



Leave No Segment Behind

Consider the context of your visitor's needs when you craft campaigns

Melissa is a seasoned, outdoors sports-woman who works in my office. She recently decided to take up a new challenge: rock climbing. She's planning a trip in a few weeks and already has a few climbs scheduled. Being a novice, she has no idea what kind of equipment and rope she needs for outdoor climbing, so she does what any 20-something would do—she Googles the term “rock climbing rope.”

In her hunt, she surfs through at least two dozen rock climbing ropes, clicks on several pay-per-click banner ads, visits three online retailers—and ends up more confused.

Not one online retailer can answer all or even some of her basic questions, or point her in the right direction for a proper purchase. At least three marketers paid for her click; each of these marketers had the product she needed.

Melissa is the definition of a qualified prospect. She certainly fits into at least a few direct marketers' target audiences. She not only wants to buy, but is eager to buy. In fact, she earmarked \$1,000 for supplies, but her online experience leaves her uncertain that anyone online wants her money.

Melissa ends her shopping excursion by buying at a brick and mortar store; all she needed was some information that an informed clerk was able to share with her in less than five minutes.

This is tragic.

Let's assume that some of the

e-tailers Melissa visited sport the average conversion rate of 2.4 percent. Of the 97.6 percent of unconverted visitors, how many had similar buying needs? Would I be going out on a limb to say 1 percent of those 97.6 percent of visitors just needed a simple buying guide to get resolution for a particular product purchase? If you could convert half of that 1 percent, the conversion rate would jump to 2.9 percent and then only 97.1 percent of visitors would be left on the table.

Melissa's situation is only one of dozens of “novice rock climbing” scenarios for which a direct marketer can account, plan and optimize. Melissa also represents only one prospective customer segment—one that might not even be the largest or the most profitable.

Most marketers have tweaked their way to very slight increases online because they are trying to maximize only one pipeline. But you can only do so much with one pipeline. How many times can you tweak the banner, change fonts, change the header image or redesign a site to minimal success? None of these single pipeline optimizations would impact a segment like Melissa's. Instead, marketers should build multiple pipelines crafted to address the needs of several viable segments.

Persuasive Measures

Direct marketers need a methodol-

ogy that will guide them in planning and prioritizing marketing tactics, and leave no customer segment behind. And of course, direct marketers require an accountable methodology for modeling customer behavior if they're to maintain their lead and growth rate as well as maximize ROI. To all this, they must add the traditional marketing challenges businesses have been tackling since the dawn of commerce.

But this can be achieved through the use of persuasion scenarios. A persuasion scenario consists of well-planned components that convince a customer segment to participate in a conversion action. Some of these components will be linear; others will be nonlinear. All must be customer-focused—based on how each segment approaches the decision to buy—rather than business-focused.

Each aspect of a persuasion scenario must be planned with a customer focus that acknowledges the differing needs of each visitor segment and provides persuasive momentum.

The scenario also must incorporate the business' sales process in a way that benefits visitors without undermining their buying decision process. After all, what good is improving the customer's experience if you're not closing the deal?

Each scenario component must consist of one or several persuasion

(continued on page 26)

(continued from page 25)

entities, each with a distinct responsibility and measurable contribution to the scenario's success. A persuasion entity can be any contact method with a prospect that is planned, optimized and held accountable to its responsibility in the conversion process. This can take the form of a catalog, Web page, direct mail piece, banner ad, search engine result, mass-media ad, print ad, telephone sales script or even a business card.

The components of a persuasion scenario include:

Driving points. This is the prospecting point where a scenario technically begins. It might be a catalog, infomercial, search engine result, paid click, banner ad or homepage. It's the first interaction with a prospect, and the concretely identifiable place where the prospect shows a level of interest.

In Melissa's case, the driving points—search results and banner ads—were effective. They matched her search term and enticed her to click through.

Funnel points. These entities usually are the entry points of the classic conversion funnel. A funnel point can be a landing or main product category page, or a catalog call center.

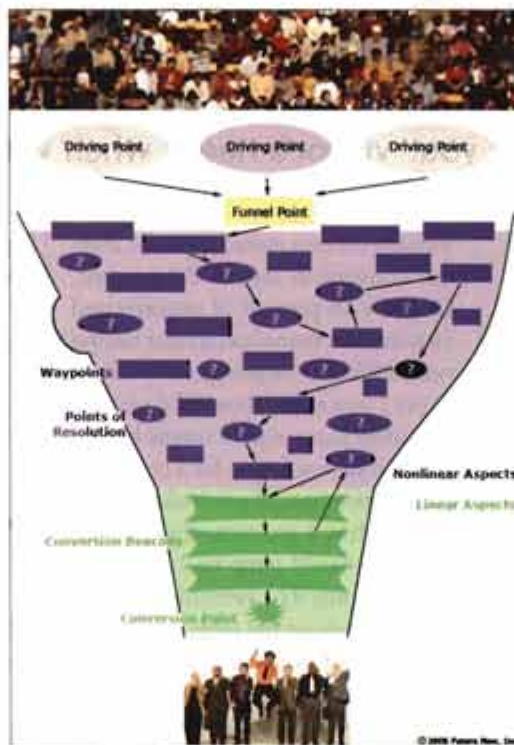
Many of the funnel points Melissa passed through were simple product listings. These online marketers would be better served by a specific landing page for climbing ropes. On this page, they could have better framed Melissa's experience by listing sections for novice, intermediate and expert climbers. They even could have put together a few starter kits. Melissa might have bought one of those on the spot.

Resolution points. These pages contain information visitors need to answer questions associated with their individual buying processes, such as a return policy page. Each resolution-point page or entity needs to link to either a waypoint or a conversion beacon (see below for definition) to ensure the visitor never misses an opportunity

to convert.

Melissa may or may not be concerned about the return policy, or she may want to know more about different brands. The marketer must allow her to get this information, get resolution and easily get back to her conversion path.

Waypoints. These are persuasive touchpoints that marketers determine are integral to their conversion goals, as well as important to the needs of a



The components of a persuasion scenario include driving points, funnel points, resolution points, waypoints, conversion beacons and, finally, the conversion point.

particular visitor segment. Waypoints support the sales process and conversion goal. Not every site visitor must hit every waypoint to be persuaded or complete the scenario. Waypoints are selling-process pages that meet the needs of a majority of folks within a visitor segment.

For example, the page listing product suggestions for novice climbers would constitute a waypoint for Melissa, as would several product detail pages and comparison sites. The pages for expert climbers or clearance items would be waypoints for other segments. Each of these pages also should contain

upsell opportunities.

Conversion beacons. A conversion beacon signals the first or next step in a linear process through which a visitor must pass to reach the conversion point. Resolution points and waypoints lead a visitor to a conversion beacon, the place where the consumer demonstrates her intention to convert.

When Melissa places a product into her shopping cart, she is entering a conversion beacon. Each step in completing the checkout process constitutes another conversion beacon, and the visitor must complete each step in order.

Conversion point. This is the point where we know with absolute certainty a visitor has successfully completed a persuasion scenario. The conversion point is the entity that's delivered so that both the business and the visitor know conversion has occurred, such as a confirmation message.

A Little Planning, More ROI

If you plan scenarios, you'll know exactly what to measure. This is a highly accountable process.

Let's revisit Melissa's scenario and conservatively estimate that 1.9 percent of the remaining 97.1 percent of visitors are similarly qualified prospects seeking to buy. Let's also estimate that with the proper persuasion scenario in place, they would be persuaded to convert. This would raise the conversion rate to 5 percent, an increase of more than 100 percent. That's not a huge stretch.

When you think and plan in the context of your visitors' needs—and account for how, when and why they buy—when you craft your marketing campaigns, you are cooking with gas. ■

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