



JAMES MICHAEL HIGGINS

increasing website conversion

**TRANSFORMING YOUR WEBSITE INTO A LEAD GENERATION
POWERHOUSE**

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Special thanks to all the colleagues, clients, prospects, authors, and bloggers that made this book a reality. Collectively, you've provided both the questions and the insights that have shaped my ever-evolving thinking on this topic.

knowledge is meant to be shared.

Feel free to post this on your blog, or email it to whomever you believe would benefit from reading it.

Thanks and enjoy!

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the evolution of online marketing (cliff note style)

THE EARLY DAYS

First, there was the just the Internet – basically a huge collection of interconnected computers that offered a really cool way to access information... information on everything from Anacondas to Zebras. For academics and computer geeks, it was a little slice of heaven!

THE “WEBSITE RUSH”

Then something happened - something that would forever change the way individuals and companies transact business. Someone asked the simple question, “*How can I use the Internet to grow my business?*” Almost overnight, that single question started a modern day gold rush as individuals and companies raced to secure their domain names, create their websites, and establish viable ecommerce models. Everyone wanted to “get online”... and FAST!

HELLO... HELLO... IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

So... over the next few years, a couple of websites went live (actually over 15 million of them by 2003, but who’s counting!). Some large, some small, some conservative, some hip, some cool, some boring, some visual appealing, and some down right repulsive. But they all had one thing in common. **They all needed more visitors.** It seems a light went on for all of us - you can have the best website in the world, but unless people see it, it’s about as useful as a car without an engine.

So what did we do? We’ve spent the last several years **OBSSESSED** with growing website traffic. In no time, it seems we developed a strange new language and started using words like SEO, keyword metatags, robots.txt, keyword density, link popularity, whitehat, blacklist, link farms, pay-per-click, and organic search.

Hosting a dinner party that’s going a little later than you intended? Start throwing out a few of these terms. That should clear out the place for you!



Seriously though, search engine optimization and driving traffic via online advertising is BIG, BIG business, and it’s getting even bigger. Companies continue to exit traditional print advertising in droves, and they are spending higher and higher percentages of their marketing dollars driving potential customers to their sites. And you know what? Many companies have developed sound formulas for producing consistently high traffic levels.

TRAFFIC AND SALES LEADS: TWO VERY DIFFERENT ANIMALS

So that brings us to today. Most of us have websites and most are using some form of advertising and/or search engine optimization to drive traffic. But the reality... the success rate at converting this traffic into qualified sales leads (or sales) is... well... down right awful for most companies - I mean SCARY BAD. According to the most recent Fireclick Index, the average conversion rate hovers around 3%. **Put another way, 97% of the dollars being spent on building traffic is NOT delivering the goods!** Sadly, many companies have simply accepted this as a reality of doing business on the web and are content to see a 2-3% conversion rate month-after-month, year-after-year.

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wsletter,



But what if?... What if you could somehow double your conversion rate? Or what if you could consistently experience a 10% conversion rate? Well, for starters, increasing your conversion rate from 2% to 10% would **increase the number of sales leads FIVE FOLD** – AND your cost to acquire each lead... that would **decrease by 80%!**

5 times more leads, 80% less cost – maybe we're on to something here!

Here's two quick examples, both using a \$1,000 monthly spend on pay-per-click advertising (e.g., Google AdWords or similar) to drive traffic, but with very different conversion rates.

2% Conversion Rate

Pay-per-click monthly spend:	\$1,000
Number of visitors (i.e., click-throughs):	350
Conversion rate:	2%
Number of leads obtained (350 * 2%):	7
Average cost per lead (\$1,000/7):	\$142.85 per lead

10% Conversion Rate

Same Pay-per-click monthly spend:	\$1,000
Same Number of visitors (i.e., click-throughs):	350
Conversion rate:	10%
Number of leads obtained (350 * 10%):	35
Average cost per lead (\$1,000/35):	\$28.57 per lead

A huge difference for sure, but is it attainable?

Here's the good news. While the majority of the world might accept a 2-3% conversion rate, you don't have to! By taking the specific actions outlined in this e-book, you WILL significantly increase your flow of sales leads without spending an additional dime to increase traffic levels on your site.

OK... let's dig in and cover eight keys that will dramatically increase your website conversion!

1. plan your work... work your plan

We'll start with the big picture. Too many web marketers operate without a plan.

While their intentions are good, these folks are all about the latest article or “tip” they received via email. Based on this information (some good, some not so good), they go forth and make changes to their site in an attempt to increase conversion... making their call-to-action button bigger, changing out a graphic or headline, re-writing website copy, offering a new incentive, etc.

These marketers get an “A” for effort. They understand opportunity exists to increase their site’s conversion, and they are taking steps to address this. The problem is that without good baseline metrics and a more structured method for applying site changes, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to see if their efforts are really paying off. So they remain in the same cycle... constantly tinkering with their site, constantly experiencing increases and decreases in conversion, but not experiencing a longer-term, consistent upward trend in sales leads.



You need a plan (or “blueprint”), and this is the first thing you should give thought to prior to proceeding with the rest of the recommendations in this book. But don’t worry. We’re not talking about days of analysis and project planning. At this stage we’ll keep it simple. You simply need three things:

- A) a clear picture of how your site is converting today (i.e., conversion rate)
- B) a realistic conversion rate you’d like to obtain within the next 90 days
- C) your specific tactics for closing the gap between A and B

THE SPECIFICS

The first order of business is to understand how successfully you are converting visitors today. To determine this, first determine the total site visitors you had in the last 30 day period (actually, I like to use the last calendar month for which I have complete data, but either is fine). You’ll obtain this information by consulting your web-logs for the period, or asking your webmaster for the data. Make sure you use the statistic “total unique visits,” rather than total “hits.” Total unique visits is related to people (that’s what we’re most concerned with), while hits refers to the total number of files served up... including pages, graphic files, etc.

Next, you need to accurately determine the total number of conversions you experienced during the same 30-day period (i.e., the number of people who took your desired action).

TIP: Be careful here. Often, when I ask clients what they consider to be a conversion, they respond by saying “people who fill out my information request form.” Sounds reasonable. Then I ask what they are actually using to track these conversions, and often they respond, “We track the number of times the information request form was accessed by site visitors.” Again this sounds logical, but wait. You may have several people that get to your information request form, look at it, and decide not to complete it. Are these conversions? NOPE! So when using site statistics to define a conversion, make sure you use the subsequent landing page – typically a “Thank you for requesting information” page. Only people who receive this page are true conversions.

Even better than using weblogs, spend a little more time to actually count the number of leads, info requests, or newsletter subscribers you received during the month... that’s the real deal.

Now that you have your two numbers, it’s quick math. Divide your Total Conversions by your Total Unique Visitors... then multiply by 100. That’s all there is to it – this is your current conversion rate.

TWO RELATED POINTS:

- 1) I’ve described the process above from a high level... but you can get as granular as needed. It certainly makes sense to conduct separate analysis for individual landing pages you may have created. In most cases, it also makes sense to look a little deeper and analyze where this overall conversion rate is coming from. Are 90% of all conversions coming from your newsletter signup on the homepage, and only 10% of conversions coming from a product information request? – If so, is this OK? Digging deeper will help you to uncover the success rate of each Call to Action, and put a plan in place to increase all or some of these.
- 2) Now that you have your overall conversion rate, you’re probably wondering how you stack up. Well it’s hard to say as this varies greatly by industry, B2B vs., B2C, and what you define as a conversion... but here is a general guide based on my view... irrespective of statistics which point to a 2-3% average.
 - a. **0-3%** - poor, you should take simple steps to immediately double this (*work to implement the steps outlined in this e-book... like pronto*)
 - b. **3-5%** - below expectations – it will take a bit more effort, but you shouldn’t settle for this (*again, working to implement the steps outlined in this e-book will quickly get you out of this range*)
 - c. **5-10%** - starting to see results – if you’re in this range, you’re doing some things right... but there is potential for more.
 - d. **10-15%** - now we’re talking – you’ve got a good sense for your audience, and what it takes to convert them. Your goal should be to consistently exceed 15%.
 - e. **15%+** - excellent! – You’ve got the formula. Keep refining your strategy, but you are doing a good job at leveraging your investment in site traffic.

So as you look at the next 90 days, what is a realistic goal for increasing conversion?

Much depends on the time you have to devote, and the extent to which you can use outside help to implement some of the more sophisticated techniques outlined in this e-book. Although you may be at 2% today, there is NO REASON to believe you can't be at 10-15% in 90 days – it's all a matter of the number and type of techniques you use.

Read on to learn proven techniques for closing the gap between your current conversion rate and your 90-day conversion rate goal.

2. speak with potential customers, not your coworkers

THE MINDSET:

I'm going to present six statements. These statements speak to the **mindset** of marketers who truly “get it” – If you want to see powerful results in your web marketing, first take steps to ensure you and your company's leadership are firmly on-board with these six statements.

- 1) My website is a first and foremost a SALES vehicle.
- 2) My website's over-arching goal is to excite visitors and get them to take the next step.
- 3) My website is about my prospects and how we will make THEIR life better.
- 4) My website is NOT a re-purposed whitepaper or product factsheet.
- 5) My website is NOT a forum to detail the depth of my company's knowledge.
- 6) My website is NOT all about “us.”



A PERSONAL EXAMPLE:

I struggled with this during my tenure as the Vice President of Sales and Marketing for a specialized consulting firm in the Human Resource Industry. During this time, it seemed logical that the company's site should focus on (like almost all the others in our industry) building credibility – making it clear to visitors how smart we were and how our products and services had more depth than our competitor's offerings. So what did we do?

Well... for starters, the site's copy was written entirely by Ph.D.-level Industrial and Organizational Psychologists – folks that were brilliant when it came to their discipline and folks with exceptional writing skills. However, they were people without the MINDSET – the marketing mindset... and folks without experience writing compelling marketing copy.

Bottom line – our company's site was impressive and it got high marks for possessing scholarly content. But it was focused ON US – NOT our prospects... and as a result, didn't deliver nearly the conversions it should have.

Too make a long story a little longer, we eventually saw the light! By shifting our mindset, working hard, and making several changes outlined in this e-book, we were able to increase our conversion rate by a multiple of 6! And the outcome: the rate at which we gained new clients DOUBLED within a period of 18 months.

So once the mindset is in place, what changes can be made to your site to increase conversion?

There is so much we can say about this, but I'll save the exhaustive treatment of this issue for a subsequent book. For now, I'll just provide some guiding principles that will assist you in assessing the need for site changes.

KEEP THINGS FOCUSED:

What is the NUMBER 1 (single) reason that visitors would be interested in your company over a competitor? In other words, what is your Unique Selling Proposition? This messaging should be front and center throughout your entire website. Don't kid yourself into thinking you can successfully market five Unique Selling Propositions – you can't. By trying to accomplish too much with your “leading message” you will only dilute the effectiveness of your pitch.

Keep in mind, your site's pervasive Unique Selling Proposition is not limited to your words. For a great example of this, spend a few minutes on Apple's website. Without reading a word, you get it! sleek, innovative, simple, hip. Perhaps better than any company I've seen, Apple clearly understands their market and their Unique Selling Proposition... and they don't need 1000 words to convey this point.

KEEP THINGS SIMPLE:

Remember, you are writing for your audience, not your co-workers. If you want your site to sell, you can't make the mistake of letting things get to academic, theoretical, or complex. In almost all cases, LESS is better.

FOCUS ON BENEFITS, NOT FEATURES:

This is perhaps one of the most well known marketing mantras, but for good reason. **A successful site doesn't sell widgets, it sells a DESIRED STATE.** Spend the effort to “paint the picture” for your visitor of how their life will be better through the use of your product or service. Here are a couple quick examples:

DON'T JUST SAY:

Our quilted covers are made from either high-end damask or double-knit cotton fabrics.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

We hand-craft each quilted cover from either high-end damask or double-knit cotton fabrics that are soft to the touch and that will last for years.

DON'T JUST SAY:

Our extended service plan provides on-site service for a period of one year.

SAY SOMETHING LIKE THIS:

Our extended service plan offers you complete piece of mind with on-call, hassle free in-home service for a full year.

3. pass the 7-second test

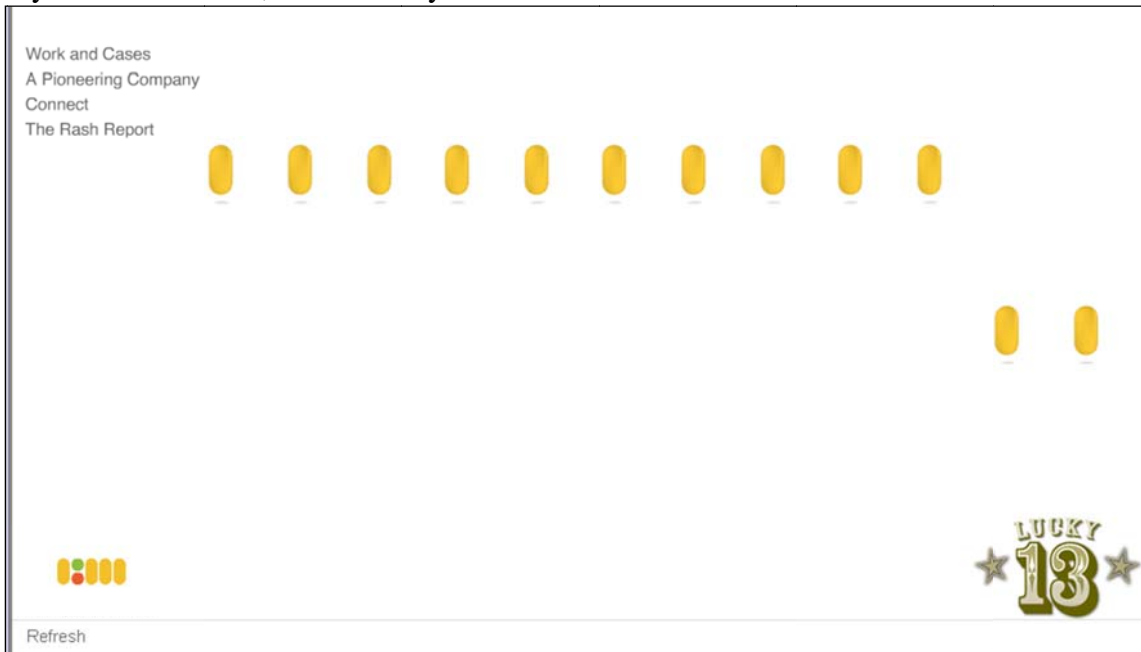
The Internet is full of choices. If your visitor doesn't understand AND see immediate value in your site's content, they're gone... and in most cases, gone forever. And that's a shame; because that visitor could have been an ideal prospect for your products or services. They might have been your next customer!

If you want your site to convert, it all starts with your homepage (or initial landing page).

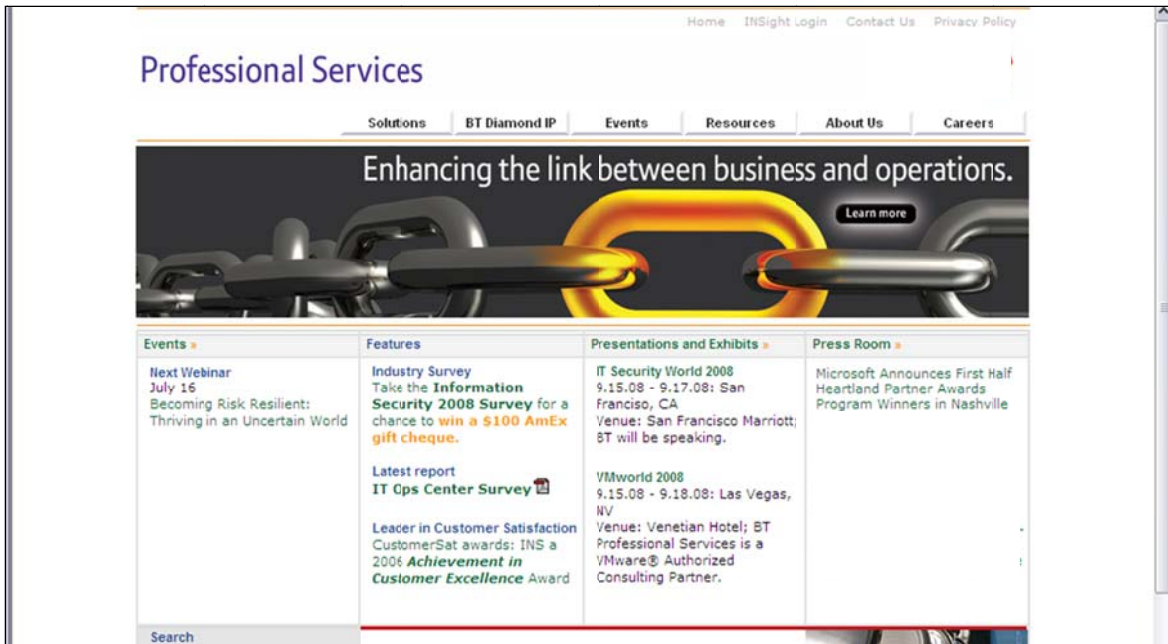
Bottom line, you've got only about seven seconds to hook your visitor.

Unfortunately, sites abound that just don't get it. To illustrate the point, it's helpful to take a look at a couple real-life examples.

If you were a visitor, how would you react to these two sites?



Ok... I spent my seven seconds, and I still have ABSOLUTELY NO CLUE what these folks are all about.



This site is more typical of the masses. It looks professional, but (in my opinion) it's no more effective at converting visitors than the previous site.

Upon my seven second review, here's what I know about this company:

- They provide professional services
- They enhance the link between business and operations

That's really about it. Sounds good, BUT WHAT IN THE WORLD DO THEY DO? AND HOW CAN THEY HELP ME? It seems there are a host of other things on the site such as surveys, webinars, and news stories, but very few folks will spend more time digging into these resources without a clear and compelling motivation.

OK – So what's the key to making the most of your visitor's seven seconds?

- 1) Your homepage copy and visual elements should stay narrowly linked to your unique selling proposition.
- 2) Your homepage should display a prominent, attention getting headline, then build on that main point with a concise summary of your offering. Limit your headline to 10 words. Limit your offering statement to 40 words.
- 3) Your homepage copy should be customer focused, NOT you focused. You MUST clearly answer “what’s in it for them” within your headline and/or offering statement.
- 4) Your visual elements should clearly support and build interest in your copy. It should not distract from your copy.

Here’s an example from Business Shorts. Please understand, I don’t present this as a picture of perfection. I’m NEVER satisfied and we’re always seeking ways to improve our site’s conversion rate. What I can say is, after months of analysis and tweaking, the page below converts a very high percentage of visitors (as of late January, 2011... the number stands at 14% total for the page, and 23% of visitors who actually view the 3 minute tour!).



DOES YOUR SITE PASS THE TEST?

Let's spend some time now to take an objective look at **your** homepage – but not the way you typically look at your homepage. I want you to see it through the eyes of your prospects. I want you to literally launch the page and spend a max of seven seconds processing the content (images, text, etc.) found there.

Then, close the window and think about the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following three statements (again, answer as if you are a prospect):

1) It is absolutely clear to me what this company does.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree* *Neutral* *Agree* *Strongly Agree*

2) I understand how their products or services can benefit me.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree* *Neutral* *Agree* *Strongly Agree*

3) I feel engaged and motivated to learn more about this company.

Strongly Disagree *Disagree* *Neutral* *Agree* *Strongly Agree*

How'd you do? If you answered anything less than "Strongly Agree" on any of these questions, you've got room to improve.

Work hard to tighten/streamline the copy on your homepage, ensuring your messaging is tightly linked to your organization's single biggest competitive advantage (i.e., your Unique Selling Proposition). Also, ensure that any graphics support this core message, rather than distract from it.

4. shelf the text - start engaging your prospects

THREE TRUTHS:

- 1) It takes effort to read a text-intensive site. Most people simply won't do it.
- 2) People only remember about 10% of the text they read.
- 3) Of all media options, text is the LEAST effective at engaging your prospect.

So I'm saying text is bad, right? Yes and no. I'll explain.

Text can be powerful. Text can drive leads – IF it is used effectively.

The problem is that the vast majority of sites don't use text effectively. In many cases, websites are merely an electronic version of a company brochure or product factsheet. They operate under the false assumption that people will actually take the time to read paragraphs and paragraphs of text.

If you're serious about converting more visitors, text should be **part** of your website mix. It should NOT be your primary lead-generating method.

To convert at very high levels, you must

- offer visitors a very low-effort method for obtaining information
- deliver your message in a way your visitors will remember
- find creative ways to quickly engage your site visitors

Of course, achieving these three objectives is the sole focus of our work at Business Shorts (www.business-shorts.com) – using concise, persuasive web-based movies to engage your prospects, build excitement, and generate more sales leads.



While I sincerely believe a Business Short is the single most effective thing that can be done in the short-term to increase a website's conversion, it goes deeper than that. There are a host of other "engagement strategies" that can also be included in your site to empower your visitors and increase conversion. Here are just a few examples:

METHOD:	EXAMPLE:
Video testimonials from customers <i>(images with text can also be effective)</i>	http://www.halogensoftware.com/customers/video-testimonials/
Live online chat / Q&A functionality	http://www.hoovers.com
Online product tours/demos	http://www.salesforce.com/video/demos.jsp
Online polling	http://www.inc.com
A return-on-investment calculator <i>(or similar business modeling tools)</i>	http://www.business-shorts.com/roi

The idea here is to use elements of low-effort, interactivity (in addition to text) to keep visitors on your site for a longer duration, learning more about your offerings... and getting closer... and closer to taking the next step.

WHEN USING TEXT, FOLLOW THESE GUIDELINES:

In addition to finding interactive alternatives to text like those just described, here are four things you can do today to improve the text elements of your site.

- 1) Make use of headings, callouts, and bullets to break up large sections of text. When forced to use paragraphs, a rule of thumb I find helpful is limiting all paragraphs to a max of 6 lines of text, with no more than two paragraphs per section heading.
- 2) Craft your text as if you are speaking one-on-one to your visitor, not as if you are delivering a formal speech to thousands. For example, I tend to use contractions like “We’ll work hard to ensure you, our client...” instead of “We will work hard to ensure that all of our clients...” Remember, to convert your visitors, you must first CONNECT with your visitors.
- 3) If you offer detailed, feature-based product literature like product datasheets, make these available as downloads for those interested, rather than including all this content on your site pages. Preserve your prime real estate for generating interest through clear and compelling **benefits**.
- 4) When possible, avoid displaying reverse text (light text on a dark background). This is just a usability issue. Sites like these are tougher to read than traditional dark text on a lighter background.

5. lance likes high-end bikes, not sporting goods

Up to now, we've pretty much contained our discussion to "general" visitors that enter through your homepage (e.g., the importance of focusing on your single most unique selling proposition and passing the 7-second test).

But what if your company offers a host of products and services, each possessing its own target market and unique selling proposition? It's pretty hard to clearly convey value to ALL these people and for ALL your offerings in a single page, isn't it?

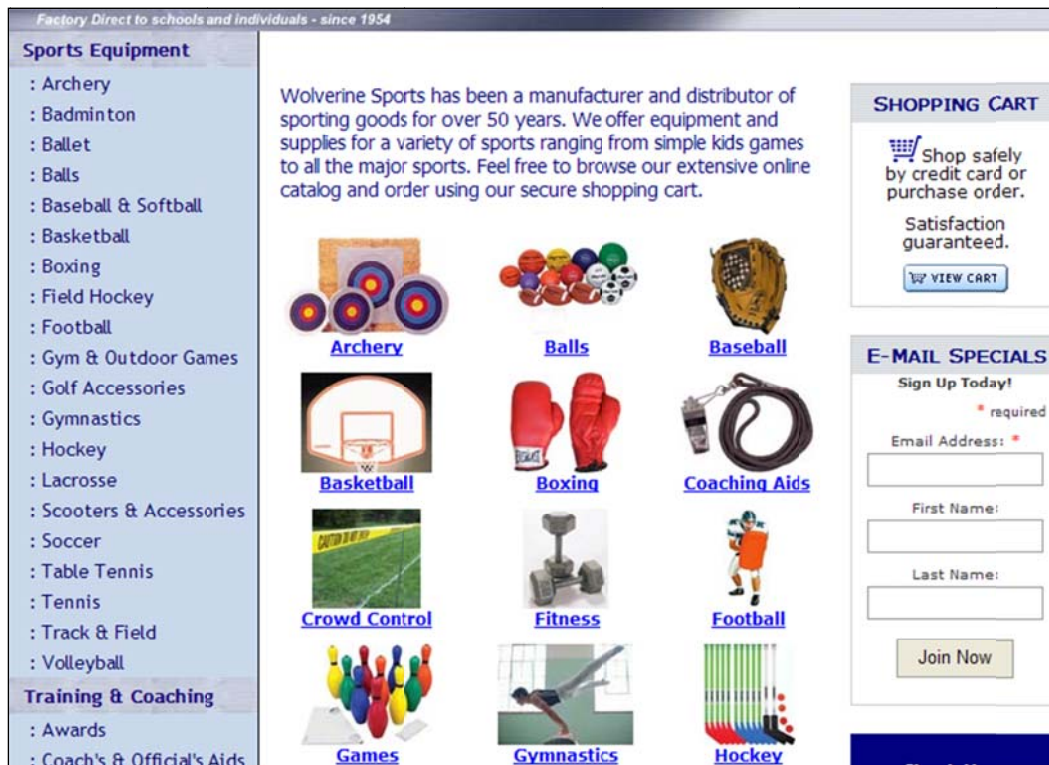
I think of this as similar to the cardinal rules of direct mail. What are the most important factors that determine response rate in a direct mail campaign? Is it the type of mailer? Is it the images or layout used in your mail piece? While both could be important factors, they pail in comparison to:

- The quality of your mailing list (i.e., a list that is well targeted to your niche prospects), and
- The extent to which your mailing is customized to address the needs of your targeted niche.

So the same can (and should) be applied to your web marketing efforts.

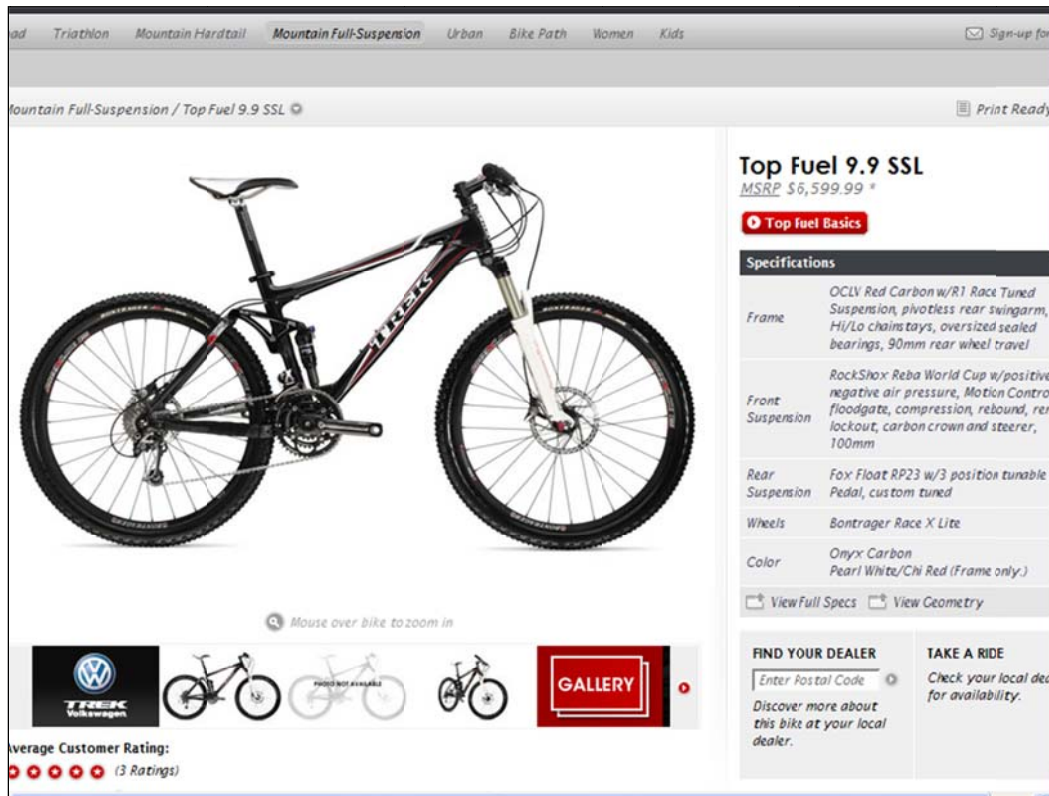
THE TREK TOP FUEL 9.9 SSL VS. SPORTING GOODS

Let's say you run an online sporting goods site. Based on a certain keyword search or pay-per-click ad, you know that web visitor X (let's call him Lance) is interested in a very specific mountain bike, the Trek Top Fuel 9.9 SSL. Of course the easiest thing to do is route Lance and 100% of all your other ad traffic to your homepage, which may look something like this...



If you were Lance, what would you do? Chances are you'd give it just a couple seconds to scan the page, looking for something about the Top Fuel 9.9 SSL. If you didn't find it in 2-5 seconds, you're GONE!

Now let’s say you spent the effort to create a webpage specifically designed for the Top Fuel 9.9 SSL. This time, Lance typed in his search term, saw your pay-per-click ad (or organic search result) and clicked through to a page that looked like this:



Think Lance will bail in the first 10 seconds? NOT A CHANCE. More likely, he’ll spend several minutes on this page checking out the specifications, photos, and pricing. And that means you’ve got an engaged prospect - a prospect that is highly likely to take the next step in the sales process.

Give some thought to your own products or services. Are there opportunities to better funnel your traffic based on their interests, needs, or industry affiliation? If so, consider routing your search engine pay-per-click ads to those pages – whether they be existing pages on your website or landing pages specifically created for your pay-per-click ads.

NOTE: A good landing page involves much more than just sending a visitor to a more targeted page, but covering all the details is beyond the scope of this e-book.



The best resource I've found on this topic is the *Landing Page Handbook*, produced by MarketingSherpa. You can find it at <http://www.sherpastore.com/RevisedLandingPageHB.html>. I have absolutely zero business relationship with these folks, so you can consider this a truly unbiased referral.

It will cost you about \$500.00, but consider it an investment in your business that will pay itself back many times over.

6. the anatomy of an effective call to action: prominent, clear, & compelling

As great as your product may be and as compelling as your website copy reads, **these alone are not enough to convert a high percentage of visitors**. Don't assume your visitors know what action you'd like them to take! You **MUST** have a prominent, clear, and compelling Call To Action (*from here on, referred to as CTA*).

So how do we create a prominent, clear, and compelling CTA?

First, consider each page on your site as a tool to accomplish some business objective. (*Remember our new mindset? "My website is a first and foremost a SALES vehicle"*)

What is the single most desired action you want your visitor to take while on that page?

- Sign-up for a newsletter?
- Register for a live demonstration?
- Register for a webinar?
- Register to download a free E-book?
- Call you on the telephone?
- Email you with questions?
- Request more information?
- Actually buy your product?
- Something else?

I strongly recommend clients identify one (and only one) key objective per page, and keep their CTA exclusively focused on that objective. I've seen many pages that try to equally promote multiple CTAs, like this:

"To arrange a demo, click here!"

"To contact us, click here!"

"To request more information, click here!"

While you **HAVE** given visitors more options, **you'll experience a lower conversion rate!** Why? Presenting multiple primary CTAs on a single page only creates competition among the choices... and rather than dealing with making a choice, many people simply leave. While it's ok to offer secondary (less prominent) CTAs on a single page, be very careful not to distract visitors away from your primary CTA.

DO WE REALLY NEED A STRONG CALL-TO-ACTION?

This is an important question to address. We've all heard the saying that "content is king" on the web, and there's certainly a lot of truth in this saying. The problem is, some people have taken this to mean that content alone will drive lead generation. Their attitude is "if we engage visitors with top-notch content about our offering, they'll naturally just call without us asking them to click on some cheesy-looking button!"

Well... here's the rub, and it's rooted in sales 101. Over the last 50 years, companies have spent millions trying to define the competencies and behaviors that make sales people successful – the core skills that separate top performers from average performers. One consistent finding from all this research:

Top sales people ASK FOR THE BUSINESS... low to average performers do not.

So you can be the most polished, most knowledgeable, hardest working sales person on the planet, but if you fail to directly ask your prospects for the business, you'll close a much lower percentage of deals. In the direct sales world, asking for the business might sound like this: "So can we get started with a service contract today?" or "I think your husband would be thrilled to receive an iPad for Christmas, can I go ahead and ring it up for you?"

The same applies in the online marketing world. You must directly ask your prospects for the business (or your desired next step), and you do this through a prominent, clear, and compelling CTA.

COMPONENTS OF A HIGHLY EFFECTIVE CTA

Let's spend a minute digging deeper into the three components I believe comprise a highly effective CTA.

1. Your CTA Must Be Prominent:

Your website is first and foremost a SALES vehicle. So don't be shy about asking visitors to take the next step. Your call to action should be a prominent component of each page on your website, and we'll cover the two elements of prominence now.

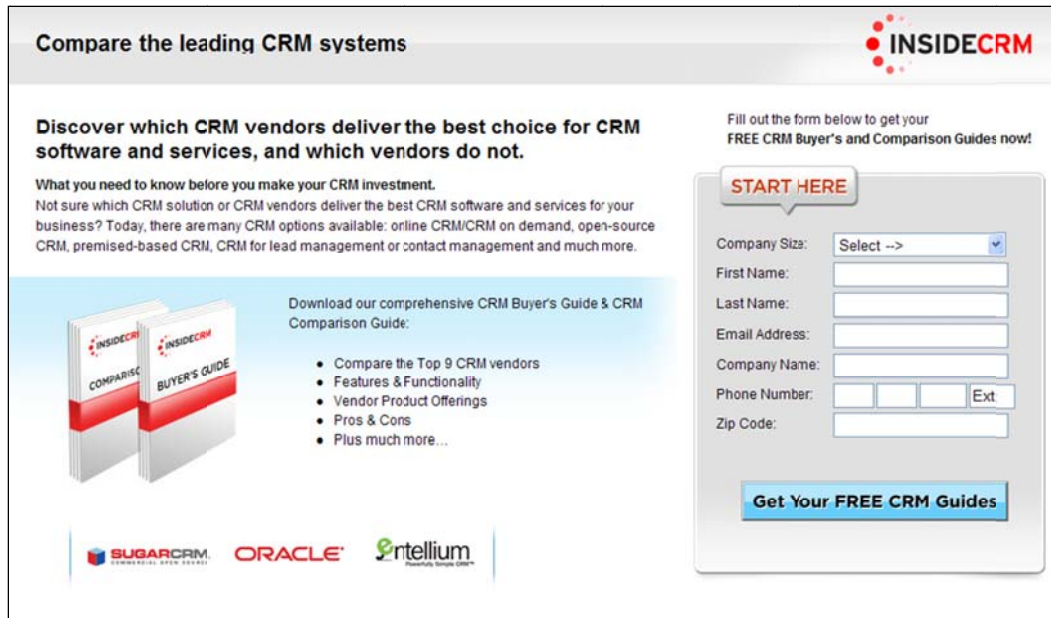


This first element of prominence is **placement/positioning**. Most experts agree that your primary CTA should be positioned “above the fold.” By this, we mean it should be viewable by all site visitors without requiring them to scroll. Usually this means positioning your CTA within the top 25-30 lines of horizontal space on the page. Remember, your visitors' computers will have a variety of screen resolutions. So what might appear “above the fold” to you, may actually require scrolling for someone with a lower screen resolution. To be safe, make sure you preview all your pages in a lower resolution like 1024x768. If you make it above the fold at a 1024x768 resolution, you'll be in great shape. (To simulate how your site would appear for a variety of common screen resolutions, here's a great free tool: <http://www.webconfs.com/web-page-screen-resolution.php>)

In addition to being above the fold, make sure your CTA is cleanly set apart from other page elements. One simple way of doing this is to ensure you've designed enough white space on all sides of your CTA. This will prevent the CTA from getting lost and will allow your visitors to quickly identify it as THE desired action.

The other element of prominence is CTA **design**. I'll cut to the chase here and provide three basic best practices, without all the explanation.

- a) Buttons RULE... and the bigger the better. You've got choices for your CTA which include text links, banner ads, images, and buttons. In most cases a well crafted button will deliver a higher conversion rate. With respect to size, a bigger button is preferable to a standard sized submit button like you'd find at the bottom of most web forms. Here is an example of a site that seems to have the right balance on size – not too small, but not too big.



- b) Just as your CTA button should be bigger than typical navigation buttons, so should your CTA text. Make this font at LEAST 2-4 points larger than the font used for your main page copy. You might also consider using a different, but complimentary, font from the rest of your page.
- c) Make your CTA stand out with eye-catching colors, while still keeping things professional.

2. Your CTA must be clear:

You should leave no doubt in your prospect's mind what you are asking them to do. You accomplish this by making a very concise, simple request. Here's an example:

“Subscribing to our company newsletter allows us to keep people informed of upcoming events and product enhancements”

What's going on here? Are they asking me to subscribe, or just educating me on the purpose of their newsletter? When I click on the newsletter link, will I see a newsletter, or will I be asked to provide my information?

Let's take a look at another example:

“Signup TODAY for the Insider Tips Monthly Email!”

As you can see, I did tighten up the sales copy. But the main point is that visitors have no doubt what you are asking them to do - signup TODAY to start receiving a monthly email.

3. Your CTA must be **compelling**: Prominence and clarity aside, you must compel your visitors to act:
- Through the quality of your offering (i.e., the “what’s in it for them”), and
 - Through the sales copy related to your CTA (i.e., how you present the offering)

Consider these two CTAs:

- 1) Register today to receive our company brochure.
- 2) Register today to receive a no obligation, all expenses paid cruise to Hawaii!

Which CTA has more appeal? Duh... Yes, it’s an exaggerated example, but it helps make the point. To drive significant conversions, your offer needs to be something of high perceived value to your visitors. In my opinion, your offer needs to be more than a company brochure or monthly e-newsletter. While these might be great resources, your visitors have probably seen these CTAs thousands of times, and these offers are not likely to excite them.

So what WILL excite them? This is a question only you can answer based on your knowledge of your market and your prospects. For an online retailer, “FREE Shipping” or “An Instant Discount Code” may prove to do the trick. For other businesses, it might be “A FREE Retirement Planning Guide” or “FREE 30-day Software Trial.” Take some time to determine what high-perceived-value item you could offer prospects, and build that into your CTA (better yet, come up with 2-3 options, and experiment to see which offer leads to more conversions).

CTA SALES COPY

To wrap up our discussion on your CTA, let's address the topic of sales copy. By this, I mean HOW you craft your CTA to maximize interest. Time and time again, I see sites that simply present a button on the page saying things like:

“Attend a 1-hour Webinar”

“Download Our 50-page Report”

“Start Your 30-Day Trial”

What's the problem with presenting a rather general CTA like this, shy of any benefit-oriented context? Basically, these CTA's don't do enough to “hook” the attention of visitors. They are commonplace... they are too general... they are (for the most part) ineffective.

Now... let's improve upon these CTAs, using 3 simple rules:

1) Always precede your actual CTA with a visitor-focused, benefit rich lead-in statement.

2) Make sure your CTA includes at least one of these 10 powerful marketing word:

- FREE
- You
- Save
- New
- Easy
- Experience
- Discover
- Proven
- Guaranteed
- Results

3) Make sure your CTA tells visitors when to act... NOW!

Here's our 3 CTA's after applying our new rules.

Are you STUCK in Corporate America? Discover how three ordinary people cut the ties, pursued their life's calling, and achieved INCREDIBLE things.

YOU can join them!

**Register today for this FREE webinar:
"Break Free... Live Your Life!"**

55% of all small businesses fail within the first 2 years.

Why? NEW research reveals the TOP 3 REASONS!

**You DON'T have to be part of the 55%.
Download the FREE research report Now!**

Process Your Payroll in HALF the time at HALF the cost.

Within 10 minutes, you can experience the full POWER of ExecuTEK.

Download your FREE, No Obligation Trial Now!

Big difference, right? We'd obviously want to test our theory, but my guess is these CTAs would convert at least 2-3 times as many visitors as presenting a more general CTA without the benefit-rich context.

7. ask for a little - get a lot.

Obtaining conversions is all about give and take. Visitors agree to give you their contact information, and in return, they are free to take you up on your offer. Pretty simple right?

The problem arises when we (as marketers) ask too much of our visitors too early in the sales process. In other words, the value of our offer doesn't warrant the effort we're asking our visitors to take. Think about a site that is promoting a free newsletter as their CTA, but they ask you to provide your name, title, company, email, business phone, mobile phone, fax, mailing address, how you heard about them, etc., etc... Would you be willing to provide all this info for a typical company newsletter? Probably not.

This Value-to-Effort relationship is illustrated in the following table.

Conversion as a Function of Offer and Effort Required

<i>High Value Offer</i>	MODERATE - HIGH CONVERSION	VERY HIGH CONVERSION
<i>Low Value Offer</i>	VERY LOW CONVERSION	MODERATE-LOW CONVERSION
	<i>High-Effort Request</i>	<i>Low-Effort Request</i>

First, if (in the eyes of your visitors) you are pitching a low-value offer, you'll be swimming upstream no matter what action you are asking them to take. So make sure you're offering something of high perceived value.

Now, assuming you've hit the mark with the offer, it becomes a balance between the amount of information you need and the amount of sales leads you desire. In most cases, there is a direct inverse relationship. Simply put, the more information you request of visitors, the fewer leads you'll receive. The less information you request, the more leads you'll receive.

As a general rule, I advise clients to **ask as little as possible**. Each question you ask visitors, beyond name and email address will cost you 10 to 15 percent of leads you'd otherwise generate – leads that could turn out to be your biggest future customers.

*You want 15 in 100 to put their toe in the water and start a relationship with you...
NOT just the 1 in 1000 who will take a dive from the high board.*

So what do I mean by *as little as possible*? If you truly want to maximize conversions, use name and email only (if you are in the B2B market, make sure you specify "business email" in your form). Then do some detective work to build out the lead information in more detail.

Here's a quick example. A visitor completes a form on your site and provides the following information: Rachel Murphy and rmurphy@msha.com. If your only objective is building a mass marketing email database, then these two pieces of information are just fine – mission accomplished. But what if you wanted to be more proactive in follow-up efforts, or maybe you want to segment your prospect database for future promotions?

What has Rachel really provided you? With about 5 minutes of effort on the web, here's what we REALLY know about Rachel:

Name: Rachel Murphy

Company: Mountain States Health Alliance

Company website: www.msha.com

Industry/Company Type: Healthcare system

Likely address: 400 North State of Franklin Road, Johnson City, TN 37604

Main Telephone: 423-431-6111

Email: rmurphy@msha.com

Now that's a lead I can get my arms around!

Bottom line – Don't ask for too much too early in the relationship with your prospect. Maximize conversions by offering a very HIGH value offer and a very LOW effort request.

8. trust

Visitors come to your site with healthy skepticism about you, your offer, and your intentions. Unfortunately, there are people on the web who are unethical. If their CTAs were completely honest, they might sound something like this:

*Give me your email address and we'll sell it to hundreds of mass marketers who will bombard your inbox with spam.
You'll also have no chance of ever getting off all these lists!
Signup Today!*

As an HONEST marketer, it's critical that you differentiate yourself from these scammers and spammers, and you do this by building TRUST. If you want a visitor to click "submit," you MUST address their natural anxiety about providing their personal information.

This is not complicated. It's really just a matter of page design and putting in the effort. Here are some of the best examples: (try to place one or more of these near your request form):

- Displaying one or more verifiable customer testimonials
- Offering some type of iron-clad, no-questions-asked guarantee
- Providing phone and address information to reinforce you are a "real" company
- Including a short privacy statement like, "We'll NEVER share your information"
- Using the statement above as a link to your official privacy policy
- Displaying a Better Business Bureau (or similar logo) if applicable

Of course, even more important than the trust-building element used to support your CTA, is your company's intention to honor these commitments. Only make claims you're prepared to back up 100% of the time.

conclusion

So there you have it – the short course for increasing your site’s conversion.

1. Plan your work... work you plan.
2. Communicate with your potential customers, not your coworkers.
3. Pass the 7-second test.
4. Shelf the text. Find ways to engage your prospects.
5. Consider using product-specific landing pages.
6. Create a prominent, clear, and compelling call to action (CTA).
7. Don’t ask for too much too early. The priority is starting the relationship.
8. Reduce website visitors’ natural anxiety by building trust.

My guess is this e-book has elicited one of two reactions.

For more experienced web marketers, the reaction might be “This was a good overview of core best practices and it served as a good refresher.” If you’re in this group, here’s my challenge to you: **Knowing and CONSISTENTLY DOING are two very different things**. Take the information in this book, combine it with your own knowledge, and create a consistent and repeatable process for continually increasing conversions. “Operationalize” this knowledge in the form of checklists, templates, and project plans to ensure that 1) you actually take action, 2) you don’t omit critical elements required for success, and 3) you approach your conversion efforts in a more planned, methodical manner.

For a host of others, I suspect the reaction is “Wow! This book pointed out several things I really need to address, but I’m feeling a bit overwhelmed. Where do I even start?” If you’re in this group, DON’T let your anxiety stop you from taking action. Here’s the deal. Although this book outlines eight ways to increase conversion, it’s not a race to complete all eight and then call it quits. In fact, great marketers are always looking for ways to improve upon these (and other) principles. The important thing for now is that you take **SOME** action, no matter how small. If you want to take the next month and only focus on collecting baseline data and tweaking your homepage to pass the 7-second test, that’s fine. If you want to bite off a little more, go for it! It’s a process... and more than anything else, my hope is that you’ll take the knowledge gained in this book and start that process.

I wish you continued success in your online marketing efforts!

James M. Higgins

about the author

James Higgins is CEO and President of Florida-based, Business Shorts (www.business-shorts.com), a firm dedicated to helping small and mid-sized businesses generate high-quality sales leads through more strategic and more engaging marketing practices.

Jim holds a B.A. in Business and Psychology from Marshall University and an M.A. in Industrial Organizational Psychology from Radford University. As a recognized thought leader in the marketing space, Jim is best described as the “quintessential practitioner” of the rapidly evolving online marketing landscape – continuously innovating and freely sharing his knowledge to help fellow marketers be more successful.