

conversionTM RESULTS

Web Alchemy **5 Pure Gold Tactics for Turning Visitors into Customers**

By Mat Greenfield

If you've been involved in generating leads or sales on the web for any period of time, you've probably reached the same conclusion that many of your web colleagues have, namely **increasing the amount of traffic that your site receives is easier than turning more of your existing traffic into leads and customers** (we'll call this a 'conversion').

An effective web marketing strategy addresses both of these issues. Here's a metaphor that will explain the situation that many companies find themselves in: imagine that you're trying to put out a fire, but you have two problems – your water pressure is just a trickle, and your hose leaks. Which do you fix?

On the web, most companies seem to 'turn up the water pressure', spending money to drive more traffic to their site with strategies such as pay-per-click advertising, e-newsletter sponsorships, and search engine optimization. What happens? The hose just leaks faster. Sure, these companies experience a slight increase in overall results (some water makes it out of the hose), but most of their efforts are wasted in 'leaks', and their costs are increased in greater measure.

A more effective approach for the web is to patch the holes in the hose by increasing the number of visitors that take action (a conversion), and then increase the water pressure. You'll substantially increase the amount of 'usable' water. That is to say, your website will produce dramatically more in the way of leads and sales.

I'm convinced that 'conversion' is the next great frontier for web marketers. Think about it, a few years ago it was possible to out-tech

your competitor. What I mean is you could create a better website just by knowing more about the technology – more about flash, more about shopping carts, more about search engine optimization, more about pay-per-click, etc. But in 2005 your competitor has the same access to great information and tools that you do. But the need to out-sell your competitor remains – hence the importance of *conversion*.

The Purpose of this Guide

There are many tools, tips, newsletters, and books that assist with increasing the amount of traffic that a site receives, but much less information on increasing conversion rate. I think there are two reasons, the first is that driving traffic is easier than increasing conversion rate, and second, any increase in traffic will yield some return (assuming that the conversion rate remains constant) giving the illusion of an acceptable increase.

However, increasing conversion rate is actually a much more profitable activity, and is top priority for serious web marketers (and inevitably hits the radar screen for other companies once they've exhausted the 'low hanging fruit' strategies for increasing traffic).

The purpose of this guide then, is to provide **five step-by-step activities that will increase website conversion rate**. Now, I won't mislead you – these tactics won't take the place of a complete marketing strategy, nor in some cases will they take the place of a complete site re-design. But, if these steps are followed, any website will have a better overall conversion rate.

Where do the Five Tactics Come From?

Over the past few years, my company has evolved from a general marketing consulting company, to focusing on developing high-conversion

websites. During that time, we have identified a number of effective principles which increase conversion rate. These principles have become 'best practices' for us, as we design and implement full-website projects for our clients. These principles are fully effective when implemented during a complete web site re-design, but can be partially applied as a band-aid to an existing website. In this guide I pass five of these best practices on to you in the form of step-by-step tactics.

To sum everything up, this guide does not offer an entire view of everything that could or should be done to increase conversion on a website. Instead, it provides a fast, but effective way for the web marketer to increase website conversion rate with very little effort. In addition, these tactics can likely be implemented by a business owner in just a few days, with the aid of any competent web programmer.

The Five Tactics

Here are the five tactics for increasing your website conversion rate – today!

- 1. Simplify your homepage**
- 2. Add a call-to-action to every page**
- 3. Get your copy edited by an outsider**
- 4. Give something away**
- 5. Implement an autoresponder follow-up process**

I understand that these steps look simple (perhaps too simple to be effective), but don't be deceived. There is an inherent power in these five steps despite their simplicity.

Let's look at the five tactics in detail:

Web Alchemy Tactic #1 - Simplify your homepage

For a moment, I'd like for you to reflect on your experience of driving along the freeway. Have you ever seen a new billboard, but before you could understand what it was, you were past it?

Your web site home page is actually not so different. The visitor's mouse hovers over the 'back button', just waiting for a reason to click. So, your goal is to provide a reason for the visitor to stick around and delve deeper into your site.

One of the problems with many homepages is the sheer amount of everything. As an Englishman living in the US, I feel somewhat qualified to comment on the American philosophy that 'bigger is better' (think SUV's, hamburgers, and retail stores). However, for your homepage, I want you to change your mantra to "less is more".

Ideally, viewing your entire homepage wouldn't require any scrolling. In addition, in a split second it should be pretty clear what you offer, and to whom you offer it (remember the billboard drive-by). There should also be a few very specific places to click next. Any extraneous information is likely to be a distraction.

So here goes your assignment:

1. Identify any information that really doesn't need to be there (your goal is to reduce the overall page length to eliminate scrolling).
2. Reduce the overall number of possible links, and make sure that the main items visitors are looking for are more visually prominent than other navigation options.
3. Replace any detailed text with a 'positioning statement' that describes your main value in less than 25 words. Use graphic design to make this positioning statement stand out.

Web Alchemy Tactic #2 – Add a call-to-action to every page

Have you ever visited a website, read a page that you found very interesting and compelling, but then been forced to scroll back up to the main nav bar to figure out where to go next? Wouldn't it have been more helpful if there had been an obvious next click for you to continue learning about that product or service? Wouldn't you have been more likely to buy if the site had made it easy for you to get all your questions answered by reading about a product in a logical flow?

You should implement a call to action on each page to achieve exactly that. In the general sense, a 'call to action' is an instruction. When you see an infomercial on TV and they say "pick up the phone now to order" – that's a call to action. When a local car dealership sends you a flyer in the mail which reads "come to our showroom for a test drive" that's a call to action. In the same way, you can use calls to action on websites to instruct and direct visitors what to do next.

Consider the call-to-action a 'signpost'. In other words, it's a navigation tool, literally telling the visitor where to click next. Essentially it says, *"if you like what you read here, then go here next"*.

A signpost call-to-action is often as simple as a "click here for more" or "next" link at the bottom of a page. Our testing has shown that more descriptive calls-to-action are often more compelling than simple text like "more" or "next", so consider using a little 'tease' in your signpost. "Learn how we do it" was a call-to-action that we used quite successfully on a recent client site.

Graphically, the call to action should obviously be the most appealing click for a visitor to take. Using a 'roll-over' effect on your text is often helpful to guide the visitors' eye towards your CTA.

Your assignment:

1. Individually consider each page of your site. Where would it make sense for you to direct the visitor to go next?
2. Based on that, create a graphically appealing call-to-action for each page and place it below the last sentence of text.

Remember not to get visitors lost in a perpetual loop of inter-linked pages. Ideally, wherever they enter your site, each visitor will end up at your main offer (see Alchemy Tactic #4) within a few clicks.

Web Alchemy Tactic #3 – Get your copy edited by an outsider

In many ways, your site text ('copy' or 'messaging') is the single most important element of your website. The key is to speak to your target audience in a way that they really understand. Just like any other marketing copy, your web text must be concise, clear, and compelling.

Concise: We're all busy, so don't use 57 words when 7 will do.

Clear: I understand that some visitors are more savvy than others, but if your message requires a technical manual to understand then you've probably lost most of your visitors in the first sentence.

Compelling: You need to appeal to emotion as well as intellect. Tell me *why* I want it before you tell me *what* it is...

Remember your message is what highlights your unique value in the marketplace. It's what sets you apart from your competitors. Give people a reason to do business with you. Get them excited about the benefits of your products and services.

Intellectually, most web marketers understand the need for clear, compelling text. The problem is that many have difficulty actually writing text that meets that description. One of the reasons is that people get so

close to their products and services, becoming experts in their respective industries that they lose the ability to explain what they do in simple terms.

So here's the solution (and your assignment). I've heard it called 'the history professor test'.

Find someone outside your company and industry that is intelligent, but has no training or education in your particular field (like a history professor). Ask them (or pay them, or whatever) to review your website text and give you feedback on three key concepts:

1. What products and services do you provide?
2. To whom do you provide them?
3. How does that group benefit from using your products?

This is the real key. **If your 'history professor' can't explain these 3 points from having read your site text then it must be re-written.**

You mustn't second-guess your history professor. If they say you're your text is unclear, believe them! For that reason, choose your History Professor carefully – pick someone whose opinion you value, but is entirely outside your industry.

Ideally, you'd enlist their help in refining your text to better communicate these 3 points. Once you've re-written your text, you should repeat the test – with a different history professor.

This will give you an objective eye, which allows you to develop concise, clear, and compelling web copy.

Web Alchemy Tactic #4 – Give something away

One of the keys to website conversion is to offer something for free. Well, not exactly for free, but in exchange for the visitor's contact information. This is even a good idea on websites that are primarily e-commerce in nature, because the free giveaway offers a lower commitment transaction for the visitor who hasn't yet decided to purchase. The real advantage of course, is that you now have the opportunity to follow-up and create a sale at a later point (see Alchemy Tactic #5 for more on a follow-up strategy).

The key to an effective offer is that it must be of **high-perceived value to the site visitor, and low cost of delivery to you**. Using that measurement, you'll realize why "contact us for more information" isn't terribly compelling.

My favorite types of giveaways are information based. If you sell products, think about offering a buyer's guide or a 'getting the most out of your new widget' guide. Service companies can usually put together some valuable 'insider information' such as the travel agent who gives tips on how to get upgraded to first class.

These guides can be nicely formatted, and turned into a PDF using a free tool like PDF995 (www.pdf995.com). Always remember to include your contact information so that if your document gets forwarded, readers can still contact you for more information.

Your assignment:

1. Create an 'offer' that meets the 'high perceived value, low cost to deliver' rule.
2. Build a web form to capture lead information as an entry to your offer.
3. Promote your offer at various points on your site. (Using some of the calls to action from Tactic #2 is a good starting point.)

Web Alchemy Tactic #5 – Implement an AutoResponder follow-up process

I worked at a software company a few years ago. One day I came across a dusty old box of what looked like a couple of thousand sales leads. When I asked what it was, I was told that a couple of years earlier, the company had scraped together the cash for an ad in Fortune magazine, to promote a new product they had launched. When I inquired how successful the ad was, I was told that the sales team had been too busy to follow up on the leads, and no sales had resulted... (*Excuse me?!)*

Now I'm not sure how typical that is, but I suspect that most companies have a 'didn't-follow-up-on-good-leads' skeleton in their closet. The sad part is that, in 2005, following up on sales leads isn't at all difficult.

Just imagine having an assistant that would send out follow-up emails in a pre-set sequence, on a pre-set schedule to individuals that request information from your company. Sounds expensive, right? Not really – an autoresponder will do exactly that for about \$20-\$50 per month.

Here's how a simple 3-step autoresponder campaign might look:

- Immediate – "Thanks for downloading our Widget buyer's guide"
- 3 days later – "10 reasons to buy widgets from us"
- 4 days later – "Special offers for first-time widget buyers"

Of course, your campaign can (and probably should) be more elaborate than that. You can also create an autoresponder campaign for new customers (offering them add-ons, up-sells, and new models).

One of the most robust and simple to implement autoresponders that we have found is **IntelliContact** (www.intellicontact.com). Their monthly fees are reasonable, and you get a pretty awesome toolkit for the money.

What's Next?

Earlier in this guide, I mentioned that you should be able to implement these tactics in a day or so, and I'm serious. I'd imagine a day for planning, copy writing, etc, and a day for actual web changes.

As I also mentioned earlier, this guide has not attempted to provide an entire view of everything that could or should be done to increase conversion on a website. Instead, we have outlined a fast, but effective way for the web marketer to increase website conversion rate with very little effort.

Since you've reached the end of this guide, I know two things about you. First, you're serious about improving your website results. Second, you understand that you have to invest time and effort to make that happen. With that said, the decision is yours about whether to set this guide aside, wondering whether it would have been effective, or actually implement the tactics and reap the rewards of a higher conversion rate. As you know, increasing website conversion rarely happens by accident. It's a highly pre-meditated activity, and only those companies that implement a specific plan will reach their goals.

Please let me know about your experience. I'd love to hear about your successes and challenges. As fellow web marketers, we're in this together.

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Please send any feedback, comments, and experiences to:
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Conversion Results is a results-based website consulting firm developing high-conversion websites for corporate clients. Project services typically bundle together web strategy planning, copy writing, project management, as well as full graphic design and site creation from a team of marketing, design, and technical experts.

Typical clients have included software development and other technology companies, training and consulting firms, luxury and adventure travel providers, telecommunications firms, and executive recruitment companies.



Mat Greenfield is the founder and CEO of Conversion Results, and has been in marketing since 1996. He is recognized as a website conversion expert by a number of industry organizations including Register.com and Constant Contact. He is a regular contributor to a number of print and e-magazines, and is a monthly columnist for Practical e-Commerce Magazine.

Mat is originally from England where he attended the University of the West of England, Bristol, and the prestigious Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. He now lives in Utah with his wife, Trisa, and their four children.