Landing Page Handbook

Creating Sales Letter Landing Pages that Sell

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MEQUODA DAILY
Helping Publishers Make Money Online

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Introduction

Most people arrive at a website and within less than 10 seconds can determine whether it's clean, professional and worth their time. Your landing page delivers the first impression. It's usually the most important page on your site. It needs to be a fast, effective messenger.

With a quick glance, visitors to your site should know exactly what your site is all about or what your business does. Determine what image and message you want the customer to "get" in those first few seconds, and design your landing page toward that objective. Anything that distracts from the central message or image you wish to project should be eliminated.

The Mequoda online marketing experts have developed 12 guidelines for optimizing landing pages that support getting the order.

Five Tips

Here are some tips for keeping visitors around and convincing them to order.

Keep it clean, efficient, and focused.

Your website should create an immediate sense of comfort and well-being.

Accomplish this by choosing a clean, efficient design with an easily discernable central focus. Use lots of white space, choose comforting colors and readable fonts. Avoid speckled backgrounds, unreadable type fonts and a bewildering assortment of buttons, animations, drop down or pop up menus and Multiple frames.

Write strong, engaging headlines.

Don't distract the visitors by confronting them with rotating banner ads for other products. Instead, write a forceful headline to capture their attention and interest.

Far too many landing pages fail almost immediately by offering up lack-luster headlines and subheads. A good landing page delivers a compelling headline for a single product or service.

Don't make them wait!

If you only have 10 seconds to capture the attention of your visitor, then your front page better load quickly. If it takes more than 20 seconds to load, many visitors will bail out before reading your message.

You can speed the loading of your landing page by eliminating unnecessary graphics, especially photographs. Review every image on the page carefully, and include only those that are absolutely necessary. The graphics that you must use should be minimized using an image compression program.

Also, avoid using offsite page counters, news feeds and other resources that slow down the loading of your main page.

Make it easy to navigate.

Use a standardized navigation system throughout your site. Easy-to-use navigation helps visitors feel comfortable about exploring your site.

Avoid using hard-to-read graphic buttons, hard-to-find drop down menus, or any other programming tricks that do more to prevent visitors from exploring than encouraging them to do so.

Keep it fresh.

Make sure the headlines, text, and other information on your landing page is always up to date. Visitors are usually interested in current news, reviews, and information, and will leave your site if they get the impression it hasn't been updated in months.

Check your navigation links. Most visitors will abandon your site after encountering just two broken links.

There is a lot of money to be made selling information online, from books, reports and memberships to audio conferences and live events.

How do you get your share of this bonanza? You can create great content. You can set up an attractive website to display your wares. And you can drive traffic to your site through search engine optimization and Google AdWords. But none of these efforts will be effective if your site visitors don't actually buy your products.

So how do you convert visitors into buyers?

Among other factors, it's all about optimizing your landing pages by creating irresistible offers and making it easy for your visitors to order. As a general rule, commercial websites should use the "real estate" of their landing pages conservatively. Whether your strategic objective is to get the visitor to sign up for

a free email newsletter or buy a trial paid subscription, your landing page needs to be tightly focused on a single intention—getting the reader to take action.

How many times have you visited a new website and been confused by what is being offered?

Often your mind reels from the possibilities. What should I read first? Where should I click now? What's the deal here? How much does this product cost? We strongly advise simplifying the offer. Remove the clutter. More is less. Simplicity promotes clarity. State your promise. Describe your unique selling proposition. List the benefits. Reveal the price. And only then ask for the sale.

CHAPTER ONE: WRITING EFFECTIVE AND PROMISING HEADLINES

When a visitor arrives at your website landing page, you have about 10 seconds to make a good impression and capture her attention. If you don't succeed immediately, she is likely to click away and you're apt to lose her forever.

So don't distract the visitor by confronting her with rotating banner ads for other products. Instead, write a forceful headline to capture her attention and interest.

Far too many landing pages fail almost immediately by offering up lack-luster headlines and subheads. A good landing page delivers a compelling headline for a single product or service.

Think benefits and features when writing headlines. The visitor who is reading your landing page wants nothing more than the answer to this one question: "What's in this for me?"

Answer that question well and you will make a sale.

All the other messages about your corporate image, company background, brand, etc., are of little importance to your prospective customer at this stage. Stay focused on the site visitor's interests. On your landing page, that process begins with a compelling headline.

A great headline is really an advertisement for an advertisement. It grabs the reader's attention with such force that she can't resist reading the next sentence.

THE BIG PROMISE HEADLINE

Legendary copywriter (and Mequoda contributor) Robert W. Bly advocates using a Big Promise headline. He characterizes a Big Promise as a succinct, compelling statement of why the prospect should buy your product that can be stated in 15 or fewer words.

If effect, the Big Promise headline says, "We know who you are, we know what your pain is, and if you buy this product, we promise to make your pain go away."

The Big Promise headline works for a variety of "pain" and "solution" products, whether the customer wants to double his dating, retire at age 50, or be a self-employed copywriter.

Consider this example from one landing page:

"In Less Than a Year You Could Have a New Career Working From Home, Enjoying Freedom and Income You Had Only Imagined."

There is nothing vague or ambiguous about that promise. If you long to be self-employed, you're intrigued, and you read on. If not, you don't.

That's the test of a headline's effectiveness. The Big Promise "gets you into the tent." You take the next step by continuing to read.

Here's another Big Promise headline from the **eBookSecretsExposed.com** landing page:

"How to Make MASSIVE Amounts of Money In Record Time With Your Own eBook (Whether You Wrote It Or Not!)"

The "how to" headline is always powerful, especially when the promise is for information on achieving prestige or financial success.

Headlines like these get the reader's attention, which is Job One. The formula for the effective advertisement, which was developed and proven in the print medium and works online as well, is summarized with the acronym AIDA (Attention, Interest, Desire and Action).

The A stands for attention; a good headline gets the reader's attention. The I stands for interest. And the Big Promise headline is effective because it quickly sorts out the interested reader from the casual reader.

How to Make MASSIVE Amounts of Money In Record Time With Your Own eBook (Whether You Wrote It Or Not!)

You... a best-selling author? Yes!

► Even if you don't have time to write the ebook yourself

► Get your ebook out to as many people as possible

► Create new income streams for your website

'I sold $61,662.00 worth of my ebooks in the first four-and-one-half weeks because I followed Jim's and David's advice to the letter!

Without the information in 'eBook Secrets Exposed,' I assure you, this never would have happened. It's the one resource I count on all the time. This book is a godsend for anyone who writes or publishes books on the Web. It certainly has been for me."

Headlines like these get the reader's attention, which is Job One.

THE PROMISE OF INSIDER INFORMATION HEADLINE

Now consider this headline:

> **"Seventeen secrets that only the most successful restaurant owners know for increasing casual dining profitability."**

This headline identifies a target audience (successful restaurant owners and wannabes) and gets their attention (secrets) by offering a Big Promise (casual dining profitability).

Here's a "Secrets" landing page headline that InvestmentU.com uses to convert visitors to customers for its lead product, The Investment U Course:

> **"Inside: 141 Secrets... What It Takes to Become an Extraordinary Investor..."**

If you're interested in successful investing, chances are you're going to keep reading.

THE INTELLECTUAL CURIOSITY HEADLINE

Consider this headline from **Doctor Douglass' Real Health Breakthroughs** Landing Page:

> **"URGENT HEALTH BULLETIN: Discover why one M.D. says 'I HAVEN'T HAD A GLASS OF WATER IN 20 YEARS...' And why you don't have to gulp it down by the gallon either."**

The Big Promise offered here is the satisfaction of the reader's curiosity. The headline doesn't isolate a single benefit of the health bulletin. Instead, the site's strategic intent is to shake up the way the reader thinks about health and lifestyle-related issues. You can almost hear the paradigms shifting.

CONVINCE YOUR WOULD-BE CUSTOMERS WITH FACTS, NOT HYPE

The business model of writing boastful, self-serving copy is finished. It doesn't work anymore—at least not for anyone with an IQ greater than room temperature. Customers don't want to be "marketed to." They're too smart and sophisticated for that. They want to be "communicated with."

They want to buy from a person, not from a corporation. They want to be addressed personally, not as a faceless group.

You can still capture their attention with a big, bold promise in the headline.

That's essential. But you'd better be quick to back up your claims and support your promise with factual, sincere and believable text, or you've lost them.

THE STRAIGHT PRODUCT OFFER HEADLINE

This headline offers a Big Promise for the prospective customer who already knows your product and brand, wants to buy, and recognizes your offer as a terrific deal. It generally reads something like this:

"Get this product now for less money than you ever thought possible."

A straight Big Promise headline can be effective if your prospect is pre-sold and merely needs a reason to justify his purchase decision right now. However, this is seldom the case when selling information products. Selling information generally requires weaving a compelling story filled with reasons that justify a purchase decision.

YOUR BRAND OR COMPANY NAME IS NOT A HEADLINE

A publication's name alone seldom provokes sufficient interest or provides motivation to subscribe. You can add interest to the heading of your page with any number of standard headline techniques, such as putting an offer in the headline (e.g., "FREE sample issue!") or incorporating a benefit or promise (e.g., "When doctors at Harvard Medical School get sick, this is what they do…").

FINAL TIP

Here's a simple formula for writing a compelling book title, press release headline, email subject or benefits list.

The most succinct copywriting tip we've heard in a long time came from Fred Gleeck at a product development seminar. Fred cited this maxim in a discussion of how to title your book. But the adage is just as valid whether you're writing a headline for an advertisement or a press release, or a pithy subject line for a convincing email message, or a list of product benefits.

We all know that people sort for self-interest. Everyone's favorite radio station is WII-FM. That's short for "What's in it for me?"

So here's Fred's formula for writing a compelling book title that appeals to the customer's self-interest: Combine your customer's greatest need with your product's greatest benefit.

Some examples:

Manual: "Low Cost Website Promotion" (Need: website promotion; benefit: low-cost ways to do it)

Report: "Guide to Profitable Marketing Results" (Need: marketing results; benefit: how to get them)

Workbook: "How to Get $1 Million Worth of Publicity Free" (Need: free publicity; benefit: how to get $1,000,000 worth)

Book: "301 Direct Mail Tips, Techniques and Secrets - an Insider's Guide to Direct Mail Marketing" (Need: direct mail how-to info; benefit: insider's secrets)

CD-ROM: "Building & Managing Profitable Subscription Websites" (Need: specific how-to info; benefit: profits)

You get the idea. Now make up your own list of headlines/benefits for your product or service.

CHAPTER TWO: CAPTIVATING READERS WITH A COMPELLING STORY

Great products seldom stand on their own or sell themselves without someone creating a story. A great landing page is a sales letter that begins with a story that heightens desire for the product and prompts a purchase decision.

The D in the AIDA acronym stands for desire. The final A in AIDA stands for action—what you direct the reader to do in order to respond to your offer.

GAINING RAPPORT WITH THE READER

Whether writing a newsletter, article, or advertisement, think of one person and write (speak) directly to him personally. Start by getting a clear picture of who your ideal customer is so you can write your offer to that one person.

For instance, suppose you write a landing page (product ad) for people who work in the food service industry. Do you think people who work in the food service industry think of themselves as "food service workers"? They do not. So, which lead for a specialty coffee ad is more pleasing to the targeted reader and creates better rapport?

"Food service industry workers like those of you who read this newsletter know good coffee." That's very impersonal, unfocused and lumps a whole group into one general category. Compare it to this: "If you're a restaurant owner, executive chef, or specialty food buyer, you know excellent coffee even before you taste it. It's color, freshness and aroma tell you volumes about its quality."

This story lead identifies its target audience, gets rapport, and compliments them. Note, also, that plain old "you" is a lot more personal and intimate than "those of you." Make sure your landing page contains an interesting, engaging, believable story told by someone your prospect can relate to and appreciate.

After all, you're asking her to spend valuable time reading your pitch; you owe her a good read. Plus, a compelling story will move her smoothly along to the purchasing decision.

FUNDAMENTALS OF PERSUASIVE COPY

Bob Bly says to be persuasive, your copy must

1) gain attention,

2) focus on the customer,

3) stress benefits,

4) differentiate you from the competition,

5) prove its case,

6) establish credibility,

7) build value,

8) close with a call to action and

9) give the user a reason to act now instead of later.

We agree with Bob. And we would argue that the most important of these are focus on the customer and stress benefits. Fundamentally, benefits are reasons for the customer to buy.

The reader requires reasons to take action. Even if she has already decided to buy your product, she needs reasons to take the next step. It's a matter of acting congruently, or being able to rationalize her purchase decision.

Buying decisions are largely emotional. Consumers buy what they want, not necessarily what they need. Compelling benefits (read reasons or rationalizations) provide the congruency required to justify a subconscious purchase decision. An engaging, believable story enhances this process.

One more important point: Often someone involved with online marketing believes that "long copy doesn't work on the Internet"—a myth we know to be patently false.

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CHAPTER THREE: WEBIFYING CONTENT TO MAINTAIN INTEREST

By "webification" we mean the most efficient use of all the multi-media and interactive technology available. This does not, however, mean using technology just because it's there.

Many personal brands use an audio or video clip that speaks speaking directly to their audience. This is one of the more effective ways of making a sale that is personal and requires trust.

Popular video blogger Gary Vaynerchuk has made a living out of selling wine from WineLibrary.tv. The salesletter for his new book "Crush It" includes tons of videos about the book, speaking engagements and anything else Vaynerchuk wants to say that'll enourage people to buy his book (see: http://www.crushitbook.com).

In the same way, if you want to join his "wine club", you'll get personal video from him describing the different club options and the types of wines you'll receive. If you're looking for someone to watch, there's no one who uses video to sell a product like Gary Vaynerchuk.

If you're thinking "video is shiny and attractive and all, but is it profitable?"

Just ask Vaynerchuk. He's a self-trained wine expert who revolutionized the wine industry with his video blog, **WineLibrary.tv** and has grown his family wine business from $4 million to $60 million in five years. Yes, it's very profitable.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Never let the technology outshine the sales message. Don't let your readers be so dazzled by the bells and whistles on your site that they forget to buy. If you're using video, it should be focused on the sale, not on comic relief or as a distraction.

Technology should be used to enhance the sales message, not to replace it.

Creative online publishers have discovered numerous ways to use technology on their sites, from offering valuable file downloads and full text archives of all past issues, to simple site search functions and printer-friendly page view options.

Others offer on-demand webcasts and interactive tools. Even "click to email an article to a friend" is good webification.

ADDITIONAL NOTEWORTHY EXAMPLES OF WEBIFICATION

While not located on the landing page, here are some other examples of great webification:

DeniseAustin.com offers an interactive self-assessment questionnaire. The visitor must complete the questionnaire before she is offered a fitness plan (for which she must pay). This creates the perception that the site is delivering personalized advice, not boilerplate content.

WebMD.com offers an interactive "symptoms check."

Insurance.com offers online calculators that enable the user to enter the criteria necessary for the agency underwriters to prepare a price quote.

Lawyers.com provides multiple ways to search for an attorney, including search by type or area of practice, search by name, search by geographical location, search by language and search by practice type (i.e., firm, individual lawyer).

BabyCenter.com offers dozens of interactive tools to play with, including such fun topics as predicting your child's adult height, calculating the amount you'll spend on your child throughout his lifetime, and ovulation charts for the still-trying crowd.
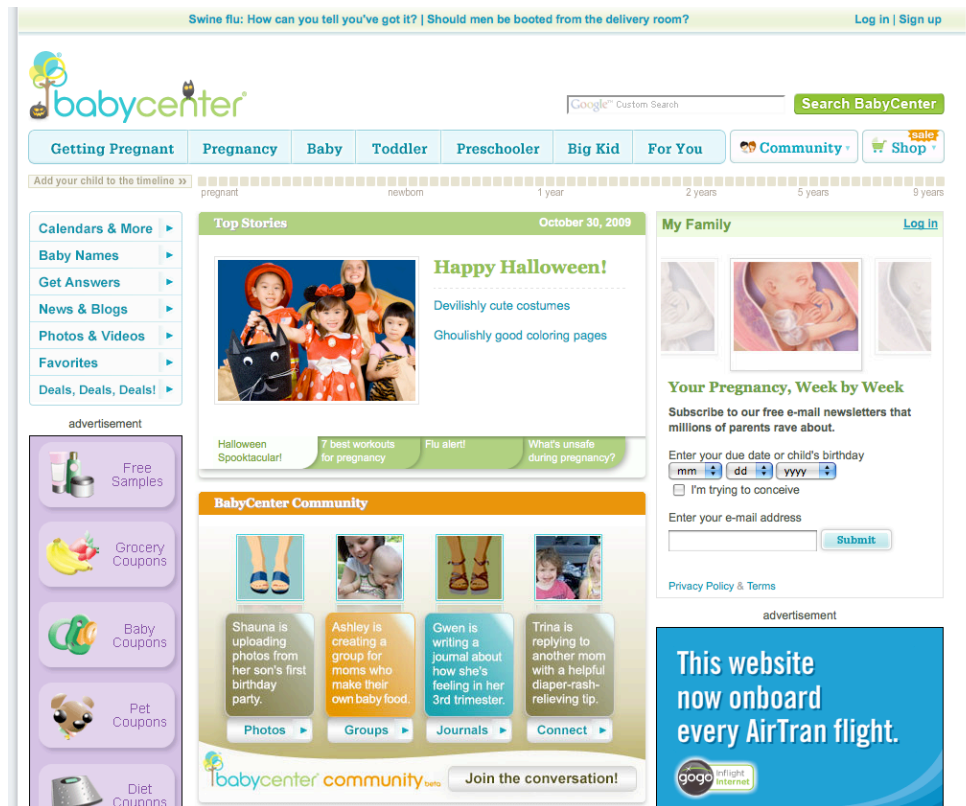

Insurance.com offers online calculators that enable the user to enter the criteria necessary for the agency underwriters to prepare a price quote.

CHAPTER FOUR: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH EMAIL CAPTURE

Once you've captured your prospect's interest, it's important to keep your name, product, and/or service in front of them. Offering a free newsletter or a free report is a handy, non-invasive way to accomplish that. These items have a high-perceived value and are surprisingly cheap to produce and distribute.

Additionally, it is crucial to use effective pop-unders as a mechanism for capturing a prospect's email address if they've decided to abandon your site before buying.

Why? Because if you get the visitor's email address before she leaves without ordering, you can serve her a series of follow-up emails via auto-responder, attempting to convert her to a trial subscription.

And, you've added another valuable name to your house e-list. Without her email address, you have lost the opportunity for follow up, significantly reducing your conversion rate.

NOTEWORTHY EXAMPLES OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

On many landing pages, the publisher asks for your email address immediately and refuses to give you additional information until you "give it up"—the address, that is.

Auto-responders can be very effective at getting your potential customers eager to buy more of your product or services.

Some publishers have built an entire business model using auto-responders. On one publisher's website, once the user submits her email address, an auto-responder starts a series of "lessons" from the editors, delivered once a day for five consecutive days.

These messages are short on valuable content (e.g., "One tip is to remember that patience is golden. There is no reason to get discouraged or disheartened.") and long on promoting their featured book.

CHAPTER FIVE: INCREASING CREDIBILITY WITH USER TESTIMONIALS

Buyers love having their purchase decisions validated. It comforts and reassures them to know that other customers—just like them—have bought and been very satisfied with your product or service.

The credibility of your product or service is invaluable. The authenticity of your user testimonials must likewise be completely believable. Good, credible testimonials are a vital element of any sales letter.

A testimonial is an endorsement or factual statement of praise from a satisfied customer or celebrity spokesperson.

The most credible testimonial messages feature individuals who share similar demographics to your target prospects or their heroes. Testimonials should be an accurate transcription of your customer's own words and ideally should include a full identification of the buyer by name, city, state and occupation.

A statement of support for your financial newsletter from Tom S. in North Carolina is obviously less valuable than one from Tom Smith, Certified Financial Planner, from Boone, North Carolina. In fact, under-identified testimonials can inspire suspicion and work against your sales message.

The best testimonials are specific and support your key copy points. They work well when integrated into the sales letter flow and feature genuine results and benefits. Alternatively, they can appear in a separate list of your satisfied customers, especially if yours is a B2B product and you cite respected corporations that have bought from you.

Bob Bly says that a natural, conversational tone adds to believability and notes that using quotation marks to frame the testimonial may increase readership.

The higher the perceived value of a product or service is, the more engaging and believable your testimonials should be. Online voice and photos can add even more credibility.

NOTEWORTHY EXAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS

This landing page below features effective, strong testimonials with photos and voice clips of happy customers who have purchased the newsletter.

Want proof? Listen To What My Customers Say.....

Listen to George Thompson

"Kris is by far the most talented direct marketer I've ever seen. I've worked with a pile of creative' types who are driven by ego and not results. **My investment in her words and strategies has resulted in 7 people participating in the quizzes and several emails complimenting me on my NEW newsletter only one week after mailing it out! It has already been a success and I want to thank you again.**

Kris, I would also like to thank you for being so honest when your merchant company accidentally charged me twice and thanks for the quick response of getting the money credited back to me so quickly. You are obviously an honest person!"

George Thompson
Current Subscriber
Access Integrity
Beaverton Oregon

Listen to Marty Stebbins

"Dear Kris,

Just a quick note to thank you for the Grand Prize in the Trivia Contest - who'd have thought, of all the entries that I'd win! I want to tell you too that each week I must receive a dozen phone calls or pieces of direct mail from brokers that would like me as their client. Each and every piece of mail looks the same and each ends up unread and thrown away - **but your newsletter is different.** As a business person myself, I think you are on to something; **an entertaining, educational piece of mail that I actually enjoy reading and a great way to separate yourself and your**
company from the rest. Good thinking!"

When we took this screenshot, the American Writers and Artists Institute (AWAI) landing page boasted 300 testimonials, although many lacked complete identification.

"This is the best correspondence course for copywriting I have ever seen – in fact, the best copywriting course I've seen anywhere, in any form. Anyone who wants to get into direct response copywriting would benefit enormously from taking it."

-- Bob Bly, Dumont, NJ

One that lets
the world for
prestigious, w

Every year th
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the layout of
of dollars to w
57% of people

There is a hug
writers, graph

re ever seen
o get into direct
sly from taking it."

Robert Bly,
author The Copywriter's Handbook

"I've found that Jen Steven's course on Travel Writing has been a great help to me in organizing my research and planning articles for inclusion in "The Traveler" as well as for submission to other publications. The 7 templates of good travel articles, tips on writing well, the ins and outs of the travel writing business, everything I've learned at AWAI ... all of this I have put to use in the "real world."

Tom Schueneman,
Creator and Editor of "The Traveler"
and graduate of the AWAI
Travel Writing and Copywriting Courses

"I kept my job until January of 2001, then started resume writing full time. Actually, though I consider this to be my full-time job, I really spend only about 20 hours a week doing it...Working at home is WONDERFUL! I can determine my own schedule. And I can take in as much or as little work as I want."

Michele A.,
graduate of the AWAI Resume
and Copywriting Courses

The AWAI landing page boasts 300 testimonials, although many lack complete identification.

This next landing page example contains a lot of testimonials, most of which were well written and right on the message. However, they should be presented in a more compelling fashion. A few are worked into the copy as boxed items. Not many of them are part of the story.

> "I look forward to each months issue. Dr. Richebacher's analysis seems well thought out and I have come to rely heavily on what he says."
>
> -Ken M., Oakland, CA

Unfortunately, this investors. They si truth of how preca are. They don't ev want to keeping or mutual funds, extr because they've b they'll always go u means by borrowi waving Fed tells tl

And, worst of all, they are the kind of testimonials signed by a first name and a last initial and a city and/or state name. This sort of thing screams "made up." Surely the esteemed Addison Wiggin, publisher of the Richebächer newsletter and the signer of the letter, wouldn't fib to us

But this isn't how it *really is*, and these poor u

This kind of testimonial lacks credibility.

about testimonials...but the testimonials certainly lack credibility because of those signatures.

However, if you want riveting testimonials with a stunning ring of authenticity, simply copy the technique used at The Investment U Course.

- The critical ingredients for every successful portfolio - two famous studies have proven it ... Page 20

> "Steve was the first one who taught me about the concept of the trailing stop. As crazy as it sounds, I had been investing happily enough without knowing about it, but once I grasped it, I was able to delve into markets that I thought were extremely overvalued, even bubble-like, and still have an exit strategy. Trailing stops gave me a way to "play," and I mean that in the "play around" sense. It thus became more fun to get in the game a little, rather than just watching." ~ **Chris Weber**, Monaco-based millionaire investor and editor of *The Weber Global Opportunities Report*

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> "I have personally known just about every financial guru to come down the pike in the last 30 years. And Steve ranks right up there with the very best of them." ~ **Bill Bonner**, editor of the *Daily Reckoning* and author of the *New York Times #1* Financial Bestseller *Financial Reckoning Day.*

> "In all my years as a broker, financial analyst and investment advisor, I've seen countless investors go charging into the markets only to get burned... It makes me wish every investor in America could get access to Steve's commonsense ideas, ideas anyone can take and use to clobber the markets. Actually, now they can." ~ **Jeff Winn**, wealth protection director, *International Assets*

The sales letter copy is interspersed with seven glowing recommendations. Each is clearly identified by name and credentialed as an authority.

CHAPTER SIX: CREATING STRATEGIC ORDER FLOW LINKS

Links and buttons are the vehicles that allow a prospect to navigate your landing page. Your objective should be to make them as easy as possible to understand and use.

There are two schools of thought when it comes to the links to the order flow. In regular text email promotions, some publishers want the whole story told before taking the user to the order page. In many cases, the user doesn't even know the price of the product or service until taken there.

Guerilla marketers believe that in long copy, if the prospect "gets it" and is ready to order, then she should be taken immediately to the order page.

They argue that when the user is ready to buy, nothing should get in the way. They believe there should be "Convinced? Want to order right now?" buttons throughout the landing page. Why make the prospect read any more than she needs to before making the decision to buy?

We say it depends. Our testing shows that eight out of 10 times, response rates are neutral or higher when peppering order buttons and links throughout the copy.

What makes the difference? Here's our best guess: if the product is well-known, easy-to-understand and cheap, the "pepper them everywhere" approach almost always wins.

But we also believe that for each unique combination of product, buyer and the hundreds of different elements on the landing page that may cause them to buy or click away, the only sure way to increase landing page conversion rates is to test the variations and go with the winners.

Regardless of how long your sales letter landing page is, or how many "order" buttons you imbed in the copy, clicking on the link or button should bring the user to a simple, easy-to-follow order page. Too many order options for too many offers and products can be confusing. And the confused mind always says "No!"

The winner.

Buttons should be well designed and easy to identify and use.

In one test, order button color proved to have a significant impact on response.

An orange/blue button out-performed red/white, green/white, and yellow/black buttons.

The losers.

NOTEWORTHY EXAMPLES OF LINKS TO ORDER FLOW

The landing page for orderflow options to the right includes several well- designed buttons on the landing screen.

The various links throughout the Rukeyser Mutual Funds landing page promise a 100 percent risk-free trial to the newsletter when you click on the link (see below). Clicking brings you to a simple, easy-to-follow order page where you can sign up for that trial.

The one flaw—and it's a big one—is that the offer of a "100% risk-free trial" is not repeated or explained on the order page. It is explained in the closing text of the right-hand column, but if you click on a link before that and go to the order page, you won't see it.

Three Delivery Options

1 Year (12 issues)
Delivered to your mailbox and electronically

⊙ $89.00 United States

○ $129.00 Canada/Mexico

○ $149.00 Other

CHECK OUT

1 Year (12 issues)
Delivered electronically
$69 for an annual subscription
$49 for Morningstar.com Premii
Members

CHECK OUT

Single Issue
$15 for the current edition

CHECK OUT

LOUIS RUKEYSER'S MUTUAL FUNDS

NO-RISK ROCK SOLID GUARANTEE
Subscribe now and cancel at any time. We'll promptly send you back every cent you paid - no matter how many issues you've received. Not a pro-rated portion, but 100%. Your introductory subscription is fully guaranteed.

The offer of a 100% risk-free trial is not repeated or explained on the order page.

CHAPTER SEVEN: APPLYING USER-CENTRIC LABELING AND LANGUAGE

Make your website navigation friendly and familiar. Experienced web surfers are familiar with what have become the traditional "road signs" of well-designed web pages. Most of us have come to expect hypertext links (not graphic buttons) to move us from one page to another. Links connect to additional information.

We expect graphic buttons only to initiate processes, such as "Click here to join!" Buttons create action.

We have grown accustomed to hypertext links that are the color blue, that turn another color when moused-over and finally become purple after we have clicked on them.

Traditionally, hypertext links are underlined. These are our expectations after nearly 10 years of online experience with the best designed and most successful websites.

Violate these familiar navigation standards and you go against the norm, taking us out of our "comfort zone" and perhaps detracting from your website's credibility.

THE AP STYLEBOOK

It belongs next to the dictionary and thesaurus on the desk (or on the computer hard drive) of every writer. More people write for The Associated Press than for any single newspaper in the world. For 50 years, The AP Stylebook and Libel Manual has been an invaluable resource. Now the journalist's bible has been reissued and is available online.

The AP Stylebook is an A-Z guide to usage, spelling and punctuation, as well as a reference book for terms and topics commonly encountered in journalism. The spiral-bound style manual is an essential handbook for all writers, editors, students and public relations specialists.

The AP Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law is available in both print and electronic forms at **APStylebook.com**.

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE

Clear language and good grammar are part of good storytelling and so is telling the truth. Don't try to bamboozle your prospect with tired ad copy clichés.

Have you ever seen a sales letter that included a bulleted list of items... and the last item in the list said, "and much, much more?" Well, nobody with an IQ higher than room temperature believes that there is "much, much more." If you actually have more benefits or features, put them in the list.

If you sell information products, whether in print or online, you're in the direct response marketing business. It doesn't matter what your product is, if you can't describe its features and write glowingly about their benefits, you can't sell it effectively.

Some tips on labeling and language:

- Write for the reader.
- Break up long copy with sub-headlines.
- Use power words to create excitement and urgency.
- Avoid using jargon and terms not commonly understood by the user.
- Proofread for errors.

Good writing is consistent in the use of spelling, abbreviation, terminology, grammar and punctuation. Web copy is no exception. Does consistency matter?

Definitely, because inconsistency confuses readers and makes you look uncertain of what you're doing. Words drive the brain. Good copywriting compels the reader to take action. Form follows function.

CHAPTER EIGHT: IMPROVING READABILITY AND CONTENT DENSITY

If a landing page is comfortable and easy to read, your prospects are far more likely to keep reading and respond to your sales message.

Much of this is the responsibility of the copywriter, whose job it is to keep the message flowing in interesting and easily assimilated (bite-sized) chunks, but there are other factors that contribute to making a website comfortable and easy to read—notably, the choice of typeface.

Some Common Fonts

This is Times New Roman type.

This is Baskerville type.

This is Garamond type.

This is Georgia type.

This is Caslon type.

This is Arial type.

This is Helvetica type.

This is Verdana type.
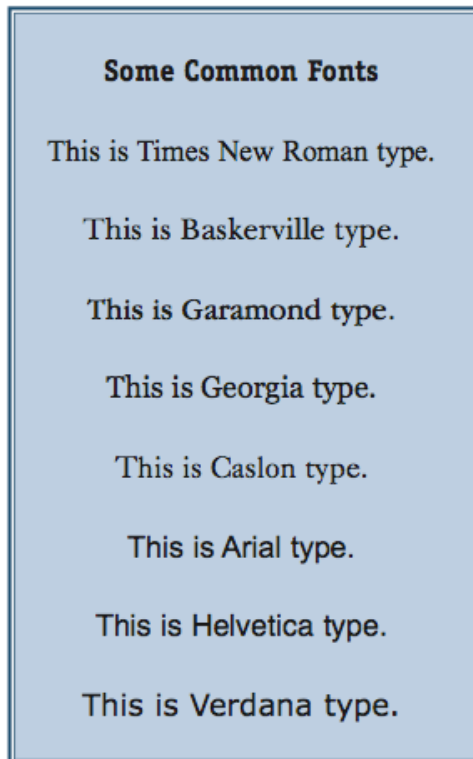
More than 25 years ago an article entitled *Why Johnny Can't Read* by Vrest Orton in *The National Review* argued that sans-serif typefaces make printed text unreadable.

Mr. Orton, born in 1897 in Hardwick, Vermont, founded the Vermont Country Store in 1946. That year, he also began publishing its catalog, *The Voice of the Mountains*. When Mr. Orton died 40 years later, his son Lyman, continued both the store and the catalog, which is still set, as it has been from the beginning, in **Times New Roman** type (a serif face).

About 12 years ago, *Target Marketing* magazine revisited the argument and concluded that, had Vrest Orton written for a direct marketing publication, the article might have been titled *Why Johnny Doesn't Order*.

Mr. Orton's argument goes along these lines. The major reason children can pass through the primary schools and even graduate from high school without being able to read has to do with printing.

He insisted that a "bold, blunt, hard, stark, rigid style of type called *sans serif*" is grotesque. He claimed that this style of type "not only repels and insults the eye, but actually makes printed matter almost impossible to read."

Mr. Orton favored typefaces such as **Baskerville** and **Garamond**, because the "letters fit together in such a way that the reader is never conscious of each letter, but only of word and sentence."

SHORT AND PUNCHY GETS THE READER'S ATTENTION

In his textbook, *Introduction to Online Journalism*, Dr. Roland De Wolk says it is important to keep in mind the following considerations when writing online:

- **People do not read carefully online**, they scan. If it takes too long to find what they want, they leave.
- **"Too long" is a matter of seconds**, not of minutes or of word counts. Chances they will stay on one page for more than 60 seconds are remote. The remote control is essentially the same as a computer mouse. People will move on fast unless captured by a story.
- **People come to the Web for information**. Therefore it must be a quick, pleasant and useful task.
- **Bulleted lists and other clear graphic elements** are essential for getting information quickly.
- **Writing in brief**, bright bursts of light works best.
- **Visuals need to be connected** to the story. The image must fit the words or the brain rejects the words.
- **Always edit, edit, edit**. Re-tell the main point of the paragraph, story or page in one sentence.
- **The writing toward the end of each document** or page should read like the end of a movie scene—it should lead the reader on.

Excerpted from *Introduction to Online Journalism: Publishing News and Information* by Roland De Wolk. Needham Heights: Allyn & Bacon, 2001

ENTER THE WORLD OF ONLINE PUBLISHING

For more than 20 years now, people have been reading letters and words on monitors. For about 10 years, many of these are constructed with sans serif typefaces.

So what happened to Mr. Orton's theory about the evils of sans serif typography for text?

The answer has to do with the dot size of your computer monitor and the overall size of the typeface you are viewing. Paradoxically, on a computer screen, sans serif faces such as **Arial** and **Helvetica** are more popular than **Times New Roman**.

But these typefaces are not the most legible online either, because they were designed in another era, for a different medium. Some years ago, Microsoft decided to address the problem and had two new typefaces designed specifically for use online.

They are **Verdana**, a sans serif typeface named for the verdant Seattle area and **Georgia**, a brilliant serif typeface allegedly named after a tabloid headline about alien heads found in Georgia. **Georgia** is recommended for online headlines, while Verdana seems to work best for online text.

Verdana is extended; it has extra space between characters so they don't touch. It also has a large "X" height, making the characters appear larger on the screen.

Georgia is a sturdy but friendly typeface that is attractive and comfortable to read. It holds up equally well in print as it does online and has become a favorite.

Verdana and **Georgia** have become favorites among website designers and they add tremendously to the readability of webpages.

Whatever you choose, the typeface of your landing page should be familiar, comforting and easy to read online.

On most websites, that means using a family of sans-serif typefaces including **Arial**, **Verdana** and **Helvetica**. Your landing page layout should be uncluttered and easy to follow, making adequate use of white space. Graphics should be well integrated with the sales letter flow.

These are responsibilities for a professional graphic designer with web design experience. Not all graphic designers who cut their teeth in the print world have made a good transition to designing webpages. And too many webpage designers

have never mastered the fundamentals of good graphics that are fundamental to outstanding print designers.

So seek out a designer who understands the online medium and won't impose graphics on your site that overpower the sales message. Remember, it's not creative unless it sells.

MAKING WEBSITES SENIOR-FRIENDLY

If the target market for your online newsletter is older Americans, you might want to heed this advice on senior-friendly websites from the National Institute on Aging. If fact, you might find these suggestions are worthwhile for any group squinting at the computer screen.

Plain text, plain type and plain terms are plainly effective ways to broaden the reach of a website to an older audience. Growing numbers of people 60 and older are computer users and information seekers on the World Wide Web, according to the National Institute on Aging and the National Library of Medicine.

These two components of the National Institutes of Health are providing a free booklet, *Making Your Web Site Senior Friendly: A Checklist*, to help web designers tailor all websites—old and new—for use by older people.

The checklist is based on results of scholarly research showing that age is no hindrance to computer or Internet use. While normal, gradual, age-associated declines in vision and cognitive abilities may be impediments to the use of electronic technology, the checklist ticks off ways to design readable text and navigational features that can shape up a website for older people.

It also covers suggestions for style and for incorporating popular features like photos, videos and audio. It wraps up with an extensive list of research references and suggested reading to address in-depth web design issues.

"By implementing this checklist, web designers can help open the Internet to great numbers of people over 60 who want to know more about their health and aging," says NIA director, Dr. Richard J. Hodes.

"We have found that people age 60 and over now constitute the fastest growing group of computer users," notes NLM director, Dr. Donald A.B. Lindberg.

Single copies of *Making Your Web Site Senior Friendly: A Checklist* are available as a PDF download at http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/checklist.pdf.

CRITERIA FOR A SENIOR-FRIENDLY WEBSITE

• Phrasing: uses the active voice

• Scrolling: avoids automatically scrolling text and provides scrolling icon

• Mouse: uses single clicks to access information

• Lettering: uses upper and lower case for body text and reserves all capitals for headlines

• Justification: uses left justified text

• Style: uses positive phrasing and presents information in a clear manner without need for inferences

• Menus: uses pull down and cascading menus sparingly

• Simplicity: uses simple language for text; glossary provided for technical terms

• Typeface: uses san serif typeface that is not condensed

• Color: avoids using yellow, blue and green in proximity

• Backgrounds: uses light text on dark backgrounds or visa versa; avoids patterns

• Consistent Layout: uses standard page design and navigation that is the same on each page

• Organization: uses a standard format; lengthy documents broken into short sections

• Navigation: uses explicit step-by-step navigation procedures; simple and straightforward

• Help & Information: offers a tutorial on website or offers contact information

• Icons & Buttons: uses large buttons; text is incorporated with icon when possible

• Text Alternatives: provides text alternatives for all other media types

• Illustrations & Photos: uses text-relevant images only
• Type Weight: uses medium or bold face type

• Type Size: uses 12 or 14 point for body text

• Site Maps: uses a site map to show how site is organized

• Hyperlinks: uses icons with text as hyperlinks

• Animation, Video & Audio: uses short segments to reduce download time

• Back/Forward Navigation: uses buttons such as "previous" and "next" for reviewing text

• Physical Spacing: uses double spacing in body text

CHAPTER NINE: PROVIDING URGENCY AND CONTENT FRESHNESS

Few things destroy the credibility of a sales letter landing page more quickly and effectively than content that's out of date. How can you expect the prospect to take your message seriously if you're not even interested enough in the content to keep it current?

Aim to convey a sense of freshness, excitement, timeliness or discovery.
Some of your potential customers will only visit your site once. If they don't buy immediately, they may never return.

But if you offer a mouthwatering, gotta-have-it special premium that they will receive immediately upon buying, you can significantly increase your conversion rate.

Do you have a fast-reading special report or a handy checklist to offer new customers?

Do you offer a downloadable tool, a template or an instructional Flash video that solves an immediate concern that all your potential customers share?

Consider using a free e-zine, a blog, a "what's new" section, a media room, an articles library or a streaming RSS news feed for delivering fresh content to the reader.

Something as simple as displaying the current date on the site can help with content freshness. Or create urgency by letting the reader know that the price is a "market test" and may change soon. Alternatively, announce an expiration date for the offer—a deadline by which the user must respond to get the free bonuses.

Caution: if you say quantities of an information product are limited, you have to make that claim believable by explaining why this is so, e.g., "We have a limited supply of our free CD, and once the inventory is gone, we will not be going back to press."

CHAPTER TEN: SPEEDING UP LANDING PAGE LOAD TIME

Nobody wants to wait for a website to load.

"People hate to wait," Andy King states in the opening line of his book, *Speed Up Your Site*". The Web is essentially a self-service environment. A core promise of self-service is speed. A customer turns to self-service to save time, to save money and because it is more convenient."

Some of the key points Mr. King addresses in his book include:

- How responsive your site is will in large part determine its adoption rate, which in turn affects your bottom line.

- People perceive fast-downloading pages to be of high quality, while they associate slow-loading pages with inferior quality products and services, com promised security and low credibility. Lower user satisfaction can lead to abandoned websites and shopping carts.

- The longer people interact with a website, the less they will tolerate delays.

Call us *spoiled* or *impatient*, but the fact is that the Web-using public doesn't want to wait at all. If your landing page loads at anything slower than the speed of instant gratification, you run a serious risk of losing your customer. As web- pages grow in complexity, page load time can take longer and longer. This can translate into a loss of readers, page views, advertising impressions, click-throughs and ultimately, a loss of revenue.

Here's more convincing evidence of how a fast-loading website can affect your bottom line.

A major high technology publisher recently shared this data for their website that will allow them to generate $5.3 million in extra revenue during the next 12 months. An upgrade of their content delivery system decreased page load time by 17 percent and increased total page views by 12 percent. The financial implication:

Revenue Impact of Making Webpages Load Faster

	Before	After	Change	% Change
Average Load Time (secs)	87	72	-15	-17%
Annual Impressions (000s)	1,386,000	1,552,320	166,320	12%
Revenue per M	$32	$32	$-	0%
Total Revenue	$44,352,000	$49,674,240	$5,322,240	12%

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO CREATE GREAT WEBPAGES THAT LOAD AS FAST AS POSSIBLE?

According to iProduction Founder & CEO Steve Laliberte, "The key to figuring out why your pages are loading slowly is to figure out why your code is slow, and then understand the things you can fix to make it faster."

If your site is too heavy with graphics, try using an image compression software such as PhotoShop. These programs optimize your web graphics and enable them to download faster without much loss of color or detail.

Here are some other ways to make a webpage load faster that were suggested by Mr. Laliberte, who is an experienced software publisher, computer systems analyst, trainer and author. (Don't get bogged down in the technicalities. If you don't understand all the jargon, ask your webmaster to implement these suggestions.)

- Eliminate as many non-essential images as you can.

- Use system typography instead of images for navigation. Use a background table cell color instead of a reverse image to create a rollover effect.

- Reduce the overall size of the initial HTML page. Fewer lines of code always
- load faster.

HTML generators like FrontPage and Dreamweaver produce very long and inefficient code. And every time you change something, they introduce an extra set of tags.

As an alternative, try editing the code by hand. By doing so, a skilled pro grammar can usually cut down the number of HTML tags by 50 percent, compared to a page that was created by an HTML generator or WYSIWYG editor.

• Use a small, effective style sheet to reduce the redundant definitions of font, size, color, effects and other attributes of objects. Reference images in the style sheets. Use short style names.

• Java scripts must be loaded, interpreted and executed, which robs speed and memory from your computer. Therefore, you should eliminate as many Java scripts as possible. Note: Not all browsers interpret Java scripts the same way. For best results, check your work in several browsers.

• Explicitly define the width of tables and cells, and the width and height of images. The browser will not have to wait until the entire image or contents of the table are loaded to begin displaying them.

• Use "valid" HTML or XHTML to enable the browser to process the code more efficiently. Many browsers have a "quirks" mode that is slower, but much more forgiving of little mistakes.

• Avoid rollover menus, which require JavaScript and DHTML to increase the size of the page before causing it to rollover.

• Minimize interactions with the database. Try to resolve all database calls and simply display the data in HTML on the page. If you must interact with the database, select only on indexed fields.

THINK GLOBALLY WHEN PREPARING YOUR ONLINE CONTENT AND AVOID MAKING CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

The Internet is available to surfers in nearly 100 countries, so if you have the right niche content, you're likely to get subscribers from all over the globe.

Subscribers to your English language content will likely be read in Canada, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, India, Barbados, the Bahamas, Guyana, Grenada, Jamaica, the United Kingdom and throughout the English-speaking world. That includes such diverse places as Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates—all countries where English is the official or unofficial language.

This means if you write in "American" English, you need to be careful to avoid using slang or referring to U.S. television programs or other exclusively American cultural icons.

Also, avoid using a joke that depends on English language ambiguity for its punch line. It may fall flat or even offend.

It's also a good idea to avoid local geographic references such as calling it "The Lone Star State" without first identifying it as Texas.

Additionally, you should avoid posting large inline graphic files and always offer text alternatives (HTML ALT codes). That's because many international subscribers are likely to have narrow bandwidth Internet connections, making the downloading of large images difficult and frustrating.

If you have a large graphic that is important content, consider putting it in a separate file folder and giving your members the option of downloading it. Be sure to tell them how large the file is in kilobytes.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: DESIGNING AESTHETICALLY PLEASING LANDING PAGES

Beauty is relative, cultural, genetic and ever-changing. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and aesthetic judgments are subjective. So how can you decide on the right design for your website?

The answer is to know your target market and create an appearance that conforms to your visitors' expectations. We call it the "user's mental model."
The way a landing page looks and feels is almost as important as what it says. A favorable decision to purchase your product or service is usually the result of a sales effort that made the customer feel comfortable and safe.

The graphic design of your website should be comforting and trustworthy for the target user, and consistent with his mental model. The look and feel of the landing page should support and reinforce the sales letter's flow, as well as the product or service brand.

Visitors instantly judge your credibility by the way your site looks. If it looks good, a visitor might take the next step, reading some copy or clicking a link. But the site design itself is the first hurdle.

There are innumerable options here. So many, in fact, that it's easy to get overwhelmed and lose all direction. Before you settle on a design, take a good look around at other site designs.

Start by visiting CoolHomePages.com. Here you'll find thumbnails of dozens of sites, with links to the actual pages. Each site is rated, with the rating shown attached to the thumbnail, so you can see which designs are considered good and which are bad.

As you consider designs, keep in mind your main objectives: a professional look, without clutter, that's easy to navigate.

DON'T MAKE ME THINK!

It's a fact: people won't use your website if they can't figure out their way around it.

Don't Make Me Think! A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability is an indispensable 200-page essay by Steve Krug.

It makes a strong case that the navigation systems, main pages, labels, buttons, etc. on your website can either make using it easy and obvious—or they can discourage users by making them think too much.

Mr. Krug has done a lot of hard thinking about what works and what doesn't, so we don't have to. And unlike many graphic designers, he can write intelligibly and even whimsically. His book is filled with illustrations, examples and pithy statements, making it a fast but thought-provoking read.

Some observations:

- People don't read, they scan.
- Users don't make the best choice, they select the first "good enough" solution.
- Visitors don't figure out how things work, they "muddle" through.

Krug's clearly explained, easily absorbed principles will help you arrive at both the right questions to ask the experts you hire, and practical answers so you can make difficult technical, aesthetic and structural decisions.

DESIGN MATTERS TO CREDIBILITY

In 2002, the Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab, a think tank, and Makovsky & Company, a New York-based public relations agency, surveyed more than 1,600 people from the U.S. and Europe about website credibility.

Some highlights:

- Pop-up ads were regarded harshly, seriously damaging the perceived credibility of the site.

- One of the surest ways to create a credible site is to arrange the site in a way that makes sense to the users.

- One of the surest ways to lose credibility is to make it difficult to navigate.
- The researchers compiled six overall design implications, each of which will help boost a website's credibility.

- Add value to each Web visit (fresh content, quick responses to customer questions, search capabilities, printer-friendly pages and contact information).

- Guard the integrity of your content. (High marks to site content that identified its sources and provided its authors' credentials.)

- Make it simple to get around. A site's navigational system can directly impact perceptions of credibility.

- Appearances matter (a clear link between solid design and site credibility).

- Make sure everything works. Broken links and unexpected downtime received some of the lowest marks.

- Watch your reputation and your affiliations. A company's standing in the real world impacts the credibility of its website.

CHAPTER TWELVE: OFFERING MULTIPLE AND CONVENIENT ORDER OPTIONS

Posting a landing page with a confusing or inadequate order mechanism is like opening a new Wal-Mart, but forgetting to install cash registers. What's the point?

In direct mail advertising, one of the two most important elements of the package is the order form (the other being the outer envelope). If you get everything else right and blow the order mechanism, your sales letter landing page will almost certainly fail.

Your customers should be able to fill in the fields of an online screen and check boxes to select their preferences. Simplicity and brevity are priceless. Ask only for the information you need to process the order.

Generally, it is unwise to offer more than two options or two price packages. You can test this, but frequently too many choices tend to overwhelm users and diminish response. A good online order page should include such alternate order options as a toll-free number for phone orders and a printable order form for fax orders.

The order page should state your guarantee and return policy. In general, longer guarantees—the longer, the better—will increase sales and diminish the number of returns.

It is critical that the online order form incorporates security technology. The current standard is Secure Socket Layer (SSL) encryption.

SSL is a method of encrypting information that travels over the Internet. It is the security protocol industry standard for online transactions. Messages between your site and the customer's computer are automatically encrypted (or scrambled) when sent, and unscrambled when received.

Once your site has the SSL certificate, transactions are certified to be coming from where they claim to be coming from, to discourage forgery.

How do you get the SSL for your site? Your site host can handle it for you, although they probably charge a fee for the service. The SSL certificate can come from one of several certification authorities.

VeriSign and Thawte are two well-known sources.

The process is fairly simple, but detailed. You have your hosting service generate a Certificate Signing Request, then you go to VeriSign or Thawte's website and fill out and submit a form, including the Certificate Signing Request.

SSL secured sites begin with "https://" instead of "http://" and most browsers automatically indicate to the user whether a page is secure or not.

It's always a good idea to remind your customers that their credit card information is protected by SSL. You can state this on your order form, and include the logo of your SSL provider.

Viewing Your Website Landing Page as a First-Time Visitor

We recently had a client with an unhappy customer who could not join their online newsletter because his credit card has an expiration date in 2015. The drop-down menu for credit card expiration date on their secure order form only showed the years 2008 through 2012.

The result: he could not use his credit card to join. A potential customer who was trying to give them money was turned away in frustration because their order form literally was not up to-date.

Fortunately, he brought the problem to their attention. A few keystrokes of HTML code fixed that problem quickly, but it made us wonder how many other potential members had simply left the site and not bothered to bring this deficiency to the clients' attention.

In traditional brick-and-mortar businesses, there is a theory of management called MBWA. It stands for "management by walking around." Getting out of the office and onto the work floor. Talking to people. Experiencing the business first hand, much
like a customer would.

Those of us with online businesses need to do something similar.

Take a critical look at your website and its landing page from the viewpoint of the first- time visitor. What obstacles to closing the sale need to be removed? For instance, is your order form up to date?

CONCLUSION

You can divide products into two categories: must-have and nice-to-have. Newsletters and other information products fall decisively in the nice-to-have category. No one needs newsletters and information products.

As Bill Bonner, founder of Agora Publishing, says, "Nobody wakes up, taps their significant other on the shoulder, and says, 'Honey, we need to get some more newsletters today'."

Newsletters and other information products do not sell themselves. They need to be sold. This document provides some cutting-edge information on how to do that, but it's not finished.

As Internet commerce becomes more popular, and the number of information products offered for sale online increases, the importance of sound online marketing practices will become even more important. In the process, they will change.

That means there is no real conclusion to the topic of website landing pages or any other aspect of online publishing. This is a living document.

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