



LANDING PAGE OPTIMIZATION: IT'S ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY NOT TECHNOLOGY

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“Advertising is the art of getting people to buy things they don’t need with money they don’t have.” This statement predates the Internet by a number of decades, yet still rings true today. While it might be a bit cynical, let’s not forget that in the Internet world people rarely stumble across a website without actively searching for something. If you have what people are looking for, it’s your job to help them find it.

The problem is most websites are so ill conceived and poorly constructed that they’re little more than monuments to their owners.

Let’s make something transparently clear; people do not read on the Internet, they scan. They see headlines, images and bullet points. Depending on the personality type of your visitor, you have between two and eight seconds to convince them to stay on your website. Searchers click in, take a quick peak, and click out. Those are the conditions in which business is conducted on the Internet.

What is a Landing Page?

A Landing page is where visitors arrive after clicking on an email link, a search engine result, a banner ad, a PPC ad, or following an offline advertisement like a newspaper, billboard, or TV/radio broadcast.

The objective is to convert the presumably interested consumer into an actual customer by influencing them to take specific action. That action might be downloading a whitepaper in exchange for their contact information, to influence them to spread the word virally, to have them pick up the phone and contact your organization, or the ultimate objective: make an online purchase.

Types of Landing Pages

There are essentially three general categories of landing pages. The choice of which is largely dependent on the specific strategy and goal of the campaign:

Standalone Landing Pages. These are typical of specific promotions or specific products or services.

On-Site Landing Pages. These often include the homepage or service or product pages.

Microsites. These are typically small multi-page websites with a single focus and a built in sales funnel.

Sub-Types of Landing Pages

Each of the three main landing pages comes in multiple flavors:

Teaser Pages. The objective of a teaser page is to give the visitor just enough information to click through to the next stage in the sales cycle. An important aspect of this type of page is to stay on topic by controlling the choices the consumer has and sending them on a predetermined path. To do this, you want to minimize any unnecessary distractions. With each click they essentially qualify themselves as a potential customer. Anyone who doesn’t progress to the next step is probably not fit to be your customer. Keep in mind, however, that it may also be an indication that you didn’t do a good job teasing them along to the next step, or your traffic to the landing page just wasn’t targeted enough.

Squeeze Pages. The objective of a squeeze page is to capture the contact information of the visitor to harvest the lead at a later time or as part of a scheduled lead nurturing strategy. An example of lead nurturing might be setting up a series of pre-written emails that are automatically sent to the consumer over a period of weeks, building up interest and culminating in a sales pitch or special offer.

Anyone with common sense understands that once they give up their contact information they're in essence inviting you to sell them something. Therefore you have to barter with them for their personal information by trading something of value, like exclusive information in a whitepaper, access to a webinar, or a discount or coupon not available anywhere else.

A well-designed squeeze page typically has one objective and no navigation or links to other pages. Just gather their data, give them what they bought in exchange for their contact information, and let them go. You'll have plenty of opportunity to reengage them on your terms now that you have their contact info.

Infomercial Landing Pages. These come in a couple of different flavors, but you've probably seen the ones that resemble the old style sales letter that is mostly text and sensationalism. Just like the classic late night infomercials on TV, they try to verbally make their case as to why you can't live without their product or service. They typically scroll in perpetuity punctuated only by periodic offers you can opt-in to and thus put yourself out of your pain by succumbing to their offer.

A well-designed infomercial landing page is so engaging that you find yourself past the point of no return. The consumer eventually invests so much effort into following the narrative that they're on pins and needles just waiting for the offer. These pages are typically very tightly targeted to a specific market niche.

Viral Landing Pages. The goal of viral landing pages extends past merely converting your visitors into customers by enlisting them to tell their friends as well. It might be a funny video or a game that is somehow branded to your company via a subtle logo or product placement as part of a greater branding campaign.

It might be a more aggressive incentive based strategy like contests or rewarding accomplishments. Unlike your typical viral video that's fueled by humor or shock value, commercially viral landing pages are powered by incentive. For example, a cloud based service like Dropbox might offer additional storage space if you get a specific number of your friends to join through your tracking link.

Good viral landing pages have three things in common:

Great Content. It doesn't matter how much money or effort you put into the campaign, if you don't have the goods, nobody cares.

Incentive. Give something away, such as additional storage space or a free sample. Or it could be as simple as being the one who found this terrific piece of content and increased your social credibility by sharing it.

Convenience. Sharing your content is inversely proportional to how difficult it is to share. Anyone can copy and paste a link and email it to their friends, but that would require the incentive to be that much richer. One click links like social sharing buttons (share on Twitter, Facebook, Google+, etc) are a great example of making it easy for consumers to play along.



Microsites. Yes, the Cadillac of landing pages because it requires a bit more commitment. This is essentially a mini-website with its own URL and custom design. These are often the destination of choice for larger investments in the form of paid advertising such as PPC, and print and TV ads.

Despite the fact that they consist of multiple pages, they're typically focused on a single product (or product line). You often see these promoting a movie release or new car model. Obviously microsites often have a limited shelf life as the movie runs its course and the car becomes last year's model.

However some durable goods or "evergreen" products may have a longer shelf life worthy of long-term promotions. In some cases the microsite may even be refreshed along with product updates and special promotions. Just like a successful single landing page, the basic template can be repurposed across multiple product lines.

Product Specific Landing Pages. This is a very common, but useful type of landing page because it probably already exists. Typically just an existing page on your website that contains all the information on a specific product or service.

The advantage is that since it's part of your full website, consumers are also free to wander around the site and be exposed to your other products and services. The disadvantage is that consumers are free to wander around your site and be exposed to your other products and services (it's a paradox!). These types of landing pages are certainly convenient, but have a tendency to be unfocused (due to the normal distractions of navigation and links and banners, etc) and harder to track conversions.

Homepage. Typically has the lowest conversion rate because the home page is like the index in a book. It's the jump-off point for the entire contents of the rest of the site. As such, it's unfocused by nature.

However, there are ways around this. For example, employing an eye-catching graphic or headline that's consistent with the message that got the visitor to the site in the first place, thus preserving the continuity of the sales funnel.

The Case for Conversions

It's easy to fall into the trap of throwing money into driving traffic and living with your conversion rate. But the notion that buying traffic means more customers isn't efficient or cost effective.

The scenario below illustrates that a mere 2% increase in conversion results in 240 additional customers without increasing traffic. Depending on the lifetime value of new customers, a 2% conversion increase could be a game changer for businesses.

Improve Sales by:

1. Increasing Traffic
2. Up-Selling
3. Improving Conversion Rate

Visitors	Conv. Rate	Customers
12,000	→ 1%	→ 120
12,000	→ 3%	→ 360!!!

Tips for Effective Landing Page Design

So what does an effective landing page look like? The simple answer is it can look however you want it to, as long as it contains some important and necessary elements. Here's a list of tips to creating an effective landing page and making it your own.

Define Success

In order to accomplish your goals, you have to know what they are. Is this an eCommerce website focused on transactions? Is the purpose to generate leads, or is it about branding, relationship building, or increasing your database through membership registration? A good marketer will often start at the bottom of the sales funnel and work their way up to the point where the visitor first enters the funnel.



Define your Customer

It's not about you. Many businesses feel compelled to tell their story to what they perceive as a captive audience. But there's no captive audience on the Internet. Check your ego at the door, it's just too easy for a visitor to leave and find what they really want.

A tried and true technique for defining your customer is to actually create a persona, complete with name, age, marital status and anything else relevant to your target audience. You may even have multiple profiles; just make sure that you prioritize them. Remember, if you try to appeal to too many different customer types, you'll wind up appealing to no one. Once you know who your ideal customer is, you can craft your message so that it appeals to them.

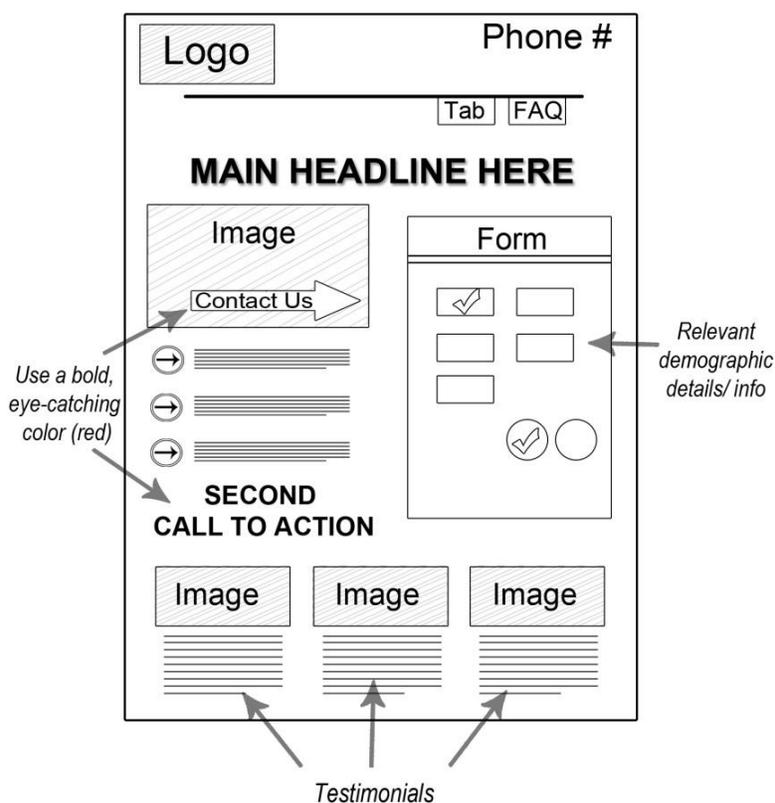
Selecting Domains

Most businesses consider their homepage their landing page. That may be perfectly acceptable in some instances, but it's not always the best choice. Your landing page may be part of a microsite or single page with its own domain name. You might consider one or more "vanity names" targeting a specific product or service. That's particularly effective when the domain will be visible such as on printed material or PPC ads.

Wireframing

A wireframe is a sketch of a page layout. Start by listing all of the elements that go on the page and lay them out on a piece of paper. You should do this before you write the copy because the space available will dictate the amount of copy

you have to work with. Make sure that you place the most important elements above the fold (the spot on the page where most visitors will have to scroll down to see more).



Copywriting

As we mentioned before, people don't read on the Internet, they scan. They see headlines, bullet points and graphics. It's important your headline refer back to what the visitor was looking at before they landed on your page. Only about 20% of your visitors will actually read the body copy (but that still has to be good).

Don't forget the call to action! You might test matching the call to action with the headline since that's almost certainly the one element on the page that you can be sure people will read.

Testing and Tweaking

This isn't a spare time activity. It's something that should be scheduled at regular intervals. Examine your metrics, make incremental changes and re-examine the effect. Don't make too many changes at once or you won't know what you did to effect the changes. Your testing and adjustments should match your original goals (transactions, lead generation, branding and education, relationship building, registrations, viral marketing).

Elements of a Landing Page

So how many elements need to be on a landing page? The correct answer is as many as necessary, no more and no less.

These are just some items that may go on a landing page. It's not meant to be a checklist of items that should be on every landing page:

- Logo
- Conversion Button
- Offer Explanation
- Headline
- Links to More Information
- Deadlines
- Descriptive Tagline
- Testimonials
- Technical Specifications
- Guarantees
- Rich Media

Copy Tips

- Use half the copy that you would use in printed material
- Headline should match the headline that got them there
- Nothing more than needed, nothing less than needed
- Don't waste valuable real estate with "welcome..."
- "You" and "your" trumps "we" and "our"
- People only read the first few words of bullets and paragraphs
- People read the beginning and end of lists, not the middle
- Keep your first few paragraphs short and inviting
- Alternate long and short paragraphs
- Paragraphs shouldn't be longer than four or five lines
- Numerals have more impact than written numbers

Campaign Killers

Too much text. As mentioned multiple times, people don't read, they scan. They see images, headlines and bullet points. You have 2-8 seconds before they decide to bounce off the page or spend some time on it. How much is the right amount of text? No more or no less than you need to make your case.

Error pages, broken links and anything that does not work. Nothing diminishes confidence like a website that doesn't work. Even worse for landing pages because unlike a website with multiple paths, a landing page has a very specific path down the sales funnel. Anything broken on the path becomes a dead-end.

Required fields. Consumers don't like giving up their personal info for fear of finding themselves on yet another list. Unless you're using required information to pre-screen submissions (where the cost of screening exceeds the value of capturing contact information) you're more likely to get a submission if you try to gather only the most essential information. There will be plenty of time to request their personal information and telephone numbers once you have their basic information and have established a relationship with them. As a general rule, the less you ask for, the more you'll get.

Reset buttons. Have you ever intentionally used a reset button? Have you ever gotten so lost in filling out a simple form that you just give up and reset the entire form? No, of course not. At best a reset button is useless. At worst, a consumer may inadvertently click on it instead of the submit button and delete everything they just filled in. It's hard enough to get them to fill it in the first time, what are the chances they'll fill it in a second time?

No email privacy information next to the email form. Few people actually read a lengthy privacy policy, but most consumers are comforted when you do have one. The mistake is burying it deep on the page when you should be linking to it right at the point where they make the decision whether to submit your form.

Lack of communication choices. Everyone has their favorite communication preference. Some people like to talk with a human being on the phone, some people like live chat because of the spontaneity and anonymity at the same time. Others like the convenience of just filling out a form and shifting the initiative to follow-up to the merchant. There is statistical evidence that having a phone number as an option actually increases form submission simply because of the additional confidence that the merchant is accessible if necessary.

Inadequate shipping and pricing information. No one likes surprises when it comes to money. Not making it clear what a consumer's final price will be (including shipping and taxes) is a sure formula for abandonment.

Too many links leading to too many destinations. Every parent learns that you don't ask a child what they want for breakfast. You ask them if they want Cheerios or Oatmeal. You manage their choices. If you give them too many distractions they wander off the path. Keep it simple and keep it focused.

In-House vs. Outsource

The biggest obstacle to in-house landing page optimization is a lack of resources. In mid-sized companies the marketing department is typically overloaded. In smaller companies the owner or the staff, even if they had the right credentials is (or should be) too busy minding the core business.

Resources. It's tempting to try and do things yourself or assign it to existing staff. Take into consideration the true cost of doing it in-house. Are you diverting staff members from other necessary duties? Are you paying them to learn on the job when an agency or consultant may already have the know-how? You may indeed have the talent under your own roof; just carefully consider the true costs.

Aptitude. Most individuals are either left brained or right brained. That is to say technically or creatively inclined. Since a landing page campaign is a combination of creative and analytical, a technical oriented team or individual isn't likely to come up with the compelling creative, and the creative team may not be able to interpret the data. That applies to agencies as well as you and your staff.

Experience. Agencies may have strengths in both creative and analytics, however they may not have the full array of skill sets necessary to do it any better than you can in-house. Consider the traffic to your landing page. If your current levels of web traffic are insufficient, make sure you work with a consultant that can deliver everything that you need, either in full or in conjunction with your in-house team.

Summary. Landing pages are unique in that they are generally tied directly to a greater marketing campaign that undoubtedly represents a significant investment for your company. This is not the place to drop the ball and hand the assignment over to whoever has time to deal with it.

Landing page design is a marketing assignment that employs a great deal of psychology. A common mistake companies make is to assign the design of a landing page to their IT department or even their graphics department as a side job when it should be a focal point of their current marketing campaign.

This whitepaper is not designed as a step-by-step handbook, but rather as a reality check for CEOs and business owners who are about to make an investment in their companies growth and profit.

25-Point Landing Page Checklist

- Does your headline say what the page is about and relate to your PPC ad?
- Does your sub-headline further refine your message?
- Is your landing page focused on a single purpose?
- Could someone understand the message in 5-10 seconds?
- Does the visitor understand what they will get in exchange for contacting you?
- Does the copy focus on benefits rather than features?
- Are you using a unique image that tells the story? (no generic stock photos)
- Do you have an obvious call to action?
- Does your landing page look professional?
- Is your Opt-In form visible without having to scroll?
- Did you eliminate extraneous navigation from the page?
- Are you asking only for the minimum contact info that you need?
- Is there continuity between your landing page and your web page?
- Do you have a privacy policy link or statement near the submit button?
- Is your submit button more interesting than just "Submit"?

- Is your landing page as focused as your elevator speech?
- Did you articulate the value of your giveaway item (white paper, discount, etc.)?
- Did you use trust icons and testimonials where appropriate?
- Did you offer multiple contact options (phone, email form, live chat, etc.)?
- Did you use light boxes (pop-outs) to offer additional information without the visitor having to leave the page?
- Are you using your confirmation page to “remarket” to the visitor? (Follow us, share this page, additional offers, survey, etc).
- Is your offer time sensitive to create a sense of urgency?
- Are you creating separate landing pages to segment your leads? (PPC, Display advertising, email, print)
- Have you designed your page as a template so that you can repurpose the page in the future?
- If you have a multi-step process, did you make it clear how long it will take or how many steps it will take? (Take our two-question survey, etc).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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With degrees in graphic design, digital electronics and an MBA from Keller Graduate School of Management, his areas of expertise are search engine marketing, social media management, website design, landing page design and conversion technologies.

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