

8 Quick Steps to Double B2B Conversions

Break through the barriers of integrated web marketing

Executive Summary

The great divide for business to consumer (B2C) and business to business (B2B) marketers is the definition of conversion. In the B2C world, conversion starts and ends in the same place: the purchase. For B2B marketers with long, complex sales cycles, conversion typically means getting a visitor to fill out a form in exchange for something of value: a white paper, a demo or a free consultation, for example.

There are four distinct groups of people that are interacting with your landing pages:

1. Visitors that leave within 10 seconds of arriving at your landing page make up the vast majority of viewers.
2. Visitors that leave when they decide your landing page is not compelling are the next largest segment.
3. Some visitors attempt to fill out your form but fail or give up and then drop off.
4. A small percentage of your visitors successfully convert and become leads.

Online visitors are busy and easily distracted. As the information above illustrates, you have a very limited time window to prove your value proposition. In the eight steps that follow, you will learn how to boost the effectiveness of your landing pages and raise the number and quality of your B2B conversions. Some of these steps are simple best practices and others are made possible by recently developed web technologies, but all will contribute directly to your online lead generation program.

Eight Quick Ways to Double Your Landing Page Conversions

► Simplify Your Form

Use conditional fields to keep things short and sweet.

With landing pages, less is often more. Nothing frustrates a visitor more than arriving at a landing page, seeing a compelling white paper offer, but then realizing she will have to fill out a long and complicated looking form before receiving anything of value. Companies who ask for more than a handful of data points in the first interaction with a visitor are encouraging form abandonment.

B2B sales are typically multi-touch and complex, rather than instantaneous, impulse buys. Because there is a long sales cycle, marketers can flesh out a prospect's profile over time as each touch point provides an opportunity to collect more data. A solution called progressive profiling uses what are known as **conditional fields** to ask for just one or two data points during each interaction and gradually build an in-depth prospect profile. This lessens the burden on prospects while still collecting the valuable information that the marketing and sales teams need to move forward.

Picture this:

A visitor hits your landing page and is asked for her name, email address and company in exchange for a white paper. Twenty minutes later she requests a flash demo and is asked for her job title. In three weeks, she returns to your site and is asked for her department in exchange for a case study. Finally she is asked about her buying stage when requesting a live demonstration.

The same form is used for all the content across your site, but progressive profiling allows the form to intelligently display only the fields that you are missing for a prospect. Marketing automation software uses cookies to identify returning prospects and remember what information they have already given you.

Try to keep the first form down to four fields at the most and guide prospects to view other compelling content across your site to gradually obtain additional data.

▶ Track Implicit Data in Addition to Explicit

Your prospects are telling you a lot more than it seems.

You can gain valuable data from prospects on forms, but often even more telling is the implicit information that can be gleaned without your visitors even telling you.

By tracking activities at the individual prospect level, you can:

- Track the **lead source** on landing page submissions down to the search term. This shows you exactly where your leads are coming from, so you can optimize your pages based on popular keywords and determine which campaigns are most effective.
- **Capture all form entries – even corrected or abandoned fields.** This provides great insight in to a lead’s readiness to be contacted and helps determine the right path for follow-up or continued nurturing.
- Use **Website Caller ID** to capture data for both anonymous and identified visitors using domain name and WHOIS lookup. This can tell you what company your visitor came from without them ever entering that information. You can then run this information against Jigsaw, Hoover’s or other databases to find information on the company and any contacts that might be listed.

A marketing automation solution can record any abandoned or updated data even before the form is submitted. In the example below, you can see that the prospect entered three different email addresses before successfully completing the form. He first entered a Yahoo! address and was prompted to use a non-free address. He then tried an invalid, made-up address and was prompted to give a valid email. He then finally gave his corporate address. This indicates to a marketer that the prospect is wary of being contacted via email. It may be more appropriate to put leads like this one on a nurturing track rather than contact them with a sales pitch.

▼ Visitor Audits			
Field	Type	Value	Date / Time
First Name	Form Field	Jim	October 05, 2007 09:36 AM
Last Name	Form Field	Jackson	October 05, 2007 09:36 AM
Email	Form Field	jjackson@yahoo.com	October 05, 2007 09:36 AM
Email	Form Field	jjackson@asdfasdf.com	October 05, 2007 09:36 AM
Email	Form Field	jjackson@microsoft.com	October 05, 2007 09:36 AM

Show rows: < Previous | Page 1 of 1 | Next >

► Tone Down Your Error Messages

Use soft error messages to prevent drop off.

In terms of annoyance for visitors, in-your-face error messages are a close second to lengthy forms. Imagine that your visitor has taken the time to fill out and submit a form. The visitor expects to receive your white paper, but instead of a familiar thank you message, they are greeted with a red error message - or worse - not only an error message, but an empty form, forcing them to start all over again. Guess what? Chances are, they won't. Another one bites the dust.

The quick fix for this is to handle error validation instantly, displaying any error messages as soon as your visitor completes a field. This much softer warning allows your visitor to correct his entries without a full screen refresh, reducing the risk of form abandonment.

Please fill out the form below to have the white paper emailed to you

First Name ★

Last Name ★

Email ★

Please input a valid email address from a non-free provider.

Company ★

▶ **Test, Test, and Test Again**

Continuously improve your landing pages through multivariate testing.

The one great truth about landing pages is that you can always improve upon them through testing. Many marketing automation systems allow you to set up a simple multivariate test, which automatically distributes your incoming traffic to two separate landing pages. The landing pages should be just slightly different, perhaps varying the design, copy or content offering. After some time has passed, evaluate which version has a higher conversion rate to develop the most effective possible page. Don't rest on your laurels though. Rinse, repeat and continue to improve those pages. Things can almost always get better.

At a loss for what to test? Try a few of the following variables:

- **Headline:** Keep it short and compelling; the headline should describe an immediate benefit to the reader
- **Offer:** Experiment with white papers, demos, free consultations and other content to see what prospects view as most valuable
- **Imagery:** Try a shot of your white paper cover, an internal page, or a screen shot of your demo
- **Form Length:** If you started with a lengthy form, try removing a few required fields and see if conversion improves
- **Form fields:** Try department vs. job title or changing up formatting with drop down menus or checkboxes

Although testing can be difficult to do manually, many marketing automation solutions can make complex tests a breeze, automatically assigning traffic to each of your page designs and reporting on the results.

▶ Lock Up Your Valuable Content

Email your collateral to ensure you are getting valid contact information.

Many companies simply redirect to the requested content (white paper, demo, etc.) when a visitor submits a form. A better solution is to set expectations that you will email a link to the white paper or demo upon form submission. While this does not always guarantee that the lead will give you a valid, business email address, it does make it more likely. A simple statement such as "Please complete the form below to have the white paper emailed to you," should suffice.

It is also a good idea to include a short privacy statement that ensures prospects that their email address will not be abused or re-sold. This is a small step that can help reassure prospects who may be hesitant to provide their information.

Using validation on forms allows you to set custom levels of approval to ensure that email addresses that are entered are non-free (often important for B2B marketing), from a valid email domain or both. A quality form hosting provider such as a marketing automation vendor can actually check the email domain in real-time and display a gentle error message if the validation conditions are not met.

When delivering the content via email, it is best to send a link to the document's location, rather than an attachment. This allows for tracking link clicks so that you can determine exactly when the materials were accessed or if they were even accessed at all. When your reps follow up with a phone call, they will benefit much more from knowing when the document was likely read rather than when the email was opened.

We take your privacy seriously and will never share your information.

Please fill out the form below to have the white paper emailed to you.

First Name

Last Name

Email

Company

► Images: Skip the Lifestyle Shots

Give your visitors a sneak peek.

How many times have you gone to a landing page and been greeted with a header graphic that has nothing to do with the offer? Does seeing an image of a businessman on a laptop or a girl flying a kite really have anything to do with the white paper you are about to request? Probably not. A better solution is to provide a small image of the white paper or demo that is being offered. This gives your visitors something tangible to look forward to and a much more compelling reason to convert.

The screen shot below is a classic example of a white paper “hero shot”, giving the visitor a sneak peek of what she will receive after converting.

The 7 Barriers to Inside Sales Success

Through reading this paper, inside sales and telesales managers will learn:

- Three simple steps to tripling your success rate over the phone
- The **one reason** a lower level contact will sponsor you to a higher level contact
- The **top two techniques** for building value over the phone
- The keys to **engaging unreceptive decision makers.**
- How to overcome the **five common challenges** to discovering honest needs



► Keep it Above the Fold

Too much scrolling will hurt your conversion rate.

You have tons of great content. You have fantastic imagery. Save those for your website. Your landing page should be a quick, clean path to conversion for your visitors. Eliminate as much scrolling as possible by keeping most (if not all) of your content above the fold. This axiom was true for newspaper advertising and it is every bit as true for the web.

► Brag About Your Credibility

Third party credibility indicators help build trust with your visitors.

Visitors who are not familiar with your company may be hesitant to enter their contact information, even in exchange for something of value. Listing a few seals, certifications or awards that your company has won can go along toward establishing some credibility with your audience.

Examples Include:

- Client testimonials
- Site security badges (Verisign, Thawte, Trust-e, etc.)
- Ratings from Better Business Bureau and similar organizations
- Awards and industry recognition

The following example is the footer of a landing page for a popular marketing solution. Badges such as the Inc. 500 and Marketing Excellence Awards let visitors know that this company is legitimate and helps reassure them that their information is safe. They also serve as the first step to establishing your brand's reputation with new visitors.



Conclusion

By implementing these eight simple steps, you will not only increase your total number of conversions, but also the quality of the data that you capture. Some of the steps are simply best practices, while others may be part of a marketing automation solution. Most can be implemented at little or no cost and will help improve ROI for any online marketing program.

About Pardot LLC

Pardot is a marketing automation software provider that increases revenue and maximizes efficiency for companies with multi-touch sales cycles.

Prospect Insight, Pardot's lead management software, features CRM integration, email marketing, lead nurturing, lead scoring and ROI reporting. These tools help marketing and sales teams work together to generate and qualify sales leads, shorten sales cycles, and demonstrate marketing accountability. Pricing plans start as low as \$500 per month and plans do not require contracts.

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