



Special Report

Surprising Wins from 2009: Using insights from an uncertain economy to drive 302% growth

In 2009, many marketers had to fight harder to win and keep customers, often with shrinking budgets. Yet, some marketers found innovative ways to adjust. In other words, they not only fought harder, they fought smarter.

This issue of the MarketingExperiments Journal will take a look at four experiments that showcase how these innovative marketers – our research partners – used solid, data-driven approaches to gain unique insights into their customers and achieve outstanding results in these unsure times.

As 2010 approaches, it is more important than ever to research your customers' behavior, which may have changed drastically since they were last in the buying mood.

With that goal in mind, this issue features our top four takeaways from the hundreds of experiments we conducted in 2009 – illustrated by some of our most surprising results. From these experiments, you will gain ideas for real-world applications to help you grab the most from 2010's opportunities.

1. WHEN DEMAND IS SOFT, MAKE YOUR VALUE ROCK SOLID.

Making a sale or generating a lead is a matter of trust. But in 2009, customers were more skeptical than ever. And who can blame them? Even the largest financial institutions and safest investments suddenly seemed precarious.

To overcome that anxiety, the clarity of your value proposition is paramount. In test after test last year, we saw how simple value proposition changes led to impressive results. Here is a look at one such experiment...

Experiment #1



Experiment ID: *(Protected)*

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: 1291



Research Notes:

Background: The Research Partner provides end-to-end marketing 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?

Approach: A/B split test that focused on increasing overall communication of the value proposition.

In this industry, leads are quite valuable. Yet small and medium businesses, like most customers in 2009, were increasingly hesitant to sign up for yet another sales call. Here's how the research partner was generating leads...

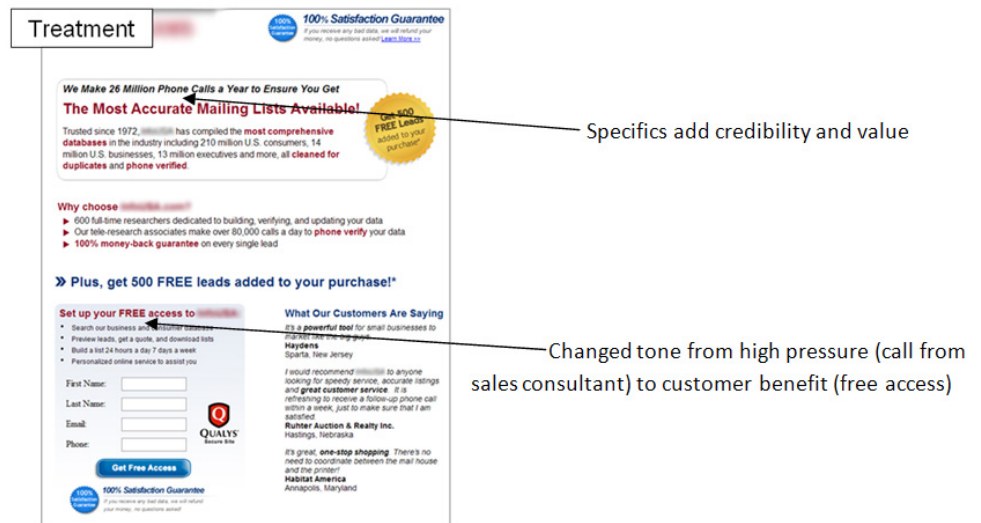
Control:

A screenshot of a landing page for a business lead generation service. The page has a light blue header with a "Control" label in a box. The main content area is white with blue and red accents. It features a large headline "Searching for the Most Accurate Mailing Lists? Your Hunt is Over!" and a sub-headline "Get 500 Free Leads Today with Qualifying Purchase". Below this is a form with fields for First Name, Last Name, Company Name, Email Address, and Phone Number. A red button labeled "Click Here" is positioned below the form. To the right of the form, there is a section titled "Why Should You Market Today?" with a video player icon. Below the video player, there is a section titled "Why Choose [Company Name]?" with a list of bullet points: "Safe & Secure online shopping", "Expert advice to help you succeed", "Privacy & Do Not Call compliant", "Free counts & quotes", and "Free Business Resource Center". At the bottom of the page, there is a disclaimer: "Disclaimer: Receive 500 FREE leads with your minimum purchase of 2,000 business leads or 4,000 consumer leads. Offer valid one per customer." and a "Privacy Policy" link.

After analyzing this page, we focused on a few key elements that warranted further testing. The headlines and call to action might not have clearly communicated the value of this offer in a credible way. Much of that value was getting lost in either the video or copy that is out of the main eyepath.

We wanted to change the tone as well. For example, the “you will be contacted by...” line in the form might be a turnoff to 2009’s more hesitant customers. If someone is unsure about buying, they do not want to receive a call from a sales consultant.

Treatment:



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!

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**.

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!**

Set up your FREE access to [redacted]

- Search our business and consumer databases
- Preview leads, get a sample, 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

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 [redacted]

Hayden
Sparks, 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.

Ruiter Auction & Realty Inc.
Hastings, Nebraska

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

Habitat America
Annapolis, Maryland

In the treatment, we added key specifics (e.g., “26 Million Phone Calls”, “Trusted since 1972”, “210 million U.S. consumers”) that were previously buried in the page to add credibility and value to the headline. As opposed to a video that is perhaps distracting, we sought to highlight key statements and utilize images that draw attention to value.

Start with measurable value. Quantified statements build trust and credibility with hesitant customers.

Most importantly, the tone of the form and call to action were changed to better express the value to unsure customers. The focus was switched to the benefits customers receive from free access, as opposed to the pressure inherent in a call from a sales consultant. Let’s take a closer look at these two key changes...



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!

Start with measurable value. Quantified statements build trust and credibility with hesitant customers.

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](#)

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](#)

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



Rethink how you talk to customers and recognize that they have the power in the relationship. Customers are not interested in what they can do for you, but rather what you can do for them. In this unsure environment, it may be better to take baby steps in your lead nurturing process than pressuring customers into receiving a sales call.

We tested our ideas about strengthening and aligning value proposition to better reflect the customer's hesitancy in the current environment, and here's what we found...

Results:

	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	4.86%	-
Treatment 1	14.65%	201.3%

*An incentive is
not the same
as a value
proposition.*



What you need to understand: This research partner garnered more than three times as many leads by rethinking how to strengthen its value proposition. In this industry, where leads are so valuable, that is a huge number.

But the more memorable lesson was this: an incentive is not the same as a value proposition. Both pages had the same offer, but the control relied on that offer as its full value to the customer. The treatment created a rock-solid value proposition by adding quantifiable credibility and a benefit-focused tone.



What does this mean for you?

In an economy where customers are hesitant to buy, don't be satisfied with a mediocre value proposition. Sometimes it just comes down to clarity and location. We call this the "buried treasure effect." In many experiments, we did not craft an entirely new value proposition. We simply found information that was buried deep in a site, perhaps in the "About Us" section, and better clarified and positioned it to clearly communicate the value to spending-conscious customers.

Figure out what sets you apart from competitors and communicate it. The "pockets of ignorance" are disappearing. In the early Internet you may have been able to put an offer out there and customers would take your word for it. Those "pockets" are disappearing as customers are increasingly marketed to, and more savvy than ever at comparing your offerings to the competition.

Communicate your value with statements that are instantly credible. Use quantitative statements rather than qualitative ones. Add third-party credibility indicators. In 2009, customers were more skeptical so you must be more specific.

2. WHEN YOU HAVE FEWER RESOURCES, MAKE YOUR PAGE DO MORE.

Many marketing budgets took a hit in 2009, and marketers were asked to do more with less. But organizations that were successful found new ways to use their websites to not only gain greater efficiencies, but improve results as well. Your website may be the most overlooked member of your marketing team. Here's an experiment where a research partner made their website step up and deliver more...

Experiment #2



Experiment ID: *(Protected)*

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: 1238



Research Notes:

Background: The Research Partner is a provider of critical B2B information and insight.

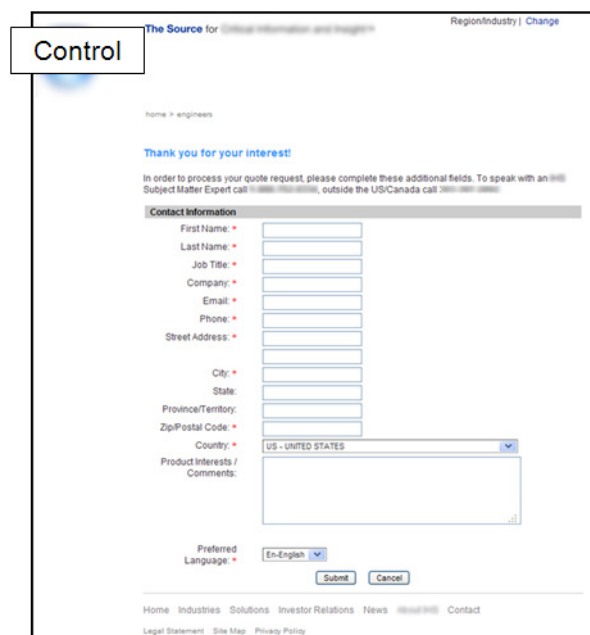
Goal: To increase the amount of sales-ready leads.

Primary research question: Which form process will generate the most sales-ready leads?

Approach: A/B split test of two different lead-generation processes.

To reduce the cost of sales force resources wasted fishing through leads, this research partner needed to generate higher quality, prequalified leads.

Control:



We implemented best practices such as clarifying the value proposition and reducing friction to create this optimized page. Through detailed testing we learned that these changes did increase leads, but they were lower-quality leads. Therefore, the sales force needed to do the same amount of work for smaller gains.

This is why we test. Best practices that may work for the majority of research partners do not work in every situation.

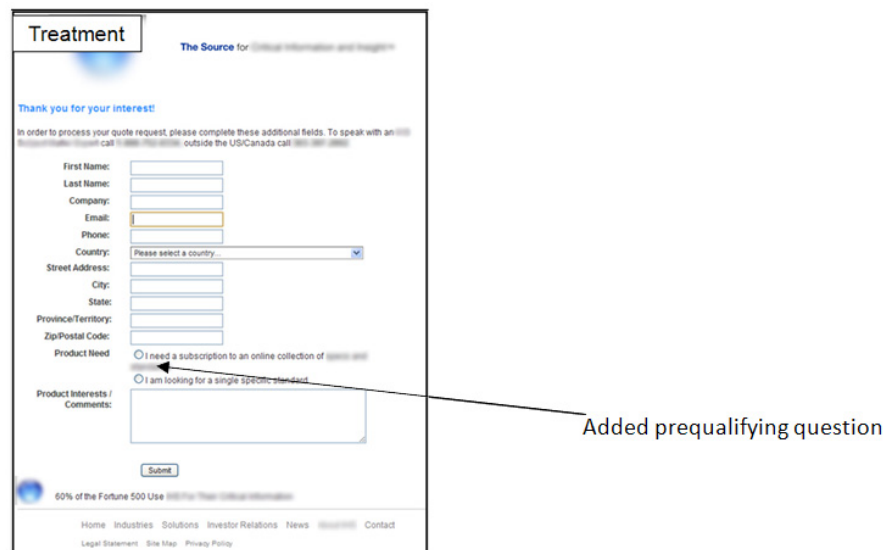
Design:

So we created a new test. After all, our ultimate goal is not just generating leads, but generating revenue. We needed a paradigm shift. The new test compared a treatment that increased friction with our previously optimized control. Instead of sending leads right to the sales force, we had the website do the work of prequalifying leads. The architecture of this test is below:



Treatment:

Here is a look at the treatment form where the qualifying question was added at the moment of interest:



The screenshot shows a form titled "Treatment" with the subtitle "The Source for critical information and insight". The form includes fields for First Name, Last Name, Company, Email, Phone, Country (a dropdown menu), Street Address, City, State, Province/Territory, and Zip/Postal Code. Below these fields, there are two radio button options: "I need a subscription to an online collection of [redacted]" and "I am looking for a single [redacted]". An arrow points to the second option with the text "Added prequalifying question". The form also has a "Submit" button and a footer with navigation links and a privacy policy link.

Treatment Path:

We had to change the site strategy from just generating leads to generating sales-ready leads. This may seem like a minor difference, but it helped us shift our paradigm and try a practice we usually shun – increasing friction



If prospects were just looking for a single product, they were sent to the online store. After all, they were likely ready to buy and did not need the sales force's help. Of course, the Research Partner would still market to them at a later date.

If they wanted a subscription to an online collection (a more complex buy) the lead was sent through to the sales force. Let's look at the results...

Results

	Sales Ready Leads	Relative Difference
Control	6.38%	-
Treatment 1	15.09%	136.6%



What you need to understand: By qualifying leads while prospect interest was at its highest, the treatment path was able to obtain more than twice as many sales-ready leads while reducing cost per acquisition.



To reach the research partner's goal, we had to change the site strategy from just generating leads to generating sales-ready leads. This may seem like a minor difference, but it helped us shift our paradigm and try a practice we usually shun – increasing friction . Since we were testing and would be sure of a result, we were willing to take that leap and see where it led us. Adding that simple step on the front end saved time and money in lead nurturing costs on the back end.

What does this mean for you?

Getting more qualified leads does not necessarily mean spending more money. Think out of the headcount box about where you qualify. Reconsider what part of the qualification process occurs on the web page. The more that happens on the web page, the more your sales force can focus on activities that your page can't.

Think beyond conversion rate. This shouldn't be your only indicator of performance. If you can get better quality leads, it may be worth a reduced quantity. It may also be worth using different forms for different segments of your audience. By testing, you can decide which approach will get you to your ultimate goal.

Test adding the friction of the qualification process at different points in the process. You may think adding friction is forbidden, but that is the benefit of testing – to find what works best for your site. Also, by asking qualifying questions when the motivation is high, as opposed to in a follow-up sales call, you are more likely to hone in on what your customers really want.

*We decided
to challenge
the model and
try something
completely
different.*

3. WHEN CUSTOMERS ARE OVERWHELMED, CHANGE YOUR FOCUS.

What are you focused on? Your product? Or the best way to communicate your product to your customer?

It may seem like splitting hairs, but you must remember that your customer probably does not care as deeply about your product as you do. And for good reason. You've probably seen research showing how the average customer is exposed to thousands of advertising messages a day. They are simply overwhelmed.

You likely do not have the resources to change their focus. However, by changing your focus, and testing ways you may not have previously considered to communicate your value proposition most clearly, you may be able to get them to act.

If you're testing and have yet to receive that gain, maybe it's time to try a completely new way of doing things. Here is an experiment where the research partner was willing to test an approach that many marketers consider forbidden...

Experiment #3



Experiment ID: *(Protected)*

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: 1243

Research Notes:

Background: The Research Partner is a consumer credit counseling service offering free debt consultation.

Goal: To increase the amount of free debt consultation sign-ups without additional traffic.

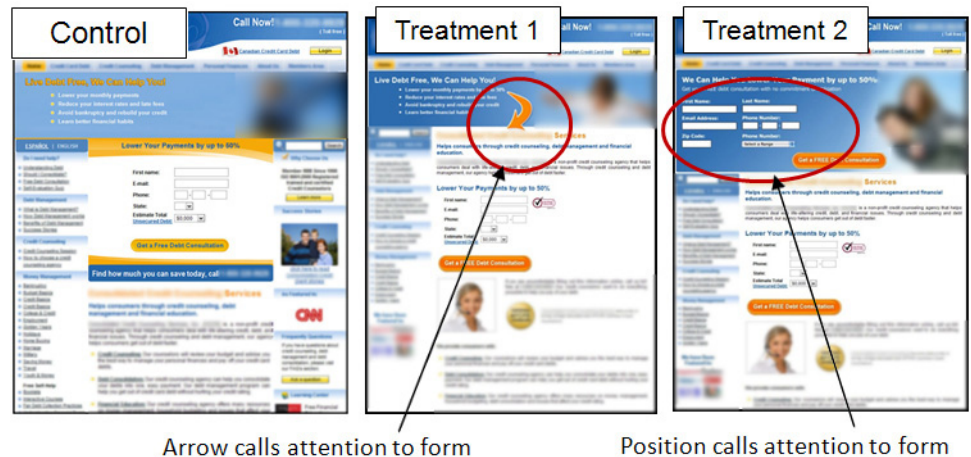
Primary research question: Which page will generate the highest completion rate?

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

This research partner has worked with us for a number of years, so we have a long history of testing with them. After running a significant number of tests, we were worried about becoming complacent and settling for the gains we had already achieved. We decided to challenge the model and try something completely different.

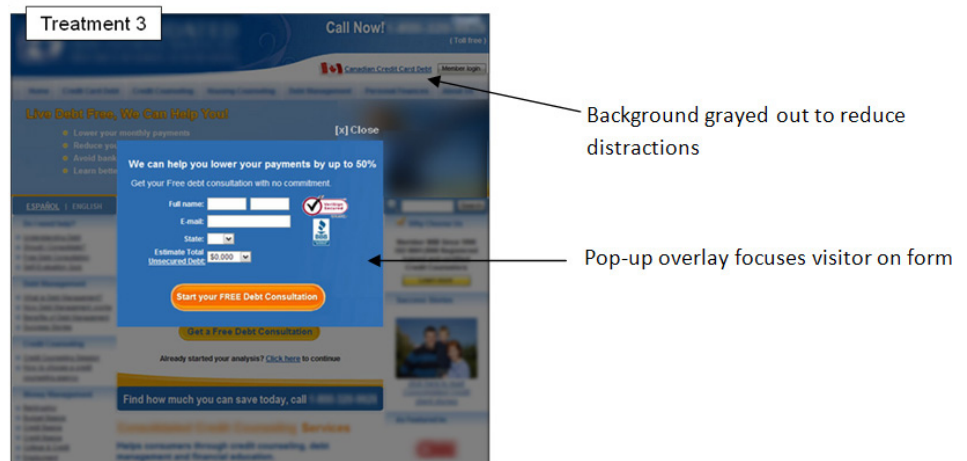


Control, Treatment 1, and Treatment 2:



In Treatments 1 and 2, we made small changes to bring more attention to the form. In previous experiments, we have found that small changes can dramatically increase results.

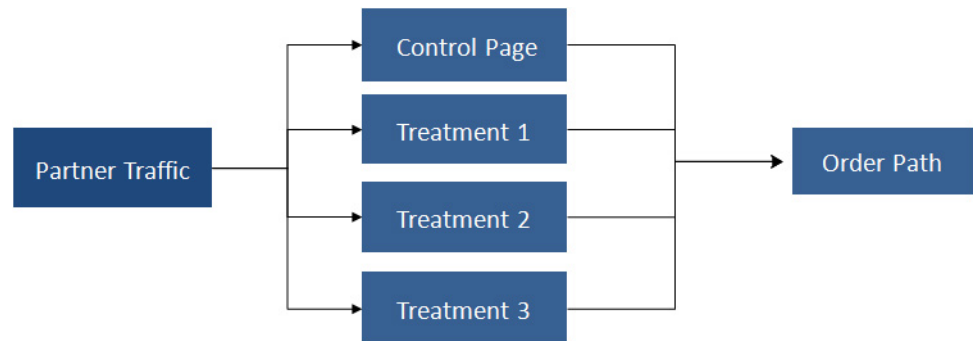
Treatment 3:



But for Treatment 3, we took a radically different strategy. We eliminated all distractions and focused visitors with a pop-up overlay that brought attention to the form. Since pop-ups generally have such a negative perception in customers' minds, we weren't sure of the results we would get. But, we figured it was worth testing against our two more traditional treatments.

Test Design:

The homepage test split traffic evenly across the four different versions.



Results:

	Conversion Rate	Relative Difference
Control	14.06%	-
Treatment 1	12.18%	-13.37%
Treatment 2	13.79%	-1.92%
Treatment 3	22.95%	63.19%

A tactic that most marketers (and customers) think of as quite negative actually increased conversions significantly.



What you need to understand: While the simple changes to draw more attention to the form caused a slight drop in conversion, the pop-up overlay version received 63% more completions than the control.

This experiment showed that it is important to test all assumptions. Simple changes to draw more attention to the form that have worked in past experiments actually drove down conversion. A tactic that most marketers (and customers) think of as quite negative actually increased conversions significantly.

Of course, pop-ups can be annoying. This pop-up probably worked because the value proposition was strong.

If it was simply used to grab attention with no thought put into the benefit to the customer, the tactic itself would have likely failed.

What does this mean for you?

Focus visitors to get them to complete your objective. This may take more effort than a few small graphical adjustments. So consider more radical strategies. And in so doing, change your own focus. Do not be afraid to challenge so-called “best practices.” Test something new like a pop-up overlay. When your current efforts to attract overwhelmed customers aren’t working, sometimes you must be bold and test a radically different approach.

When it comes to leads, decide what is more important to you – quantity or quality. Experiment 2 was an excellent example for how to increase the quality of your leads. And while Experiment 3 increased the quantity of leads, odds are they were less qualified. Decide which goal is more important to you, and optimize accordingly.

But, more importantly, test. Try new things. Try old things. Try different things with each segment. But you must test to truly know which modifications deliver. Something we have learned from our experiments in 2009, which we find every year, is there simply are no true “best practices.” You must find out what works for your site. The more you test, the more you know. And in online marketing, knowledge equals revenue.

4. WHEN IT MATTERS MOST, MEASURE WHAT MATTERS.

With web analytics, there are a proliferation of data points you can collect from clickthrough rates to bounce rates to time spent on a page. But at a time when you must justify your marketing budget more than ever, it is important to choose a measurement that most accurately reflects the impact your tests have on your ultimate bottom-line goal. And in so doing, you’ll be able to communicate to key leaders, whether they are CxOs, business unit leaders, or investors, the value of your online marketing efforts with a metric they are most interested in.

The following experiment is a great example of honing in on the metric that really tells the story...

Experiment #4



Experiment ID: *(Protected)*

Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library

Test Protocol Number: 1214

Research Notes:

Background: The Research Partner is a leading software provider.

Goal: To increase total leads.

Primary research question: Which process will generate the most leads?

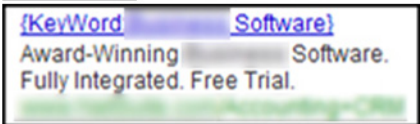
Approach: Radical redesign of the complete lead-generation process.

Software is a very competitive market. Therefore, the keywords this research partner needed for paid search were quite expensive. So it was very important to maximize the return from each keyword.

PPC Ads:

We started this experiment with a competitive analysis. We learned that other PPC ads in the same space were very similar and there was no real differentiation.

From this analysis, we decided to test strengthening the value proposition with quantifiable, fact-based claims to stand out from the competition.

Control	Treatment
 The control ad features a blue header with the text "{Keyword} Software". Below this, in black text, it says "Award-Winning Software. Fully Integrated. Free Trial." The background is white with a thin blue border.	 The treatment ad features a blue header with the text "Software Suite". Below this, in black text, it says "#1 On-Demand. 6459+ World Clients Award-Winning Solution. Free Trial". The background is white with a thin blue border.



By strengthening the communication of the value proposition, **the new PPC ad obtained 21% more clicks.**

Landing Pages:

Once we changed the PPC ads, it was essential to change the landing page as well. There must be continuity and congruence between the ad that drives prospects to a landing page and what that landing page offers. If the landing page does not pay off the ad, prospects will quickly bounce.



At first glance, there is not a huge difference between the control and treatment. But if you look closely, you will see the treatment carries through the same theme by referencing the Research Partner's position in the marketplace (#1) as well as credibility indicators that back up the claims from the ad – referencing the number of customers as well as awards it has won.

By optimizing the landing page with relevance to the PPC ad, a clearer eyepath, a stronger value proposition, and an emphasized call-to-action, **the treatment obtained 54% more clicks.**

Forms:

Traditionally, we look at conversion as being from the landing page to the submission page. But to increase total leads, the form was critical. Again, we focused on the continuity and congruence of the entire sequence of events, from the prospect first seeing the PPC ad to eventually filling out the lead-generation form.



By optimizing the form with relevance to the landing page, customer testimonials, a stronger value proposition, and an emphasized call-to-action, **the new form obtained 97% more submissions.**

Control

Get Your Free Trial of [Software Suite] Now

Experience for yourself how [Software Suite] can help you run [Business Type] better.

Just enter your information below. A [Software Suite] representative will respond promptly to give you details for your trial.

Fields marked with an * are required.

First Name*
Last Name*
E-mail address*
Phone number*

Company Name*
Zip/Postal Code*
Contact Role*
Country*
Number of employees*
Type of business*
How did you hear about us?

Are you working with a [Software Suite] Solution Provider?
If yes, what is the Solution Provider's name? (if known)
Referral code (if known)

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

[Get Free Trial Now](#)

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

Treatment

The World's #1 On-Demand [Software Suite] Software

Almost there! To begin your **FREE TRIAL** of [Software Suite], please complete the simple questionnaire below:

First Name
Last Name
Company Name
E-mail Address
Phone Number
Postal Code
Country

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

Are you working with a [Software Suite] Solution Provider?
If yes, I would like to receive information from [Software Suite].

Start Your Free Trial of [Software Suite]

[FREE TRIAL](#)

[Software Suite] gives you unprecedented control of your company.

"We saved \$1 Million by switching to [Software Suite] from [Previous Software], and reduced costs from 3% of revenue to 0.5%!"

"We save more than \$200,000 annually in transaction costs and \$75,000 per year in IT costs!"

Results:

*Do not optimize
in a vacuum.*

Metric	Control	Treatment	Relative Difference
Landing Page Clickthrough	7.17%	11.06%	54.26%
Form Completion	15.84%	31.25%	97.27%
Total Conversion	1.14%	3.46%	204.31%



What you need to understand: By creating PPC ads that differentiated the research partner from the competition, and then ensuring the entire process was consistent in the mind of the prospect, this experiment more than tripled the conversion from landing page to lead.

But then we were left asking ourselves, what do these numbers really mean to the bottom line? Sometimes the primary question needs to be expanded to ensure your key performance indicator (KPI) truly reflects the result that is the most meaningful. So we conducted a revenue and profit analysis on the data, and found that this experiment generated 268% more revenue **and a projected profit difference of 302%**.

It was important to measure each step of conversion along the way. By doing so, we ensured every step of the process was delivering. For example, sometimes companies overlook the importance of the form itself in conversion.

Revenue and profit were the most important numbers to look at, due to the cost of the expensive keywords in the PPC ads. When we looked at these statistics, we found an even greater gain. But had we found that the increase in conversion was not driving profit, this would have been important information as well. It would have meant that the cost of the ads was not warranted even at these improved conversion rates.



Finding your proper metric of success is critical to realizing that success. The more you can tie your tests to the numbers you are really after, such as revenue and profit, the more assured you can be that the data you garner from your tests will really impact your end goal – in most cases, the bottom line.

What does this all mean to you?

All metrics are not equal. It is true that each metric can give you different insights into your page's effectiveness, but some are more valuable than others. That is why it is so important to craft the KPI that is most relevant to your overall goals. Because revenue and profit often matter most. So make sure you can quantify your results in dollars and cents.

OVERALL LESSONS FROM 2009

In our November 11th web clinic, we gave our presenters an opportunity to look back at 2009 and comment on their biggest overall lesson from conducting experiments with our research partners and training marketers in our certification classes...

“Challenge the model.” – Adam Lapp, Research Analyst

Before you worry about fine tuning headlines or button color, consider testing radically different strategies to your overall approach. You may get negative results. But every so often, if you keep trying radically different strategies, you may hit on a huge gain. After all, that is the benefit of testing – trying new things and seeing how they impact your results.

“Competitive analysis is vital.” – Paul Clowe, Senior Manager of Training and Certification

It's a tough economy, and every dollar matters. To stay ahead of the curve, you must position yourself favorably against competitors. Do not optimize in a vacuum. For our software company research partner in Experiment #4, we evaluated other PPC ads in that keyword space and fashioned an ad that was different from everyone else. With this approach, we were able to take market share.

But doing this once is not enough. You must keep analyzing – establish a standard program perhaps – because your competitors will react. And if they are reacting to you, that is a great position to be in.

“It's never too late to start gaining value from testing.” – Boris Grinkot, Senior Manager of Research and Strategy

In 2009, I had the opportunity to travel to many industry events and certification courses. And I'm always surprised how often I am asked... “We're not testing, what are some best practices you can give us?”

You can't simply copy a best practice. What worked in one experiment we conducted might or might not work for your unique situation. These are not set-in-stone truths.

I often point these marketers to the vast array of information we provide on MarketingExperiments.com. These resources can help you decide what to test and how to construct a valid test. So, if you're not testing yet, take your first steps in 2010. From what I've seen in working with Research Partners, the value you gain is more than worth it.

BOTTOM LINE

This was a challenging year for marketers. From the hundreds of experiments we conducted in 2009, we were able to pinpoint a few key findings about how successful marketers took on these challenges with smarter ways to approach their audience and sell their offering.

It begins with the value proposition. Customers are more skeptical than ever, and it takes a value proposition focused on customer benefits backed up by quantifiable data to truly sway them, as we saw in Experiment #1.

At this point you may be thinking... no matter how strong my value proposition is, I simply don't have the resources to achieve my goals. But by taking a broader look at your marketing department, you may find that your website can do things you had previously allocated to headcount. For example, in Experiment #2, our Research Partner increased the quality of leads while reducing cost per acquisition by having its website qualify those leads – a task previously handed off to the sales force.

Even a strong value proposition and wise use of resources is not a guarantee of success. So when you're hitting a wall with your marketing efforts, try changing your focus. Find a new way to have a conversation with your customer. By changing your focus and testing something you may have previously considered a bad practice, like the Research Partner in Experiment #3, you may find new ways to leverage a strong value proposition and grab the customer's attention.

In the end, what gets measured gets done. So make sure you are measuring the right thing. With a complex test, you may focus on intermediary numbers that are important to conduct a strong experiment, yet don't impact your overall goals. You can ensure you are investing in the right areas by understanding the overall picture of the test with metrics that lead to your ultimate goal, likely bottom-line results, like the Research Partner in Experiment #4.

By applying these principles in your tests, you have a greater probability of gaining important intelligence into your customers' behavior. This is valuable information, no matter what the economy throws at you.

For hundreds of free test ideas and case studies, and information about our Fundamentals of Testing training and certification course, visit: MarketingExperiments.com.