



A Harte-Hanks White Paper

# Conversion Point 2010

## Leveraging the Web to Convert Visitors into Customers



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## Conversion Point 2010

The Conversion Point is a methodology that Harte-Hanks uses to create and optimize digital properties. The Internet does not stand still and neither does this methodology. The Harte-Hanks 2010 release of this white paper focuses on how to use social, mobile and other new trends, as well as serve as a refresher on Conversion Point.

Despite advances in both technology and design, most Web-based marketing efforts reveal a continuing struggle among business leaders, marketers and developers to grasp a fundamental truth – success hinges on conversion. The prospect must be able to convert quickly into a visitor, and the visitor must be able to convert quickly into a lead, an applicant, a customer, a donor, a subscriber, etc.

By detailing best practices for driving conversion through digital marketing campaigns, as well as revealing some of the most important elements of conversion-focused design, this white paper enables a critical assessment of an organization’s digital marketing strategy, and informs a deeper understanding of specific tactics to engage audiences online and to drive desired results.

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## Introduction

It is often said that the Internet brings challenges like never before, or the demand and need are greater than ever. The fact is this will always be true. Technology changes as quickly as it is discussed and with it, the perception of what technology should do for people. Their needs change and so do their expectations.

Early Web sites comprised little more than digital brochures and business cards, and later efforts incorporated interactive features such as games and flash movies in a relentless drive for ever-greater traffic volumes. Organizations are striving to evolve their feature-filled Web sites into powerful acquisition and retention tools that deliver greater return on investment (ROI) for their efforts in digital marketing, applying the Web, social, email, mobile and alternate technologies toward marketing goals.

Economics, technology and increasing audience sophistication have driven the Web's evolutionary shifts. However, in the push for ROI among digital marketers, success has come slowly. This is especially true among corporate or non-eCommerce Web sites and online campaigns, where no traditional elements to measure exist. Now add in social networks, with 75% of online adults participating in social technology.<sup>1</sup> And consider mobile marketing, with more than 86% of US adults owning at least one mobile device and nearly 30% subscribing to the mobile Web<sup>2</sup>.

**In the push for ROI among digital marketers, success has come slowly.**

Building a digital presence that smoothly turns visitors into strong leads or active customers requires a strategic conversion-focused design across all digital properties, but many organizations have failed, in whole or in part, to focus their

<sup>1</sup> Forrester Research: Growth of Social Technology Adoption

<sup>2</sup> US Census 2008 Estimate, Nielsen Mobile

digital marketing truly on conversion. Some have yet to try, and others have failed to recognize areas where significant improvements are possible, often with little or no additional investment. Boggled down with outdated concepts of how people use and navigate the Web, grandfathered into outdated and ineffective backend systems, or blinded by inadequate reporting and analysis, even highly sophisticated and well-funded organizations continue to fall short of their goals.

Achieving a true conversion focus is possible, however, and the rewards in revenue and ROI for organizations are often significant. To attain that focus and realize those rewards, it is essential to understand what drives the online conversion process, and the techniques behind conversion-focused design. With this information, organizational leaders can better assess their current conversion efforts in the digital space, and their marketing and development teams can better identify specific areas for improvement.

## What is the Conversion Point?

For every product or service that appears on the Internet, there should be a point where visitors are able to express a commitment and become actual prospects or customers. That is the conversion point – the visitor’s point of transformation from observation to engaged interest.

Where and how conversion occurs varies from one organization to another and one campaign to another. In every case it is the primary goal behind a campaign that must drive the function and location of the conversion point. For example, the conversion point for a lead generation campaign may be registration for an online contest or becoming a Fan of a brand page on Facebook, while the conversion point for an online e-commerce acquisition campaign is typically a purchase. A retention campaign might define the conversion point at a second purchase, or at

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the opt-in stage for follow-up communications, whereas the conversion point for an online branding campaign might be a specific number of page views, which indicates the visitor's level of interest in the product or service.

Conversion may even be a two-step process; obtaining customer information for a lead may be the first part, and the follow-up leading to the sale may be the second. But whatever the mechanism or metric of conversion, conversion-focused design is most effective when it directly supports specific and well-defined objectives.

In addition to different types of conversion, there are often multiple paths leading to any one conversion point. An online or offline advertisement may point visitors to a landing page (a Web page created specifically to support a specific campaign, product or service). Or visitors may arrive through a link in an email newsletter, a text ad, a Web search engine, a Twitter link, or an organization's home page. Precisely which paths to conversion are available will depend on the nature and goals of the organization, the purpose of the campaign and the budget. No matter what forms of digital marketing an organization deploys, they should all lead visitors to a conversion point.

## Start with Web Analytics

To determine how best to attract, hold and convert visitors at an optimal ROI, it is essential to measure a digital campaign or Web site. This measurement takes the form of Web analytics.

For every Web site there is a log file that records all visitor activity on the site. This file resides on the server that hosts the site, and it contains a record of visitors: where they came from, where they went on the site, and how long they stayed on the pages they visited. In the past, most companies used log file software to view the data that enabled marketers to view customer behavior and relate it back to specific campaigns. Search engines and other Web "spider" activity are captured in log files.

Most companies today employ software that uses “tags” – JavaScript code that is embedded in HTML within Web pages. The code tracks visitor interaction and sends the data back to a third-party tool for compilation. Tags enable sites to associate purchase amounts to specific campaigns, or other conversion elements on sites. They also can interact with related Web properties using the same tags, and provide comprehensive tracking across multiple Web sites, a social network, a banner or an email. Code-based tracking programs do not see activity that is generated by Web spiders.

When comparing the two types of Web analytics software side by side, the results will be different. Some software programs use a combination, pulling elements from each to provide a full view of Web site activities.

Viewing visitor behavior enables marketers to see where problems may be occurring in the paths to conversion. Multiple roadblocks may be distracting visitors and diluting their focus, which makes conversion less likely. Web analytics makes it possible to identify and correct those problems early in the life of a campaign, potentially saving significant marketing dollars while delivering a better online experience for visitors.

The following are some common metrics that Web analysis can isolate, and the obstacles to conversion that frequently come to light:

- **Drop-Offs:** When reviewing visitor interaction with a form or application that has multiple pages, Web analysis enables following the visitor path and identifying pages that are resulting in larger-than-average exits, or drop-offs. Drop-offs may indicate an overly complicated form, a broken link or a demand for required information that visitors are reluctant to provide. More than 85 percent of Web users consider such issues annoying or very annoying, and many users will not return to sites that

suffer such problems, or will unsubscribe from promotions and messages.<sup>3</sup>

- **Time Spent:** When analyzing the time visitors spend on specific pages, it is possible to determine which pages are attracting and holding the most attention, and then assess whether that attention is because of strong content and design, or merely overly complicated material or confusing requests. Time spent is complicated by Web 2.0 technologies such as AJAX<sup>4</sup>, which allows users to click on links and see new content without a page reload. Time spent appears longer unless the proper tagging is in place for the Web analytics software.
- **Engagement:** Gaining an understanding of how consumers are engaging with the site, social applications and other digital assets will help marketers understand how to optimize and improve them. Engagement is a newer measurement as it pertains to the Web, and isn't necessarily about the time spent on a page. It's about usage of tools, views of particular types of content and social sharing of that content.
- **Social Share:** The "share to social" buttons are appearing on Web pages but what do they really mean? Valuable content is shared by consumers and marketers, and knowing when and how they share it helps define marketing strategy. The next step is to understand who the content is being shared with, and follow the content through the Social Web. Social media monitoring tools may be required to complete the second step.
- **Clickstream Analysis:** The clickstream is the path that a visitor takes through a Web site, and reviewing how visitors are navigating a site is key to redesigns and campaign analysis. For example, comparing the clickstreams of two different campaigns may reveal that visitors to each share different qualities – geography, age, gender, propensity to purchase, etc. Such analysis is especially important when integrating a

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<sup>3</sup> *Consumers' Pet Peeves About Commercial Web Sites*, Hostway, Inc. and TNS, July 2005

<sup>4</sup> *Asynchronous JavaScript and XML*

campaign with an existing site – understanding where visitors currently go makes the placement of call-outs to registration or purchase much more likely to attract the desired attention.

With a robust Web analytics function in place, it is not only possible to design better digital marketing campaigns on the front-end, but also to re-engineer them continuously to improve back-end results. This process, called optimization, leverages the speed of the Internet to gather and assess digital campaign data such as response rates, conversion rates, visitor demographics and behavior. Then, using that information, it is possible to make changes to a campaign quickly – deploying new or different creative, revising landing page design or content, creating new social content or buying more relevant search keywords.

By testing each change against previous results, organizations can assess and refine campaign performance rapidly and continuously. Additionally, although the process is typically slower because of both technical and organizational concerns, the same analytical process can drive optimization of an entire Web site to improve its ability to attract, retain and convert visitors.

It is also worth pointing out that effective Web analytics enables organizations to focus both their online and offline targeted marketing programs better.

### *Social Media Monitoring*

It is critical today to understand the online conversations taking place, both monitoring and then acting upon them. Aberdeen Research reports that 44% of “best-in-class companies” have established a method to engage consumers in online conversations; 44% analyze customer insights to improve marketing campaign effectiveness and 32% link monitoring results to increased revenues

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and outcomes.<sup>5</sup> But it is also noted that only 21% have established a method to define benchmarks and goals.

Social media monitoring tools are already integrating with Web analytics tools to gain a deeper understanding of how visitors arrived at the site and to tie social media activity to Web activity. Plug-ins are already available and will continue to become available and integrated.

## Attracting Conversion-Ready Visitors

Web sites and digital marketing campaigns that lack a conversion focus typically result from the misperception that traffic volume is an effective metric of success, and therefore the more traffic the better. This is only true, however, if that traffic arrives at the site ready for conversion; otherwise, it may prove more of a drain on resources than it is worth.

The odds of converting a visitor into a legitimate prospect or customer go up significantly when that visitor arrives on a Web site or landing page ‘conversion-ready’, which means that behavior up to the point of arrival strongly indicates a propensity to convert. The two tactics that best serve to attract such visitors are targeted online advertising (via banner ad, text ad, email, etc.) and search marketing. And consider social networks, and how those visitors may be more conversion-ready than one might think.

### *Targeted Online Advertising*

Targeted advertising is much easier to achieve on the Web today using online research in combination with targeted media buying. Online research tools use consumer surveys and Web usage data to determine where consumers go online, and use customer-provided data to define Web site profiles. With this information, media buyers can typically recommend programs or sites that will target the intended visitors through either the sites that meet the profile of the targeted visitor, or through the type of program (i.e., behavioral programs to

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<sup>5</sup> “*The ROI on Social Media Monitoring*,” Aberdeen Research, October, 2009

target people based on information collected online, or contextual programs to target based on an action such as a search or a visit to a site).

Best practices for acquisition prescribe three specific methods for targeting conversion-ready visitors:

1. **Through their media selections** — placing ads on sites that the target audience visits. For example, an organization wishing to target females, ages 25-50 in the southeastern United States might purchase ads on SouthernLiving.com.
2. **Through the creative message** — using ad content to target visitors. For example, when multiple target aspects exist (such as an occupation, a demographic segment, and a geographical region), the sites where ads are to appear may cover one or more of the targeting aspects, but the creative must complete the targeting by delivering a message that resonates with the desired audience. Advanced technology today allows advertisers to do follow-up ads based on the visitors' behavior when the banner was viewed previously, giving creative even more license.
3. **Through technology** — using behavioral or contextual advertising that guarantees that visitors in the correct demographic segment, and/or visitors who are specifically seeking the product or service, see the ad. An example of this approach would be advertising on a network of sites, but achieving the demographic segmentation through an identification of IP addresses or even down to the zip code level (similar to other direct marketing efforts).

### *Search Marketing*

It is well known that people today use search engines to aid in research, find products, find companies or other information. Search continues to increase

year over year, with an increase of 20% from May 2008 to May 2009.<sup>6</sup> Most companies would agree that search is a requirement: both natural and paid. However, many companies still do not put the emphasis that is needed on search tactics to get the best performance.

Visitors who come to a Web site or landing page through search engines are some of the most relevant visitors to the site. They arrive after specifically searching for the site by name, product or product description. They have already prequalified themselves through their search and by clicking on the listing.

Search marketing includes both natural and paid search, along with “social search” tools such as bookmark sharing.

There are three aspects of search to consider for improvement of natural search engine positioning, to ultimately attract more conversion-ready visitors:

1. **Keywords and content** – ensure that the keywords (the phrases and specific terms that a target audience is likely to use when searching for a product or service) appear on the site. Focus sections of the site with multiple pages that are focused on the most important keywords – the site must validate the relevance of the keyword when search engines index the pages. A number of programs are available that will assist in determining how people search.
2. **Meta tags** – invisible to site visitors, these tags appear in the code of every page in a Web site. They provide information about site content to search engines that use them and, like the site content itself, should include relevant keywords. Descriptions should be created that contain marketing copy as search engines may use the description in their listing when the site is displayed in results. Title tags should be unique and

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<sup>6</sup> Nielsen Megaview Search, 5/09

contain the most important keywords first, avoiding the temptation to put the site or company name first.

- 3. Search engine friendliness** – ensure that the site is accessible by search engines by using the search engines to do a “site search” or reviewing entry pages. Log file data include search engine spider activity, which can be used to determine how the search engine spider interacts on the site. Tools are also available to mimic the search engine and help determine if the site is being indexed completely. Make sure that technology does not interfere with spider behavior and that it doesn’t block important content.

**Marketers must also look at how search results are changing. Bing, Microsoft’s search engine, changes the search game by incorporating other relevant searches, competitive information, and reviews, and only shows the first three natural search results for each term. Top positioning is critical, but relevancy even more so. Making sure the site is positioned for related terms as well as primary ones makes keyword research critical.**

And not just for search engines such as Bing – it’s a smart strategy to consider for Google and Yahoo as well.

Blogs are often well positioned on search engines due to the inherent way that bloggers use keywords and links, and search-friendly blog software. Consider how blogs are driving traffic and determining how best to leverage links into conversion-focused pages.

Not nearly enough attention is paid to how to optimize natural search for conversion. Using Web analytics tools, it is easy to find out what keywords used in natural search result in conversion. And that is what should drive optimization of campaigns. Looking at the internal landing pages, and the keywords visitors use to arrive there, should help the marketer determine what conversion elements should be on the page. And when considering a redesign, determine

how to reshape the search strategy based on the keywords and phrases that drive results – not just visits.

**Paid search** is often a requirement for marketers. JupiterResearch recently reported that 70% of executives reported that they see paid search as a way to improve conversion rates.<sup>7</sup> Bidding on keywords may seem counterproductive, especially for branded terms, but it is a surefire way to ensure that people searching for the company and products will find them quickly, and not lose them to a competitor. This is especially true of broad media, direct mail and even banner advertising – people may see the URL provided or the link, but they would prefer to do the search and find the site themselves. Landing pages are a requirement for paid search (see section below), to ensure that conversion is most likely to occur.

### *Social Media*

Channels are shifting demographic profiles, as teens reduce their usage of the email channel in favor of mobile and social networks.<sup>8</sup> Older generations are moving rapidly to social networks, with 50% of Facebook users and 44% of MySpace users in the US over the age of 35.<sup>9</sup>

Social networks and media are part of digital marketing and should be viewed like any other type of campaign. While the measurements may be different, many companies are proceeding into social media with an eye toward results – whether those results are direct sales or brand recognition.

Understanding the conversion elements as they relate to social networks isn't that different from other campaigns. Creating content that users engage with from a pure social aspect can be paired with marketing – content or offers. Applications that engage fans and keep them in communication with the brand can also drive marketing when it is a matter of choice.

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<sup>7</sup> JupiterResearch SEM Executive Survey, 6/08

<sup>8</sup> Pew Internet Life, Generations Online in 2009, 1/09

<sup>9</sup> Ad Age, using Comscore Data 1/09

Forcing marketing in the social space may not be effective, but finding the combination of community and marketing that is unique for every brand and audience is the key. This is done through testing, using the same principles of optimization used in digital campaigns. Post content, measure, improve post and measure again.

The other aspect of social to consider is communities. Company-sponsored communities can provide a wealth of mineable information that can help build conversion-based strategy. Understanding how customers view products, how they feel about competitor products and how they feel about the brand can influence communications in the future – and what those future conversion points should be.

## Engaging & Converting Visitors with Landing Pages

Landing pages are more effective as conversion points than home pages for most digital marketing campaigns, especially when the purpose of the campaigns is lead generation, e-commerce or acquisition. In fact, lead generation ads that send visitors to the home pages of Web sites typically fail, as illustrated by a pharmaceutical manufacturer's recent campaign to drive acquisition using an online survey. Conversion (in this case, completing the survey) was below three percent when advertising drove visitors to the company's home page and forced them to click another link to the survey, yet jumped to nearly 15 percent completion rates when the link went to the survey directly.

**Lead generation ads that send visitors to the home pages of Web sites typically fail.**

The reason is focus. An effective landing page serves only a single campaign or, at most, several campaigns for a single product or service. It is easy for visitors to remain focused on the goal that brought them. A home page, however, must serve a host of demands, and typically cannot provide robust or

exclusive support to any single campaign without risk of diluting its support for other initiatives. As a result, links from campaign ads to home pages typically result in too many choices for visitors and no clear direction to the conversion point. Ultimately, most will use their back button, click elsewhere on a site, or close their browser.

A conversion-focused landing page, however, is immediately engaging for three reasons:

1. It is relevant to the ad or search that attracted the visitor.
2. Its relevance is obvious because design elements such as copy, graphics and layout are similar for the ad and the landing page, to reinforce the connection between the two components of the campaign.
3. It leads clearly to the conversion point. The action the user expected to perform upon arrival, such as completing a survey, registering for a contest, making a purchase or filling out an application, is easy to locate and complete.

What happens after conversion on a landing page depends on the campaign. A typical campaign-oriented landing page can be a stand-alone page, although usually a visitor sees a “Thank You” page upon conversion. However, microsites (small groupings of interlinked Web pages) sometimes serve to further engage the visitor’s attention even after conversion. Once the visitor has completed a registration or application, these additional pages of relevant content become available, and may even offer additional conversion opportunities (such as opting into a loyalty program after making a purchase, for example). Alternatively, the landing page may send the visitor directly to the Web site home page once the conversion goal is complete.

Social networks may provide secondary engagement elements as well, with conversion of the lead remaining a priority. Data capture will improve on social

sites over time, potentially making social the priority landing page, depending on the campaign.

## Building a Conversion-Focused Web Site

Although landing pages are recommended for most digital marketing campaigns, the principles of conversion-focused design also should apply to an organization's Web site. This approach takes into account the fact that visitors may come directly to a Web site in search of campaign-related information, rather than click on a banner ad.

A conversion-focused Web site also enables greater campaign flexibility. For example, correctly placing campaign-related links and content on the site will ensure every opportunity for conversion of those arriving at the site because of offline marketing.

Creating a conversion-focused Web site should occur in three phases:

1. **Define** the online strategy.
2. **Build** the site.
3. **Measure**, test and refine the site.

### ***Phase 1: Define the Online Strategy***

Before building (or re-building) a corporate Web site, organizations must determine the strategy for their online presence. Getting this right means first understanding that a Web site itself is not a strategy; it is a tool of a strategy. Its purpose is to help an organization accomplish specific objectives.

Thus, one of the first steps in this phase is identifying all of the functions of the site, from an internal and external perspective. Internally, what purposes does the Web site serve? How does it support the organization? Does it help the company by servicing customers after hours when the call center is closed? Does it aid recruitment efforts? Externally, does the site provide customers with

relevant content? Are they able to find what they need? Does it also serve investors, partners or suppliers? Does it allow customers to engage with other customers?

Once the site's current functions are identified, the next step in this phase is to set both qualifiable and quantifiable goals for the future state, with each tied directly to the organization's overall business goals. Qualifiable goals cover the types of content and functions that the site includes, as well as layout, navigation and design. In short, qualifiable goals determine what is on the site and how users interact with it.

Quantifiable goals, on the other hand, set the desired results such as traffic volume, conversion rates, search engine listings and positions, and sales volumes. Setting both types of goals realistically requires two essential tools – Web analytics and competitive analysis.

Consider some of the elements involved when creating or optimizing the site strategy:

### *Competitive analysis*

All successful digital marketing strategies also require online competitive analysis. A cursory analysis of this type will identify competitors in the marketplace and assess their relative strengths and weaknesses, identify their positioning and messaging, and review their site content. A more robust analysis will provide a deeper level of detail regarding each competitor's digital marketing campaigns and strategies. Additionally, this type of analysis should include online competitors in the search engine space – those who may bid for identical keywords, even though they are not considered a competitor in the offline world. Some competitors may be in both groups, but there are typically some that are unique to each environment.

Understanding what competitors are doing ultimately has an impact on decisions about goals and results, and serves to maintain or strengthen a site's

focus on conversion of visitors. For example, analysis may reveal content or features common to competitor sites that visitors are likely to expect. Additionally, there may be opportunities to gain competitive advantage by providing a valuable feature that competitors are neglecting, or providing poorly.

Consider using social media monitoring to evaluate competitors, as well as the brand, to understand the consumer viewpoint.

### *Web site scorecard*

Perform a scorecard using Web analytics data and industry best practices to gain an understanding of the current site performance. The scorecard will provide an overview into content, architecture, technology, search and most importantly, conversion.

### *Additional aids to strategy-building*

Other components of strategy-building may include key stakeholder interviews, usability testing, surveys, wireframes and site architecture. Stakeholder interviews enable organizations to determine how internal stakeholders view the site and what their needs are. Having this information prior to development will ensure that the goals and strategy for the Web site meet company objectives. Similarly, using surveys on existing Web sites, organizations can query current visitors to the site to gather valuable feedback that can aid strategic decision-making for the new site.

Usability testing is critical for sites that are looking at expensive redesigns. Data alone can not always provide the information that one-to-one interviews or focus groups can. Asking the user to complete a task and then recording their session is incredibly valuable insight that sometimes forces the strategy team to step back and see the site through someone else's viewpoint. Even activities like Card Sorts (almost a playing card deck of site pages that are displayed to users, asking them to first group like items together and then sort them) should be done to understand what constituents really think about the site and its content.

Web analytics and/or usability experts also help to assess the strengths and weaknesses of online forms on Web sites and in marketing campaigns. These assessments evaluate the sizes and locations of data entry fields, required fields that visitors are rejecting, scrolling issues, and the placement of “continue” buttons. As indicated earlier, research shows that visitors will quickly grow impatient with unnecessarily long processes, so additional evaluation works to minimize the number of clicks visitors must make in order to complete the conversion process.

Once these strategic elements are complete, by weighing the results of all against overall business goals, it should be possible to develop a well-informed, realistic Web strategy that will guide the next level of the strategy-building process: mapping wireframes and planning architecture.

The wireframe methodology is a simple one in theory— it is merely a visual representation of the layout of the Web page. A wireframe of a Web page does not contain images or content – only the purposes of each area of the page (navigation to product pages, call-outs, primary content, etc.). The wireframe is the perfect place to start conversion planning. The architecture will provide the site map, a representation of how all of the pages of the site will link together, and each level of navigation.

### **Phase 2: Build the Site**

The Web sites, landing pages and even banner ads that achieve the greatest conversion rates do more than enable visitors to locate and navigate to relevant content and achieve the goal that first prompted their visits. They make the entire process for the visitor clear, concise, easy to follow, and fast.

To ensure that visitors have an experience that equals or surpasses their highest expectations, marketers and site builders need to keep a few key guidelines in mind during development:

- **Architect from the bottom up.** Strategy comes first, then wireframes, and functional specifications and business requirements. Content documents and conversion design documents are next. Consider all of these elements as the layer underneath the design, with creative design as the packaging. Creative is the last step as it must be influenced by the strategy and all of the user experience related steps that must occur.
- **Work backward.** For each goal that visitors are likely to have (for example, making a purchase, researching a product, receiving service, etc.), determine how they are going to reach that goal, and then work backward to make sure that they are able to do so quickly. Minimize links and distractions. Prioritize goals when thinking about where and how the conversion will occur.
- **Speed is critical.** In fact, it often drives other considerations such as content and layout. The reason is that a typical visitor to a Web page spends less than 10 seconds determining its value – a fact commonly reported in the media, and supported by the Web development and digital marketing experience of Harte-Hanks. Therefore, if a form is unnecessarily long, or the page content is not quickly engaging, or the navigation is confusing, the likelihood of conversion drops significantly.
- **Synchronize.** In addition to serving any number of functions effectively, the site needs to be in synch with all of the marketing campaigns running concurrently, whether they are online or offline. Remember that direct mail, radio, print and TV advertising often drive visitors to the Web to look for a company or product, even if the campaign does not provide a Web address.
- **Enable conversion from every page.** Visitors that come to a site through search engines may enter at any page, not just the home page or a landing page. Because each page may be a visitor's entry point, conversion-focused sites include call-outs throughout that lead clearly and directly to registration pages or campaigns.

- **Scrutinize interactive features.** Interactive applications still have plenty of value, but only if they are relevant to the visitor's intention. For example, calculators and scenario tools are "must-haves" for financial sites; however, once visitors complete the calculator, the next step of their path on the site should be a clear link or call-out to the application process. Applying Web analytics to a tool's activity may indicate areas needing improvement and illuminate the actual value it delivers.
- **Leverage conversion to improve retention.** Incorporating retention efforts into the conversion process further engages the customer in the brand experience, and creates cross-sell and up-sell opportunities. For example, applying the principles of conversion-focused design, an organization might consider inviting a newly converted customer to complete a survey in exchange for a coupon.
- **To blog or not to blog.** Companies struggle with decisions relating to user-generated content. User communities can provide engagement and positive user experiences, but also have the potential to create havoc with online reputations. If the decision is made to move forward with blogging, it is critical to have a process to monitor and manage the content, and to make sure that messages can be responded to both objectively and fairly.

### *The Mobile Web*

Mobile is anticipated to continue at an annual growth rate of 131% through year 2013. With such high penetration, most marketers are starting to consider the Mobile Web in their strategy. Should they make their Web site mobile friendly, or build a mobile-only Web site?

The needs of mobile users are quite different from users sitting at their computer. Although a certain portion of mobile Web users have migrated to the device entirely as their primary Internet access, most people are using the mobile Web when convenience suits them, which often happens to be outside of their home or work environment. When considering a mobile Web site, the needs of

those “mobile” users must be taken seriously. Mobile users may not need access to the hundreds if not thousands of pages on a .COM site; but they may need fast access to the things that matter most.

Intuition can help guide what does matter most – contact information, maps, tools, FAQs are all obvious. To understand the rest, a usability test for mobile users may be required. The key is relevance, and getting in-the-moment tools may be well worth the investment.

Consider an insurance company that offers an iPhone application that helps the insured take pictures in an accident and record information from the other driver. Or an automotive company that provides quick access to service records and dealer locator tools. Or a health insurance company that provides quick access to benefits.

Measuring conversion on mobile sites works the same way as Internet sites, with the same types of processes in place. Here are some additional tips:

- **The Third Screen is small.** Make sure the mobile site is hosted with a mobile company, who can detect the correct device and operating system, and deliver the site in the right size.
- **The site is searchable.** The mobile Web has search engines, and mobile sites can appear in mobile search engines. Optimization rules are very similar to Internet Web sites.
- **Less technology.** For now, most mobile phones cannot accommodate Flash or JavaScript, so consideration must be made for the lack of these features when creating tools or navigation schemes. Simple is best.

### ***Phase 3: Measure, Test and Refine the Site***

In addition to Web analytics, post-redesign usability analysis is an invaluable tool for ensuring that Web sites and landing pages effectively support the conversion of visitors into leads and customers. Usability testing should be an

ongoing effort to gain the benchmark but also continue to gauge user interactions and feedback given changes in the online environment.

Combining Web analytics with other tools such as social media monitoring, ad serving data, mobile campaign data, social network results, search engine positioning and other data provides a full online view of the brand. And allows marketers to understand when changes made at one level can impact others.

Web sites are never perfect the first time; the reason is simply that customers' needs change, as well as their expectations. In a dynamic environment, optimization is necessary to keep Web properties performing.

## Going Forward

The conversion point for any digital marketing effort is a living thing. It should change with trends like social and mobile, with campaign types, with promotional offers and with organizational goals. However, continuously applying the principles of conversion-focused design, and optimizing accordingly, will ensure that the conversion process stays on target and continues to result in improved return on investment.

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