MARKETING EXPERIMENTS

Special Report

Beyond Landing Pages:
Conversion rate optimization strategies

Adding the term "landing page" to optimization isn't always a perfect fit.

Many marketers say they don't use landing pages, while others are more concerned about increasing the conversion rate for their homepages, order paths, shopping carts, emails, PPC ads, and more.

That's where the MarketingExperiments Conversion Sequence comes in. The goal of our September 16 web clinic was to address two common misconceptions about landing pages and demonstrate how you can apply our optimization principles across a broad range of marketing and sales efforts.

Misconception 1: Landing pages are the specialized, long-copy, single-product, non-navigational pages that are detached from your website.

However:

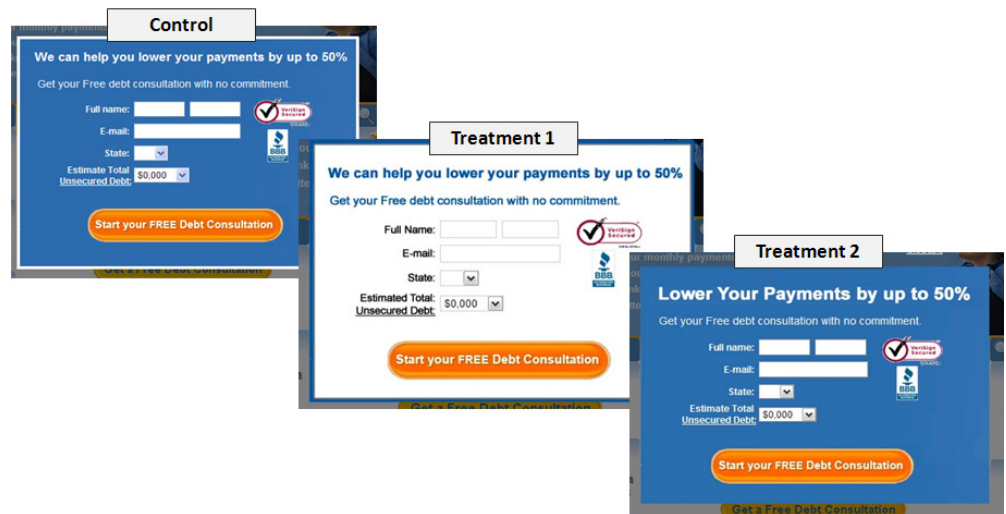> *A landing page is likely your first and best opportunity to start a conversation with your visitor. Don't blow it.*

- A landing page is any page that receives visitor traffic from sources other than pages on the same site.
- An "ideal" landing page from a marketer's point of view is a page that receives visitor traffic from a narrowly defined channel through a single call to action.
- A landing page is not defined by its content length, copy style, layout, and position within site flow, being on a separate domain or part of a microsite. A landing page can be integrated into the site, and a homepage can be a landing page, for those who type in your URL.
- A landing page is likely your first and best opportunity to start a conversation with your visitor. Don't blow it.

EXPERIMENT 1: OPTIMIZING POP-UP FORMS

In this test, the Conversion Sequence principles were applied to a pop-up box with a short form that appeared upon a visitor accessing the site's homepage. The homepage remained unchanged.

- **Background:** This 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 pop-up will generate the highest completion rate?
- **Approach:** An A/B/C split test of three different versions of a homepage pop-up box.

Treatment 1 was essentially a single-factorial test, where only the background color was changed (from blue to white) to see how it might independently impact conversion.

Treatment 2 featured a modified headline to increase the clarity, with which it communicates the value proposition (from what "we" can do to how "you" can benefit). The larger font also made it easier for visitors to understand the headline instantly, chipping away at the level of friction.

Which pop-up produced the highest conversion rate?

Subscription path	CTR	Relative diff v. control
Control	16.88%	-
Treatment A (color)	17.30%	2.49%
Treatment B (headline)	**19.64%**	**16.31%**

What you need to understand: Applying the Conversion Sequence produced a pop-up that outperformed the control by more than 16%. Note that in this case, background color alone had little relevance based on the Conversion Sequence.

It is interesting to note that the research partner's homepage and PPC landing pages also use forms similar to the pop-up box tested. This underscores the point that homepages and landing pages typically share the same or similar goals, but present them differently. In turn, the same optimization principles can often be modified and applied to various types of visitor communications.

Key point: Any page where you start a conversation with the visitor can be considered a landing page.

Misconception 2: There are a handful of principles for landing page optimization, but they only apply to landing pages.

The principles for landing page optimization expressed by the MarketingExperiments Conversion Sequence helps us understand the sequence of thoughts in the visitor's mind that lead to conversion. The Conversion Sequence heuristic is explained in more detail on other web clinics and in our training workshops, but briefly:

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

"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

Why is "conversion" singularly important? Aren't there other things we should care about, like clickthrough rate, email open rate, etc.?

By definition, conversion is the performance of a specific [desired] action by target user. The fundamental measurement of conversion is the conversion rate, determined by dividing the number of completed actions by the number of attempts or opportunities. For example:

- Cart conversion (sales/carts started)
- Conversion to email capture (addresses captured/visitors to form)
- Ad clickthrough (clicks/unique impressions of the ad)

It's important to keep in mind that "conversion" does not have to be a sale or a lead capture. Any measurable action can be treated as a conversion for the purpose of applying the Conversion Sequence. The Conversion Sequence applies to any communication or process where a conversion can be defined.

> *By definition, conversion is the performance of a specific [desired] action by target user.*

EXPERIMENT 2: ORDER PATH OPTIMIZATION

In this test, the Conversion Sequence was applied to the sales funnel process, while the landing page itself (top of funnel) remained unchanged.

Background: This research partner provides educational resources for health and fitness professionals that subscribe to one of their online memberships.

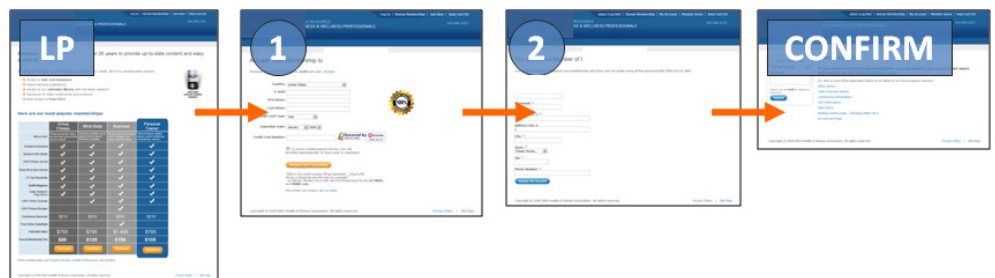**Goal:** To increase the amount of membership sign-ups.

Primary research question: Which payment path will have the highest conversion rate?

Approach: A/B split test reducing the amount of steps in the sales funnel process.

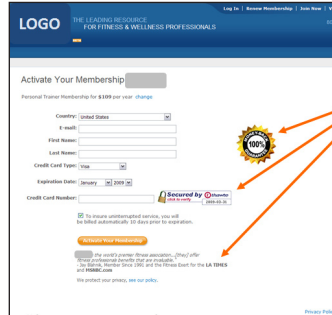**Control order path**

Treatment order path

In this test, we applied the principles of the Conversion Sequence and made the following changes:

- Reduced the number of steps/pages (reduced friction: length + difficulty).
- Eliminated a number of non-essential fields the user has to fill out to complete the process throughout the funnel (reduced friction: length).

Other modifications based on the Conversion Sequence were also applied, including:

- Added a money-back guarantee seal and a testimonial on the CC capture step (reduced anxiety: value + credibility).
- Removed distracting links in the footer (reduced friction: difficulty).

Which path produced the highest conversion rate?

Order Path	Conversion rate	Relative diff v. control
Control	5.47%	-
Treatment	**9.17%**	**68.70%**

What you need to understand: Applying the Conversion Sequence produced a sales funnel that outperformed the control by more than 68%.

Key points:

- Any page where your conversation with the visitor starts can be considered a landing page.
- The principles used for increasing conversion rate of landing pages can apply to any communication or process that has a definable objective.
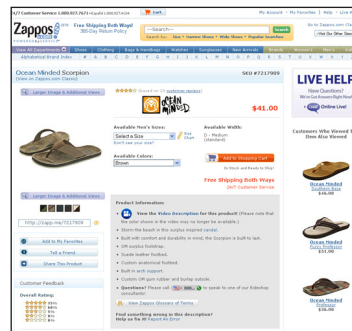
EXAMPLES: APPLYING THE SEQUENCE BEYOND LANDING PAGES

The following examples show how Conversion Sequence principles could be applied to other marketing communications.

Each pair features an example with significant room for improvement, and another that already does many things right according to the Conversion Sequence. While these examples are used to illustrate our research-based principles, they are not drawn from tests that we've run. However, the issues noted by our research team are the same areas we would consider testing.
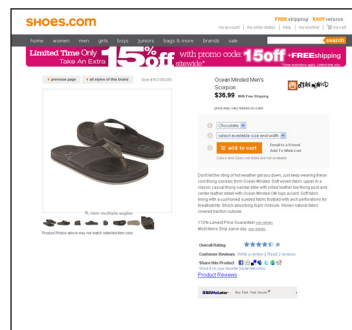
1. Ecommerce product pages

Conversion Sequence Element: Friction

- The visitor eyepath is not being clearly directed. The three-column format and competing images create confusion.
- There are banner ads and competing objectives that distract from the main goal of this page.
- The sequence of order process steps is unclear. Too much "unsupervised thinking."

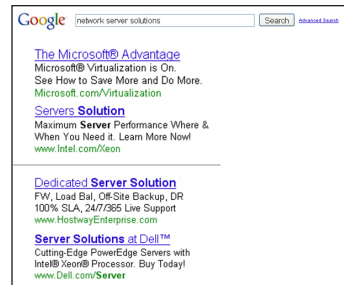Conversion Sequence Element: Friction

- There is significantly less friction created by this shopping cart page.
- The visitor eyepath is being directed by the images and layout of the page.
- Additional ads and navigation
- competing for attention of the visitor are minimal.
- The product options are clearly sequenced and even numbered.

2. PPC ads

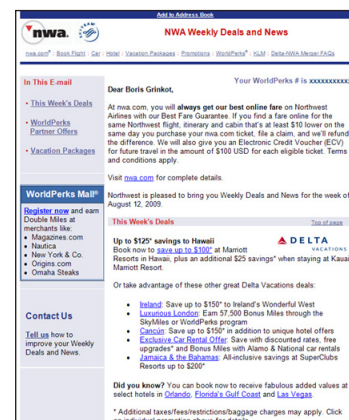Conversion Sequence Element: Value Proposition

- The first two ads are weakly communicating the value of their offers. They use vague, boastful language and unsupported qualitative statements. Ultimately, these ads leave the viewer wondering "why should I click on you?"
- The second two ads do a better job of using specific details and quantitative statements that more clearly communicate the value of their offers.

Note: We do not expect that one ad here performs better than another; rather, the first two ads would likely perform better if modified based on the Conversion Sequence.

3. Email messaging

Subject Line: "Best Fare Guarantee on nwa.com, great vacation packages with Delta Vacations, exclusive partner offers and more..."

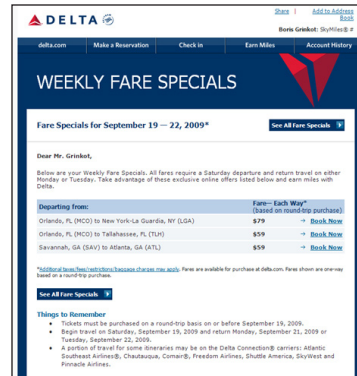Conversion Sequence Elements: Anxiety, Value Proposition, and Friction

- Subject line uses several strong spam-like sales words: best, great, and exclusive.
- There is discontinuity between the subject line and the body copy.
- There are too many objectives trying to be accomplished (over 25 unique offers and calls to action in this email).

Subject Line: "Delta Weekly Fare Specials"

Principles applied: Anxiety, Value Proposition and Friction

- Subject line is straightforward and will do a good job appealing to those who are looking at traveling soon (highly motivated prospects).
- There is immediate continuity between the subject line and the actual email body copy.
- The email has a clean and clear single column layout, making it easy to digest.
- There is one main objective for this email and it is displayed clearly in multiple places.

APPLYING THE CONVERSION SEQUENCE TO YOUR CAMPAIGNS

- Landing pages are not limited to a certain type or style of page. Rather, any specific place that traffic is arriving on your website can be considered a landing page.
- Don't restrict the MarketingExperiments Conversion Sequence optimization principles to landing pages. They can be applied elsewhere.
- Look at the full range of your marketing efforts to see how these optimization principles apply to areas beyond landing pages, such as:

  - Homepages
  - Shopping carts
  - Order paths
  - PPC ads
  - Email subject lines
  - Email body copy

For hundreds of free test ideas and case studies, and information about the Conversion Sequence and our Fundamentals of Online Testing training and certification courses, visit **MarketingExperiments.com**.