



we simplify
the Internet

Landing Page Design

Common Mistakes & Tested Techniques

WSI White Paper

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Introduction

It's Not About Technology; It's About Psychology...

“Advertising is the art of getting people to buy things they don't need with money they don't have”.
That statement predates the Internet by a number of decades, yet it is as true today as it was back then. A bit cynical? Perhaps, but let us not forget that in the Internet world people rarely stumble across a website without actively searching for something. If you have what they are looking for, your job is to help them find it.

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

Let's make something transparently clear; people do not read on the Internet... they scan! They see headlines, images and bullet points. Depending on the personality type of your visitor, you have between 2 and 8 seconds to convince them to stay on your website and delve deeper into it. They click in... take a quick peak... and click out. Those are the conditions in which business is conducted on the Internet.

Why Are Effective Landing Pages Essential?

A Landing Page is where visitors land after clicking on an email link, a search engine result, a banner ad, or manually typing in a specific advertised address. Actually making use of that tidbit of knowledge is a little more complex.

It's easy to fall into the trap of throwing money into driving traffic and living with your conversion rate. Want more customers? Just buy more traffic. Not exactly efficient...or cost effective.

The scenario below illustrates that a mere 2% increase in conversion results in 240 additional customers WITHOUT increasing traffic. Depending on the lifetime value of those new customers, that might be a game changer for this particular business.

Improve Sales by:

1. Increasing Traffic
2. Up-selling
3. Improving conversion rate

Visitors	Conv. Rate	Customers
12,000	1%	120
12,000	<u>3%</u>	360!!!

6 Steps to Effective Landing Page Design:

Step 1: Define Success

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

Step 2: Define Your Customer

It's NOT about YOU! Many businesses feel compelled to tell their story to what they perceive as a captive audience. There is no captive audience on the Internet. Check your ego at the door; it's just too easy for a visitor to leave and find what they really want.

A tried and true technique for defining your customer is to actually create a persona... complete with name and age and marital status, etc. You may even have multiple profiles; just make sure that you prioritize them. Remember...if you try to appeal to too many different customer types, you will wind up appealing to no one. Once you know WHO you are selling to, you can craft your message so that it appeals to THEM.

Step 3: Selecting Domains

Most businesses consider their home page their landing page. That may be perfectly acceptable in some instances, but it is not always the best choice. Your landing page may be part of a micro-site or single page with its own domain name. You might consider one or more "vanity names" targeting a specific product or service. That is particularly effective when the domain will be visible such as on printed material or other instances where the domain will be visible such as on sponsored link advertising (pay-per-click).

Step 4: Wireframing

Essentially a "sketch" of the page layout. Start by listing all of the elements that go on the page and lay them out on a piece of paper taking up approximately the amount of space they will warrant. You should do this "before" you write the copy because the space available will dictate the amount to copy you have to work with. Make sure that you place the most important elements above the "fold" (the spot on the page where most visitors will have to scroll down to see more).

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Step 5: Copywriting

People don't actually read on the Internet...they scan. They see headlines, bullet points and graphics. Headlines should refer back to what the visitor was looking at before they landed on your page. Only about 20% of your visitors will actually read the body copy... still, it has to be good (less is more).

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

Step 6: Testing & Tweaking

This is not a spare time activity. It is something that should be scheduled at regular intervals. Examine your metrics, make incremental changes and reexamine the effect. Don't make too many changes at once or you won't know what you did to effect the changes. Your testing and adjustments should match your original goals (Transactions, Lead Generation, Branding/Education, Relationship Building, Registrations, Viral Marketing, etc.)

Key Considerations

There is a difference between a "web designer" and a "web marketer". A web designer can make a web page pretty. A web marketer can make a web page pretty compelling. Although a list of tips is no substitution for a web-savvy marketing professional, there are certain industry best practices that every business can use as a guideline or "check sheet" to avoid some campaign killing mistakes.

Scrolling, Paging & the Fold

Scrolling is the point on a web page where a visitor would have to scroll down to see the rest of the page. If the visitor isn't intrigued at first glance, you will never even get to show them what is below the fold.

- Do NOT make text-copy columns too wide or fonts too small just to keep content above the fold.
- 10-12 point or larger fonts / no more than 50-60 characters (*including spaces*) across.
- Women ages 34-45 are more likely to scroll, read more info and click onto additional pages than men.
- Above-the-fold info must contain enough convincing data to will over the short attention span visitors.

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Navigation Bars

It is very tempting to make sure that no information about your company is left out; however the truth is that most people just don't care at this point. Keep in mind what your goal is... if it is to get visitors' contact information, you will have plenty of opportunities to educate them as you build the relationship.

- You will have plenty of opportunity to tell your customers how wonderful you are.
- Would you tell an attractive stranger your life history when you are just trying to get them to agree to a first date?
- The objective is to not encourage the visitor to wander "off-point"

Landing Pages with Links to Other Pages

Use discretion when providing links to other pages or websites from your landing page. You may be tempting the visitor to wander off-point. In some cases it may be permissible or even desirable to offer the visitor an opportunity to learn more as long as each link returns the visitor back to the sales funnel.

- Eliminate any clicks to irrelevant pages or advertisers
- Minimize font size of links to privacy and legal information
- Make the ENTIRE area around a link clickable
- Make the first 3 words of a link descriptive
- Make your hero shot clickable and open in a separate window of information so the visitor does not lose the main landing page (hero shot is a single picture that tells the story).

Color Choices

Believe it or not, color choices have remarkably little influence on the effectiveness of a landing page. However poor color choice that impacts reading comprehension does have a negative effect. Keep in mind that a higher percentage of the population than you probably realize is color blind and may have trouble with the contrast of certain color combinations.

- **Copy:** Black (or dark) text on a white (or light) background
- **Headlines:** Large enough to be readable in most colors, so largely irrelevant.
- **Hotlinks:** Blue until clicked and then turns purplish. Designer colors are OK...but test first....
- **Branding Colors:** OK if branding is more important than copy.

Typeface Fonts

It is hard enough to get a visitor to actually read your copy, so don't make it any more difficult than necessary. Generally small font sizes "look" better because they mentally form a block which is a convenient design element. However, effective trumps pretty every time.

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- Make copy as easy to read as possible. Many visitors will bail just because the page “looks like work”
- Use 10 point or larger font. Consider a larger size if you are targeting children, adults or if you have very long copy
- Captions, form field names, legal and some tech-specs can be smaller
- Smaller text promotes slower reading and a drop-off in comprehension
- Text should never run more than 52-60 characters across the screen. People can't comfortably read long or wide columns.
- Keep columns at a fixed width (no liquid designs)
- Use “web-safe fonts” to control the appearance of the page.
(http://www.efuse.com/Design/web_fonts_basics.html#WebSafeFonts)
- With the possible exception of one-line headlines, all text should be flush left and NOT centered.
- Headlines should be significantly larger and possibly bolder. Sub-headlines should be close to body copy size and bold

Sample #1: Multi-line headline with each line centered

Multi-line text of any size is very hard to read because the human eye looks for the beginning of a line over to the left and we expect it to be in the same place ever time. If it isn't we have to adjust

Note: Harder to read because the human eye wants to return to the same point after each line.

Sample #2: 9 Point of Smaller Verdana in Gray:

The average person over the age of 40 will not have an easy time reading this. This is one of the most popular font/size combinations online. Higher rez monitors can make the font look even smaller.

Note: The block of text may look good because smaller print makes a nice “design element” however small size and poor contrast make it hard to read.

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Sample #3: Column wider than 65 characters across:

Using a liquid design instead of a static design makes it harder for you to maintain control of the appearance of your page. On higher screen resolutions the column will expand (and get shorter). Is it any wonder that newspaper and magazines use narrow columns?

Note: The human eye is trained to move from left to right only so far. Any farther and it requires a conscious effort to continue to get to the end of the line.

Sample #4: White body copy on black background:

Perhaps art directors like white copy on black backgrounds because they never actually read the copy so they don't expect any one else to. Sometimes it might look cool...but it still doesn't convert well.

Note: We grow up reading dark print on a light background (school books, newspapers, etc.). The contrast is better with dark over light.

Sample #5: Bold for Verbal Emphasis (Not Readability):

The **average** person over the age of 40 will not have an easy time reading this. This is one of the most popular **font/size** combinations online. **Higher rez monitors** can make the font look even smaller.

Note: Bold print is not necessarily more readable. In fact it can obscure the different characteristics of each letter that helps us quickly differentiate various words. Bold should be reserved for emphasis.

Sample #6: Paragraphs longer than 4 ½ Lines:

He is going to speak to the Elite Coaching clients and give an introduction to the movement of spinal corrective care in the profession and CBP. This is a phenomenal opportunity to hear one of the professions foremost leaders fighting for you in the political and insurance arenas. It is because of efforts of dedicated individuals like Dr. Deed that gives us the opportunities we have in practice. Please come to the New Orleans seminar early on Friday and give Dr. Deed Harrison the respect he deserves.

Note: Group your paragraphs into short easily digestible “blocks”. Not only is it easier for a person to comprehend, it appears to be “less work” to read at a sub-conscience level.

Sample #7: Pros that should be a Bullet List:

Some common mistakes that designers make when writing text include Multi-line headline with each line centered, 9 Point of Smaller Verdana in Gray, Column wider than 65 characters across, White body copy on black background, Bold for Verbal Emphasis (Not Readability), and Paragraphs longer than 4 ½ Lines

-OR-

Some common mistakes that designers make when writing text include:

- ▶ Multi-line headline with each line centered
- ▶ 9 Point of Smaller Verdana in Gray
- ▶ Columns wider than 65 characters across
- ▶ White body copy on black background
- ▶ Bold for Verbal Emphasis (Not Readability)
- ▶ Paragraphs longer than 4 ½ Lines

Note: Which do you think is easier for you mind to organize and retain, the block or the bullets?

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How many elements should be on a page?

The correct answer is.... *As many as necessary... no more no less....*

These are just some items that MAY go on a landing page. It is not meant to be a checklist of items that should be on every landing page.

- ▶ Logo
- ▶ Hero Shot, which may be clickable
- ▶ Conversion button or link
- ▶ Headline
- ▶ Quick offer explanation
- ▶ Longer product or Service explanation
- ▶ Links to more information
- ▶ Deadlines
- ▶ Forms with descriptive tags
- ▶ Descriptive tagline
- ▶ Security and trust icons
- ▶ Testimonials (text, audio, video)
- ▶ Technical specifications
- ▶ Guarantees
- ▶ Rich media
- ▶ Copyright /Legal (at bottom)

Trust Icons

Data and case studies prove conclusively that trust icons do make a difference in conversions. Multiple icons may help even more. Make sure you place the icons above the fold and at critical decision points such as form submissions or transaction points in a shopping cart.



Consider using the space around your logo to identify it with a trust image and slogan like the Kelley Blue Book logo to the right. Notice that Kelley Blue Book awarded themselves their own trust icon, however it gives the appearance of an award or certification.



Video on Landing Pages

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Video can be a powerful tool or an unwanted nuisance depending on how it is used. NEVER start playing the video automatically when the visitor arrives on the landing page!!!

No one likes a commercial forced on them. The visitor just may not be prepared. In fact visitors might be in the work place and might bail as soon as unexpected sounds start blaring from their computer. They may want to scan the page before investing in the video, or simply adjust their speaker volume. The quickest way to shut down an unwanted video is to close the web page. That is the last thing you want.

There are many reasons to use video; to educate, to demonstrate, to entertain and become viral... One of the more successful commercial applications of video on a website is the “As Seen on TV” scenario.

- The purpose is not to sell, but to brand and reassure the visitor that they are in the right place
- Use a shorter version (30-seconds or less) than the original TV version
- Typically works best on the top left side of the page or in a featured area



Video Testimonials are very powerful. There is evidence to support that amateur video of a real person is more credible than professional video of a model. Not all video should intentionally be poor quality, but in the case of testimonials, or product demonstrations, it does give it a sense of realism.

Response Devices

Unless you are cultivating a branding-only web presence, you are probably trying to elicit a particular response from your visitors (remember your goals). It's important to consider that different personality types prefer to communicate using different media. Some people prefer to pick up the phone for the comfort of a human voice; others prefer the anonymity of email.

Phone Numbers:

- Bigger is better....don't be shy
- Some consumers just prefer to call
- Some consumers just want to be reassured there is a real person available (even if they never intend to call)

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- Put a phone number on EVERY page, not just the landing page or contact page

Buttons

Next to headlines, button copy, color and shape as the most important element on the page. Don't be afraid to test; red vs. gray... round vs. rectangular. Wording is important as well. You may get different results from "Buy Now" vs. "Try it Now".

Different buttons work for different audiences



But don't get too cute with the labels....say what you mean!

Registration Forms

As a rule, the less you ask for, the more likely you are to have people fill out the form. Go on the premise that you will have future opportunity to get the rest of the information as you build a relationship with the visitor.

Be patient. Ask for only what you need... you will have more chances to get the rest. Roughly 40% of visitors may answer a few extra questions on the "Thank You" page for example.

On certain occasions however, you may actually want to use a longer form as a screening or "qualifying" tool. You might want to trade volume for quality if there is a cost associated with following up.



Copy Tips

- Use half the copy that you would use in printed material
- Headline should exactly match the headline that got them there
- Stay on point.... headline match body copy
- Nothing more than needed...nothing less than needed
- Don't waste valuable real-estate with "Welcome..."

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- “You” and “Your” trumps “We” and “Our”
- People read only the first few words of bullets and paragraphs
- People read the tops and bottoms of lists...not the middle
- Keep your first few paragraphs short and inviting
- Alternate long and short paragraphs
- Paragraphs shouldn't be longer than 4 or 5 lines long
- Numerals have more impact than written numbers

Long Copy vs. Short Copy

Face it, the USA Today newspaper is written at a 6th grade reading level for a reason. Attention spans and motivation to invest time reading is contingent on the demographic of the visitor, and the nature of the product or service. Long copy works well for....

- Expensive products and services
- Money related products and services
- Health related products and services
- Older consumers
- Reading related products
- Technical products

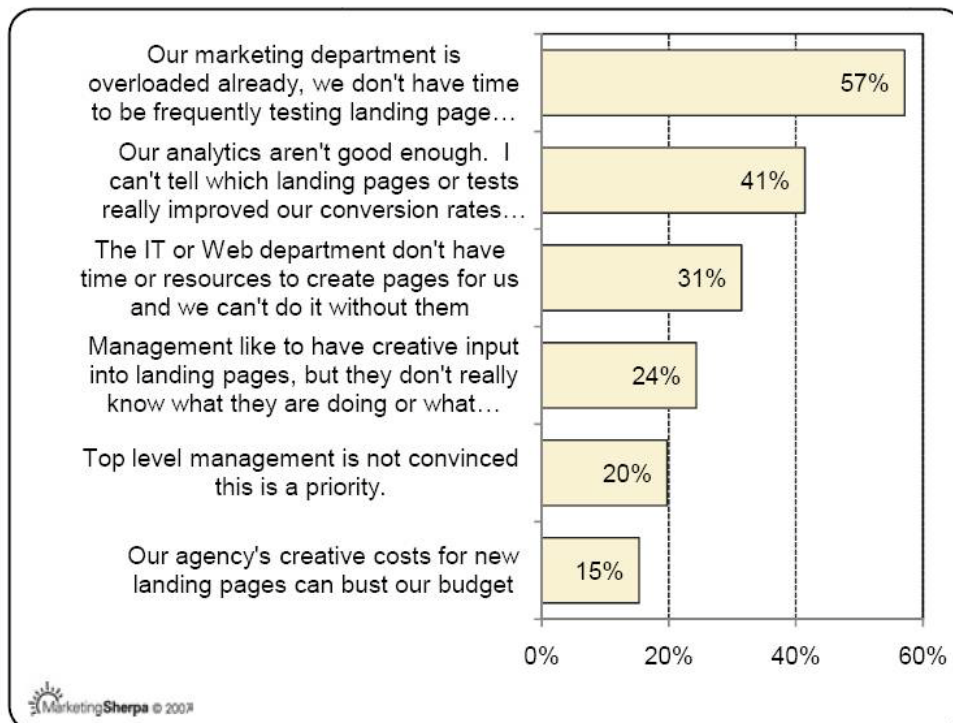
Common Mistakes and Campaign Killers:

- ✗ **Too much text** (*some exceptions*)
- ✗ **Error pages, broken links and anything that does not work.**
- ✗ **Required fields** (*especially personal info & telephone numbers*)
- ✗ **Reset buttons**
- ✗ **No email privacy information next to the email form**
- ✗ **Lack of communication choices**
- ✗ **Inadequate shipping & pricing information**
- ✗ **Too many links leading to too many destinations**

In-House vs. Outsource

In September of 2007 MarketingSherpa conducted two surveys in an effort to learn what challenges in-house marketers have designing a landing page program, and what challenges agencies have managing a landing page campaign for their clients. Notice the common frustrations in each case:

Frustrations of In-House Marketers round analysis of Landing Pages



Base: In-house marketers n=2688

Source: MarketingSherpa, Landing Page Survey, September 2007

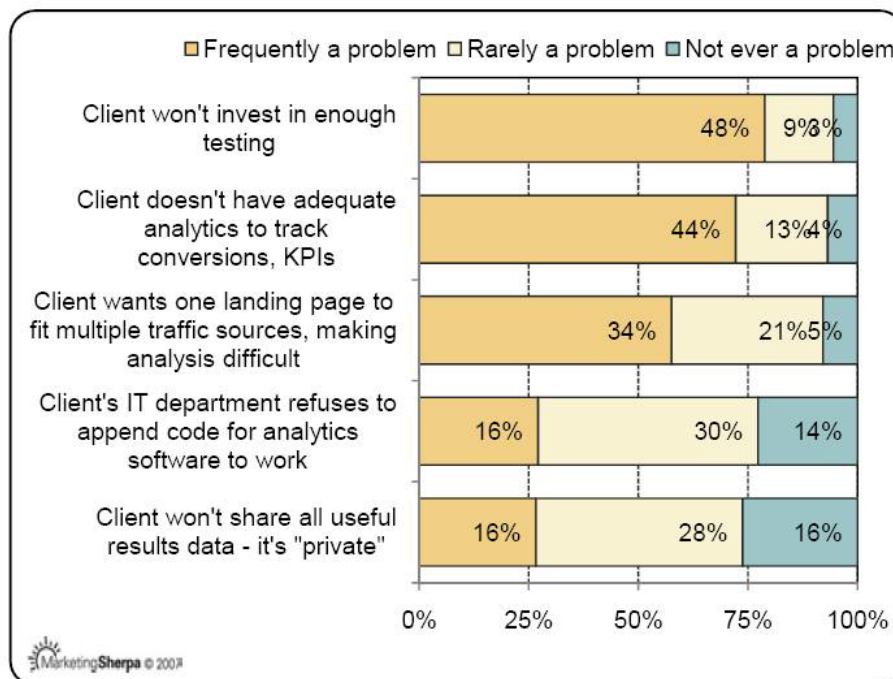
Methodology: 4,213 surveys were collected from in-house marketers (n=3,120) and agency marketers (n=1,093) who are actively involved with landing pages in some capacity. They were recruited from MarketingSherpa and MarketingExperiments reader lists between September 6th and September 18th, 2007.

The biggest obstacle to in-house landing page optimization is by far is the lack of resources. In mid-sized companies the marketing department is typically overloaded. In smaller companies without a marketing

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department, the owner of the staff, even if they had the right credentials is (or should be) too busy minding the core business.

Frustrations of Agencies in Providing Better analytics to Clients



Base: Agencies n=1084

Source: MarketingSherpa, Landing Page Survey, September 2007

Methodology: 4,213 surveys were collected from in-house marketers (n=3,120) and agency marketers (n=1,093) who are actively involved with landing pages in some capacity. They were recruited from MarketingSherpa and MarketingExperiments reader lists between September 6th and September 18th, 2007.

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

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

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

Summary

The limited scope of this white paper covers only some industry best practices. Virtually every element on a web page has some effect...positive or negative on the actions that a visitor takes. Ultimately only testing will determine what works and what doesn't.

Whether you are working with an agency, a consultancy, in-house staff, or doing it yourself, this paper was designed to help you avoid costly mistakes and wasted effort. Use the information in this paper to help you implement, or manage others to implement best practices. There are however other considerations:

- **Traffic:** If you are not driving enough traffic to your website, no amount of landing page best practices will help. There is still a common misconception that if you build a website your customers will automatically find it. Before you can gauge how your visitors react to your landing page, you need to have visitors.
- **Testing:** It's easy to say that you will test the results, but do you have the mechanisms in place to capture the data? Do you know how to interpret the data?
- **Implementation:** Who will implement these best practices? Should you hire professional help or task you in-house staff? If that is a budgetary decision, what is the true cost of re-taking your staff?

About the Author



Chuck Bankoff is a WSI Certified Research Analyst, and has certified other WSI Consultants around the world in Landing Page Design and Conversion Architecture strategies. Chuck is currently serving his third term on the Internet Consultant Advisory Council for WSI and is a sought after speaker at Internet marketing conferences in both the United States and Europe.

If you have any questions, please email education@wsicorprate.com.

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Special thanks to team at MarketingSherpa for providing much of the research data used in this paper.