

# Chapter 1

## Introducing Landing Page Optimization

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding what makes up a landing page
  - ▶ Determining the focus of your landing page
  - ▶ Understanding your audience
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**I**n the past few years, the popularity of online marketing has exploded. Advertising opportunities from Google, Yahoo!, and social networking sites (such as Facebook) have all brought with them new online marketing avenues. For many individuals and companies, these online opportunities are simply too good to pass up. Just imagine being able to take a product or a service, mix in some creativity, add a little bit of hard work, and from that, create an income-generating online business? This sounds too good to be true — and it often is. The brutal fact is that few people can even augment their salaries, much less earn a living from the results of their online marketing efforts.

Face it: Moving from a concept to a successful online marketing campaign can be a difficult, hard road to travel with many wrong turns, roadblocks, and the occasional pothole. But knowing the lay of the land may help you avoid some of the bigger potholes.

The one key feature of the online marketing landscape is the *landing page* — that (hopefully welcoming) doorway to your online storefront, which you present to your Web site visitors. You may not be too familiar with the concept or aren't quite sure what's all wrapped up in the idea of a landing page, but don't let that bother you now. With this book in your hands, you'll be okay because it acts as your landing page GPS, steering you in the right direction.

In this chapter, we introduce what landing pages are, what you use them for, and who they're designed for.

## Introducing the Landing Page

Perhaps the most logical place to start a book on landing page optimization is to come up with a clear, concise definition of landing page. We believe that creating a successful landing page starts with a good understanding of its intended purpose, so here's our attempt at crystalline clarity:

A *landing page* is the Web page your visitors arrive at after they click an online ad or an e-mail link, or follow a search engine result or any form of offline advertising campaigns, such as radio ads. The landing page is an extension of these ads and is designed specifically to generate interest and persuade the visitor to take a desired action.

For a real-world landing page example, follow these steps:

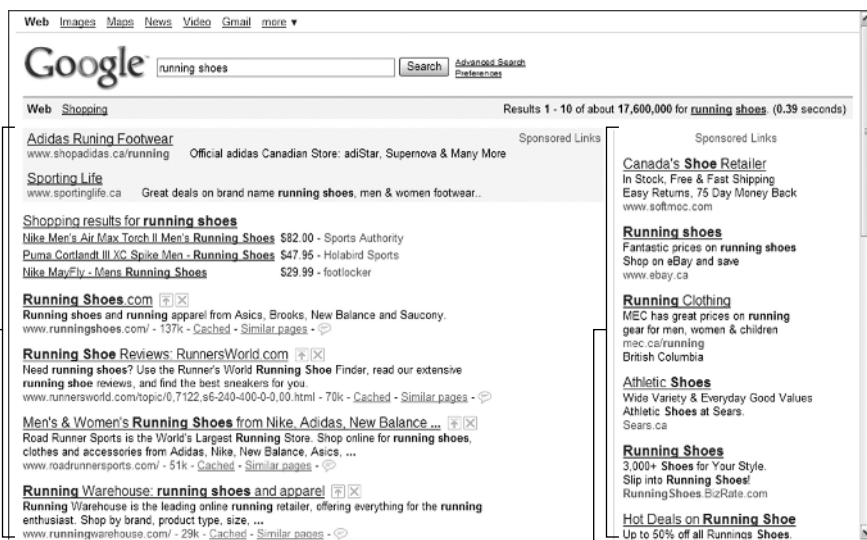
1. Go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) to open a Google search box.

2. In the Google search box, type running shoes.

In the new Web page that appears, you see search results displayed on the left side of the screen as well as a list of Google ads running down the right, as shown in Figure 1-1.

3. Click any of these Google ads to view an honest-to-goodness, bona fide landing page.

**Figure 1-1:**  
The Google  
search  
results for  
running  
shoes.



Search results

Google Ads

Click through several Google ads that you find when you search for running shoes to get an idea of the types of landing pages used. Some of the landing pages you click through are pretty darn good, and some of them, quite honestly, aren't very good at all. When you browse these landing pages, see whether the content of the landing page and the ad actually match. Recall (from the definition we gave earlier) that the landing page is an *extension* of the ad; it's *not* a bait-and-switch, in other words. (For example, a *bait-and-switch* is when you click an ad for running shoes and are taken to a landing page for clothes, hammocks, or travel packages.) If, in your quest to get running shoes, some landing page owner takes you on a wild goose chase, that someone could probably use a copy of *Landing Page Optimization For Dummies*.

People new to developing a landing page often ask, "How can you tell the difference between a good landing page and a great landing page?" The answer is straightforward: A *good* landing page is well-designed, professional, and easy to read; but a *great* landing page makes you buy. With that in mind, in the earlier running-shoes example, were you tempted to buy anything? Did any of the sites entice you to read more? If so, bookmark that landing page to refer to it later. Those landing pages that carry you through to the checkout are typically great landing pages.

## *Understanding what a landing page is not*

Folks sometimes confuse a landing page with other types of Web pages, such as splash pages, home pages, gateway pages, and microsites. Although you may find some overlap among some of these pages, they all tend to serve quite distinct purposes, which the following list makes clear:

- ✓ **Splash pages:** Often used as an introductory page to a Web site, splash pages capture the visitor's attention for a short time and can introduce a promotion or a lead-in to the site home page. Splash pages are often fancy, full of color, and sport Flash animation or other eye-catching features. Although splash pages can be pretty, they're typically bad to use with landing pages — essentially, they're just one more click to get in the way of a sale! You want your visitors to go directly to a landing page and not be annoyed by a flashing advertisement.
- ✓ **Home pages:** A home page is the introductory page to an entire Web site. A home page typically has many elements to it and many pages from which you can navigate. A landing page doesn't have to be (and shouldn't be) all things to all people. A landing page is much more focused than a home page and is designed specifically for converting visitors to customers.

- ✓ **Gateway pages:** In the Web developers' world, gateway pages have been optimized, so they rank high in search engine results. A gateway page attracts visitors from searches with keywords and phrases. As such, gateway page design is geared toward search engines and not visitors per se.
- ✓ **Microsites:** As auxiliary supplements to a primary Web site, microsites provide more specific information and easier-to-find content than their parent site. A microsite often has its own Web address but links to a parent site. A microsite sits somewhere in between a landing page and a regular site. A landing page may have linked pages, whereas the microsite typically has more navigation options.

## *The function of landing pages*

The function of your landing page is straightforward: Convert an online visitor to a customer or a client by persuading her to complete a specific transaction. End of story. Now, this persuasion often encourages the visitor to buy a product or a service, but not always. Landing pages may persuade visitors to find out more about a particular theme, issue, topic, or organization. Such *informational* landing pages recruit visitors through ad links or other means. These landing pages may take visitors to a page of content to increase exposure to a company, a church, or a particular group (such as a political party), as well as to an organization looking for donations and so on.

Persuading a visitor to complete some transaction on your landing page may not sound all that hard. Reality check: Here's just a taste of what you're up against:

- ✓ **Most visitors don't like reading lots of text.** Brevity and precision are absolutely necessary.
- ✓ **Most visitors hate revealing contact info.** Such resistance to giving up e-mail addresses and phone numbers is going to make any follow-up with a potential customer difficult.
- ✓ **Most people don't take the time to fill out information onscreen, including forms, surveys, and so on.** This makes any customer follow-up difficult.
- ✓ **Many people are very concerned about using their credit cards online.** They need to feel completely secure before even considering doing so.
- ✓ **Visitors choose from a billion Web sites.** How do you get them to hang out, for even a few seconds, on yours?

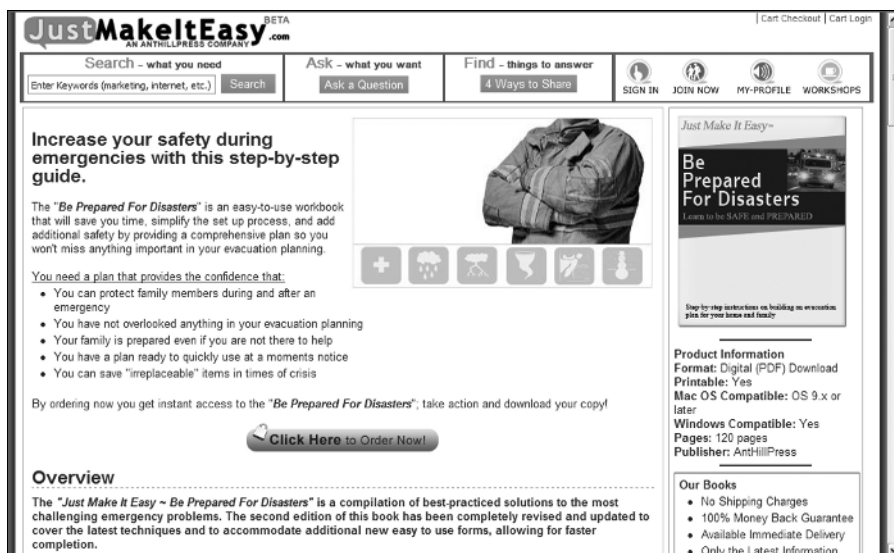
The list is almost endless. These factors make landing page *conversions* — that moment when a visitor becomes a client — difficult, but successful landing pages take such factors into account and address all these concerns. You can put specific and proven strategies to use to manage each of these areas. In a nutshell, landing pages are all about dealing with these concerns, which is the purpose of this book.

## Choosing Your Landing Page Focus

The overall landing page function is to persuade and convert a visitor to a customer or a client. Within this framework, you can use your landing page to promote a variety of different products and services. Also true, though, is that you have a variety of different landing page options to choose from, with each one organizing and presenting information in a slightly different way, often depending on the specific product being promoted. For instance, a landing page that promotes a running shoe would present itself differently from one that recruits volunteers for a political rally. Despite the differences, each landing page still contains the same key components to make it successful. The following list identifies some of the landing page types you may be using. Selecting one type is important in terms of helping you focus on a specific area:

- ✔ **Selling physical products:** Many landing pages are designed to sell a specific physical product. This includes everything from shoes to books, tires, mousetraps, kitchen gadgets, and so on. Physical products, and their associated landing pages, have additional considerations, such as shipping issues, transportation costs, storage costs, return policies, and so on. Landing pages for physical products must overcome the fact that your customer can't pick up the product and look it over the way they can in a regular store.
- ✔ **Offering virtual products:** Virtual products can be a gold mine because they don't have shipping costs, storage costs, and other hard costs. Such products include e-books, downloadable software applications, and any product that can be delivered digitally. Virtual offerings are often the holy grail of landing page products because of less overhead. They can be configured to automatically download to paying customers, and all you have to do as a product provider is log on and check sales. Figure 1-2 shows a typical virtual product landing page.
- ✔ **Specializing in educational products:** Many landing pages are used to promote educational material, such as books, textbooks, and online courses. Educational landing pages may include both virtual and physical products. One additional component often associated with educational products is an appeal to credibility — the landing page design focuses as much on the product as the qualifications of the person offering the materials. If you're trying to sell a course on real estate investing, your visitor wants to know that you're a successful real estate agent who's in a position to pass on your expertise.

**Figure 1-2:**  
A landing  
page  
promoting  
a virtual  
product.



- ✓ **Generating leads:** Some landing pages get contact information from a visitor to encourage a future purchase, rather than a purchase today. These types of pages can be very effective if you can contact the visitor and close the sale. However, getting visitors' contact information can be difficult because people are extremely wary of e-mail sign-ups. They fear these sign-ups lead directly to a tenfold spam increase in their e-mail inboxes.



One strategy is to have visitors sign up for newsletters or other free features — the e-mail address they provide for the newsletter or other free feature then becomes the e-mail you use in following up on the lead. Simple but elegant.

Lead generation can be very effective, especially if the product is too expensive, has too many options, or has high shipping costs. Antique cars are a good example of a product that's ideal for a lead-generating landing page.

## Identifying and Knowing Your Audience

To launch an effective online marketing campaign, you have to understand who your potential customers are, which is done by developing a customer profile. A *customer profile* is used to clearly identify your target customer. You need to have a clear vision of your target audience to write effective ads, choose the correct keywords for your search engine optimization strategies, and of course, design your landing page. (You can find more information about developing customer profiles in Chapter 8.)



When marketing online, people tend to consider *everyone* as a potential customer. After all, the Internet provides a potential worldwide market. Admittedly, online marketing makes it possible to get customers that fall outside your customer profile, but these are the exception and not the rule. Customer profiles are used to pinpoint your customer and provide the framework for all online marketing efforts.

Successful landing pages are typically designed with a specific type of visitor or audience in mind. Remember, landing pages (and their associated ad campaigns) are intended for targeted marketing. The visitor type you're aiming for dictates the landing page type and design used. Examples of visitor types may include

- ✓ Job seekers
- ✓ Employers
- ✓ Women over 50
- ✓ Residents of a specific geographical location
- ✓ Athletes
- ✓ Teachers
- ✓ Musicians

These are, of course, just a few of the many customer categories that you may be working with. (Left-handed vegans from Skookumchuck, anyone?) As part of developing your online marketing campaign, define your key customer and demographic. How? You have many methods to choose from, but one of the more commonly used methods of tracking customer demographics is with Web analytics.



When you first start your landing page or troubleshoot an unsuccessful one, identify your specific market. Your online marketing efforts are dictated by who your actual customers are.

## Web analytics

Gather as much information about your audience as you can to really get to know them. You can't always get customer information easily, but fortunately, you have some powerful tools at your beck and call. Whenever someone visits your landing page, you can log a significant amount of information about that person, such as

- ✓ The pages the visitor viewed
- ✓ The Web browser they use
- ✓ How long they view each page

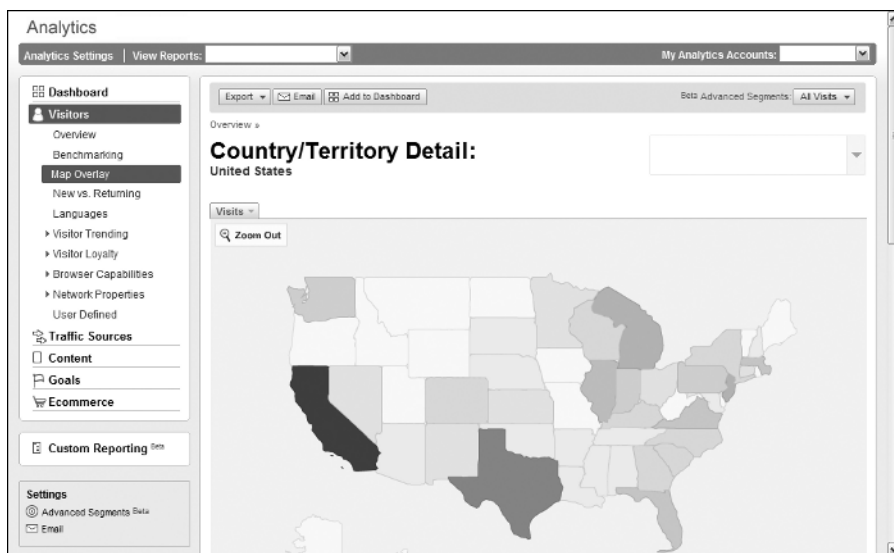
- ✓ Whether they're a repeat visitor
- ✓ The visitor's Internet Protocol address

Logging the information is an easy task; interpreting the results is a different matter. Here Web analytic software comes into play. All the information you log on your site can be reviewed and interpreted by analytic software. You can then use the information the Web analytic software gleans from all the raw data to help identify the demographics of your visitors, such as their surfing habits and what they like and don't like in your landing page.

Web analytic software ranges in price and functionality, with lower-end software providing simple reports and the more advanced software providing an almost overwhelming number of configurable options. Some of the features provided by analytic software include

- ✓ **Real-time statistics:** View in real time how visitors respond to your landing page. Are the page layout and the heading working? These statistics allow you to see what's working and what needs to be adjusted for your customers.
- ✓ **Keyword cost analysis:** Starting a keyword campaign with Google AdWords or another online marketing effort costs money. Keeping track of your keyword costs can be tricky, especially if you are running multiple landing pages. Web analytic software can help identify where your highest keyword returns are helping you put the money in the right places.
- ✓ **Visitor path tracking:** Do visitors complete the desired transaction? If not, where do they stop? Analytic software identifies how visitors navigate your site. This includes which pages they spend the most time on and what navigational areas may need troubleshooted. Correct path navigation is critical, particularly when tracking the visitor path to the actual purchasing page.
- ✓ **Trend identification:** Do more of your sales occur at night, or during the weekend or weekday? Web analytic software can be configured to help spot trends in sales. Identifying trends can really help focus your landing page to a specific demographic.
- ✓ **Affiliate tracking:** You can see which affiliates refer the most traffic and the traffic types they refer. In affiliate marketing, an ad is placed on one site (the affiliate), and directs traffic to someone else's landing page. The affiliate is paid for the leads that are generated by hosting the ads.
- ✓ **Geographical tracking:** Where are your visitors from? You can track by country or even specific state. Figure 1-3 shows an overview of a geographical analysis done by Google Analytics, a popular Web analytic software program. The darker areas (California and Texas) represent the areas providing the most visitors.





**Figure 1-3:**  
Geographical  
Web  
analytics.

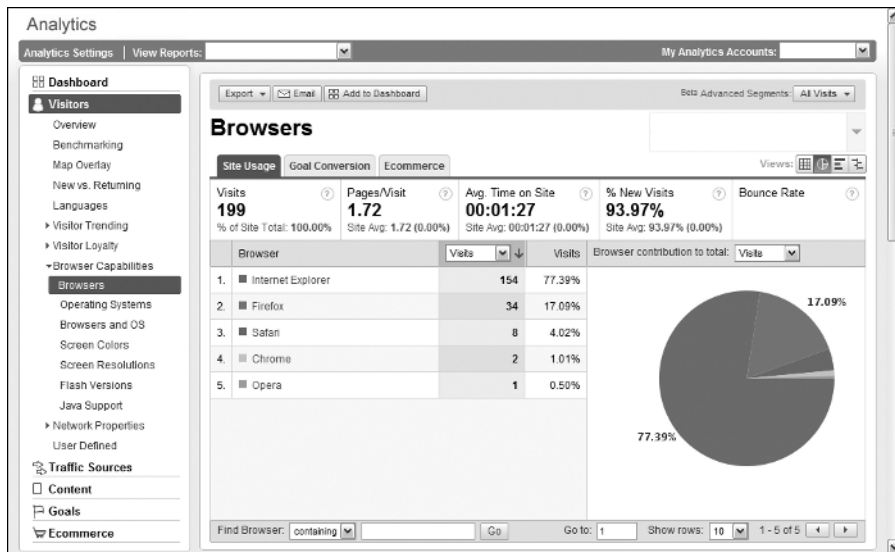
- ✓ **Printable graphics and charts:** Need to show your landing page results visually? Web analytic software can prepare charts and graphics displaying a range of demographic information.
- ✓ **Browser tracking:** Some Web browsers may perform better for you and therefore, should be your focus for ad campaigns. Web analytic software enables you to quickly see which Web browsers are generating the most traffic. (You can see the Web browser statistics for one particular landing page with Google Analytics in Figure 1-4.)

These are just some examples of what Web analytic software can do. However, more advanced software can do much more than this. The information that Web analytic software can produce is critical in understanding your demographic, and it's worth your time to investigate and figure out how to use Web analytic software.



Web analytic software isn't hard to find. Both Google and Yahoo! provide analytic software for their advertising ventures. Many third-party Web analytic software packages are available, however. Simply type **Web analytic software** in your favorite Web browser and you'll find many — even a few free and time-trial versions. That may be a good place to start to review the types of features and benefits you can see from using such software. Or check out Chapter 12, where we talk a bit more about your Web analytic software choices.

**Figure 1-4:**  
Google  
Analytics  
software  
display-  
ing Web  
browser  
statistics.



## *Identifying customer expectations*

Regardless of the groups you focus your marketing efforts on, they have expectations of your landing page. When these expectations are met, the landing page works toward customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction can be achieved when your visitors find what they expected to find. Depending on the type of customer you're marketing to, specific expectations vary. Younger clientele, for example, may want to see the latest technologies used, whereas teachers may want to see your credentials for promoting a particular product.

We cover the specifics of managing your customers' expectations in Chapter 9. However, some general customer expectations that need to be established on your landing page include the following:

- ✓ A friendly approach
- ✓ Knowledge about product/service
- ✓ Relevant information that's easy to find
- ✓ Effective use of technology
- ✓ Professional service
- ✓ Follow-through
- ✓ An easy-to-navigate interface

When customer expectations such as these aren't met, sales, conversions, and traffic all fall. You can track how effective you are in meeting these specific expectations with the help of the Web analytic software we mention earlier. For example, if visitors can't navigate your site properly, they'll be frustrated and go to a different site. The Web analytic software identifies navigational trouble spots. After you correct these spots, your landing page can better match customer expectations.



We've all heard the expression, "The customer is king." This is definitely true of visitors who come to your landing page. They have clear expectations of what they want and need to find on your site. To get your conversions anywhere near where you want them, you have to be able to meet your visitors' expectations. Take the time to review your site critically through the eyes of a potential customer.

## *Identifying product benefits*

One key in determining who your audience is — and how to appeal to them — is to clearly identify the benefits of what you offer. For example, if you sell a product on your landing page, clearly identify for yourself the most important benefit of that product. With that (clear and concise) information in hand, it's much easier to identify the target market and to create the framework for developing your entire landing page.

For example, if your landing page sells smoke alarms, safety is the benefit. From here, you can focus your landing page on families and the safety your product can provide them. Perhaps your landing page would use images of children sleeping, of emergency vehicles, or a picture that appeals to the security your product provides. To appeal to emotions, you may not use a picture of the actual product, but rather of the benefit of that product.

In addition to outlining the benefits of your product, clearly identify its key features. The feature list you generate is used as the main selling features outlined on your landing page. In this smoke alarm example, the alarm may have features such as a warning beep if batteries are getting low, an automatic LED that flashes with an emergency, and so on.

To get a handle on identifying product benefits and features, as well as on how this helps develop your landing page design, complete Table 1-1 as a warm-up exercise.

Table 1-1		Product Benefit Exercise	
Product	Benefit	Features	Potential Audience
Rechargeable batteries			
Mountain bike			
Baby booster seat			
Recyclable shoes			
Flat bottom boat			
Your potential product			

Whether you’re just designing your landing page or fine-tuning an existing one, performing this exercise on your product/service can go a long way to increasing your sales.