

# Landing Pages 101

## Best Practices for Leveraging Landing Pages in Your eMarketing Mix

### What's IN:

- Video, Top 10 lists
- Simple fast-loading HTML
- Company landing pages
- Recommendation engines
- Multi-channel touch points (direct mail, banner, text message, pay-per-click)

### What's OUT:

- Boring Whitepapers
- Flash jump/intro pages
- Individual landing pages
- Boring "thank you" pages
- Web only campaigns

During the last five years, online marketing has experienced explosive growth, moving beyond simple email blasts to pay-per-click, banner ads, online promotions, webinars and landing pages. To enhance their chances of cutting through the clutter, marketers need to hone each of their sales elements, including landing pages, to ensure they are as effective as possible.

### Landing Pages 101

Wikipedia defines a landing page as a lead capture page that appears when a potential customer clicks on an advertisement or a search-engine result link. The page will usually display content that is a logical extension of the advertisement or link, which is optimized to feature specific keywords or phrases for indexing by search.

In Business to Business (B2B) contacts, landing pages are often the first interaction a company has with a sales lead. As a result, companies are placing greater importance on deploying good landing pages to improve their conversion rates.

While landing pages are used both in both Business to Consumer (B2C) and B2B interactions, there are significant differences in their application.

In B2C, the page is designed to identify the lead and make the sale in that one, transactional visit. One person is generally the decision maker, and the product is typically a consumer product, such as a brokerage account. The goal is to identify the lead, convert them, and make the sale all on that one page.

In B2B, the sale is more consultative, with a team of people likely being the decision maker. In B2B, the original contact may not even be part of the team, but simply an information gatherer. The decision to buy is more critical, for example it could be about a system to run the financials of a brokerage company.

### Why are landing pages important?

The question is sometimes asked: Why create a landing page? Why not just send potential customers to the homepage? Most marketers will say that a landing page is for testing and optimization of design and content. Customers will be coming in through different avenues, so why not refine the message and the offer based on where the ad was placed? By contrast, sending a customer to a homepage is like sending them on a whole new level of search. In a way, sending them to the homepage is a waste of click dollars.

**Specifically, a landing page allows for greater testing, enabling you to:**

- **Refine message and offer based on where the ad is being placed.**
- **Understand what works and what doesn't work**
- **Maximize conversion rates**

Testing in turn creates greater opportunity to optimize the page, which will again maximize conversion rates and decrease marketing spend.

### And Because Google Said So

Google has recently introduced a new web crawler, AdBot-Google, which checks to see if your keywords and landing pages are relevant to each other. That information is used to determine your ad quality score. Ads with a high quality score can rank higher, even if the ad buyer is paying less than others for the ad. Google has also indicated that refusal to allow AdBot scanning could result in lower scores.

Beyond Google's ranking system, there are other metrics that show the advantages of directing prospects to optimized landing pages as opposed to the home page.

- **Average conversion rates for lead generation for the home page from search engine marketing or pay-per-click fall between 5 percent to 6 percent.**
- **Landing pages that match the theme of the keyword search have an average conversion closer to 10 percent.**
- **Landing pages that match the keyword exactly have a conversion rate closer to 12 percent.**

When you're paying for clicks, you should think about these conversion rates.

If you've decided you want to increase conversion rates while keeping a lid on marketing expenses, here are several steps to consider.

## Top 10 Landing Page Best Practices

- 1 Continue the information scent trail.** A scientific theory, called Optimal Foraging Theory, says that our minds have evolved to forage for information in a certain way. We follow sameness and likeness as we search out new data. So if we want prospects to respond to our banners, emails and pay-per-clicks, we need to think about the messaging process as if we're laying out a train of bread crumbs to draw in prospects. We can use web messaging to create the equivalent of a "scent trail" that can be followed. Commonality of message makes it easy for prospects to follow along till they get to where you want them, which places a premium on reinforcing the exact messaging in the search, in the hit, and on the landing pages.
- 2 Design for Web-induced Attention Deficit Disorder.** Information glut is common on the web, so make it easy to follow the data flow. Keep the message above the fold on the landing page, use bulleted text, with crisp, clean language. Make your offer obvious on the page, with no scrolling needed to find it or follow it. Netflix is a perfect example of how well this can be done.
- 3 Don't have other navigation.** It's a very common mistake to place navigation to other products or offers on a landing page. The thinking is that, "We've got them here. We should show them all our great products, and tell them all the great messages we have to tell." But, there are several reasons to repress that tendency. First, the vast majority of people will bail from a landing page in eight seconds or so. Therefore, if you want to have an impact, don't dilute or distract from the key message. Once a prospect has been led to your landing page, reinforce the scent trail.

Second, it is easier to measure the impact of your offer, messages and page design when there are fewer distractions like other navigation. Without other navigation, reasons for failure can be limited to a) the offer wasn't good, b) the design wasn't good, or, c) too many questions were asked. With other navigation on the page, customers may leave for any of those reasons, plus they may have clicked to go somewhere else. If you keep the page focused, then you maximize your ability to test the page's effectiveness. Stay with the idea of simplicity and resist the urge to have additional features. When other features are added, then the page becomes a microsite, which is really designed for browsing and awareness. A landing page is geared for conversion.

- 4 Limit your survey questions.** In the movie, the 40-Year-Old Virgin, the main character goes to a meeting where potential dates are introduced every few minutes. If he wanted to know anything about them, he had to ask in a hurry and not leave anything out. But the dynamics behind landing pages is not similar. This is not speed dating; this is consultative selling, where an extended exchange of information is likely going to be necessary to generate a sale.

For the first survey questions, ask for only the essentials like name and email address, and carefully limit any other questions. Then, give your prospects a benefit for providing that data: Offer to send them information on events in their areas or offer to send a whitepaper. In both cases, you'll get valid emails from interested prospects. It may also be possible to pre-populate their profile from information already in your sales or marketing database.

As the interaction goes on, incrementally ask more questions. For example, if they request a whitepaper, ask for first and last name, email, and phone. If they sign up for a webinar, ask for the same information, plus the size of the company and BANT questions. At MarketBright, the process is called dialogue marketing, and it seeks to get the information and build a relationship through two-way interaction.

As an additional step, establish greater trust by saying that you won't spam or sell their email on the landing page itself. That reassurance provides comfort in an age of identity theft and privacy violations.

- 5 Make your offer compelling.** When customers come to the landing page, their focus on your message needs to be reinforced quickly. Make the information on the page easy and quick to consume. Devices like a headline with a number in it—Top 10 Reasons or Three Key Steps—simplify the information flow, which can tip the scales toward conversion. Also, put in claims, such as "Ranked #1 by XYZ Benchmark Report", which boost credibility.
- 6 Make sure it is the right offer for the right audience.** Recently, a company offered to give a free Starbucks card to those who signed up for its webinar. They were getting about 1,500 signups an hour because a free coupon site picked up their offer, and thousands of teens enrolled. It was an appealing offer, but its distribution went to a far larger group than its target audience. Keep the offer focused to your target audience by making it pertinent primarily to their needs, not the world's.
- 7 Test Your ideas:** The technology behind landing pages allows marketers to test concepts in a way that hasn't been feasible in the past. It was difficult to gauge the precise impact of print ads in mass marketing, much less focus on the effectiveness of any individual element, because of the time delay of responses and the vagueness of the information. When constructing landing pages, consider engaging in basic A/B testing. Test which graphic works best, which survey works best, which button works best. By applying the results of

such testing, conversions could increase by a half percent or more. While that might not seem like much, it could lead to a sale worth \$250,000. In B2B, that's very feasible. Consider taking the testing beyond A/B into split-run testing and advanced multi-variant testing, like that offered by Google and Omniture.

- 8 Test your channels.** Today, direct marketing is more a real-time activity, where it is easy to see where the dollars are going and what returns are coming in from different channels. Test placements, direct mail vs. email, Banner ads vs. pay-per-click, Google vs. Yahoo vs. Ask.com vs. MSN.

Name	Type	Status	Page Views	Visitors	Responses	% Conversion	Created
4 Marketeers \$76, 1-21-2008 DROP	Web Link	Active	244	114	<u>75</u>	65.8 %	15-JAN-2008 11:06
Adobe Max	Web Link	Active	1	1	<u>0</u>	-	22-JAN-2008 23:33
B2B 1-15 DROP	Email Marketing	Active	191	76	<u>23</u>	30.3 %	15-JAN-2008 09:00
Contact Us List	Web Link	Active	16	6	<u>5</u>	83.3 %	22-JAN-2008 17:08
Dreamforce List	Web Link	Active	15	5	<u>5</u>	100.0 %	22-JAN-2008 23:20
Link from Marketbright.com	Web Link	Active	88	49	<u>10</u>	20.4 %	14-JAN-2008 15:32
Marketbright Email	Web Link	Active	279	157	<u>102</u>	65.0 %	16-JAN-2008 00:22
PayPerPost Press Release	Web Link	Active	77	27	<u>3</u>	11.1 %	23-JAN-2008 13:24
SFDC Leads - Various Stages	Web Link	Active	1	1	<u>0</u>	-	23-JAN-2008 10:00
SFDC Opportunities	Web Link	Active	61	24	<u>20</u>	83.3 %	23-JAN-2008 09:42

- 9 Think new ideas.** Because of today's information glut, it is becoming increasingly difficult to cut through the clutter with a fresh message. While some traditional devices like whitepapers continue to remain solid attractions, the sheer number of them on the web now diminishes their effectiveness. Consider using updated channels like video, podcasts and quickly read, bulleted Top 10 lists that are easily absorbed. Elaborate intro pages are being replaced with simple, fast-loading HTML to focus attention on the scent trail. In addition, "thank you" pages are being replaced with recommendation engines, similar to those found on Amazon. ("Others who liked this book/ CD, also purchased these.") Recommendation engines, which use an algorithmic process known as householding, have been used on retail sites for years and are now migrating to B2B sites. In addition, the proliferation of touch points – direct mail, banner ads, texting – enable marketers to reinforce their basic messages through multiple channels, all driving back to a single campaign.

- 10 Take advantage of "thank you" page.** If a potential customer has stayed to that point, there is no harm in giving them more options. The site will have benefited from the click-through, and it will have collected their information. So at this point, it is fine to use regular navigation, promote other offers, make the call-to-action link obvious and central, and send the offer via email to ensure valid email. Consider adding a recommendation engine, though, to ensure that the prospect sees they are being offered more than an extended sales pitch.

## What optimized landing pages can achieve

Evault, a Seagate Co., had been spending a lot of money on Google with few leads generated. After working with Marketbright, Evault increased its lead flow by 450 percent with no increase in ad spend.

### Bottom line

Because of increasing information glut on the web, companies are using a wide array of online marketing tools, including email blasts, banner ads, pay-per-click and landing pages. Marketbright is designed to optimize the potential of generating ROI from online campaigns. On landing pages, optimizations can increase the percentage of conversions as much as one percent on B2C sites. On B2B sites, it doesn't take much of an increase to improve the ROI.

Optimizing landing pages is just one step in the sales cycle. The next step is to introduce lead qualification, or scoring, to ensure that valid leads are either placed into a nurturing program or sent directly to Sales. By optimizing the results of lead generation, companies can increase their viable leads while reducing their marketing spend. For more information on how to optimize the results of lead generation through lead scoring, request Marketbright's whitepaper, Lead Scoring 101.

*Erik Bower is president of Marketbright, a software-as-a-service company specializing in online sales/marketing solutions.*