

The 4 ESSENTIALS *of* EVERY GREAT WEBSITE

(AND HOW TO DESIGN YOURS)



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WHY SITE DESIGN MATTERS

“

“Questions about whether design is necessary or affordable are quite beside the point: design is inevitable. The alternative to good design is bad design, not no design at all. Everyone makes design decisions all the time without realizing it... good design is simply the result of making these decisions consciously, at the right stage.”

- Douglas Martin, Author, Book Design: A Practical Introduction

”

Just like still photography evolved into video, website design has grown from a static online billboard to a personalized dynamic experience. The main difference between these two transformations, of course, is that one took decades to occur while the other happened over the course of just a few short years. Today, in fact, websites are interactive platforms that share much more in common with video games than billboards.

This rapid change, though, has created a core disconnect between what a website can do and the way that many marketers approach utilizing them. In other words, while the functionality of websites has transformed substantially since the early 1990s, the way most marketers think about websites hasn't always kept pace.

According to eMarketer, nearly **90% of U.S. businesses** consider their websites as their most important online tactic, which makes it critical for them to keep their websites in working order. Staying on top of new website design and optimization trends is challenging – even trying to understand all the new terminology, such as “mobile optimization” and “dynamic content,” can get overwhelming.

CHAPTER 1

1. AESTHETICALLY
BEAUTIFUL

2. OPTIMIZED FOR THE
USER

3. PERSONALIZED
AND CONTEXTUAL

4. OPTIMIZED FOR
MOBILE

First Impressions Matter Online



*“You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world.
But it takes people to make the dream a reality.”*

- Walt Disney



The “look” of your website is the first thing your visitor will experience. According to the [Web Marketing Group](#), our brains process visuals 60,000 times faster than text. As a result, the site aesthetic – not the written content on the screen - is your first chance to reach out and grab your audience.

For your site, a compelling first impression is mandatory to get people to engage with your company. As online attention spans continue to shrink (recent estimates say you have roughly [50 milliseconds](#) to make a first impression), you will notice more that designs that don’t connect with your audience will be the first, last, and only thing a visitor learns about your

Design for the Person Looking at Your Screen

What sets great website design apart? Website design isn't about the company or the designer; it's about the person at the other end of the screen. This pivotal shift is the key that separates exceptional websites from the other [633 million websites](#) in the world today.

The designer's job is to create a compelling experience for the reader at the other end of the screen. They do this by using aesthetics and design to:

- 1 Push the meaning and purpose of the brand
- 2 Create a tone and express the personality of the brand

You want your website to create a harmonious tone, not a discordant one. On the next page, you will find two website examples, one from our recent compilation, “[53 Examples of Brilliant Homepage Design](#),” and the other voted one of the [world’s worst websites](#).

The image shows the Rezdy website homepage and a diagram illustrating how the platform works. The homepage features a dark teal background with the Rezdy logo and navigation links. It highlights the software's ease of use for online bookings and includes a list of benefits. A desktop monitor and a smartphone display the Rezdy interface. Below the homepage, a diagram titled "HOW REZDY WORKS" shows a central cloud icon connected to four circular icons representing different business functions.

rezdy
RESERVATION READY

FEATURES PRICING CASE STUDIES RESOURCES BLOG [FREE TRIAL](#) [LOGIN](#)

Online Booking Software

Rezdy is the easiest way to take online bookings for tours, activities, rentals, charters, shuttles & tickets.

- ✓ Quick set up. Accept online bookings the same day you start your free trial.
- ✓ Simple to use. Update your prices and availability in minutes.
- ✓ Easy payment. Straight into your bank account.

[FREE TRIAL](#) [REQUEST A DEMO](#)

HOW REZDY WORKS

Rezdy is a web-based platform that gives you everything you need to run and grow your business.

ONLINE BOOKINGS MANAGE YOUR BUSINESS PARTNERS REZDY COMMUNITY

CAR LEASING
Want a cheap new lease car? Start HERE!

LINGsCARS.com
UK CONTRACT HIRE CARS FROM LING VALENTINE
Version 237.1. You can trust me! ... In 2012 I'll rent over £50 million of cars (at RRP)

CAR LEASING - CONTRACT HIRE - CHEAP LEASE CARS

Home Cars and Vans How It Works Price Lists About Ling Customers Fun Stuff Quote/Order

Business Customer Pricing Personal Customer Pricing

NEW SEXY
christine full rep here

FEAR FREE CARS

Search Cars Here Go

@LINGsCARS Follow Me

LING'S LIVE TWITTER FEED

The twitter pigeon is loading "LINGsCARS" LIVE + KICKING twitter feed... WAIT!

you for making the web fun! #qjam3 >> Sorry, been getting a

Intro Film News Blog Office TV Contact Moan Links Play Quiz Privacy Policy Google Visitors

EU cookie law. Piss off Von Rumpy. Me... I hammer visitors to death with cookies, so I can find out what they want. Cookies allow my website to serve visitors the content they need. Get used to it. The EU cookie law is an ass. - Ling

You can't find a car? **Apply for a CAR QUOTE**

AS SEEN ON TV **DRAGONS' DEN**

Richard Farleigh - "I wanted to invest; I was amazed by Ling's complete lack of nerves, and also by her business acumen."
Duncan Bannatyne - "I wanted to invest... but ye turn'd me doon!"
Deborah Meaden - "Herrumph! I'm out!"

UK WARNING: Customers reporting many other internet prices are hiding true lease costs! BEWARE DODGY COMPANIES SELLING HIGH INITIAL RENTAL "6+" LEASES

VIZ Ling is OFFICIAL VIZ ethnic business ambassador!

PLAY STUPID CRASH GAME! **CHEAP INSURANCE** Google Spider Food ---> google

View LIVE visitors: 25 online

Hi! I am Ling **WAW!** from Dragons' Den. I lease cheap new cars!

ABARTH CAR LEASING
500
500 Convertible
595
595 Convertible
Punto Evo

ALFA ROMEO LEASE CARS
Giulietta
Mito

As you can see, these two sites give the reader two very different experiences. The first has a clear visual hierarchy. It uses tools like color variations and directional arrows to show the audience what's important on the site. Additionally, it provides easily understandable links readers can click to learn more about the company. On the other hand, you could stare at the second page for a half hour and still not know exactly what you are supposed to do there.

Make sure that your website serves your audience and helps to advance your business goals rather than scare your audience away. For more information on site design and visual cues, read the Conversion Centered Design book.

Create a Brand Aesthetic

“

“What really decides consumers to buy or not to buy is not the content of its advertising, but its form.”

David Ogilvy

”

If you have ever stood in front of an original Monet, you know that a beautiful design can send involuntary tingles down your spine. Unfortunately, if you explore a random sample of sites online, you will find only a small percentage of them are capable of making that kind of connection with their audience.

Really exceptional designers imbue their site design with talent and psychology to elicit an emotion from your visitors. You might not be trying to create awed reverence or spine tingles, but websites should certainly try to produce an emotional response - usually to inspire someone to buy your product or build a relationship with your company.

Because [people often make buying decisions based on emotional stimulus](#), it's important to understand how your website works to stimulate (or inhibit) those kinds of decisions.

Your website should convey the spirit and culture of your company. Are you open and fun, serious and reverent, or friendly and informative? Each of these emotions would require a different imagery, layout and typeface.

Even the colors you use will impact visitors' emotional experience on your site. In our recent "[Conversion Centered Design](#)" book, Unbounce's Ollie Gartner takes you through a number of psychological principles and triggers that you can use to understand your own website designs. Gartner explains every color triggers a specific emotion. For example, orange often creates positive feelings, while red connotes "stop" to many people. Knowing what emotion you are trying to connect with should determine which shades you pick for your design. (Based on this info, it may be best to steer clear of using any red in your design.)

Here are three websites from our "[53 Brilliant Homepage Designs](#)" compilation which use design elements and color combinations that convey three very different emotions.

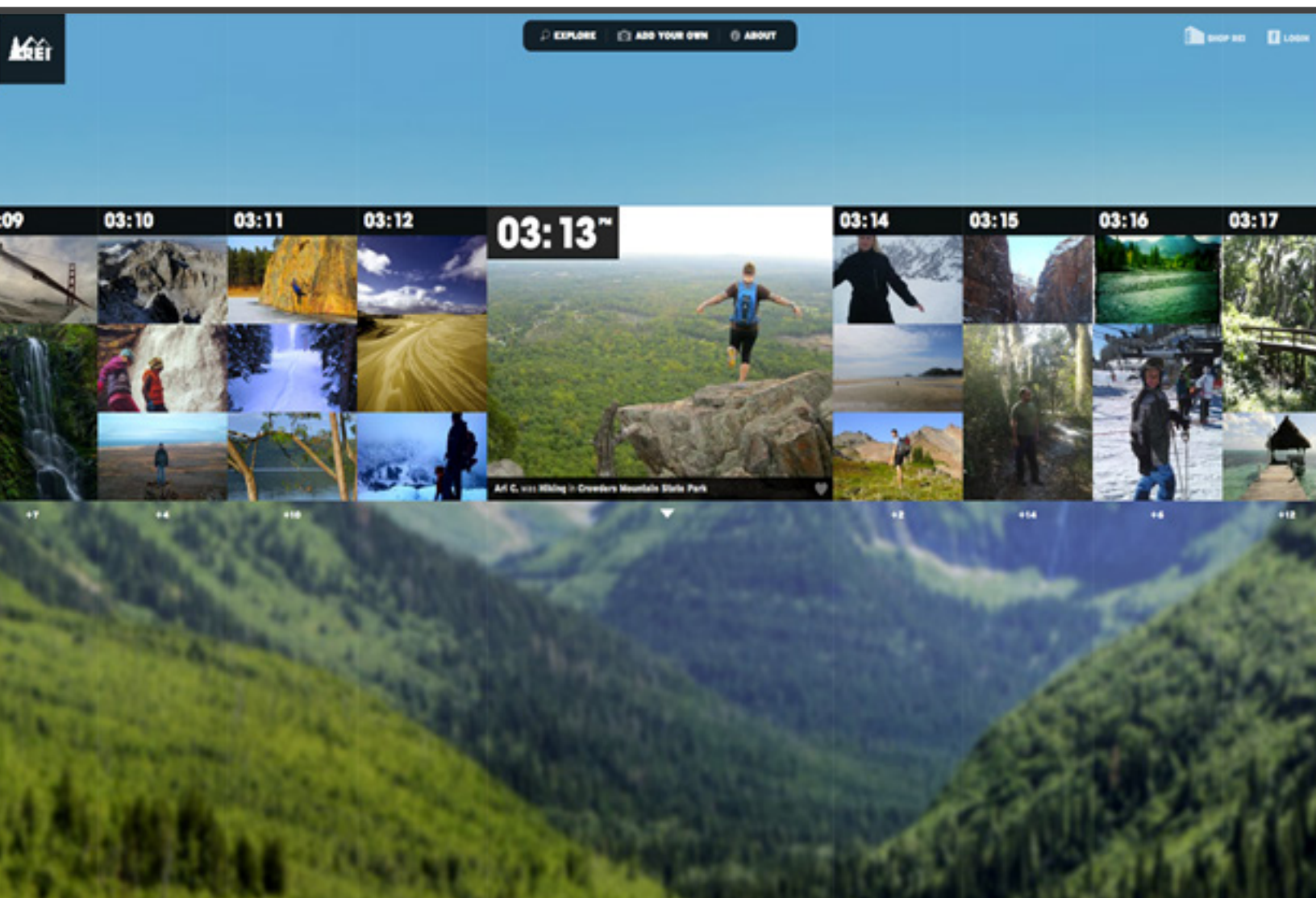




On Jacqui's Journey to the Perfect Cake, every site element combines to create a fun, whimsical visual experience. The pastel colors here are light and playful and contribute well to the overall aesthetic.

In contrast, the Magic Leap site, which promotes Ted X, elicits a sense of both wonder and the vast expanse of the universe - appropriate for a brand that is promoting continual learning.





With a very different take on a landscape layout, sports adventure store REI uses its imagery and coloring to express adventure. It also employs user-submitted content to show the company's core audience out in the world using its products, a great twist on focusing design elements on what matters to the reader.

A Beginners Guide to Design Principles

“

“Stop looking at yourself as a designer and start thinking of yourself as a deliverer of ideas.”

Stle Melvr

”

Understanding great design principles is not reserved for Monet-level artists. As a marketer, think about the exact response you want from a visitor, and use tools to elicit that response.

Even if you haven't been through design school, there are still some principles you can incorporate into your own website designs. In the book, [“Design It Yourself: The Marketer’s Crash Course in Visual Content Creation,”](#) we include a list of the [Ten Commandments of do-it-yourself design](#), which are adapted here to help you understand the first steps in addressing website visual design.

These principles are the first step to every great aesthetic experience. Following them will ensure that your design supports your overall brand goals, rather than confuse your visitors with contradictory site elements and colors.

DESIGN IT YOURSELF

THE MARKETER'S CRASH COURSE IN VISUAL CONTENT CREATION

Do-It-Yourself Design Evaluation Checklist

So you've designed something, but you're not sure you've followed the 10 Commandments we told you about. Use this **printable** checklist to mark what you've done right so you can go back and fix what you missed. Once all checkboxes are marked complete, you're ready to publish!

1. THOU SHALT UNDERSTAND THY CONTENT'S PURPOSE

• I know the answer to these questions:

- Why are we creating this?
- What need will this fulfill?
- Where will we publish this?
- Who are we creating this for?
- When are we creating this?
- How will we measure this?

Yes ☐ No ☐

2. THOU SHALT ESTABLISH A HIERARCHY

- I made a list of all the key messages this piece of content should convey to the viewer.
- I prioritized them based on importance by assigning them values (1-10).
- Once the design was complete, I determined the final product visually conveyed the same order of importance.

Yes ☐ No ☐

3. THOU SHALT RESPECT SIMPLICITY

- My design is not too ornate or flashy.
- I've eliminated all images and graphics that do not support the content's purpose.
- My design makes the content easier to consume.

Yes ☐ No ☐

4. THOU SHALT KEEP IT LEGIBLE

- The color of text is not too light or too dark on top of the background color I chose.
- I can read everything; no images or other objects in my design obscure the text in some way.
- I don't have too much text crammed into a small space.

Yes ☐ No ☐

5. THOU SHALT PROVIDE ADEQUATE SPACING

- I have equal margins around my content.
- All elements within my design are not too close to one another.
- The negative (white) space in my design helps draw attention to the most important pieces of information I established in my hierarchy (e.g., titles or headings).

Yes ☐ No ☐

6. THOU SHALT ALIGN ELEMENTS

- All of the elements are positioned in a balanced relation to one another.
- Any elements that sit side by side are placed on the same line.
- If I've disrupted linear alignment, it's for the purpose of drawing attention to a key piece of information established in my hierarchy.

Yes ☐ No ☐

7. THOU SHALT COORDINATE COLOR

- I considered what feeling I want viewer to feel when choosing my color scheme.
- I was mindful of the connotations associated with the colors I chose.
- I coordinated colors with any photos I included in my design.

Yes ☐ No ☐

8. THOU SHALT NOT OVERUSE DROP SHADOWS

- I've applied the drop shadow effect sparingly.
- I've applied a drop shadow only to pieces of information that deserve to be given depth and distinction.
- Every drop shadow applied was done with purpose.

Yes ☐ No ☐

9. THOU SHALT STRIVE FOR CONSISTENCY

- My color scheme is consistent throughout the entire piece of content.
- All visual or written elements that serve the same function have the same look and feel.
- Margins, titles, headers, links, calls-to-action, photos, and images are formatted the same as their counterparts.

Yes ☐ No ☐

10. THOU SHALT HARMONIZE VISUAL AND VERBAL

- My images complement my words and vice versa.
- I've considered illustrating a concept to eliminate the need for words.
- My words and visuals do a better job telling a story when used together than either could do alone.

Yes ☐ No ☐

CHAPTER 2

1. AESTHETICALLY
BEAUTIFUL

2. OPTIMIZED FOR THE
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MOBILE

Your Site isn't for You, It's For Your Visitor



"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."

Steve Jobs



There is an old psychological adage that there are three sides to every conversation: what you think you are saying, what I think you are saying, and the truth (which usually lies somewhere in between).

Great website design doesn't allow for any grey areas - everything should be about designing for the user experience (UX), and optimization starts with the user.

You might sense a trend here. That's not a mistake. Your website is a tool that should ultimately serve your audience and, as a result, all the design techniques we talk about. From the visual aesthetics to the functionality, all design techniques should work together to improve your site's ability to serve.

Carefully arrange every element of your site so that each one provides the right function, context, and direction for visitors. If the visual arrangement of a website is about a person's visceral reaction to your page, the optimization and UX perspective is all about how the site meets your visitors' needs.

Confusing Site Design Stems from Conflicting Goals



“Good design is obvious. Great design is transparent.”

Jo Sparano



Websites often suffer a personality conflict between what the company wants and what the user wants. Creating a confusing combination of elements on one page can ultimately frustrate your readers. As a result, according to [eConsultancy](#), 74% of businesses believe correcting your site’s user experience is key for improving sales, conversions and loyalty.

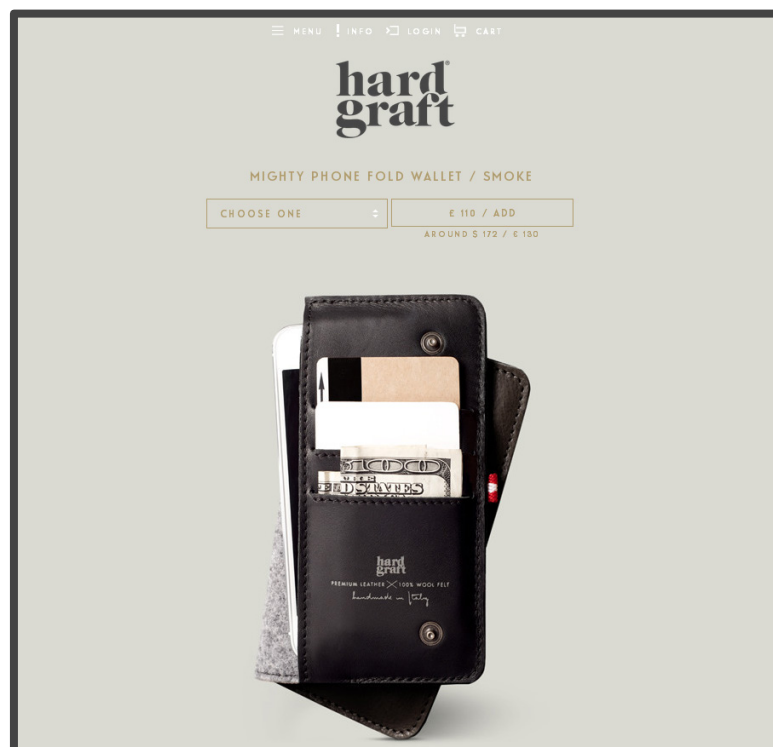
Really terrible sites fail because they were designed for a company, not for the reader. If your visitor doesn’t know where to look and what to do on your page, they will leave.

Your website is a tool to help your visitors find what they need. Many companies try to cram too much information onto one page, or they let company politics, rather than business goals, determine what gets top real estate on their sites. While a CEO might want her “pet rock” project to sit in the top-left corner of the page, this location is best reserved for the most critical business objective or company value proposition.

Regardless of why you created your website, visitors come to you to accomplish something: to find a piece of information, learn more about your company, or buy a product. You want to make it easy for them to do that, ideally on the first click.

Once you realize that the goal of creating a page that meets the needs of your business is intricately linked to creating a page that meets the needs of your visitors, it isn't that hard to do. Look at every page element through your readers' eyes and correct anything that is confusing or out of place. Not only does this serve your visitors, it will also improve your bounce rates.

Sometimes, it's the little things that let your visitors know you're focused on their needs. This website from [Hard Graft](#) does a good job at immediately dealing with their potential customers' pain points. By providing the pound-to-dollar conversion value for their products, the site serves both its U.S. and U.K. audiences and eliminates bouncing those visitors who can't do that math in their heads.



Six Keys To Optimized Design

Nearly [50% of business professionals](#) confirm that a website's design is the number-one criterion for discerning the credibility of the company. As a result, 70% of marketers deploy some kind of website optimization lessons to inform offline campaigns and other marketing communications, according to [MarketingSherpa](#).

To meet this need, over the past decade, a myriad of optimization and UX tools and experts have helped marketers improve their site functionality. In addition to MarketingSherpa's scientific approach to site design, experts worth exploring include the common sense principles of Unbounce and [Bryan Eisenberg](#) and Steve Krug's seminal UX book "[Don't Make Me Think](#)."

While their specific recommendations vary a bit, the best optimization and UX advice can be distilled into the following six keys:

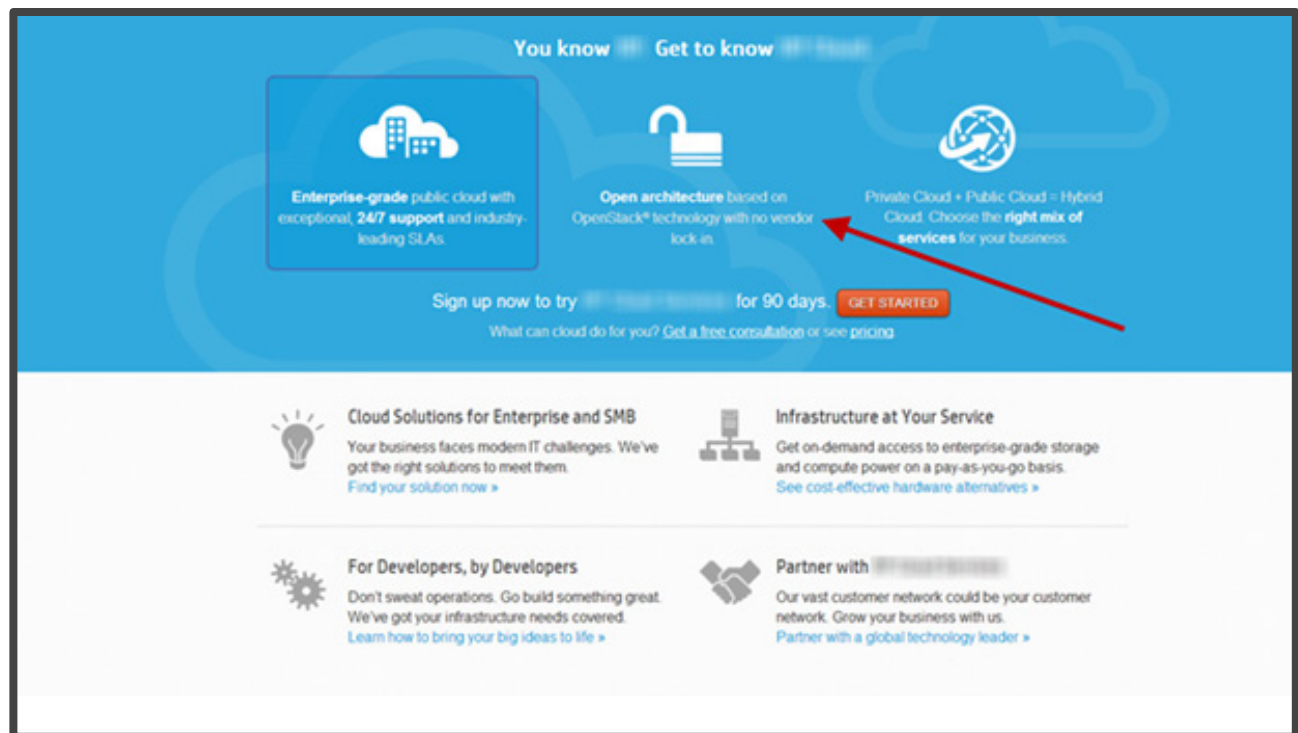


EXPLAIN THE VALUE

One of the fastest, most important levers a company can use to improve its overall site experience is to immediately explain two things: who your company is and what is your competitive advantage. This explanation is generally called a value proposition, and according to [MarketingSherpa](#), it is the 1 -2 sentence statement that clearly answers the question: Why should your ideal customer buy from you and not your top competitors?

The value proposition is generally the first sentence that your visitor will scan on your site. With that one sentence, you should convey the credibility of your company and quantify exactly what sets you apart from all other companies online.

Because of this top billing, getting your value proposition right is critical. As MarketingSherpa's [2012 Website Optimization Report](#) points out, companies who tested their value propositions were 15% more likely to produce ROI for their websites. That's a 15% bump in performance by changing a single sentence, which is a pretty compelling argument for value prop optimization.



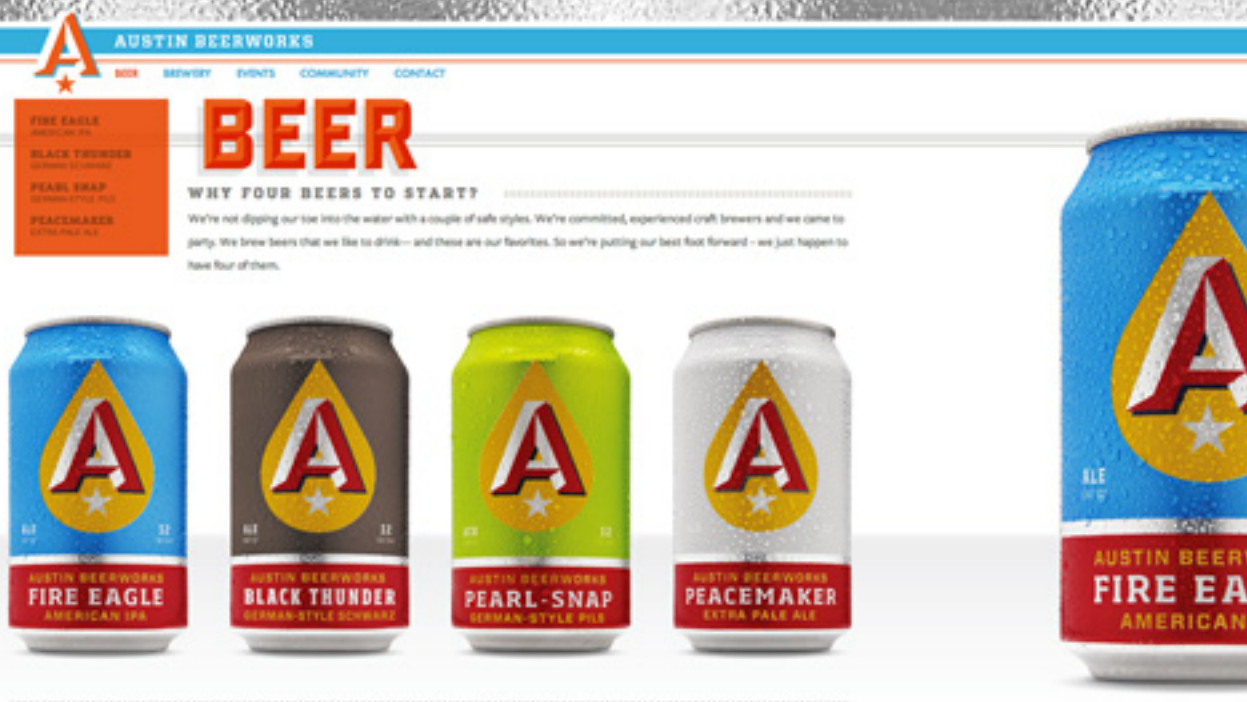
In this example, you can see three value propositions, each tailored for a specific target audience. Note that the sentences address a specific pain point, and explain how the company fixes that problem.

2

DEPLOY A BLINK TEST

During your site design process, it's easy to get caught in the weeds. Make sure your site can also pass a high-level blink test. Again, in three to five seconds, can someone look at your page and know: who your company is, what you do, and what you want the visitor to do on the page? If not, revisit both your value prop and design to highlight those important messages.

Here is an example of a site from our [“53 Examples of Brilliant Homepage Design”](#) compilation that effectively passes a blink test.



You will notice that everything about the Austin BeerWorks page works to highlight and support the company's product. With very little copy, readers immediately know what they will learn about on the site. The direct copy, dropdown menu, and clickable beer cans allow people to learn more about the product, while the clean, white background with high resolution product images further highlight the most important part of the page: the beer!

ESTABLISH A THOUGHT PROCESS

3

Once you have passed your blink test, your really exceptional site optimizers can employ deeper tools to orient their readers and advance them through your page. You, too, can increase your site engagement by creating a logical pattern to walk your readers step-by-step through the information they might be interested in on your page. We call this establishing a thought process.

According to optimization expert Michael Aagaard of [Content Verve](#), creating high-converting websites isn't actually about optimizing your web page, it's about optimizing the decisions the reader makes on that page.



The [landing page](#) for Content Verve's new book below is a good example of how a page can walk readers through their decision process, offering them the right amount of information in a step-by-step process through the page before asking for their contact information.



7 Universal Conversion Optimization Principles

Tested and proven optimization principles you can apply to your online marketing funnel and increase conversions. Based on 4 years of research and over 350 real-life A/B tests

- ✓ **Insights and experience from 4 years of research and over 350 A/B tests** distilled into one 26-page free ebook
- ✓ **17 real world case studies with before / after examples** and results from split tests performed for clients
- ✓ **7 tested and proven optimization principles** you can apply to your marketing funnel and increase conversions
- ✓ **The flexible template for a high-converting landing page**
- ✓ **Inspiration** for your own conversion rate optimization projects



The first section of the page includes a heading with a clear value proposition, and then adds supporting data points that reinforce the claims Content Verve makes in his first sentence. These concrete, numerical details reinforce the value proposition and the specificity of his numbers – 4 years of research and over 350 real-life A/B tests – establishes credibility for his claims.

Then, to emphasize his point, the next section of the landing page includes reader testimonials from experts in the optimization field. This is a really clever use of a psychological principle called social proof – where marketers can use third-party validation to motivate your visitors to take an action.



"A book like this could easily be sold for a lot of money. But Michael has elected to give it away.

All I can say is WOW...and get it today."

- Marcus Sheridan, Content Marketing Master
TheSalesLion.com



"Some books only talk theory, but this one backs up each idea with real test results."

- Oli Gardner, Creative Director Unbounce.com

According to the [Search Engine Journal](#), nearly 63% of consumers indicate they are more likely to purchase from a site if it has product ratings and reviews. By offering expert testimonials, the Content Verve book reinforces its value to the outside world and, consequently, boosts its potential conversions. For more information on Social Proof, read [10 Ways to Instantly Amplify the Social Proof of Your Marketing](#).

Finally, only after the page has explained the value of the offer and indicated that other experts read the book and put their name behind it does he include a distinct call to action at the bottom of the page.

Get the book for free:

Enter your email and download your free e-book right away!

You'll join the ContentVerve.com newsletter that comes out 2-4 times a month. You can unsubscribe at any time with one click.

Email *

Get my free e-book

I guarantee 100% privacy.

You will notice that while this page does include some good design principles – for example, using enough white space to define different content sections and images of people's faces – this isn't the most flashy site design. Instead of flash, this page design focuses on function using its understanding of why a reader came to this page as a guiding principle and providing information they will want in logical steps to build towards their final conversion.



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Tested and proven optimization principles you can apply to your online marketing funnel and increase conversions. Based on 4 years of research and over 350 real-life A/B tests

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All I can say is WOW...and get it today."



"Some books only talk theory, but this one backs up each idea with real test results."

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Enter your email and download your free e-book right away!

You'll join the ContentVerve.com newsletter that comes out 2-4 times a month. You can unsubscribe at any time with one click.

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I guarantee 100% privacy



This e-book teaches you invaluable optimization principles. I love principles because they teach you how to think, rather than giving you dogmas or just telling you what to do. Ignore these principles at your own peril.
- Peep Laja, Conversion Optimization Pro Conversionxl.com



A great collection of case studies and examples. Michael gets to the heart of the process here by showing you that small changes can have big impacts on the minds of customers. Read and be inspired.
- Craig Sullivan, Independent Optimization Pro


About the Author:



Hi - I'm Michael Lykke Aagaard, a self-employed, self-confessed split test junkie, and copywriting fanatic who's obsessed with finding out what really works in online marketing. I'm Danish and hail from wonderful Copenhagen.

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Michael Lykke Aagaard, Split Test Junkie, Content Evangelist, Online Copywriter ContentVerve.com

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  85
  152

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4

CREATE A CONVERSION PATH

Building a logical thought process for your visitors extends beyond a single page. Your website should also provide a logical conversion path that advances your visitors through a series of pages toward their ultimate conversion goal.

Rather than trying to cram every piece of information your readers may want on one page, each page of your site should have a specific goal (called a “micro-conversion”), and every element of that page should support that goal. For example, every facet of the landing page above ultimately serves to get the reader to click the bottom call-to-action button. Other goals might be as simple as getting the reader to click to the next page or as vital as asking someone to add a product to a shopping cart page.

For instance, the goal of the first page of the [Sony sign up conversion path](#) (on the following page) is exclusively aimed at determining whether or not the visitor has an account.



SONY
make.believe

1 Sony Store Account 2 Shipping & Payment 3 Review Order 4 Order Confirmation

Sony Store Account

I have a Sony Store Account
Please login to continue the checkout process

E-mail Address:

Password:

☐ Remember me on this computer [What's this?](#)

[Forgot Password?](#)

LOGIN & CONTINUE CHECKOUT

I do not have a Sony Store Account
Please enter login information to create an account and continue the checkout process

E-mail Address: (this is your username for future access)

New Password: 8-25 letters and numbers

Confirm Password:

☐ Remember me on this computer [What's this?](#)

☒ Keep me informed about Sony special offers, exclusive products and new product information.

CREATE ACCOUNT & CONTINUE CHECKOUT

[Privacy Policy](#)

Copyright ©2011 Sony Electronics Inc. All Rights Reserved. [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) **SONY**

Unfortunately, while this example effectively highlights a single-goal page, it also points to a major challenge with online conversion paths: the tendency to insert unnecessary steps or asking for too much information during the conversion process.

Given the alarming lack of online attention spans, you want to make sure your conversion path is as streamlined as possible. In this instance, Sony could have potentially used their back-end data to identify if someone was a returning customer or not and eliminated this step for their visitors.

Asking your customers to bear with you through a three-or four-step shopping cart or research process may be asking too much. Every time you ask someone to click through to another page, you risk losing the vast majority of your audience. In fact, if average site conversion rates are roughly 5%, according to [Fireclick](#), then each new page between your visitor and their ultimate goal loses approximately 95% of your total site traffic.

The goal of every online marketer should be to get their visitor to the exact page they're looking for on the first click. If a customer does a search for red sneakers on [Zappos](#), they should immediately jump to a landing page that allows them to buy red sneakers, and not the company homepage. Any additional steps, forms, or other hoops the visitor has to jump through will significantly reduce your conversion rates.

For more information on conversion paths refer to the book on [Conversion Centered Design](#), which walks you through the various types of site conversion goals – from the simple to the complex.

5

BE CLEAR

Marketers often change the way they talk online and use “marketer speak” such as “Buy NOW!” rather than a normal conversational tone. According to MarketingSherpa, [clarity trumps persuasion](#) when writing for the web.

Dr. Flint McGloughlin, the Managing Director of Marketing Experiments, uses an anecdote about dating to explain the confusing way that marketers write for the online medium. He explains, “A man would never walk up to a woman in a bar and tell her, ‘Looking for the man of your dreams, your wait is OVER!’” And yet somehow, we see that all the time in “clever” website titles and off-putting online layouts.

Don't waste valuable online real estate trying to be clever. Instead, use your site copy to convey your company message in a clear, concise manner.

6

ELIMINATE FRICTION

Simplicity is one of the most important aspects of great site design. In fact, a clean design is just as important as clear copy. Your site layout should boost the overall online experience, not distract from the website's goals. Even if they're visually appealing, site elements that confuse your visitors will ultimately reduce the overall effectiveness of your website.

Examples of friction on a webpage include:

- Sites with awkward page hierarchy or confusing navigation
- Pages with too much text and not enough white space
- Confusing or non-existent value propositions
- Pages with too much flash video
- Pages with a distracting or dissonant color scheme
- Sites that ask for personal information without any reason or privacy policy
- Equally weighted information or CTA buttons
- Competing call-to-action buttons

For example, many marketers turn to images to boost their overall site “feel” with often counter-productive results. While displaying extravagant visuals on your landing pages may sound like a fabulous idea, A/B tests at HubSpot have repeatedly shown that including too many over-the-top images doesn’t help conversion. In fact, oftentimes, it distracts the reader from the main point of the landing page, thus creating more friction on the landing page instead of supporting conversion.

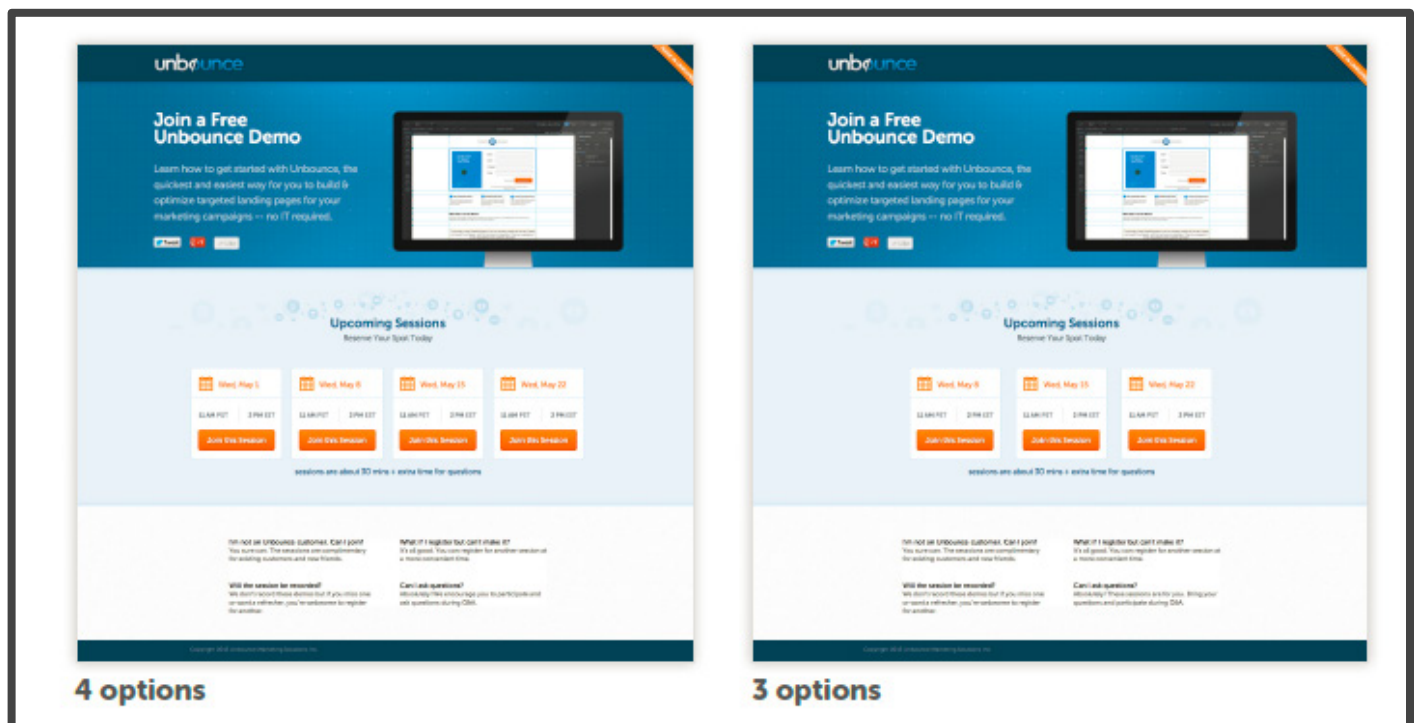


While graphics are certainly attractive, they can also increase the load time of your website. In fact, according to the [Aberdeen Group](#), a one-second delay in page-load time results in 11% fewer page views, a 16% decrease in customer satisfaction, and a 7% loss in conversions. Make sure every part of your page – from the copy to the images to the navigation - support -- not distract from -- the pathway to conversion.

The key is to provide the right amount of information for your user, without overwhelming them. Sometimes, marketers may think they are being helpful by providing more than one option for their readers. In fact, though, they are actually overwhelming them instead.

Unbounce recently conducted an interesting online experiment to identify the right amount of call-to-action options to include on a page. In the first page, they offered a page with four possible demo sessions a prospect could attend. On the second page, they only offered three.

The difference? The page with only three demo options saw a 78% conversion improvement over the initial page. While you should experiment with your own audience, it's clear that landing pages that limit their conversion goals and minimize potential confusion for their users deliver better results.



Learn more about this experiment in our [Conversion Centered Design](#) book.

CHAPTER 3

1. AESTHETICALLY
BEAUTIFUL

2. OPTIMIZED FOR THE
USER

3. PERSONALIZED
AND CONTEXTUAL

4. OPTIMIZED FOR
MOBILE

Beyond A One-Size Fits-All Site

“

It is easy to fail when designing an interactive experience. Designers fail when they do not know the audience, integrate the threads of content and context, welcome the public properly, or make clear what the experience is and what the audience's role in it will be.

Edwin Schlossberg

”

People are not static. They access your content from multiple devices. They come to your page from a number of different channels. And, perhaps most importantly, as their experience with your company grows, their needs and interests change. And yet, most websites still treat them all the same.

Using new technology, marketers are now able to create personalized websites that go even farther to serve the needs of your core audience. It allows marketers to adjust the content each person on your website sees depending on their changing needs, challenges, behaviors, and how far along they are in your sales process. What this allows you to do is adopt all the great optimization tips you've learned and create a site for the specific person behind your screen.

These new personalization tools are beginning to deliver for marketers. According to an [Adobe/eConsultancy study](#), 37% of marketers today are adopting personalization and audience targeting into their overall strategy. Adobe's Quarterly Digital Intelligence Report also found that using information such as social graph history can increase marketing ROI by 88%.

Adding personalization to your website design means creating a site that adjusts to each individual audience member - based on who they are and what they want, need, or do. Rather than “one-size-fits-all,” your various touch points with an audience – from email, to landing pages, to lead-gen forms and more – change based on the individual interacting with you at that moment in time.

Use Technology To Create a More Relevant Experience

A cohesive online experience eliminates a lot of confusion for the buyer by making every touch point between you and your visitors on your website about them. It takes the lessons of email segmentation – the channel most frequently personalized to audiences by marketers – and uses technology to create an end-to-end online experience for each prospect that starts with them, not with the business.

Rather than marketing to one broad audience with one non-specific message, we can now market to an audience of one, delivering a consistent, personalized message specific to each individual across every medium. And these little details matter.

At HubSpot, we looked at the data for more than 93,000 calls to action created using HubSpot over a 12 month period. We found that calls-to-action targeted to the user performed 178% better than calls to action that were the same for all visitors. According to [Marketing Charts](#), 69% of North American marketers say dynamic, personalized content is important for their website.

Personalization in Action

Because of the diverse traffic (translated: diverse people) landing on your site, including new visitors, existing leads, established customers, and even potential employees, websites are often the hardest to personalize, especially without cookies to identify your traffic. As a result, many marketers default to generic “catch-all” CTAs or product recommendations in a standard column that shows on every page of their site.

Unfortunately, this practice creates a confusing site for most visitors.

Returning customers are unlikely to find what they need if your site is a sales tool, while new visitors may want to learn more about your company before clicking on a “Buy Now” button. As we watch brands such as e-tailer Fab, branding whiz Coke, and the dominant Amazon incorporate contextual targeting in their website design, here are a few website personalization features to consider:



CONTENT PERSONALIZATION

Some systems enable you to swap out blocks of content depending on who is looking at them, so you can create different website experiences for leads and customers.

For example, our HubSpot blog allows us to show different content blocks to visitors who subscribe to our site and those who don't. In this way, we are delivering a much more relevant experience to our readers.

What Non-Subscribers See:

- ☐ Is the content at all at odds with our company's mission, philosophy, goals, etc.?
- ☐ Did we miss any opportunities to build a relationship with influencers, industry thought leaders, etc.?

What else would you add to this editing checklist? Feel free to [download this checklist in Word doc format](#) to customize and add your own!

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Learn how to create well-written, grammatically correct content for all your marketing assets.

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Andrew Grant 10:14 AM on June 28, 2013

Superb! A benchmark against which to measure every one of my posts. I have a nasty feeling that they will come up short. This is going up above my desk Excellent work, again, thank you Pamela

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- ☐ Is the content at all at odds with our company's mission, philosophy, goals, etc.?
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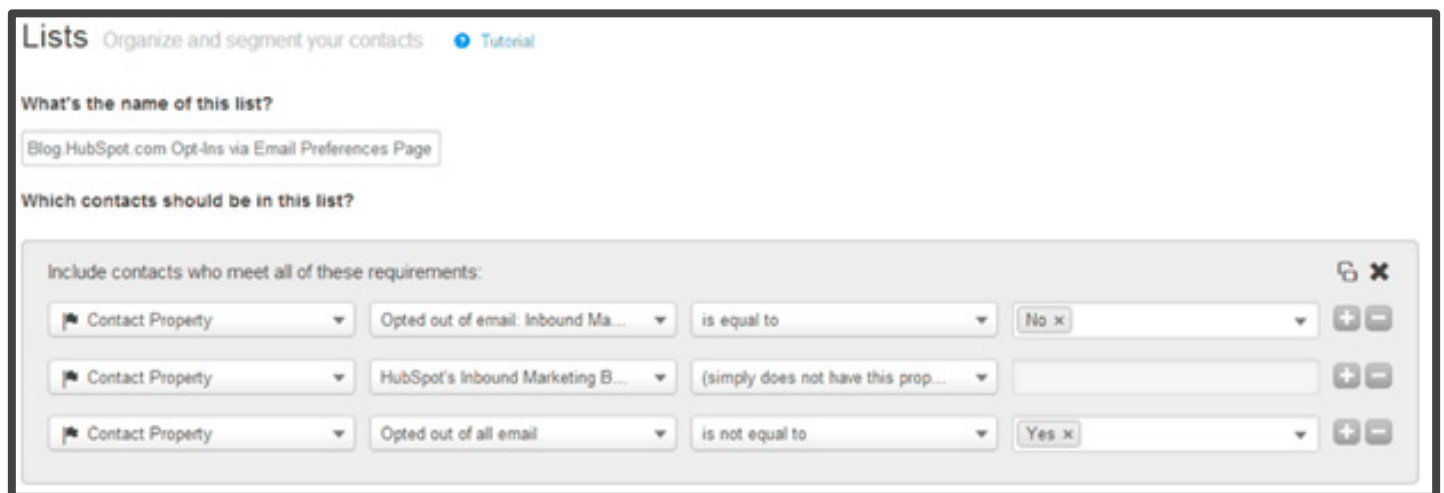
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2

SMART FORMS AND PROGRESSIVE PROFILING

You can also tailor your website to different visitors by adding or subtracting form fields depending on what information a visitor has already provided.

Set up rules in your contact management system like the one shown below to allow your website to ask different questions of your various audiences.



The screenshot shows the HubSpot 'Lists' interface. At the top, it says 'Lists Organize and segment your contacts' with a 'Tutorial' link. Below this, there's a section 'What's the name of this list?' with a text input field containing 'Blog HubSpot.com Opt-ins via Email Preferences Page'. Underneath is 'Which contacts should be in this list?'. A box titled 'Include contacts who meet all of these requirements:' contains three rows of criteria. Each row has a 'Contact Property' dropdown, a specific property name, a comparison operator, and a value. The first row is 'Opted out of email: Inbound Ma...' with 'is equal to' and 'No x'. The second row is 'HubSpot's Inbound Marketing B...' with '(simply does not have this prop...' and an empty field. The third row is 'Opted out of all email' with 'is not equal to' and 'Yes x'. Each row has '+' and '-' buttons to add or remove criteria.

Lists Organize and segment your contacts [Tutorial](#)

What's the name of this list?

Blog HubSpot.com Opt-ins via Email Preferences Page

Which contacts should be in this list?

Include contacts who meet all of these requirements:

Contact Property	Opted out of email: Inbound Ma...	is equal to	No x	+	-
Contact Property	HubSpot's Inbound Marketing B...	(simply does not have this prop...		+	-
Contact Property	Opted out of all email	is not equal to	Yes x	+	-

3

PERSONALIZATION TOKENS

A final personalization feature to consider is personalization tokens. Tokens allow you to insert a bit of information from a visitor's profile, like a company name, directly into the page they're viewing.

Personalization features in your website are certainly advanced functionality, so you'll want to think through a strategy before employing any technology. In order to personalize your website, you need to start with individual customer profiles and a contact database. So, before you launch a personalization campaign, make sure you have a robust contact database to fuel personalization across your site.

Even without these features however, you can ensure every persona has a good experience on your site by building content for each of your main target industries and each stage of the purchase process.

For more information on using context plus content to deliver relevant online experiences for your audience, refer to our new book "[The New Online Rule Book: 7 Elements of Context Marketing](#)."

CHAPTER 4

1. AESTHETICALLY
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Great User Experiences

Optimize for Mobile



“New technologies (mobile devices of all shapes and sizes and location-based services) will continue to grow, but the best marketers will realize it’s not about how to jam more ads into new platforms – it’s about how to use the new technologies to enhance your inbound powers of attraction.”

- Dharmesh Shah, CTO, HubSpot



Today’s audience has a range of options for how they view your website, from a laptop to an iPad to a smart phone. The latest survey from [Pew Research Center’s](#) Internet & American Life Project shows that nearly 60% of adults connect to the web through a smartphone, tablet computer, or laptop while on-the-go. The fast evolution and wide range of these devices have made many marketers’ original approach to mobile optimization obsolete. You need a uniquely designed mobile version of your site – it can’t simply be a second site that’s optimized for mobile. People simply jump between devices too much and need a consistent experience.

This is the final step in designing an optimized, personal site to serve your visitors. Think about every aspect of your visitor’s online experience, including the device on which your visitor will view your content. Your audience will make choices about their online browsing because it’s simple, easy, and compelling. If your customers are looking at your sites via mobile, you need to meet them where they are looking online.

Mobile Usage on the Rise

Because our society is changing so rapidly, companies who fail to capitalize on new tools risk losing their market share to those who are paying attention to the changing tide. According to the IDC, more Americans will access the internet through mobile devices than through desktop computers by 2015. As customers continue to flock online using mobile devices, can businesses afford to ignore new online advances?

The evidence of this mobile migration is compelling. Here are a few of the many statistics pointing to audience's transition to mobile viewing:

- 65% of U.S. adults sleep with their phones on or near their beds according to [Pew Internet Research, 2010](#).
- In a [2012 Google Survey](#), 74% of respondents said they are more likely to revisit a website if it is mobile friendly.
- 62% of companies that designed a website specifically for mobile had increased sales. (Source: [Econsultancy](#))
- HubSpot customers saw 44% increase in mobile traffic in the past year (HubSpot Research)
- In mobile SEO, [Google](#) penalizes sites that aren't optimized for responsive design.

As we discussed earlier, sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. The two on the next page stand as a dramatic testament to how much society has changed in a short period of time.

The top image is a shows the crowd when the new Pope was elected in 2005.

The second is from the papal conclave in 2013.



As you can see, where the first crowd was looking forward to the big screen with just a few cell phones in service, just seven years later, the entire crowd is illuminated via smart phones and tablets.

Responsive Design

Rather than dividing your channels and creating a separate mobile page, sites built using responsive design provides an experience that uses the context of the device from which your visitors arrive. Responsive sites and design recognize the device a person is using to view the page and rearranges or “responds” automatically, making itself look great on wide screens, laptops, tablets, or mobile phones.

There are some subtle differences between designing a pure mobile site and one that deploys responsive design.

Mobile Optimized Website	Responsive Design Website
URL(s): m.acme.com & acme.com	URL: acme.com
Requires administrator to maintain content on multiple domains	Allows administrator to edit content on one domain
Looks good on mobile phones only	Looks good on any device (tablet, mobile, small screen)
SEO: Nets penalties from Google for multiple domains (also true for Mobile SEO)	SEO: Maintains SEO across devices (also true for Mobile SEO)

As this chart illustrates, responsive websites adjust to whatever device your prospect is using, increasing the stickiness of your site and automatically optimizing your site for Google’s latest SEO algorithm changes.

An important note in this chart is the vital importance that social and search have on the “separate sites for separate devices” approach. A mobile URL shared to social media, for example, could be clicked by someone on a desktop and not render correctly, while your search optimization efforts for your desktop URL don’t benefit a second mobile URL whatsoever. (Google has also made changes to detect duplicate sites and prefers one site optimized for both desktop and mobile in its algorithm.) In contrast, responsive design practices, which maintain SEO tracking across devices will bolster your current SEO strategy, rather than distract from it.

(Full disclosure: HubSpot offers such a tool, which you can learn about [here](#). Regardless of the tool you use, as mobile adoption grows, we expect integrated, responsive designs to see a similar exponential adoption pattern.)

In action, here is an example of [New Breed Marketing's](#) responsive site, in which you can see subtle differences between the desktop, iPad, and mobile views.

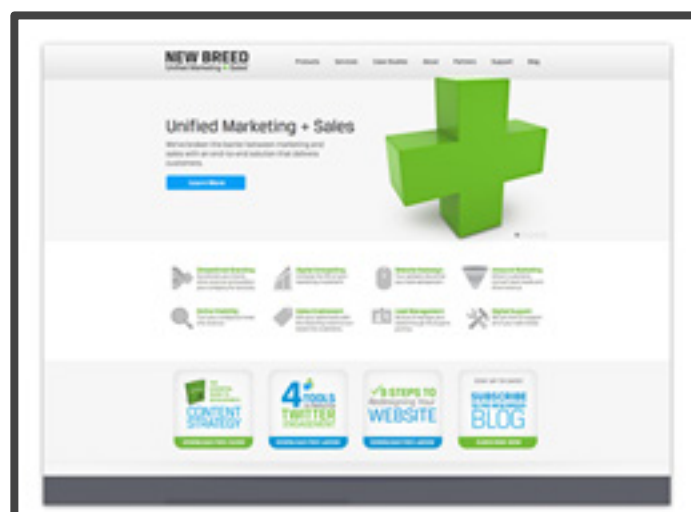
Mobile



Tablet



Desktop



Five Rules for Mobile Design

There are a handful of keys to consider when designing your mobile experience. Just like every other medium, the mobile platform has certain innate qualities that require attention during your design phase. Here are some tips to keep in mind when designing your mobile sites:

1

MAKE IT RESPONSIVE

You want your web page to automatically adjust based on how your audience is using it to view the page and rearrange or “respond” automatically, for a great appearance on wide screens, laptops, tablets, or mobile phones.

2

USE SHORT CONTENT CHUNKS

The mobile screen is smaller than a traditional web page. As a result, increase font sizes and make your content shorter and more concise to minimize your readers’ need to scroll through your site.

Keeping content above the fold is even more critical than pages viewed on a desktop. Messages that require the reader to scroll down increase both friction and frustration for your readers, and will ultimately detract from your mobile experience.

3

CREATE LARGE CALLS-TO-ACTION

Smaller mobile screens mean you should also increase the size of your call-to-action buttons, to allow them to be easily visible and clickable online.

4

PUT DESIGN AT USERS' FINGERTIPS

Most mobile phones require that people click on a touch screen in order to navigate through their interface. Thus, it's essential to take that into account when designing for mobile. Simplify your navigation and be sure to leave enough room around your CTA buttons and other navigational tools to allow for easy fingertip scrolling and clicking.

Also, people have a tendency to hit below the link, so make sure to leave enough space beneath your content to allow for that scrolling pattern.

5

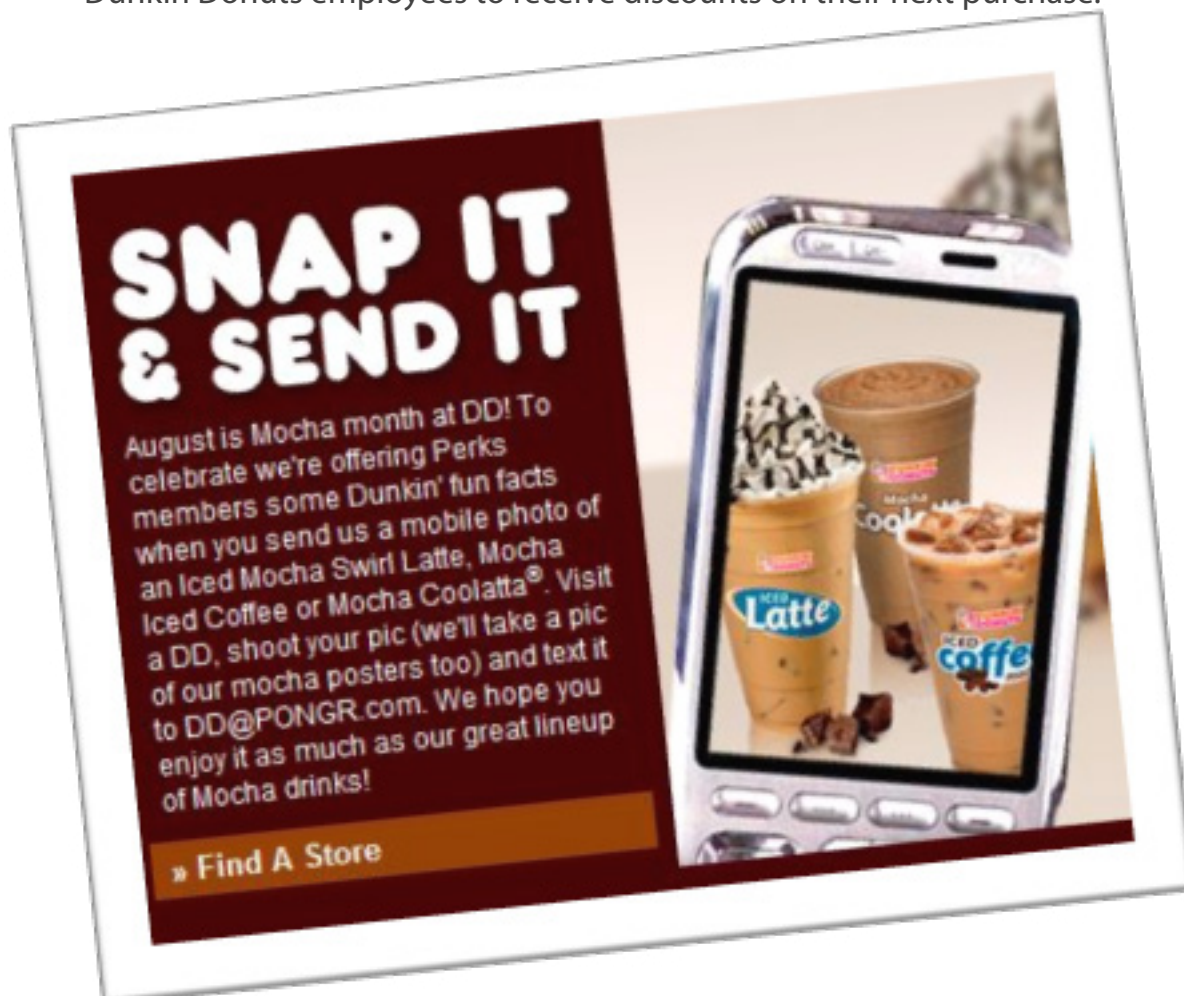
DESIGN FOR LOCAL

People take their phones with them everywhere. As a result, make sure to prioritize your local SEO to bring your company front and center during mobile searches.

Get Creative with Mobile Technology

You can leverage this portable technology in new, creative ways. Think about how to incorporate contest check-ins, pictures, and other gamification tools to create an engaging mobile experience - one that takes advantage of mobile's unique capabilities.

Dunkin Donuts does a good job in a recent outreach campaign that encourages interaction with their brand by having loyal customers take pictures of themselves enjoying their favorite coffees, then sharing these with Dunkin Donuts employees to receive discounts on their next purchase.



Great Websites Require Strategic Vision

Despite the nearly 633 million websites in the world today, many marketers still do not understand how people actually use their sites. The website is the hub of your marketing and should work *for* you, conveying the heart and messaging of your company in a user-friendly way.

As technology becomes more complicated, adding personal tokens and mobile layouts, websites that succeed must still stay true to the basics by reaching out to, and connecting with, their audience. They need to use the complimentary elements of superior content plus context about their user to deliver an end-to-end online experience. To do that effectively, every element of your website design – from the aesthetics, to the functionality, to its personal connections and mobile optimization - must all be created in service of your site visitors' needs.

This book covered the four essentials that every excellent site design must include: beautiful aesthetics, optimized layout, personalization and mobile optimization. By planning ahead and incorporating these keys into your own online strategy, you will be well on your way to developing your own great company website.

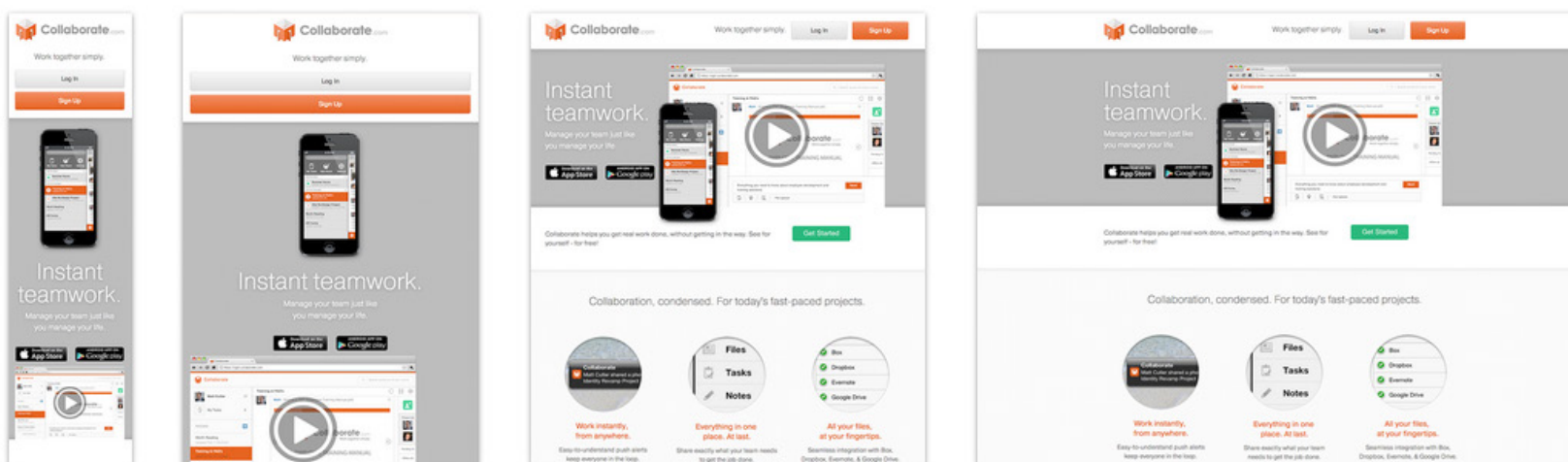
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Meghan Lockwood is a senior content strategist at HubSpot. She is responsible for developing longer-term research reports, including the 2013 State of Inbound Marketing Report. She is also a frequent contributor to the HubSpot blog and a speaker at industry conferences. Prior to HubSpot, Meghan managed the website optimization research cycle at MarketingSherpa, and authored several books on Website Optimization, including the 2012 MarketingSherpa Website Optimization Report.



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