you. So, Beth, what exactly is a Chief Listening Officer?**

*Beth LaPierre:* Simply put, a CLO is something of an Air Traffic Controller. Just as an Air Traffic Controller facilitates the safe and efficient flow of air traffic, I am responsible for the safe and efficient flow of social media data. I manage the strategy, processes and technologies to handle more than 300,000 new mentions of “Kodak” each month for both our consumer and B2B businesses.

**What specifically are you listening for and how does Kodak use that information?**

*BL:* For the most part, my role supports three main listening functions:

**Social intelligence** – This data is used to drive product innovation, monitor sentiment and inform marketing and PR strategy.

**Brand communications** – When we launched our [SoKodak](#) campaign in September, we could tell right away that it resonated with consumers by looking at social media data. It’s hard to get that from a cable box. We are able to tell very quickly whether or not an ad campaign or PR initiative will be successful.

**Customer experience** – Kodak’s owned media channels on [YouTube](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) are also becoming a medium for customers and fans to contact us for help or to ask questions. Kodak’s customers are at the heart of every listening function.

**What are some triggers that you hear that alert you to engage in conversation and respond?**

*BL:* More often than not, Kodak employees are the trigger. Each product category has an incredible dedicated team; they live, eat and breath this stuff. Product teams keep an eye on relevant online spaces and will even engage themselves.

For example, Kodak Video Camera Marketing Manager David Snook, vlogs as [Vlogger Dude](#) to understand how consumers actually use our video cameras.

Social Intel also helps with Risk Mitigation and reputation management. When a Florida news site falsely reported we had pulled our advertising from a popular NickTeen show, we immediately went to work. Fortunately, our internal PR teams are incredibly social-savvy and understand the immediacy of social engagement. With a few rules of engagement in place, I identified and reached out to influential fan blogs, Twitter users and even the show’s Executive Producer. I sent them personal messages to let them know it was just a planned break in the media schedule and that we’d be running spots the following week. They then let their fans know what was going on. This is much



by Daniel Burstein,  
Director of Editorial  
Content

December 13th, 2010

more productive than personally responding to hundreds of users. Plus, it's coming from a source that they trust.

**Kodak must see a lot of value in social media monitoring to put this position in the C-suite. If I put you on the spot and made you sell this idea to other CEOs, what is the elevator pitch for creating this position in other companies?**

BL: Recently, Dana Anderson from Kraft Foods said, "Should you do social media? That's like someone asking if they should buy a lightbulb after electricity was invented." I think this is the most brilliant social media quote to date. Companies, organizations and brands spend millions on business research. Take 10% of that and dedicate it to Social Intelligence. Traditional market research (think Chicago hotel conference room with bad coffee and soggy sandwiches) often takes a rear-view approach. Was our marketing campaign/product launch/busy season a success? Did we choose the right market for XYZ product? What do our customers like about XYZ product? Social intelligence is much more forward looking.

It's all about the surprises, the needles in the haystack you find when you're not even looking for needles. I love it when people say "What was your research objective?" It's not about research objectives, it's about business goals. Only this time, it's personal. When was the last time you (talking to the CEO here) sat down with a customer and asked them to talk a little bit about how they use your product/service?

**What tips would you give to other marketers to help them improve their social media monitoring?**

- **Evaluate social media tools (software, agencies, vendors) only after you've identified your audience, your objectives and metrics for success.** Write it all down on a sheet of paper and use it as your RFP.
- **Take a design class.** Excel charts and PowerPoint presentations are fine, but if you can pull your data into Illustrator or Photoshop, you're much more likely to get your point across. Good old HTML doesn't

hurt either.

- **Don't take it personally.** If you're out there looking for people who are saying things about you, you're going to find sometimes they're not saying nice things. Don't worry, it's not the end of the world, it's an opportunity.

## Recommended resources

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

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

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

[Always Integrate Social Marketing?](#)

[New MarketingSherpa Inbound Marketing Newsletter](#)



# Facebook Marketing in Six Steps:

## How to successfully manage your fan page

So, you have a Facebook Page for your business. Check! You even have a couple of people “liking” it already (mostly friends and family). Check! It might also have your blog posts or website updates automatically appear on its wall. Great! But what now? Why aren’t your revenue charts spiking to the ceiling?! There is an update after an update, but is there actually anyone there? No response, no interaction – what’s the point then?

Managing a Facebook Fan Page takes more than that. The good news is that you can truly build a community of **loyal fans converting to loyal customers** over time. The best part is that it does not have to take most of your day (or budget, if you are considering hiring a social media manager to deal with it for you).

In fact, after making yourself familiar with few basic rules and getting the feel for your Facebook audience (since every industry and offer or product you want to promote is totally different), half an hour of daily Facebook management is all you need to maintain the flow and eventually stimulate conversion.

### 1. Give Them Value

No doubt, Facebook is the hottest social media channel. No marketer can ignore its 500+ million active monthly users around the globe, with the average user checking it daily (well, some four to 10 times a day, to the horror of their employers!). Nevertheless, **all “Facebookers” want to do there is:**

- Be nosy and up-to-date on what others are doing
- Share their own opinions, memories and simply show off
- Be on top of great offers around their needs or interests and again – **show others what they like, believe in and want to be part of.**

As much as you would like to contribute to your fan’s arrival of a new puppy, baby shower news or their latest weekend getaway, leave

it to them or their friends and concentrate on **giving what you specialize in** instead. So, whether you are a local organic farmer delivering produce to their door or a national fashion guru, make your **value proposition stand out** in a friendly way (think of Facebook being an informal version of your website). “c.” is where you want to catch them. You have to be where they hang out, let them know about your presence and **make them hang out on your wall** or discussion tab!

For our cheerful organic farm owner, talk about healthy recipes, post pictures of your happy pigs living a dream life, eating beets and rolling in mud. Educate them about natural pesticides and how they could turn their kids’ lunch box into an attractive piece of edible health (using sweet potatoes from your upcoming delivery, of course).

The well-known designer is in a slightly better position, since most of his 140,000 fans probably found him on their own. But it doesn’t mean he can ditch all Facebook activities and keep fascinating the world with his latest trends. These trends have to be mirrored on his Facebook Fan page with updates and photos of runways and celebrities wearing the so-wanted sparkly leggings.

Make people **want to join your page** because there will be something for them. Give them a great reason to keep visiting often and checking each update. Don’t worry about selling yet. If you start by promoting your product/service at the beginning, you might start losing fans. If you’re a landscaping company in Georgia, don’t talk about your reduced spring service (yet). Rather, share tips on how to take care of region-specific plants, show examples of beautiful ponds (that you’ve installed, with links to the testimonials on your website) and how to set up a filter or what type of fish could flap their fins there.



by Zuzia Soldenhoff-Thorpe,  
Research Analyst  
December 10th, 2010



Promote yourself indirectly, share your knowledge and experience first. You might even consider naming your Facebook Fan Page “I Love Flowers” instead of “Jessica’s Flowers of Brooklyn”. **People want to join something that identifies them**, relates to their passions and interests, and shows their friends what they support.

## 2. Engage:

This is the key piece of any social media marketing strategy. A **two-way conversation** is what you need on your Fan Page’s wall instead of broadcasting and selling, or even just posting updates that do not involve the readers.

Posts in a form of questions are a great way to **stimulate discussion**. Perhaps some of your fans read everything you write, but update after update will not strengthen the bond. Show interest in their opinion and feedback, refer to them by asking questions.

A great example is the Facebook Fan Page of a small mixed martial arts gear company, with a little over 1,000 fans. Whenever they post the recent blog post’s link, a video, or link to a recent fight review, there is not much engagement, even though people do read them. There is just no reason for anyone’s involvement:



On the other side, any time a question is asked, they get tons of comments and likes from and between the fans within minutes:



And, of course, to make it a two-way conversation, you have to be the one involved in that discussion as well. This leads to the next point.



**3. Interact:**

You definitely want interaction on your Fan Page; with an average of 130 friends per Facebook user, every time one of your fans makes a comment, “likes” anything, or is tagged in a post or image, all of his friends see it and might join it as well. Two easy rules to apply every time you are checking activity on your Fan Page:

- Respond to questions or concerns. Make it visible to everyone rather than sending a private message.
- “Like” and make comments, just as you want your fans to.

Facebook users like to know that there is a real person behind all that great content and that their opinions are valued.

**4. Test what people like**

As mentioned earlier, your Page has to be **tailored to your audience**. And, as with all kinds of marketing, it takes constant testing to determine what works best. Some of the most effective ways for you and your fans to get to know each other are to:

- Run **Contests**
- Test various **promotions and offers**

A lot of the magic happening all over Facebook, and the relationship-building, comes from the ability to interact (Have I mentioned that before?). Create a vibrant space with main focus on how your supporters can play an active part in sharing what you present.

**5. Inject Your Offer**

Finally! Isn't it what you were waiting for? Yes, you can share your best offers, products or services in between the non-branded posts, once you feel that there is a good number of fans, with great interactions present. Inject your offers slowly, **don't make your wall look like your online store**. Track your website's traffic with Facebook being the source and see which approach works best, if you're testing several of them.

**6. Promote & Monitor:**

Cross promote your page by placing the linkable Facebook logo or box on your blog, website and underneath your e-mail signature.

Measuring the performance of a Facebook Fan page is very limited to the number of likes, page views, daily interactions, active fans, post's impressions, etc. You might not be able to equate these interactions to dollars (unless you use specific promo codes exclusive to your Facebook fans, promoting a particular offer). Nevertheless, checking your Fan Page's insights on a weekly basis can help you determine what practices work best.

**Go and Get Them!**

Although I'm pretty sure you don't expect to monetize each of your fans by next Wednesday, you shouldn't get discouraged if you're not seeing a significant ROI increase as a direct result of your social media activities for weeks or even months. Rest assured, though, that many other, indirect elements are being built and getting stronger (brand awareness, relationship, trust, word of mouth). Facebook is a place for people to talk to each other – if you give them the reason to talk about you, they surely will!

*\*I have used the word “fan” throughout the post, even though Facebook had changed that term to “people who like” or “Likes”.*

**Related resources**

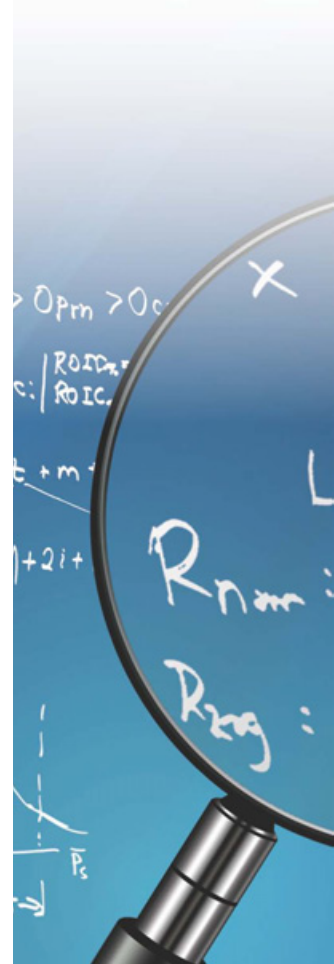
[Facebook Case Study: From 517 to 33,000 fans in two weeks \(plus media coverage\)](#)

[Social Media Case Study: Facebook plus integrated marketing helps raise \\$950,000](#)

[Improve Your Facebook Profile to Increase Consumer Interaction: 4 Tactics \(Member's Only\)](#)

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

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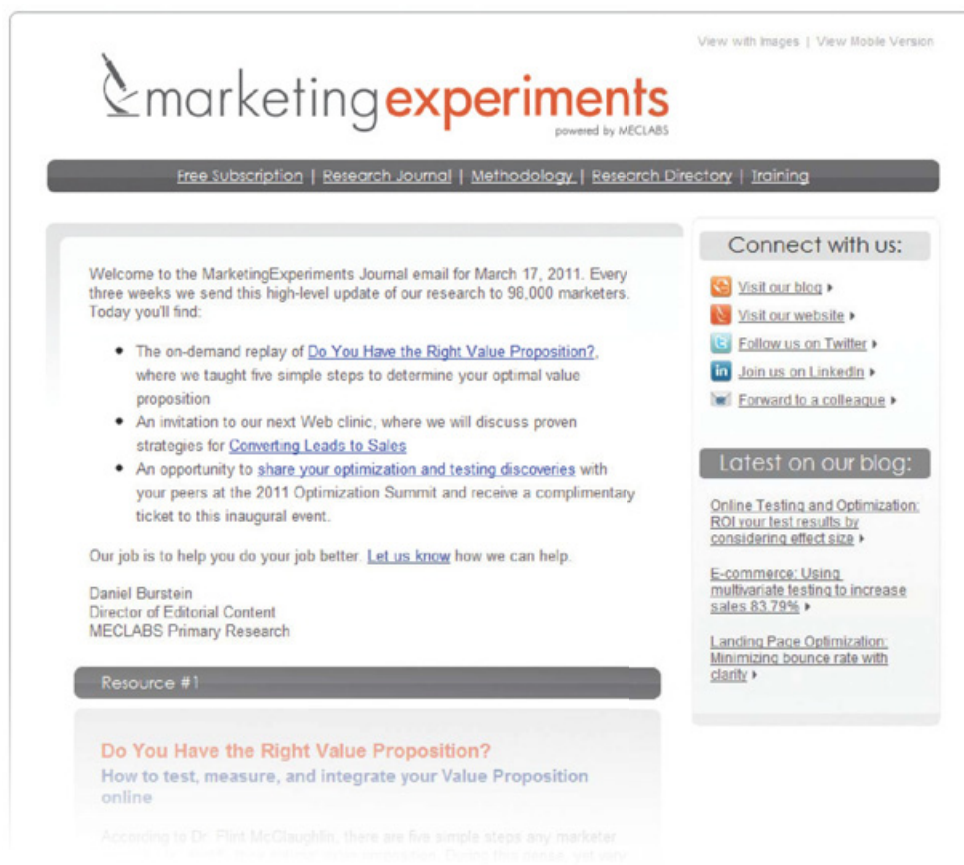
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# Call for Research Partners

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:

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- Website and landing page optimization
- Search marketing
- Online marketing (subscription, lead generation, and ecommerce)

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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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