

Landing Pages That Convert Visitors into Buyers

Your prospects searched for a specific keyword, spotted your ad listing, and clicked on it for more information. Are they sold on your company? Not yet. But they're standing inside your online store. How do you get them to opt-in for follow-up communication from you, or buy something right now? The landing page they're visiting must sell.

This is where companies doing search engine advertising may lose the sale. A vital part of making paid listings work is not just focusing on driving additional traffic to your site or paying less money for the ads. Yes, those are important objectives, but the profitability of your campaigns will spike when you persuade a higher number of your site visitors to become customers. An effective landing page, often referred to as a destination URL or target URL, impacts your bottom line.

Provide a Direct Path

Do not, I repeat do not, send search engine users to your home page without a very convincing reason. The home page of a web site acts as a mall directory does for an offline business. Both home page visitors and mall directory viewers are shown possible directions in which to begin their shopping experience. If online consumers use a search engine to direct them to a topic but don't see it addressed on the web page they visit, they'll abandon that site. The home page isn't a good landing page because it's too general. It's another set of directions.

Landing pages aren't necessarily part of your main web site. They can be, but it's not required. Pretend you own a flower shop. If your site currently has a page about calla lily floral arrangements, buy calla lily-related keywords and set this as the corresponding landing page. Or, you could send search engine traffic to a promotional page that's hidden on your web site. Because this might be a temporary offer, you won't want this landing page indexed by search engines; use the robots exclusion protocol. It's a text file that you place on your server that instructs search engine spiders to not index a specific area on your site. It would be embarrassing if you remove the ad listing but consumers continue to find this landing page because it appears in the natural search results.

Let's look at a search for "calla lily" on FindWhat.com (refer to Figures 5.1 to 5.5). The last four screen captures are the advertisers' landing pages. In Figure 5.2 you can see that BizRate.com does an excellent job of displaying calla lily flowers offered by online florists. Although Shopping.com (formerly DealTime, as shown in Figure 5.4) doesn't show calla lily flowers as I would have expected, they show a directory of categories where calla lily products are offered. It's relevant. However, on U.S. Southwest's landing page, I can't figure out why the

company bought “calla lily” in the first place. There’s no reference to this keyword in the top half of their page. Like U.S. Southwest, there’s no exact match for “calla lily” on the top portion of the Blooming Bulb landing page either. Did the latter two fail in providing a direct path? Well, if you scroll down these landing pages you’ll eventually find calla lily products. So technically, they didn’t fail. But they violate one of the rules of designing a good landing page to invite the sale, which I address soon.

Figure 5.1 The top four advertisers on FindWhat.com for the keyword “calla lily” are as shown here: BizRate.com, U.S. Southwest, Shopping.com (formerly DealTime), and Blooming Bulb.

The screenshot shows the top of a search results page on FindWhat.com. On the left is a vertical banner with a large question mark and the text "FIND WHAT?". To the right, there are four search results listed:

- Calla Lily: Compare Prices and Ratings**
At BizRate.com, search over 1,500 stores instantly! Compare prices, product features and store ratings to always get the best deal.
<http://www.bizrate.com/> (Advertiser Paid: \$0.12)
- Southwest Decor Accessories & Gifts**
Hot southwest home decor & gifts. Distinct Lazart metal wall art, metal plant stands, gorgeous slumped glass vases, and much more. Secure shopping. Fast shipping.
http://www.us-southwest.com (Advertiser Paid: \$0.11)
- Calla Lily Products- Lowest Prices At DealTime!**
Save time & money every time you shop online: DealTime is a free comparison-shopping service that helps you find the Web's best prices on links to everything from Computers & Electronics to Jewelry, Toys & more.
<http://www.dealtime.com/> (Advertiser Paid: \$0.08)
- Calla Lilies At Wholesale Prices**
bloomingbulb.com now has fall bulbs, flower seed, plants and vines available for ordering. Lots of new items available.
<http://www.bloomingbulb.com/> (Advertiser Paid: \$0.07)

Figure 5.2 BizRate.com’s landing page for “calla lily” on FindWhat.com.

The screenshot shows the BizRate.com landing page for a search on "calla". The page features a navigation bar with categories like Electronics, Computer Hardware, and Home & Garden. Below the search bar, there's a section titled "Matches for calla in Online Florists" with a sub-header "Compare prices, product reviews and store ratings for calla in Online Florists." It includes "Related searches" for Calla Lily, Calla Lilies, Mini Calla Lilies, and Mini Calla. A "Browse Product List" sidebar shows price ranges (\$40-\$60 and \$50-\$60) and stores like 1-800-FLOWERS.COM and BloomsEtc.com. The main content area displays "Matches in Online Florists" with a featured product "Calla Lily Spring Wreath" priced at \$49.99, including a promotional message about a sweepstakes.

Figure 5.3 U.S. Southwest’s landing page for “calla lily” on FindWhat.com.

The screenshot shows the U.S. Southwest landing page. On the left is a vertical navigation menu with buttons for "home", "view cart", "company", "find us", "new products", "specials", "newsletter", "privacy policy", and "shipping policy". The main content area features the "LAZART" logo and the text "Southwest Home Decorating Ideas & Fine Gifts". Below this, there's a welcome message: "Welcome to the US Southwest web site. Every day we have new and unique southwest home & fine gifts that offer refreshing elegance at affordable prices. We offer secured shopping and..." followed by contact information: "If you prefer to talk to one of our sales associates, call toll free 866-565-8877 for immediate assistance (available 10AM-5PM PST)". It also lists accepted payment methods: "Visa, Master Card, American Express, Discover accepted. If you want to pay by check or money order, call toll free 866-565-8877." At the bottom, it mentions "Southwest Home Decorating Ideas electronic gift certificates for use on this web site." and a note: "Please click on an image to see the list of products within that category, to ENLARGE any one of the images to see a full description, prices, and to order."

Figure 5.4 Shopping.com’s (DealTime’s) landing page for “calla lily” on FindWhat.com.

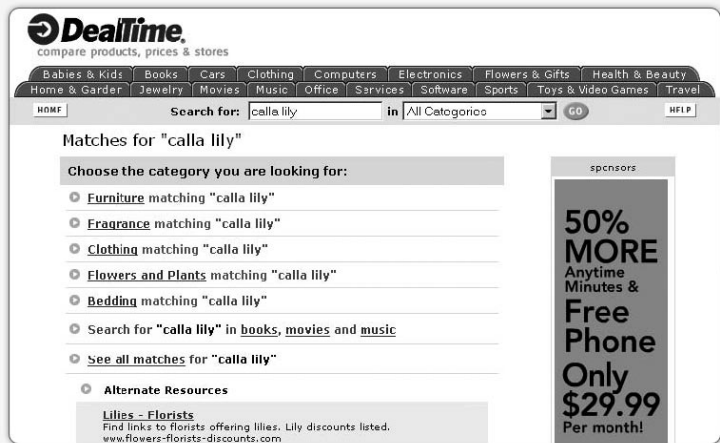


Figure 5.5 Blooming Bulb’s landing page for “calla lily” on FindWhat.com.



If you think TV viewers are speedy clickers while channel surfing, web users exercise even less patience. Many web site design agencies believe that your visitors should get the information they’re looking for within three clicks from your home page. But why make them click three more times if they already clicked your search engine listing to transport them to the requested information? Because you selected the keyword and wrote the listing, you know what visitors want. Design your landing page to show them the merchandise and then lead them to the checkout line.

Complete the Message from Your Ad Listing

I’ll continue with the calla lily example. Does the content on these companies’ landing pages match their ad listing copy? Let’s doublecheck BizRate.com and Shopping.com, because they passed the first step with flying colors (refer to Figures 5.1, 5.2, and 5.4). Can shoppers compare prices and products pertaining to calla lilies on both of these companies’ landing pages? Yes. Although Shopping.com gets an extra point for being more exact—they compare calla lily products, as specifically mentioned in their ad, whereas BizRate.com compares the prices of online florists, which they don’t mention specifically in their ad listing.

When you lead your site visitors down the path of making a purchase, ensure your landing page follows through on the promise promoted in your ad listing. For example, if you own a flower shop that claims to deliver fresh flowers direct from the grower, then shoppers need to see this benefit featured on the landing page, so they know it exists. You begin to establish trust with your site visitors when you carry the message throughout your marketing campaign, from the ad to your landing page. Gaining consumer trust increases

initial sales—plus, it’s a fundamental component in developing loyal customers, instead of one-time buyers.

Design Page Layout to Invite the Sale

You’re almost there. All you need to do now is ask for the sale! How your landing page is designed impacts your conversion rates. Does your current page lead shoppers down the path to a purchase, or does it let them wander aimlessly around your site? Here are some suggestions to reduce distraction while leading customers to the checkout line.

Position Critical Information Above the Fold

Product information, incentives, and the order button should all be seen on your landing page without scrolling. This section of a web page is also referred to as “above the fold.” Verify that key selling information is visible on multiple computer screen resolutions. Your Webmaster may have designed your site for a 1024×768 screen resolution, without considering other sizes. Your audience members who use an 800×600 screen resolution will see a smaller portion of the web page (compare Figures 5.6 and 5.7). Can’t they scroll down? Of course they can. But it’s just one more step you can eliminate to let them complete their purchase a little easier and faster.

Figure 5.6 Here is Blooming Bulb’s landing page for “calla lily” at an 800×600 screen resolution.

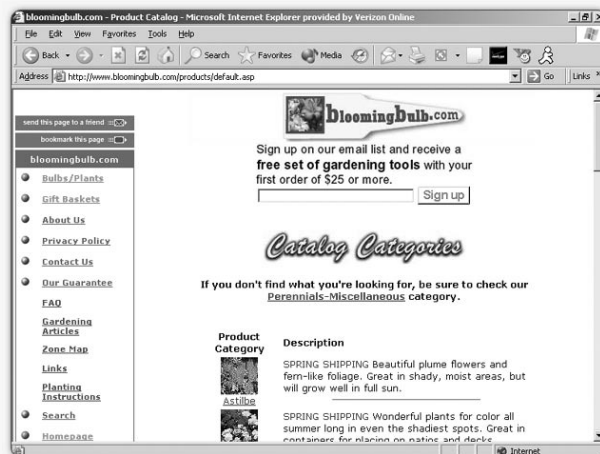
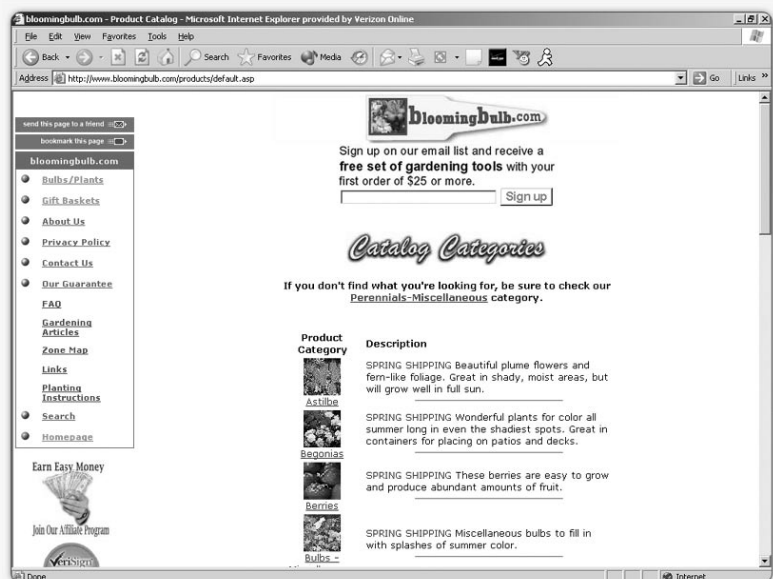


Figure 5.7 Here is Blooming Bulb’s landing page for “calla lily” at a 1024×768 screen resolution.



Reduce Navigational Choices

One of the reasons why home pages don't work well as landing pages is that they have too many navigational choices. With links and buttons everywhere, picking a path can be overwhelming. Landing pages should have fewer links on the page. Some companies completely remove their navigation bar and provide only links to information that will help them complete the sale (such as shipping information and the privacy policy).

What you allow your customers to visit when they're on your landing page is up to you. Just don't give them so many choices that they'll leave that product shelf in your store to walk around. That's almost announcing "Hey, before you buy that, do you want to take a tour?" You have a stronger chance of losing them if you distract them before they've finishing shopping. Once they complete their purchase, then you can take them to a "thank you" page that offers them site-visiting suggestions.

Use Action Words

Have you ever been ready to buy something online, and once you're on that product page thought, "Where's the buy button?" On occasion, it's only a text link, and I'm looking for a graphic image to click. Put action words like "buy" or "order" in text links and as graphics. Adding "today," "here," or "now" to these words contributes to the sense of urgency you want to foster. Hotlink the product image to your order form, too.

If you offer an option in addition to making a purchase, give that option secondary placement. For two buttons stacked on top of each other, put "Buy Now!" above "Product Details." Encourage the sale first. I was on a site recently that put "Clear Form" before "Submit Form." I must have filled that thing out twice before I hit the correct button. I'm used to seeing the "submit" button first, and the reversed order threw me...twice!

Placement of your action words on a web page matters. According to Shari Thurow, marketing director and Webmaster for Grantastic Designs, usability studies across the board report that people tend to ignore the top 60 pixels of a screen because that's the typical placement for banner ads. Consumers have developed "banner blindness." Keeping that in mind, place the buy button in a prominent area of the screen, such as the middle of the screen, and use a different color to really draw eyes to it.

Three Psychological Factors of Selling

Getting the sale isn't always about offering the lowest price or a freebie—although these help. You probably can't afford to offer a hot deal every day. It may have to be used as a seasonal sales boost. Your product or service needs to sell on its own merit. Look back at the competitive advantages you wrote down as your unique selling points. How do these speak to the emotional needs of your customers?

In addition to making your offer compelling, Dr. Ralph Wilson, web marketing and e-commerce expert, recommends using these psychological factors to sell: enhance desire, create a rationale, and build trust.

Enhance Desire

To enhance the desire for your products or services, you need to enhance your copy with words that draw your customer in emotionally. As Dr. Wilson points out in his e-book *How to Develop a Landing Page That Closes the Sale*, "Write sentences and paragraphs that paint for your prospect what it will feel like to realize those benefits."

Look at your unique selling points, or the ones I created for Red Mountain Spa as an example. Those aren't landing-page ready. Here's one:

Number and diversity of fitness classes: over 35 weekly programs including yoga and gentle martial arts emphasis—Yoga, YogaSpin, Pilates, Chi Ball Method, T'ai Chi, Ai Chi.

That's descriptive, but does it make you feel anything? I'm guessing not. How could Red Mountain Spa emotionally sell this feature as a benefit? How about this:

Soothe stress away through Yoga, Chi Ball, and any of Red Mountain Spa's 35 weekly health programs. Pamper your body and spirit at our all-inclusive retreat, which is surrounded by the American Southwest's natural beauty.

—or—

Get in shape and re-energize through YogaSpin, Pilates, and any of Red Mountain Spa's 35 weekly fitness classes. Your all-inclusive adventure in rejuvenation awaits your arrival.

—or—

Refresh your body, mind, and spirit through Yoga, Chi Ball, Pilates, or any of Red Mountain Spa's 35 health and fitness programs. Your all-inclusive vacation in relaxation and rejuvenation awaits you in the natural beauty of the American Southwest.

How will the vacation described in number one make you feel? Relaxed, less stressed, and peaceful were a few feelings I was going for. How about number two? The words set a completely different tone. These words would attract someone who wants to feel energized, challenged, and adventurous. I combined the two kinds of desires—relaxation and rejuvenation—in the third example.

This copy could be used in the ad listing as well as on the landing page. These examples don't just state the fact that Red Mountain Spa has an extensive list of fitness classes. They tap into people's desire for the benefits.

Create a Rationale

Not everyone buys on emotional appeal alone. That's where your competitive advantages come into play. For example, Red Mountain Spa even offers fitness junkies more classes than they can attend in a week. The spa's number and diversity of classes are impressive, and should be included in their landing page copy. Their program selection appeals to the logical side of people who may think "Well, out of 35 classes I'm bound to enjoy some of them. If I choose a spa that offers only a few, I'm at risk for not liking any." Sold! Combine emotional appeal with rationale and you'll connect with people through one or the other.

Build Trust

Anticipate customer concerns and proactively respond to them on the landing page. Dr. Wilson notes that credit card security, shipping costs, return policies, and email privacy are the primary concerns for doing business online. It's beneficial for any company to tackle these issues on their landing page, in addition to answering potential questions about the offer. Helping shoppers feel secure about doing business online with you is the final step before a deal is made. Although I didn't find a Red Mountain Spa listing in a search engine, they have web site material that would make a good landing page. Take a look at Figure 5.8, which is a pop-up on their home page, and 5.9, which is the landing page for the pop-up ad. Let's review how well this page does according to the landing page checklist:

Landing Page Checklist for Red Mountain Spa	YES	NO
Is a direct path provided?	X	
Is the message from the ad completed?	X	
Is critical information above the fold?	X	
Are there reduced navigational choices?		X
Are action words used?		X
Is desire enhanced?	X	
Is a rationale presented?	X	
Is trust being established?	X	

Figure 5.8 This is a pop-up ad on Red Mountain Spa's home page.



Figure 5.9 Here's the landing page once Red Mountain Spa's pop-up ad is clicked.

Summer Bring a Friend Package
\$209 per person, per night*

July 1 - August 31, 2003

Our Bring a Friend Package includes:

- Each Guest Will Receive \$100 in Resort Credit!*
- Friendship Welcome Gift for Two
- Three Gourmet Meals Daily
- Superior Accommodations
- Daily Guided Hiking in a Breathtaking Red Rock Setting
- Unlimited Use of Fitness Facilities & Classes
- Special Guest Speakers & Events
- [Red Mountain Core Program](#)

And don't forget, \$39 Massages All Summer Long!!

*Rate is per person, per night, based on double occupancy and subject to availability. Minimum 3-night stay. One \$39 massage per guest, per night, subject to availability. Resort credit valid toward Adventure Trips, Health Assessments and Outfitters Shop. Credits are not valid for spa services or alcoholic beverages. Massages and resort credit non-transferable. Not valid in conjunction with any other offer. Offer valid through 8/31/03. Single rate is \$249 per night.

[Contact Us](#)

[Remove My Email](#)

The good stuff: Red Mountain Spa's landing page highlights the special rates promoted in the pop-up ad. It also houses the relevant information inside an 800x600 screen resolution. The financial incentives appeal to visitors' logical side; the photo appeals to the visual senses by showing a peaceful location set in natural beauty.

For a few items on the checklist, Red Mountain Spa missed the mark. Because the pop-up simply sends some-

one to a designated spot within a web page, the main site navigation is easily found if visitors scroll up the page. Other promotional offers share the page space, too. These items provide distraction. Second, there are no action words or graphics encouraging people to book a trip today. Just a few minor edits could help drive people into their reservation form. Overall, this works pretty well as a landing page to their pop-up ad. This concept could easily be turned into a search engine ad listing.

- Catherine Seda, author of the bestselling book Search Engine Advertising and editor of the Search Engine Sales e-zine, is a popular conference speaker on the topics of search engine marketing, affiliate management and low-cost web site promotion. She's known for sharing practical tips in client training sessions and in her articles for Entrepreneur and Ballyhoo magazine plus other business publications.

Through her agency, Seda Communication, Catherine offers search engine seminars and she leads a team of search engine specialists in managing corporate search engine marketing campaigns.