

7 tactics to use your value proposition to guide your strategy

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Quick Guide to Website Optimization

Website Optimization: 7 tactics to use your value proposition to guide your strategy

Author

Bobbi Dempsey, Editor, Quick Guide to Website Optimization

Contributors

Austin McCraw, Content Production Manager Selena Blue, Reporter

Editor

Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

Production Editor

Erin Hogg, Copy Editor



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TACTICS YOU CAN LEARN OVER LUNCH

Welcome to *Quick Guide to Website Optimization* – a resource from MarketingSherpa featuring bite-sized tips for busy marketers.

In this report, we give you ideas to ensure your value proposition plays a central role in your website strategy.

Website optimization involves many different elements. In fact, it can often seem as if there is a never-ending series of things you can tweak, test and perhaps even totally re-invent when optimizing your website.

But, it would make sense that your first and most important priority should be to ensure your value proposition is central to all of the content on your website. The value proposition is, after all, the foundation of everything else you will do, and serves as the root of all your communication materials.

In this report, we'll show you:

- How to develop the right value proposition
- Tips for using testimonials as part of your strategy
- Ways to get started with landing pages
- Why testing and an open mind are important

We know you're in a hurry, so let's begin. We're eager to share these tips on how you can use your value proposition to optimize your website.

Bobbi Dempsey
Editor, Quick Guide to Website Optimization

About Quick Guide to Website Optimization

MarketingSherpa's *Quick Guide to Website Optimization* is designed with you, the busy marketer, in mind. We provide quick, simple tips you can use right away.

For each *Quick Guide*, we scour the vast MECLABS library of marketing research, from MarketingSherpa case studies and Benchmark Reports to MarketingExperiments optimization tests and analysis. We highlight tips to help improve your marketing performance right now ... or at least by the time you're done with lunch.

Tactic #1. Identify your value proposition

Obviously, you can't work your value proposition into your website content and design until you've first identified what your value proposition is. Ideally, you've already done this – it is, after all, the first and most important step in an effective marketing campaign. But, if you haven't yet finalized your value proposition, or aren't sure it's the best it can be, we have a few quick tips to help you get started.

First, you must realize your value proposition is essentially the answer to a single question in the mind of every visitor that lands on your website: If I am your ideal prospect, why should I buy from you rather than your competitors?

Next, you want your value proposition to be short and sweet, around 10 words or less.

Your message must also stress what makes your product or service special and unique. You must show what makes you different – as in, better – than your competitors.

There is much more we can tell you about developing a value proposition, but it's too much to cover in this limited space. To learn about value propositions in much greater detail, check out the <u>MECLABS Value Proposition</u> Development Online Course.

Tactic #2. Keep it simple

In the MarketingSherpa Research Chart, "<u>Top-rated tactics for developing value propositions that resonate and convert</u>," 71% of respondents ranked "clarity" as the top tactic for developing the most effective value proposition for their organization.

This means clearly explaining the value of your product or service. This is something every marketer should easily be able to do. Yet, many people make this much more complicated than it needs to be. Don't bury your message in lots of fluff or text intended to enhance your value, but really just weighs down your reader with too much stuff to read. Keep the message simple and clearly state why your product or service would help your readers.

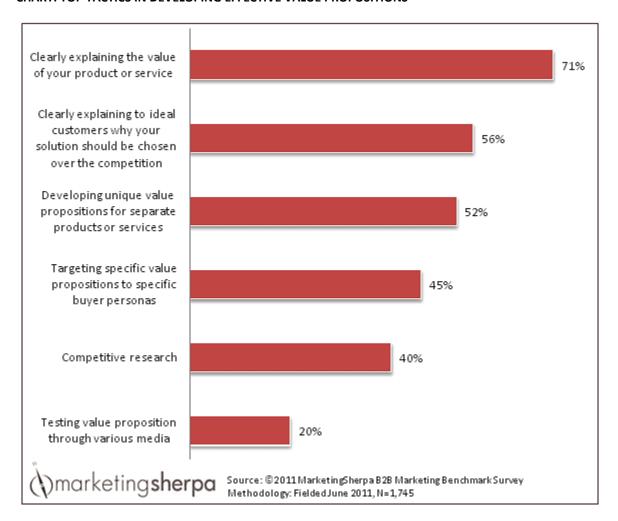


CHART: TOP TACTICS IN DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE VALUE PROPOSITIONS

The MarketingExperiments Blog post, "Landing Page Optimization: Value-focused revamp leads to 188% lead gen boost, increase in personal interaction," shared some tips and examples to help you ensure your main value proposition isn't diluted or hidden by other content.

Tactic #3. Use a PPC ad to test your value proposition

In the MarketingExperiments Blog post, "How to Test Your Value Proposition Using a PPC Ad," Austin McCraw, Senior Editorial Analyst, MECLABS, said, "Although seemingly small and comparatively insignificant, a PPC ad can provide an invaluable resource for marketers trying to identify and craft an effective value proposition."

McCraw said, "PPC advertisements provide a testing environment uniquely suitable for value propositions. It is almost as if search marketing was designed as a custom-fit workout for value propositions. Think about it – how often do you find a testing environment that naturally keeps value proposition in isolation, provides strict constraints on the amount of words you can use, all the while, pitting you against your top competitors?"

Let's take these one by one:

- 1. **Value is isolated** First, in a PPC ad, you are primarily testing statements of value. Friction is not an issue you can control, nor are there significant sources of anxiety at this stage in the process. At the bottom of it all, it's how you craft a statement of value that determines the effectiveness of a PPC ad.
- 2. **Succinctness is forced** Next, due to the constraints on the amount of characters per line, marketers are forced to tightly craft their statements of value. Remember, the most effective value propositions are the ones that can be stated in 10 words or less. PPC ads force you to do this.
- 3. **Competition is present** And finally with PPC ads, your competition is always a few pixels away, meaning when running a campaign, you are directly testing your claims of value against your competitors'. Why should your ideal prospect buy from you rather than your competitors? Well, PPC enables your customers to vote directly.

There are more reasons why PPC ads are uniquely suitable for testing value propositions – the low costs, quick statistical validation, the ability to isolate traffic sources – but the above three are the most noteworthy.

The actual testing process usually involves a three-stage approach.

In **STAGE ONE**, the most compelling reasons why your ideal prospect should buy from you rather than your competitors are determined.

In **STAGE TWO**, you craft and test unique PPC ads for each of the compelling reasons identified in the first stage. Often, multiple PPC ads should be created for each concept to ensure optimal wording.

Finally, in **STAGE THREE**, you take the top performing concepts based on the PPC testing and begin to integrate them, not necessarily in isolation, into the design of your landing pages to be tested.

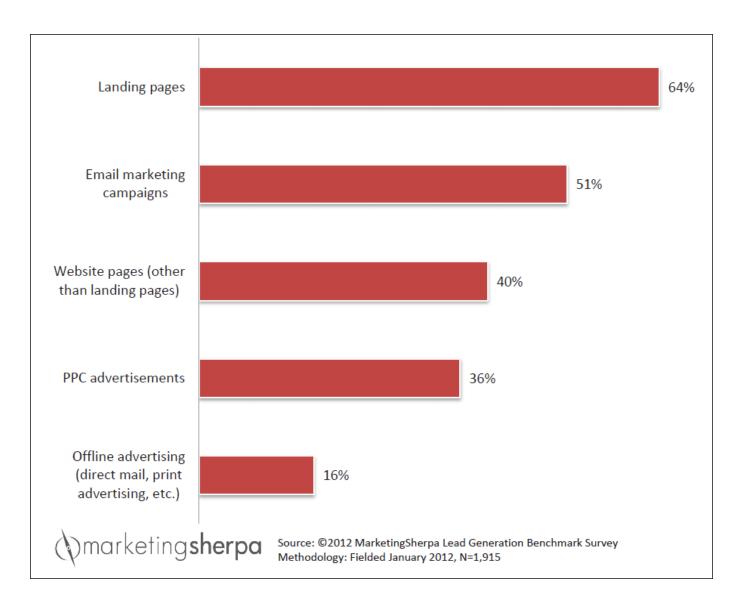
Tactic #4. Start with landing pages

When it comes to optimizing your website, landing pages are often seen as low-hanging fruit – an easy and obvious place to start. This is true when it comes to focusing on your value proposition. Landing pages usually have a specific goal and purpose, so it is relatively easy to analyze the content, find ways to infuse your value proposition, and test the results.

The chart below from the MarketingSherpa <u>2012 Lead Generation Benchmark Report</u> (free excerpt at the link) shows the most effective methods for testing value propositions, with landing pages a clear front-runner.

CHART: MOST EFFECTIVE TESTING METHODS FOR VALUE PROPOSITION

Q. Which methods have been the most effective at testing your value proposition? Select up to three responses.



Note: For much more help in optimizing your landing pages, check out the <u>MECLABS Landing Page Optimization Online Course.</u>

Tactic #5. Include testimonials wisely on your landing pages

When conveying your value proposition, credibility is an important factor. One way to establish credibility is by using testimonials. But, just any random testimonials won't do. You need to give some careful thought as to what kind of testimonials you should use – and where and how you should share them.

In the MarketingExperiments Blog post, "Online Testing: 6 test ideas to optimize the value of testimonials on your site," Selena Blue, Reporter, MECLABS, said testimonials and reviews can be powerful tools on your website or landing pages.

"As external factors, they have the ability to relieve customer anxiety on almost any issue. From concerns on product quality to cost justification to usability, testimonials can be used to alleviate very specific areas of anxiety," Blue said.

Blue shared ways to get started with including testimonials, but since individual results may vary, it's important to test all of these suggestions to see what works best for you.

Here are a few things to consider:

Location on page – Proximity is the degree to which your corrective measures – testimonials, in this case – are placed so they are experienced at the same time as, or as soon after as possible, the moment anxiety is stimulated. Testing different locations on your pages at different points of anxiety along the path to purchase could help optimize the value of your testimonials and improve conversions.

Length of testimonial – Some testimonials are quick and to the point, others fill a page with every detail possible. While some audiences might only require a short testimonial to alleviate any worry, other purchasers may require more in-depth information.

Geotargeting testimonials – When potential customers look at testimonials or reviews, it can help them better relate to the experience if they feel connected to the reviewer. One basic way to do this is by geotargeting your testimonials.

In the MarketingExperiments Blog post, "Credibility: 9 elements that help make your marketing claims more believable," Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, MECLABS, suggested some other tools that can help establish credibility, such as case studies, reviews and industry awards.

Tactic #6. Gauge the effectiveness of landing pages through A/B testing

With optimization, you must constantly research best practices when creating material such as landing pages. But then, you must make sure you test your pages to see what actually works best for you, your unique product, and your unique customers. Relying on outdated ideas can negatively impact your results, and also cause you to fail to consider newer strategies that may be more effective.

In the MarketingExperiments Blog post, "<u>Web Usability: Long landing page nets 220% more leads than above the fold call-to-action</u>," Burstein addressed the classic Web usability "best practice" that says you should place the call-to-action above the fold.

He looked at a recent discovery from the MECLABS research lab involving a landing page for Sierra Tucson, an addiction and mental health rehabilitation facility. The control was an average, short-form page template with a rotating banner. The call-to-action was above the fold on the right-hand side of the landing page.

EXAMPLE: CONTROL OF SIERRA TUCSON LANDING PAGE



After analyzing the control landing page, the MECLABS team identified a few possible areas for optimization:

- The page layout causes <u>friction</u> because elements of the value proposition are hidden within the navigation.
- The lack of value proposition on the page does not encourage users to contact the facility.

Based on this analysis, the team crafted the following hypothesis ...

Hypothesis: If we increase the value proposition throughout the copy on the homepage and decrease friction with a long-form page layout, then users will be more likely to convert.

In the optimized page, navigation was omitted and a long-form format was used to include all of the information a visitor might want to know on the first page. The value proposition was also emphasized in the headline and the body copy to boost exclusivity, appeal and credibility – essential elements of a good value proposition.

Essentially, the treatment was a single-column, long-form structure with the call-to-action down at the bottom of the page. It was nearly twice the length of the control.

EXAMPLE: TREATMENT OF SIERRA TUCSON LANDING PAGE



In what may be a shocking result, the treatment generated a 220% higher conversion rate with a 98% level of confidence.

The bottom line: By utilizing a single-column long-copy approach, the treatment better guided the prospect's thought process.

Tactic #7. Work your way through all webpages

Once you've identified your value proposition and gotten your feet wet by optimizing your landing pages with that focus in mind, followed by testing those landing pages to find out what really works, you can then start evaluating and optimizing all of your other webpages. To learn more about how testing landing pages can provide valuable insight you can apply to homepages and the rest of your site, even when those tests produce negative lifts, check out the transcripts from our <u>Web clinic on negative lifts</u>.

For example, once you've tested your value proposition in a PPC ad, and then tested the winners from those experiments on landing pages, you can turn to your most prominent real estate – homepages.

This may seem like an intimidating task, so to give yourself motivation, keep this in mind: Because value propositions are so important to conversion, making even just a few small but crucial changes to your pages can have a big impact across all of your marketing efforts, in important and measurable ways.

The MarketingExperiments article, "<u>Powerful Value Propositions: How to Optimize this Critical Marketing Element</u> — <u>and Lift Your Results</u>," explained how you can optimize your pages to express and support the value proposition using *congruence*.

What is congruence? It refers to having every element of your page either state or support the value proposition.

One of the examples in this article involved the University of New England's original landing page, which was submitted for review at a MarketingExperiments landing page workshop. With the "before" version, workshop participants had trouble pinpointing the value proposition and felt there was too much text on the page to try and find it.

EXAMPLE: UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND ORIGINAL PAGE

Strategies for Inclusion

Learn best practices in inclusion Recieve free training & support www.kitonline.org

100% Online MSEd Degree

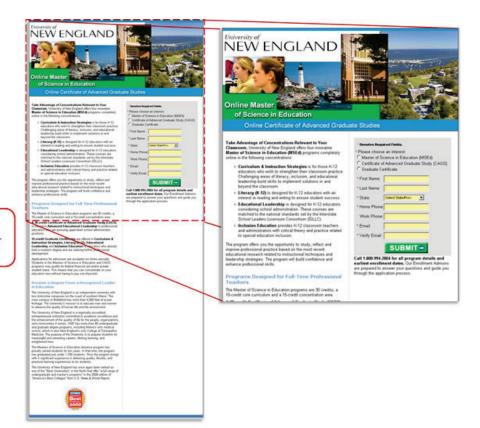
Masters Degree in Education Accredited, 18 Months, No GRE/MAT EducationalLeadership.UNE.edu

Inclusion in Education

Research and read books, journals, articles at Questia Online Library www.Questia.com

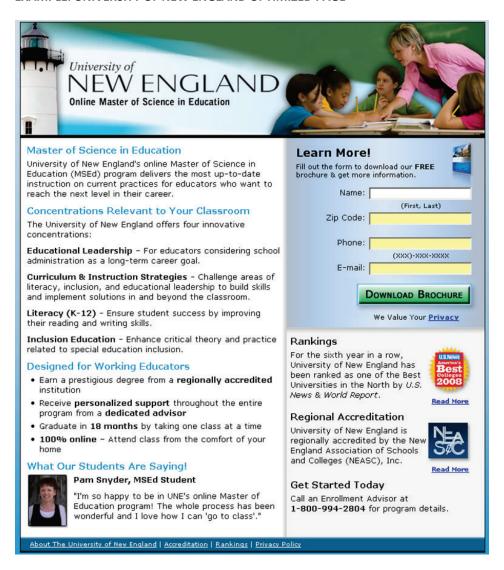
Women Waging Peace

Conflict Specific Expertise for Gender Inclusion. www.HuntAlternatives.org/Gender



The optimized "after" version was much more effective in conveying the value proposition.

EXAMPLE: UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND OPTIMIZED PAGE



Key differences in how the value proposition is now expressed include:

- Stronger introduction copy. Descriptive subheads do a better job of expressing the value proposition.
- Cleaner masthead image conveys end result of the degree, rather than features of the campus, which are not relevant for online coursework.
- Prominent credibility indicators, like the US News rank and badge, support the value proposition.

In another example from the same article, David Smith from the Down & Feather Company also submitted their homepage for review at the workshop.

This is the original value proposition Smith submitted for the clinic:

"We don't harm the birds to acquire the down and we allow our customers the ability to have their pillow firmness adjusted for one year from the date of purchase for FREE. No one else in the industry provides such service. Pillows are very personal and difficult enough to select at a big box retailer much less over the Internet sight unseen. Quite simply the finest down bedding in the world."

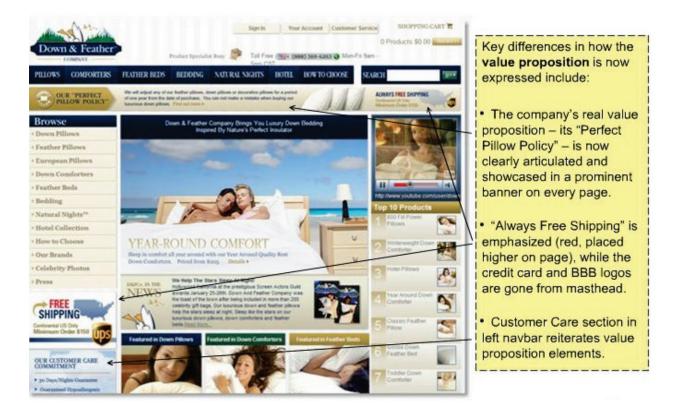
This example underscores the importance of identifying your true value proposition before trying to communicate it. The original homepage did not communicate the stated ideas adequately, much less emphasize them.

EXAMPLE: DOWN & FEATHER ORIGINAL PAGE



The truly unique features of Smith's value proposition were buried in a long, complex sentence that probably was skipped over by most visitors. The customized pillow policy, the true value proposition, was not expressed on the original homepage at all.

EXAMPLE: DOWN & FEATHER OPTIMIZED PAGE



Key differences in how the value proposition is expressed in the optimized version include:

- The company's real value proposition its "Perfect Pillow Policy" is now clearly articulated and showcased in a prominent banner on every page.
- "Always Free Shipping" is emphasized in red, placed higher on page, while the credit card and BBB logos are gone from masthead.
- The Customer Care section in left navigation bar reiterates value points.

Both companies used **congruence** to revise copy and design elements, and present a more direct message focused on the uniqueness and credibility of the value proposition.

As clinic attendees pointed out, some value propositions were already in there, but not fully expressed. Sometimes re-crafting a value proposition is simply a matter of reorganizing the information already expressed.

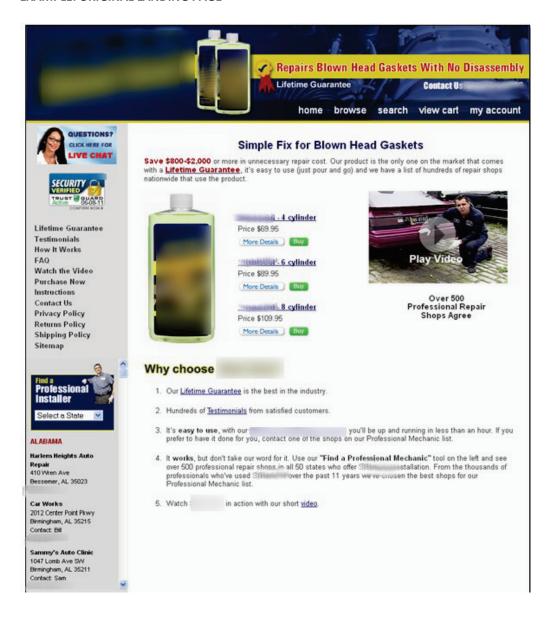
Sometimes a page does include a clear, well-written value proposition, but it gets lost in a multitude of other distracting elements included on the page.

In the MarketingExperiments Blog post, "Landing Page Test: Why less equaled (54%) more when reducing friction and highlighting value proposition," Brad Bortone, Senior Research Editor, MECLABS, showed why including too much stuff onto your page can be a bad thing because it overwhelms visitors and prevents them from focusing on the most important things: your value proposition and the call-to-action.

In the test, Bortone analyzed a landing page from one of our Research Partners, a specialized automotive product retailer. Despite a history of successful online sales since 1999, the company found conversion rates were remaining lower than expected, even with a considerable marketing push.

Upon evaluating the company's landing page, Bortone and the research team found while the page seemed clean and easy to navigate, there was no distinct eye path or logical thought process for the user to follow.

EXAMPLE: ORIGINAL LANDING PAGE



Though there is a clear value proposition included in the header of the body copy, the user is then drawn in two different directions – to the product image on the left, and the video demonstration on the right. To further complicate matters, the user is presented with three purchase options next to the solitary product image. At this point, there has been no less than four calls-to-action before visitors arrive at statements supporting the initial value proposition atop the page.

This only serves to confuse potential customers, likely resulting in page abandonment. The supporting statements, needed earlier, appear underneath the confusion. But, they are lengthy, not easily scanned by users, and are buried at the bottom of the page, likely below the fold for most users.

To optimize this page, the team designed a completely new layout for the product page that reduced friction through a reduced number of calls-to-action, while better clarifying value proposition via more logical thought sequences.

EXAMPLE: OPTIMIZED LANDING PAGE



The product image is now the primary focal point of the page, no longer competing with the video testimonial atop the page. A succinct, scannable product description accompanies the image, not only conveying thorough messaging, but also funneling the user's eye path to a supportive value statement, the money-back guarantee seal, and ultimately, the primary call-to-action.

Additional value statements adorn the left-hand navigation, which was a relatively useless section on the control, each supporting buyer confidence through easily scanned subheads like "Lifetime Guarantee," "100% Safe & Secure" and "Shop Confidently."

The lower half of the page continues the supportive value statements with a BBB rating icon, finally ending with a quick explanation of how the product can easily fix your car, both in text and the testimonial video.

Useful Links and Resources:

MarketingExperiments Blog – Value Proposition: A simple spreadsheet to help you categorize your products' value

MarketingSherpa Blog – Value Proposition: 4 questions every marketer should ask about value prop

MarketingExperiments Blog – Customer Value: The 4 essential levels of value propositions

<u>MarketingSherpa Article – Landing Page Optimization: Simple, value-infused page increases leads 8% in 24-hour test</u>

<u>MarketingSherpa Article – Optimization Summit 2013 Wrap-up: Top 5 takeaways for testing websites, pay-per-click ads and email</u>

About MarketingSherpa LLC

MarketingSherpa LLC is a research firm publishing case studies, benchmark data and how-to information read by hundreds of thousands of advertising, marketing and PR professionals every week.

Praised by *The Economist*, Harvard Business School's Working Knowledge Site and Entrepreneur.com, MarketingSherpa offers practical, results-based marketing information researched and written by a dedicated staff of in-house reporters.

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