

YOUR BABY IS UGLY

THE HARD TRUTH ABOUT
YOUR LANDING PAGES



GUIDE

MEET THE AUTHORS



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Tim Ash is the author of the bestselling book [Landing Page Optimization](#), and CEO of [SiteTuners](#). A computer and cognitive scientist by education, Tim has developed an expertise in user-centered design, persuasion and understanding online behavior, and landing page testing. In the mid-1990s he became one of the early pioneers in the discipline of website conversion rate optimization. Tim is the founder of [Conversion Conference](#).

*This guide contains exclusive excerpts from Tim Ash's best-selling book **Landing Page Optimization: The Definitive Guide to Testing and Tuning for Conversions**. [Get the full copy here](#), which includes a gift card for Google AdWords.*

YOUR BABY IS UGLY

THE HARD TRUTH ABOUT YOUR LANDING PAGES

INTRODUCTION: YOUR BABY IS UGLY

Like a parent, you are probably very proud of your creation, and you probably can't see it objectively. So let's get one thing straight. It's going to be painful to hear, but it's true.

Your baby is ugly.

Your landing page has significant and fundamental problems that affect its business performance.

Let's clarify. When we say "ugly," we don't just mean that it is lacking in artistic appeal (it may actually be very "pretty"). We are talking about the whole host of gross and subtle elements that contribute to your visitor's suboptimal total experience — often without your knowledge.

You are probably invested in your role as a competent online marketing professional and are justifiably proud of your skills and experience. Other people in your organization are paying you for this knowledge and expect you to know what you are doing.

But let's take a look at the reality of the situation. Conversion rate optimization is a complicated activity requiring diverse skill sets. You are more than likely not trained in all the important skill sets necessary to become a world-class website optimizer.

Some of these skill sets include:

- Usability principles and user-centered design
- Psychology and motivation
- Neuroscience
- Social psychology and persuasion
- Web analytics and statistics
- Direct-response copywriting
- Visual and website design

Even if you are trained or have experience in some of these skills, it's the well-rounded and deep *combination* of them all that is likely to produce results.

Please check your ego and biases at the door. The first step is admitting that you have a problem.

YOUR WEBSITE VISITORS: THE REAL LANDING PAGE EXPERTS

You can (within the limits of ethics and accuracy) represent yourself in any way that you want on the internet. Your landing page is not written on stone tablets. In fact, it is the most ethereal of objects – a set of data residing on a computer hard disk that is accessible to the whole world. No one is forcing you to use the particular colors, page layout, pictures, sales copy, calls-to-action, or headlines that comprise the page now.

The real experts on the design of your landing pages are your website visitors.

The only things stopping you from creating more compelling landing pages may be a lack of attention and imagination, and — maybe — a disregard for your intended audience.

The promise of better-performing landing pages is often tempered by a fear of making things worse than they already are. How are you to know in advance what will or won't work better? Yet you are supposed to be the “expert.” Shouldn't your landing page already be perfect based on your extensive online marketing experience? What if your design knowledge was exposed as nothing more than subjective posturing and guesswork?

Don't be afraid. You have access to a real expert — in fact, thousands of them. You are interacting with them daily already, but you have ignored most of their advice to date.

The real experts on the design of your landing pages are your website visitors.

There is a lot of lip service paid in marketing to the “voice of the customer,” when in reality we often ignore the customer and substitute opinions of people from our own company in their place. No matter how well intentioned, this practice is a big mistake.

Although you may never be able to answer why a specific person did or did not respond to your landing page, there are ways to determine what more of your website visitors would respond to. In fact, landing page testing can be viewed as a giant online marketing laboratory where your test subjects (your website visitors) voluntarily participate without being asked. Their very actions (or inactions) expose them and allow you to improve your appeal to a similar population of people that subsequently visit your page.

Websites and stand-alone landing pages have three properties that make them ideal as online laboratories. Let's look at each of these in turn:

A high volume of traffic. With high website traffic volumes, statistical analysis allows you to find verifiably better landing pages and to be confident about your decision. The best landing page version from a valid head-to-head test is a proven winner. Unlike previous non-tested designs, they are no longer based solely on subjective opinions. Nor are they

the results of popularity contests within your company or chosen according to the highest paid person's opinion (HIPPO). Without enough traffic, you risk making decisions that are not representative of your true audience.

Accurate tracking tools. Web analytics tools support the accurate real-time tracking and recording of every interaction with your website. Each visit is recorded along with a mind-numbing amount of detail. Reports can tell you the sources of the visitors, the pages they most visit, their path through your site, the time that they spent lingering over certain content, and whether they were persuaded to act and to return in the future.

Ability to easily make content changes. It is easy to personalize the content that a particular visitor sees on your landing page. The content can be changed to show many variations of the same landing page and can be customized based on the source of the traffic (referred to as *segmentation*). Different content can also be displayed based on the visitor's behavior on the page or their past history of interactions with your site (referred to as *behavioral targeting*). In non-web environments, it is expensive or time-consuming to come up with an alternative version or prototype. On the internet, countless website content variations can be created and managed at minimal cost for a landing page optimization test. The more easily you can make changes to your website, the more flexibility and options you will have at your fingertips when coming up with ideas for improving your landing pages.



Get Your Free Guide:
[Voice of Customer: the Secret Weapon for Landing Page Copy.](#)

COMMON PROBLEMS – THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF LANDING PAGE DESIGN

Chances are, your landing page is suffering from not just one, but several common deadly sins.

Let's explore some common landing page problems. You may look at the extreme examples presented and laugh at the obvious problems with the pages. However, even though you may deny it, chances are your own page suffers from many of the same deadly sins.

1. Unclear Call-to-Action: What Am I Supposed to Do on This Page?

Your website visitor should be able to answer this question easily, yet it is often not so. Instead, your visitor must spend precious time deciding what to do, and then expend the mental energy required to do it. As a result, the visitor may get confused and frustrated, and leave your page in search of clearer experiences.



The Fix

- The CTA should be clear and should draw the eye
- The placement of the CTA should be above the fold
- Competing visuals should be deemphasized

2. Too Many Choices: What Am I Supposed to Do First?

If visitors can't find a way to easily get closer to their goal, they will simply leave.

We often hear that choice is good. Unfortunately that is rarely the situation when someone visits your landing page. Most people are in a hurry and do not have time, they don't care much about your website, and they know little about your subject

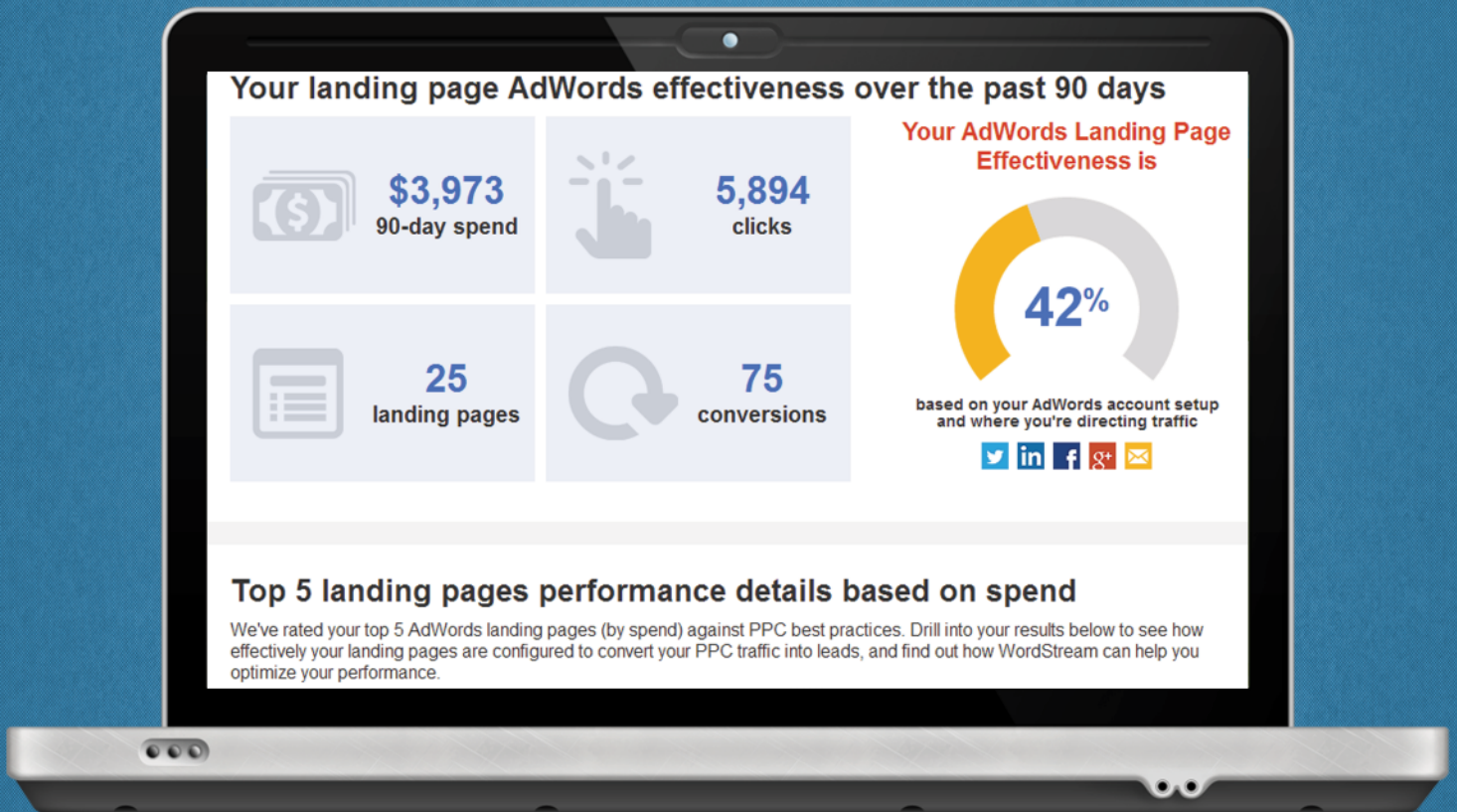
matter. Under these circumstances, too many choices can cause paralysis and inaction. If visitors can't find a way to easily get closer to their goal, they will simply leave.

The Fix

- Don't present detail too early in the process
- Group related choices into a smaller number of categories
- Use visual shortcuts to reduce reading

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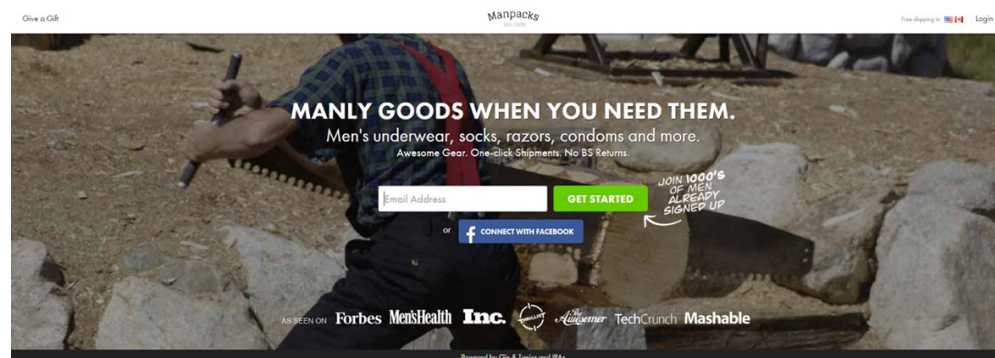
3. Visual Distractions: What Am I Supposed to Look At?

Design can definitely influence conversion. Unfortunately, it is usually for the worse. Most of the responsibility can be laid at the feet of the internal creative team or outside interactive agency. Because of the limitations of their unique perspective, you have been forced to sacrifice conversion in the name of “coolness.” So you have actually come to love your page and can no longer see it objectively.

The key to effective landing page design is clarity. The purpose of your landing page must be clear. The visitor should be focused on taking a simple path that leads to the desired conversion action. The simple path should arise out of the Zen-like stillness of your landing page.

The Fix

- Remove all graphical elements that do not directly support the conversion action
- Remove colorful page elements and animation or motion, unless they test better
- Replace generic stock photos with specific relevant images



4. Not Keeping Your Promises: Does Your Landing Page Deliver What I Expect?

Your visitors did not just materialize out of thin air. They came from somewhere. This “somewhere” could have been another page on your site, a search engine results page, an email newsletter, a link in a blog post, or a pay-per-click (PPC) ad. Regardless of the origin, some kind of expectation had undoubtedly been set. Does your landing page keep the promise that your upstream traffic sources make?

The Fix

- Understand your important upstream traffic sources and their context
- Match landing page content to the traffic source messaging and intent
- Provide clear access to promised information or functionality, without strings attached

5. Too Much Text: Do You Really Expect Me to Read All This?

Do not write in complete sentences — use short bullet lists whenever possible.

Study after study has shown that people do not read online. No one reads full-paragraph text on the web. People get lost if there is no clear hierarchy or flow to the organization of the text.

The Fix

- Use a clear page title and headlines
- Use an “inverted pyramid” writing style, putting the important stuff first
- Do not write in complete sentences — use short bullet lists whenever possible
- Ruthlessly edit and shorten your text
- Move long text to supporting pages or user-initiated information popovers

6. Asking for Too Much: Why Should I Give You All This Information?

In real life, most people are careful to follow social rules and norms, giving people their “space” and a high degree of privacy. Most business transactions are also governed by a certain etiquette.

Online, however, marketers often become greedy — possibly because of the anonymity of the web. They start asking for information simply because it might be useful in the future, without considering the negative impact on conversion rates.

Rethinking the role of landing pages in conversion:
Using testing to reveal hidden conversion opportunities

Fill out the form to the right to download
As an internet user, how often have you searched for a specific item only to end up on a generic landing page? With little more than three seconds to make an impression on the visitor, interactive marketers need to make sure that their landing pages create immediate engagement.

This webcast and guide discusses strategies that empower marketers to optimize every element on a landing page, presenting ideas and best practices to improve content relevance. Adobe customer, Salesforce.com provides real-world examples of how they have optimized their landing pages using analytics, testing, and targeting to achieve quick wins and deliver a more relevant user experience. You'll also get tips and strategies that you can use today to create a culture of testing and web page optimization at your organization.

This webcast and guide will review:

- Five tips to run an effective test
- Practical steps to optimize your landing pages
- How Salesforce.com uses testing to increase leads by 57%

If you're not optimizing and testing on your website, you may be missing a huge opportunity to increase conversion. Download this webcast and guide today to get actionable tips and strategies to create a testing and optimization culture at your company.

Please provide the following information:

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LAST NAME:

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PHONE:

COMPANY:

WEB SITE:

COUNTRY:

DEPARTMENT/FUNCTION:

JOB TITLE:

PRIMARY SITE OBJECTIVE:

INDUSTRY:

RELATIONSHIP TO OMNITURE:

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Make sure that the value scale tips in favor of the visitor at each stage of your deepening relationship with the visitor. Don't expect them to endure hardships or a loss of control in order to supply you with information.

The Fix

- Ask only for information that is absolutely required
- Collect additional information at a later date as trust is established
- Shorten labels and unclutter form layout

7. Lack of Trust and Credibility: Why Should I Trust You?

Online trust must be developed without any face-to-face contact, and it must be created instantly in the few precious seconds it takes a website visitor to evaluate your value proposition.

So how can you build instant trust online?

Appearance

First impressions matter. Recent research indicates that people will form an initial impression of your landing page or website within 50 milliseconds.

Here are some important elements that contribute to a good first impression:

- Professionalism of design
- Sparseness and neatness
- Organization and clarity

Transactional Assurances

Visitors have very real concerns about privacy, security, quality and whether or not to trust doing business with you. Transactional assurances are risk-reducers that lower a visitor's anxiety about interacting with your business online.

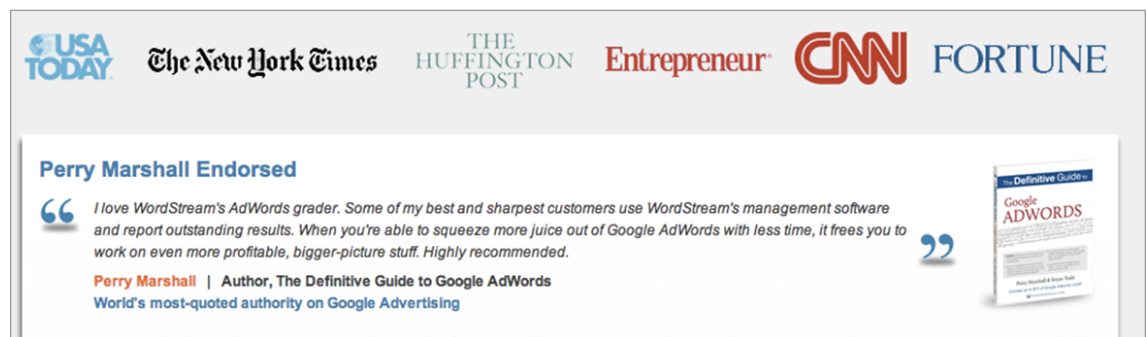
Here are some common forms of transactional assurances along with their meaning to your visitor:

- **Guarantees:** if I don't like it, I can get my money back
- **Policies:** the company has a no-hassle return policy
- **Alternative Transaction Mechanisms:** I can also complete my transaction on the phone, by mail, or in person

- **Trials and Introductory Offers:** if I don't like it, I can cancel before they charge my credit card
- **Safe Shopping Symbols:** my personal information will not be stolen
- **Privacy Symbols:** I will not be spammed by this company, and my email won't be sold to spammers

Outside Experts and Media

Unless you represent a truly world-class consumer company, people are unlikely to know your brand promise. They do not know what you stand for. Third-party validation tells people that knowledgeable experts or reviewers have concluded that you have a quality service or product. This serves as a shortcut to decision making for your visitors.



Here are some examples of third-party validation:

- Industry or media awards such as an editor's choice or fastest-growing company award
- Media coverage. Mentions in mainstream press, websites, or blogs
- Inclusion in industry analyst reports
- Endorsements from trade organizations and associations
- Partnerships with other respected companies
- Studies and surveys such as market share or customer satisfaction
- Client lists and logos

Trust is one of the few exceptions to the "less is more" guideline. It is often best to have as much visible trust reinforcement on the page as possible.

LANDING PAGE BEST PRACTICES

Although there are no hard and fast "rules," there are several things that the best-performing landing pages have in common. These best practices are widely considered to be the hallmarks of success, and ensuring that you adhere to them can improve your conversion rates immensely.

Include a Lead Form on Your Landing Pages

You could be forgiven for thinking that a strong call to action is enough to get your prospects into the funnel, but without more information, how can you be sure who is actually interacting with your site or responding to your campaigns?

If you are in a lead-generation business, be sure to actually include a lead form on your landing pages. Doing so will enable you to gather more information about your prospects, which can provide you with much greater insight into who is demonstrating an interest in your products, services or content. Even a rudimentary form is better than nothing, so consider your goals carefully before launching your landing page.

Use Well-Designed Lead Forms

Many landing pages' intended purpose is lead generation, and one of the best ways to accomplish this is through the use of forms. By entering their information, prospects are telling you whether or not they are a qualified lead for your sales team. However, mastering forms is just as much an art as it is a science, and unless you achieve a careful balance, you could miss out on potential conversions.

Make sure you're only asking for the information you truly need. Yes, more data is always good, but too many fields in a web form will discourage potential leads from completing. Generally, seven or fewer fields in a single web form is considered optimal.

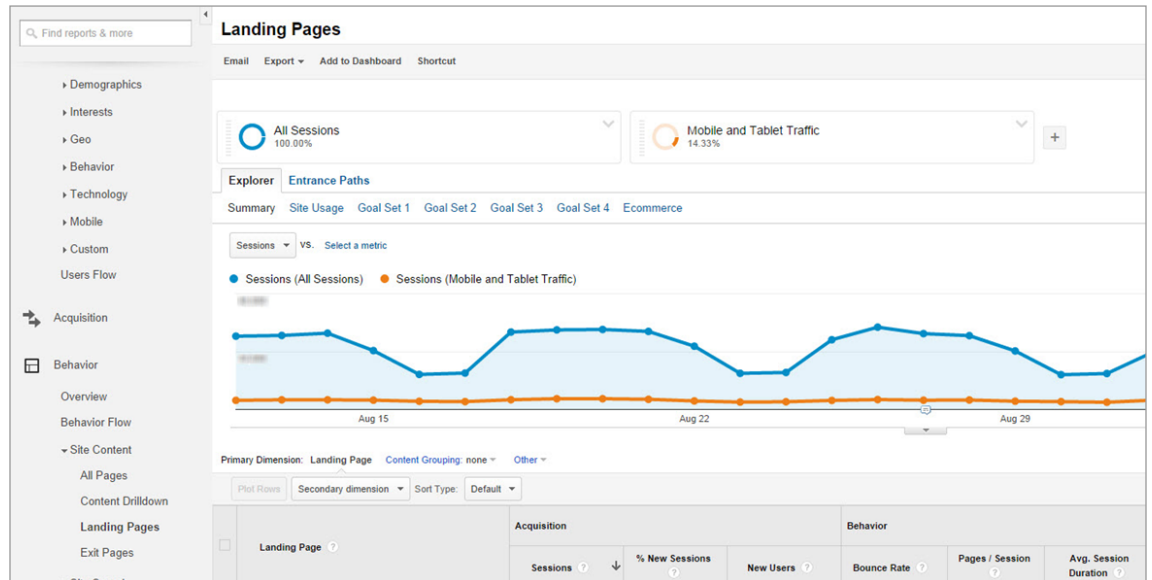
Optimize Your Landing Pages for Mobile Devices

Mobile-targeted campaigns receive click-through rates 11.5% higher than desktop-only campaigns.

Many advertisers overlook the importance of mobile landing pages. Although desktop searches remain more common than mobile — for now — increasing numbers of people are turning to their tablets and smartphones when it comes to researching products and services. In addition,

mobile-targeted campaigns receive click-through rates 11.5% higher than desktop-only campaigns, revealing how important mobile optimized landing pages can be.

Delve into your analytics data to see what percentage of your traffic comes from mobile devices. Then, break this down by device. Does tablet traffic eclipse that of smartphones? What are the most commonly used types of device used by your prospects? These considerations will make it easier when forming the basis of your mobile optimization strategy.



Use Header Tags on Your Landing Pages

It's essential that visitors to your landing pages can find the information you promised them in your ads quickly — very quickly. To accomplish this, use header tags correctly on your landing pages, which can make your landing pages easier to scan and give visitors the information they need fast.

The first-level header, or headline, is the most important text on your page. Some visitors will only read the headline! Make sure this text reinforces your main message and has clear relevance to the link they clicked to arrive at your page. If that was an AdWords ad, the ad and heading on your landing page should use the same keywords and describe the same offer or product. Second-level headers (formatted using the `<h2>` tag) should be used to introduce new sections, whereas third-level headers (formatted using the `<h3>` tag) should be used to break up larger, more complex topics into more manageable subsections.

Ensure Contact Information is a Clickable Element on Your Landing Pages

Just as you need to make sure your landing pages are optimized for mobile devices, you should also take steps to ensure that it is as easy as possible for prospective customers to contact you.

If you include contact information on your landing pages, make phone numbers or email addresses clickable elements. Don't force visitors to copy/paste this information, as this will dramatically decrease conversions. All contact information should be a clickable element.



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Include a Strong, Clear Call to Action

You know exactly what you want visitors to your landing page to do, but that doesn't mean that they do.

You know exactly what you want visitors to your landing page to do, but that doesn't mean that they do. To maximize conversions and eliminate any possibly ambiguity about what you want your prospects to do when they've arrived at your landing page, make your call to action as strong as

possible. Use powerful verbs such as "get" rather than bland words like "download," and ensure that your call to action buttons are prominent in your landing page's design.

Use Clear, Concise and Compelling Copy

Just as with your lead forms, it's vital that you achieve a balance with your landing page copy. Too much information and you risk overwhelming or boring your visitor, which will harm conversions. Too little copy, on the other hand, could leave your visitor confused about what it is you're actually selling.

Landing page copy should be as concise as possible without omitting crucial details about your offer. It should include strong verbs that focus on how your product or service can benefit the visitor — remember, nobody cares about you or your company, only what you can do for them. Eliminate verbose language, use a friendly, conversational tone, and get to the point quickly.

Make Your Offer Irresistible


It almost goes without saying, but one of the best ways to increase conversions with your landing pages is to make your offer so irresistible that your prospects simply can't help themselves.

The stronger the offer, the more likely your prospects are to take action, so consider this carefully. Whatever you're offering, make sure it's something that your ideal customer would genuinely want. Using clear, concise copy, explain why your offer is so irresistible, and watch your conversion rate skyrocket.

Include Branding and Trust Signals

Believe it or not, your company probably isn't even close to the top of the list of things your prospects care about. For this reason, make sure your landing pages are appropriately branded so they have no problems identifying where they are or who they're dealing with.

It's also vital that you include trust signals on your landing pages. Trust signals can be rave reviews of your product from satisfied customers, testimonials from industry experts, and logos of companies that use your product all lend your brand social proof — a powerful motivator for prospects who might otherwise remain on the fence.




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Small businesses > Sites generating less than \$5 million

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IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

It's not enough to know what you should be doing with your landing pages — you also have to be able to look at your landing pages with a critical eye and honestly identify areas where improvements can be made. After all, knowledge is only half the battle.

It can be difficult to identify areas of opportunity within your landing pages, especially if you devoted considerable time, effort and expense to produce them. However, it's vital that you assess your current landing pages honestly, as failing to do so could be costing you in the long run.

Is the Goal Clear?

Make the goal of your landing pages almost painfully obvious.

Hopefully, you know what you want visitors to do when they reach your landing page, but is the goal clear to them? It's vital that you remove any possible ambiguity about what you want your prospects to do when they reach your landing

page. Make the goal of your landing pages almost painfully obvious.

What Are Your Competitors Doing?

All's fair in love and war, and this most definitely applies to landing page optimization. Why not take the opportunity to learn from others' mistakes and see how your competitors' landing pages look? Think of it this way — whether they're better than yours or not, you'll still learn something. What are your first impressions of your competitors' landing pages? Too busy? Too confusing? Learn from these mistakes and apply these lessons to your own pages.

Are You Targeting Your Ideal Customer?

This one might seem obvious, but you'd be surprised how many companies overlook this when creating their landing pages. Identifying and targeting your ideal customer is crucial to the success of your landing pages, particularly if you run a business that serves several demographics. Everything about your landing pages, from the layout to the messaging, should be chosen in such a way to make your landing pages maximally appealing to your perfect prospect.

Are Your Landing Pages Too Long?

A landing page should serve as an efficient connection between your paid search ads (or any upstream traffic source) and whatever you're offering — nothing more. Make it as easy as possible for prospects to convert by removing any and all obstacles between them and the goal. This includes extraneous copy, cluttered designs, lengthy web forms and any other potential distractions.

Is Your Landing Page Content Relevant?

You don't want to deter visitors with too much content, but is the content you are offering highly relevant? Landing pages can be a valuable opportunity to showcase the benefits of your product or service, but make sure absolutely everything on your landing pages is relevant to your customer and how it benefits them.

Do Your Landing Pages Help Visitors Flow Organically Through the Conversion Funnel?

Your landing pages should, of course, encourage visitors to convert — but what happens if the desired goal isn't at the end of the conversion funnel? If this is the case, check that your landing pages are helping visitors progress uniformly along the funnel in a smooth, logical fashion. Ensure that points of entry and exit make sense, and keep the user experience in mind at all times.

Does the Design Make Sense?

Make it as easy for visitors to convert as you can — within a single click is ideal.

When designing landing pages, it can be tempting to focus solely on visual or aesthetic considerations. However, it's also important to ensure that your landing pages are functional, as well as beautiful.

Your landing page copy should leave no questions unanswered, and the navigation should be as simple as possible. Make it as easy for visitors to convert as you can — within a single click is ideal.

Are Your Calls to Action Clear?

To get visitors to convert, you need to make it as easy as possible, and one of the most effective ways to accomplish this is to make your calls to action explicitly clear. Rather than use generic phrasing such as "Submit," use expressive, simple language like "Download Your Free Guide" or "Get Started for Free." The visitors should know exactly what to expect when they click the button, so don't leave them guessing.

Are Your Headlines Attention-Grabbing?

Most visitors won't read a landing page in its entirety, which makes including an eye-catching headline just as important on a landing page as it is on the front cover of a newspaper. Landing page headlines are an excellent opportunity to reinforce your unique selling proposition, reiterate why your offer is so compelling, and entice the visitor to convert, so don't overlook them.

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Is Your Landing Page Copy Compelling?

Few things will dissuade prospects from converting faster than dry, boring copy. Nobody wants to hear about why you or your company is great — they want to know what's in it for them. Every single word of your landing page copy should be written with this in mind. Get to the point quickly, and don't waste precious space (or your prospects' time) with unnecessary copy.

Is Your Offer Sufficiently Enticing?

You might think that whatever you're offering is a truly once-in-a-lifetime offer — but is it really? Without a sufficiently compelling offer, you may find your conversion rates remain stubbornly low, even if you do everything else right. Be sure to offer prospects something of genuine utility and value.

Can Visitors Scan Your Landing Pages Quickly?

People are busy. They've already taken the time to click your ad, so help them over the goal line by making your landing pages easily skimmable. Your main points, unique selling proposition, and calls to action should be clear and easily understood, even to visitors who don't take the time to read every last word.

Are Your Images Relevant and Appropriate?

Imagery can be a powerful tool, but only when used appropriately. Any images you include in your landing pages should reinforce the points made in the copy, help the landing page flow smoothly, and reinforce the action you want your prospects to take. If you're selling a digital product, screenshots can help make abstract concepts clearer, and directional cues such as arrows can make it easier for your visitors to convert.

Do Your Landing Pages Match Your Ad Copy?

Matching landing pages to the relevant ad copy doesn't just make for a better user experience, it can also improve your conversion rate. Some companies link the same generic landing page to numerous ads, which can be a costly mistake. Make sure the language of your landing page matches the corresponding ad exactly — don't confuse prospects by sending them to an irrelevant landing page. The entire process should be smooth and logical from click to conversion.

Are You Asking for Too Much Information?

Being greedy when asking for prospects' personal data is a classic way to ruin your conversion rate. The more information you ask for, the more likely you are to drive visitors away before they convert. Only ask for the data you genuinely need to qualify them as a viable lead, and nothing more. Ideally, lead forms should contain no more than seven fields, and fewer is definitely preferable if possible.

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In this 11-part 30-day course landing page expert Oli Gardner will walk you through how to create high-converting landing pages.

The course includes step-by-step instructional videos so that you can follow along, creating your own landing pages as you go.

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Are You Taking Advantage of Trust Signals?

Word-of-mouth advertising is powerful because people trust the opinions of others, even in today's media environment of paid reviews and social rankings for sale. If people are raving about your product or service, use these testimonials on your landing pages. Don't make them obnoxiously prominent, but definitely include them, as this kind of trust signal can be a persuasive way to convince a hesitant prospect to take action.

Are Your Landing Pages Mobile Friendly?

Mobile search could eclipse desktop search in terms of volume by next year, which means if your landing pages can't be viewed easily on mobile devices, now is the time to remedy this. Check your analytics platform to see how much of your traffic comes from mobile, and ensure that your landing pages can be easily accessed on smartphones and tablets. This may be a major design consideration, as calls to action and other navigable elements may have to be redesigned for ease of use on mobile devices.

Do Your Landing Pages Load Quickly?

Every second your landing pages take to load fully, the greater the chance your prospects will click away. It's vital that your landing pages load as quickly as possible on all devices to ensure you're not losing potential conversions. Consider using compressed images for faster load times, and optimize your landing pages for slower mobile devices, such as those using 3G connections. The faster your landing pages load, the better.

Have You A/B Tested Your Landing Pages?

Even if you've optimized every single one of the suggestions above, you could still be missing out on conversions. How? By failing to A/B test your landing pages. Making decisions about your landing pages based on assumptions is a serious mistake. Don't take any chances with your conversion rate — test everything, and be sure to give your test sufficient time to become statistically significant before drawing any conclusions.

Do You Have Conversion Tracking Enabled?

Again, this might seem painfully obvious, but many marketers overlook this crucial step. If your landing pages don't have conversion tracking enabled, you're taking shots in the dark with your ad spend. You need to be able to quantify and track every aspect of your landing pages' performance. If you can't, how can you expect to know if they're working as they should?

For more ideas of landing page A/B tests, check out [this lesson](#) in PPC University.

LANDING PAGE TESTING

The Strategy of What to Test

There are endless possibilities in landing page testing. So how do you decide which elements on your landing page are worthy of testing? The following filters will help you separate the wheat from the chaff.

Breadth of Impact

The 80/20 rule (the Pareto Principle) has been applied to a wide range of disciplines and observations. It predicts that a vital few (20%) changes are responsible for the vast majority (80%) of the results. If you apply this notion to landing page optimization, it follows that fixing a few fundamental problems will result in the greatest benefit-to-conversion rate. Conversely, it also implies that some of the elements that you decide to test will not affect conversion rate at all.

So how do you determine what is vital and what is trivial? In general this can be hard to do, but you can follow the guideline of looking for the widest potential impact.

Most Important Conversion Actions

In many cases, you will have more than one desired conversion action. You should concentrate on improving or emphasizing the action that results in the biggest financial rewards. For example, if you offer three different service levels you probably know which ones your audience already prefers and their relative revenue value. By fixing or emphasizing the most popular one, you stand to gain the most. If your least popular plan only accounted for 1% of sales, even doubling its conversion rate would not have a dramatic impact on your overall revenues.

Biggest Possible Audience

Just because your best pages are generating a lot of revenue does not mean they are optimized or performing as well as they could be. By improving your top pages even more, you can usually unlock a lot of value.

Often companies have multiple landing pages for specific online marketing campaigns. You should examine which ones have the highest traffic levels and result in the highest number of conversions. Give first priority to the pages that are generating the most revenue, and cater what's displayed to your prospects' preferences.

Many companies only focus on obviously under-performing landing pages. Of course, shoring up your weaknesses is a valid approach to improving your business. However, you should not let it blind you to the opportunities hidden away in your best-performing

pages. Just because your best pages are generating a lot of revenue does not mean they are optimized or performing as well as they could be. By improving your top pages even more, you can usually unlock a lot of value.

It's important to note that in order to obtain reliable results from your tests, you need to have a large enough data set to calculate statistical significance. This means that you need at least one of two things: landing pages with consistent traffic (more than a few conversions a day) or a test that spans over a long period of time. To understand whether or not testing is right for you, [check out this helpful article](#) from our friends at ClickZ.

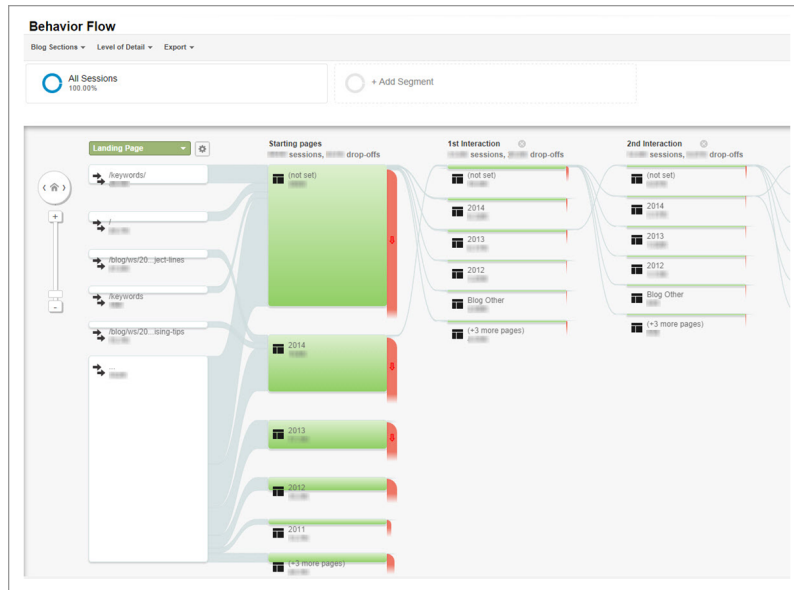
Most Popular Paths Through Your Site

Web analytics software shows you the most popular paths (flows of traffic) through your site. Some of these packages even show you the reverse goal paths — the common sequences of pages that led the visitor to the conversion action.

Do not pay attention only to the size of the landing page traffic flows because not all traffic has equal value. For example, your home page may have a high percentage of direct referral traffic. This may mean that you have a strong brand and people are proactively seeking out your company, with a correspondingly higher likelihood of conversion. Or most of your homepage traffic may be from your successful SEO efforts. Unfortunately, the traffic may be coming primarily from generic keywords. In such cases, the large number of visitors may hide the fact that they are disinterested “tire kickers” who are much less likely to convert.

A lot of traffic (especially from paid campaigns) lands on pages that are deep within your site. This deep linking is intentional and is used to present the most relevant content possible. Deep linking is common in PPC campaigns, where the intent of searchers can be inferred from their keyword. Those who use generic keywords are sent to your homepage, whereas those showing more specific intent or knowledge about their needs are taken directly to particular information or to product detail pages. The conversion likelihood of the deep-linked traffic is usually significantly higher because of visitors' latter position in the decision process, and the targeted information that they see on the landing page.

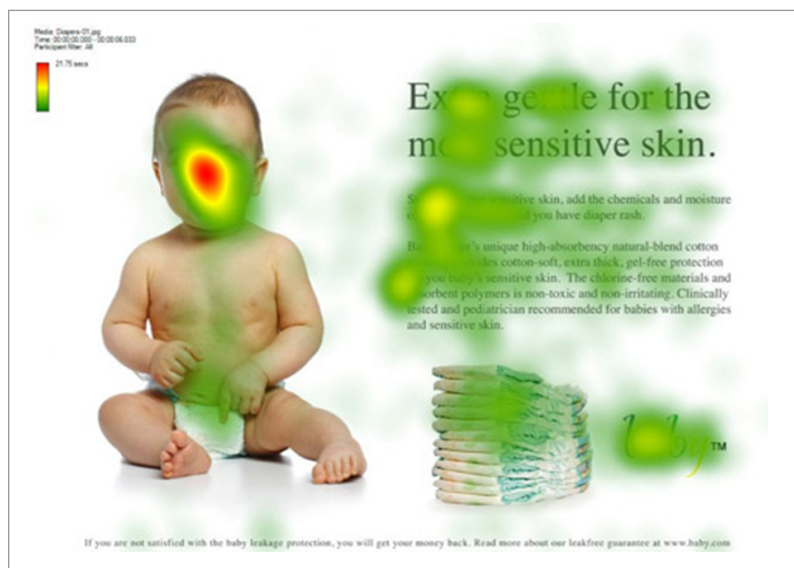
You combine all these factors into a single metric for estimating the magnitude of the potential losses for each type of landing page within your site. Multiply the revenue per visitor for a particular type of landing page by the number of visitors who land on it. This will give you a revenue estimate for the traffic source. Multiply that number by the bounce rate (the percentage of visitors who immediately exit without viewing another page). This will give you a rough sense of the potential lost revenue.



Most Prominent Parts of the Page

Eye-tracking and other behavioral studies have consistently shown that people pay more attention to the information near the upper-left corner of a page when they are trying to get oriented. They look for important content in the central portion of the visible page and typically ignore the upper-right and lower-left corners.

Placing items about the fold is critical for the awareness stage of the decision process (since you can't click on a link that you do not even know exists). But there is some evidence to indicate that the fold is not at the actual visible limit of the browser window. People start tuning out when they get about two-thirds of the way down the screen. In fact, many people would rather scroll something up into the middle of their screen to examine it than look down to the bottom of the page.



Granularity

The granularity of your test elements refers to the level of detail at which you will make changes to your design. At one extreme, you can use specific and fine localized variations (such as changing button colors or text font sizes). At the other extreme, you can create coarse and fundamental changes that join dozens of smaller individual design alternatives. It is not uncommon to completely redesign your whole landing page and test it head-to-head against your original.

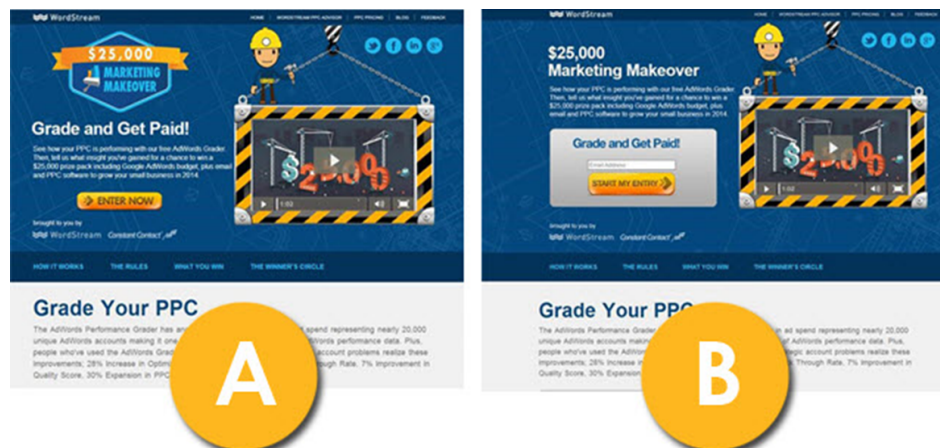
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The size of your test will be constrained by the traffic to your landing page and its data rate (the number of conversion actions per unit time). Changing the granularity of your tests allows you to include all or most of your important ideas while still fitting into a reasonable test size. For example,

reducing search space size is done by combining several individual changes into a single larger variable for testing.

When a large visitor pool for a test size is available, it makes sense to get very granular on most of the changes that you are considering. With other testing methods or low data rates, you will be forced to consolidate your test size. At that point, you have to decide if you want to focus on granular changes or combining several of them into larger tuning elements.

The advantage of the fine granularity changes is that they are quick and easy to implement. For example, you may want to consider different headlines for your page. It would not take long to come up with some reasonable alternatives, set up a test, and start collecting data. By continuously running back-to-back fine granularity tests, you can often make significant conversion improvements. By their nature, these kinds of small incremental tests do not require a lot of work or emotional investment, and are ideal for this kind of champion-challenger continuous testing.



Wholesale page redesigns are sometimes the only option when you want to consider many potential changes but do not have the data rate or time to run a series of finer-granularity tests. Such redesigns are also the only way to deal with landing pages that have low coherency. The main drawback of whole-page redesigns is the time and effort that goes into crating them. Since you don't know if the new design will outperform the original, you are taking a gamble that your larger up-front investment will pay off.

There is no inherent advantage to testing fine or coarse granularity changes. In a fine granularity test, changing a single headline from "free quote request" to "instant quote" saw the form-fill conversion rate skyrocket by 58%. On the other end of the spectrum we have seen lifts of several hundred percent with coarse split testing of completely different whole-page designs.

Sweep

Do your alternative testing element ideas represent radically different thinking? Or are they tame tweaks unlikely to produce significant changes in visitor behavior?

Closely related to the granularity of a tuning element is the notion of sweep. Do your alternative testing element ideas represent radically different thinking? Or are they tame tweaks unlikely to produce significant changes in visitor behavior?

Tactical changes such as strikingly provocative headlines can be radical, whereas whole-page redesigns that merely change color schemes can be considered tame. So sweep does not necessarily correspond to granularity.

You have choices. You can continue to evolve your landing page within the current framework of its design, messaging, and intention. Or you can test radical revolutionary alternative that can fail miserably to produce unexpected levels of breakthrough performance. There is no correct answer. The level of iconoclasm in your testing depends on your company's culture of risk tolerance and business objectives.

Coherency

Visitors respond to incoherent pages with a variety of gut reactions, and none of them are flattering. In the extreme, such pages can be experienced as tacky, cheesy, bewildering, or obnoxious. Unfortunately, you have probably seen hundreds of examples before.

The coherence of the landing page can also be related to the connection of the path a visitor took to arrive to the page. Say you've been using four sets of task labels to drive visitors in a coordinated campaign between PPC and ad retargeting, where the ad banner creative is rewritten based on that searchers' previous behavior. If you've provided

that personalization to hone in on a prospect, how coherent would it be to start using internal-speak as soon as they actually click? Does the landing page carry the same brand signals as the previous banners (remember, neither has really been read yet)?

Coherency means all of the supporting elements contribute to a unified whole. Because of this, coherency-related elements should often be grouped into a single unified look and feel element and tested as a unit that governs the visual experience of your landing pages. The need for high coherency is an excellent reason to consider whole-page redesigns, especially in low data rate environments. This allows you to fix all known visual problems in one shot. At large companies details of good coherence might be captured in brand or visual design brief documents, and reflected in standard HTML or CSS coding libraries. At smaller companies, founding documents like marketing plans may be a good starting point for online coherence.

NEXT STEPS

To gain valuable insights into how your landing pages are performing according to landing page best practices, try [WordStream's Landing Page Grader](#). This free tool will tell you, in sixty seconds or less, how your landing pages measure up against the competition and provide you with actionable tips for improvement.

If your site is generating at least \$1 million in revenue annually, ask the experts at SiteTuners for a [free 15 minute conversion review of your site](#). During this interactive session they'll identify key elements that could be affecting your conversion rate, and provide you a video recording of the review to share with your team.

WordStream's free [PPC University](#) learning resources offer additional tips and strategies for building landing pages, optimizing pages for mobile, and many other topics.

Learn the latest proven strategies in landing page optimization at [Conversion Conference](#), an annual 2-day event focused exclusively on proven strategies for increasing online conversion rates.

ABOUT SITETUNERS

Established in 2002, [SiteTuners](#) was one of the first online marketing agencies to focus exclusively on conversion rate optimization (CRO), developing landing page test plans and strategy, conversion-centric redesigns for full sites as well as single landing pages, and monthly conversion management services that bring CRO expertise and training to internal teams. Since its founding, more than 1,250 large and small companies worldwide have turned to SiteTuners to improve the performance of their online marketing programs.

ABOUT WORDSTREAM

[WordStream Inc.](#) provides search marketing software and services to small and medium-sized businesses that want better results from paid search. WordStream's easy-to-use PPC Advisor software facilitates more effective PPC campaigns by providing a customized workflow, the 20-Minute PPC Work Week, to help advertisers increase relevance across Google, Bing, and Yahoo and get expert-level results in a fraction of the time. Whether you're new to search marketing or are an experienced PPC manager, WordStream's PPC management software and services can provide the boost you need to grow your business and drive better results.