

The Other Half of the Equation



by ken burke

Marketing and customer acquisition costs are on the rise, and ROI-driven marketing is more important than ever. Accordingly, today's savvy e-commerce marketers invest precious time and money into meticulously selected search terms, carefully segmented e-mail campaigns and highly focused advertising. It's quite surprising then, how little thought goes into the other half of the equation, the landing page.

Sponsored links, paid search terms, e-mail campaigns, banner ads and other external links are designed to attract self-targeted audiences and motivate them to click and buy. Online marketers agree that these ads are supposed to engage customers and make sales, not just generate clicks. But more often than not, the page that actually does the selling is treated as an afterthought instead of an integral part of a targeted pitch.

Fortunately, devoting a little forethought and attention to these pages pays back with dramatic increases in conversion, sales and new customers. The secret? Make sure your landing pages closely mirror the terms, copy and creative in your ads so they act

together to make a relevant and strong impression.

According to published studies, a well-crafted landing page can produce sales lifts of 40 percent or more. When visitors see what they expect to see, they buy more. The closer the match, the greater the lift.

Where We Go Wrong

It sounds like good common sense, but take a look for yourself. Click on any paid search listing or banner ad—even on a promotional banner on an e-commerce site's own homepage—and you'll see that most landing pages are only loosely tied to the ad or link that drove you to click. At best, you'll land on an unremarkable thumbnail listing of related products. More often, you'll land on a page that makes you pause and wonder, like many users, if you accidentally clicked the wrong link.

A lack of continuity between ad and landing page content leads to unsatisfactory or misleading product presentation, user confusion and missed sales opportunities. Far too often, users are taken to:

➤ **A search results page with many small thumbnails, where nothing stands out,** merchandising is non-existent, and branding is weak at best. This approach especially is common across all forms of advertising, from search terms to e-mail campaigns.

➤ **A product detail page for a single product**—usually too narrow and focused relative to the user's intent. Often, the product only vaguely is tied to the link source.

➤ **A product category page.** This may or may not be specific enough to the customer's needs, but it almost certainly will not be tied closely enough to make a satisfying impression.

➤ **A homepage.** This still is more

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Landing Page Principles to Remember

➤ **Click continuity.** Marry landing pages to search terms, banner ad messaging and imaging.

➤ **Brand reinforcement.** This is your opportunity to tell or remind shoppers who you are and why they should buy. Showcase your brand and offer.

➤ **Merchandising opportunities.** Carefully craft your product presentation so it's appealing and easy to see that you offer what shoppers want. Hit them fast with items of interest.

Lift conversion with well-crafted landing pages

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common than most marketers would like to admit.

Where's My Suit?

Your landing pages must support the promise you make in your ad. While doing research for this article, I went to Google and typed "men's suits." I clicked on a paid listing for a major department store that read simply "suits." The image that greeted me was a close-up of a lawn with "super weekend SALE" emblazoned across it. My first reaction was that I had inadvertently clicked on the wrong link, followed closely by frustration. "Where's my suit?"

As it turned out, I had been taken to the advertiser's homepage. There were no visible links for suits of any kind, and although I'm sure its suits were in there somewhere, I would have been back at Google in a flash to find another store if I actually was shopping.

Think about this in relation to customer segments. Individuals who click on that ad have defined themselves as being in the "men's suit-buying" segment. You would never target your teenage segment with a catalog designed for the 50-plus crowd, so don't provide your self-defined men's suit buyer with a landing page that looks like you're pushing lawn furniture.

Good landing pages usually are focused enough so customers feel as if they've hit pay dirt right away, but they're not so focused that customers feel like they've missed the mark. It's not a good idea to direct shoppers to a page for a single product unless your ad is extremely specific.

A Lesson in Tradition

Good term selection, copy and design help ensure relevance and clicks from the right prospective buyers. However, once targeted users reach your landing page, you only have a few seconds to persuade them to stay there, so keep them confident and focused on their task by reinforcing the message that triggered

their click. Therefore, the dominant message on the landing page should mirror what you put in your ad, including visual creative, colors, typefaces and of course, the copy itself. Seamless continuity between the ad and the page eliminates any chance of confusion and promotes trust.

Traditional advertisers have leveraged the concept of "impressions" for generations. Saying and showing the same message repeatedly,



The Eddie Bauer (www.eddiebauer.com) sponsored link on Google (inset) is brief and clear, and the landing page supports its message. Unambiguous imagery and the three useful tools at the bottom further invite the shopper to explore the offerings.

whether in print, radio, TV or in any combination, compounds message effectiveness and radically improves recognition and sales. The online medium, by its interactive nature, allows us to emulate and expand on this proven concept.

Don't Forget Brand Positioning

Back on Google and still looking for men's suits, I clicked on a paid listing for a vendor I had never heard of, and was hit with a page full of tiny thumbnails and a promise of low prices. There was no imagery or messaging designed to build trust or to educate me on the product line, customer service or reputation. I felt like I was at a bargain-basement store sorting through a pile of items I knew nothing about. I had been thrown too deeply into the site and was confronted by too many choices with no supporting information. My credit

card stayed safely in my wallet.

Your landing page often provides the shopper with her first impression of your site, frequently serving as an introduction to your company or products. Even existing customers may not fully understand the depth and breadth of your assortment or expansion into various categories or styles. This is your chance to make a big splash, and grab and keep their attention. And, since the page they click to may be deep within the site, it's important to bring brand positioning and promotions to the fore whenever possible.

Getting Started

Imagine a positive retail shopping experience in which a salesperson takes a couple moments to point you in the direction you want to go, and in which the displays are designed and stocked to intuitively help you find what you want. A good landing page should do the same. Shoppers' initial interest should be rewarded with something highly relevant, while ancillary

messages and offers should pull them deeper into the site. Make sure your ads work similarly to window displays, and that your landing pages are expressly designed to welcome customers as they "walk through the door."

There is no way any one company could ever build customized landing pages for every search term or ad, so start small, with a targeted landing page for a few of your most important search terms, e-mail campaigns or online ads. Track results and build from there, as your resources permit. Think in terms of campaigns. Since campaigns are constructed around key themes, product groups and messages, they make the right landing page easier to conceive and execute. ♦

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