MECLABS
QUARTERLY RESEARCH DIGEST

Volume II, Issue 3

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For permissions: research@meclabs.com
Dear Marketer,

Welcome to the MECLABS Quarterly Research Digest – a snapshot of the research and content across MECLABS Institute.

To help you discover the most useful content published by the MECLABS’ brands, we’ve put together a collection of our most popular work from the third quarter of 2014.

We look at our readers’ social shares to learn what pieces of content they have found most helpful over the quarter. We include MECLABS’ three content-producing sites:

- **MarketingExperiments** – The most popular post of each month, as featured in the MarketingExperiments Best of the Month Newsletter
- **MarketingSherpa** – The most-shared Chart of the Week, case study or how-to article of each week, as featured in the MarketingSherpa Best of the Week Newsletter
- **B2B Lead Roundtable Blog** – The most-tweeted post of each month

Additionally, we included an article for each MarketingExperiments Web clinic published during the quarter. You’ll gain access to the latest research findings, along with actionable optimization advice, in these Web clinic reports.

In the appendix of this Digest, you will find two additional resources:

- **Marketing Research Charts of the Week** – A section dedicated to MarketingSherpa’s benchmark studies, where we include all of the research featured in the weekly MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week Newsletter
- **MECLABS Content Directory** – This comprehensive directory allows you to scan through the titles and summaries of every piece of MECLABS content produced this quarter to find additional works to help your marketing efforts.
  - 29 MarketingSherpa case studies
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How To Use This Digest

- 23 MarketingExperiments articles
- 2 Web clinic video replays
- 12 B2B Lead Roundtable articles
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While this is a collection of our most popular work, not every piece may be relevant to your unique situation. That’s why we developed a two-part table of contents to help you effortlessly find information important to your specific needs.

- **Topic of Content** – Easily filter through the table of contents by looking up the most relevant areas for your marketing campaigns

- **Content Type** – Search our content by type, from how-to articles and research charts to case studies and Web clinics

We trust this collection will be beneficial to you in your marketing efforts and help you discover new insights as you implement and test the tactics and strategies you find in this *Digest*.

Happy reading,

Selena Blue
Partnership Content Manager, MECLABS Institute
Selena.Blue@MECLABS.com

P.S. If you conduct an interesting experiment, we would love to learn about your work. Feel free to send us the details at editor@meclabs.com. We will carefully reflect on the implications of your findings and potentially publish them (with your permission) in a future edition of the *MECLABS Quarterly Research Digest*.
\[ c = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a \]

\[ eme = rv(of + i) - (f + a) \]
Landing Page Optimization: What a 29% Drop in Conversion Can Teach You About Friction
- John Tackett, Partnership Content Manager

I’m sure most of you have heard the old proverb: The road to ruin is paved with the best of intentions.

In fact, if you have a different version of it, feel free to share it in the comments below.

The proverb is a great example of the subtle dangers in optimizing a process with no perspective on how the big picture is potentially impacted by those changes.

In this MarketingExperiments Blog post, I wanted to take a close look at a checkout process experiment and what we can all learn from this company when it comes to identifying the subtle dangers in optimization that often accompany intention.

Friction is a psychological reservation toward your desired outcome

What is friction?

![Diagram of checkouts process before and after optimization]
Before we get started, I want to first explain what friction is. MarketingExperiments defines friction as “a psychological resistance to a given element in a sales process.”

So when you optimize to reduce friction, you’re really optimizing to reduce the reasons a person has for not taking your desired action.

Also, friction exists everywhere, but the slide above does a really nice job of providing a simple illustration of reducing fiction in a form.

**You may make a process shorter ...**

**Danger #1. Increasing Difficulty**

Friction is not always so easy to identify and eliminate. Take a look at these two versions of a checkout process for example.

Version A is a three-step cart checkout process that is a little lengthy.

The MECLABS research team hypothesized that by shortening the steps into a one-page accordion checkout process (Version B), they could reduce length-oriented friction.
… but it’s no guarantee that it’s easier for a customer

The accordion-style checkout in Version B decreased conversion 29%. Ouch!

But there’s an even more important question here: Why did an increasingly popular checkout process get trounced by the process that looks more burdensome?
WHAT YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND

Danger #1. Increasing Difficulty

\[ f_{Sc} = l_T + d_T \]

**Wherein:**
- \( f_{Sc} \) = Friction of sales conversion
- \( l_T \) = Length (time)
- \( d_T \) = Difficulty

**Design Elements**
- Eye-path
- Options Selection
- Button Design
- Organization
- Flash Video

For more on friction: MECLABS.com/LPO

One plausible explanation from the MECLABS research team is that while they may have reduced the length of the process, they inadvertently increased the perceived difficulty of the checkout.

As a result, the conversion rate dropped, which leads to my point about friction.

Although reducing friction is considered one of the more effective ways to improve the performance of a webpage, you have to be cautious of undermining the conversation with your customers.

When you undermine conversation, you also risk undermining the building of trust with customers.
\[ c = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a \]

\[ \text{eme} = rv(of + i) - (f + a) \]
Email Marketing
400%.

That’s how much mobile email opens have increased in just three years.

“Which is kind of crazy,” Justine Jordan, Marketing Director, Litmus, said following the recent statistics from Litmus’ research on mobile.

And she’s right. How many channels increase that much in usage in that short amount of time? Not many.

Because of the sudden growth, not all marketing departments have been able to keep up with the trend.

With 50% of emails being opened on a mobile device, mobile email strategy is worth considering for any market, even B2B companies.

Justine spoke at MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2014 as an industry perspective in the session, “Email Design: How to optimize for all environments in a mobile world.”

She joined Allison Banko, Reporter, MECLABS, in the MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2014 Media Center. There, she recapped her industry perspective session, as well as hit on two mistakes she still sees among mobile emails: content strategy and best practices of mobile design.

“It’s key to get those two things working in tandem to really optimize the full experience,” she said.

You can watch the video here: mecla.bs/JustineJordan
In addition to her industry perspective session, Justine also joined a diverse panel of experts, solution providers and brand-side marketers on responsive email design.

Watch a brief excerpt from that panel discussion here: mecla.bs/EmailPanel

“People are becoming less and less tolerant of crappy mobile experiences. And so, if your email looks horrible on mobile, not only is it going to affect your open and click rates, but you’re probably going to lose them as a subscriber period, because they’re going learn that your emails are not easy to interact with,” Justine explained.

So while subscriber experience is hard to measure, you can’t ignore it because it’s real and it affects your customers with every email you send.

You can learn about challenges of multi-device design and useful tips by watching the full panel session, “Responsive Email Design with Multi-device Customers in Mind”: mecla.bs/EmailSummit2014.
CASL.

You might think the “C” stands for confusion or perhaps concern, at least on the part of marketers.

Those letters stand for the Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation. This law applies not only to Canadian companies, but email marketers anywhere in the world sending messages to Canadian subscribers.

Since this is probably the strictest spam law ever, marketers are growing concerned. Because marketers aren’t lawyers, many are also confused about what they actually have to do.

I’ve spent a few weeks gleaning insights from experts in the field, and here’s what I’ve learned so far.

Lesson #1. A blog post is not a legal opinion

Some marketers have been reading blog posts and other content to try to understand what they must do to comply with CASL.

No piece of content can replace legal advice, including this blog post. If you think there is legitimate exposure for your company, the best thing to do is get legal advice.

CASL is a law, not just an industry best practice or a good idea. If your company breaks the law, it can be legally liable and punished. As with any law, ignorance is not a legal defense.

According to FightSpam.ca, “Penalties for the most serious violations of the Act can go as high as $1 million for individuals and $10 million for businesses.”

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is chartered with enforcing the act.

That said, I’ve included some related reading at the end of this blog post in the “You may also like” section to help you dive deeper into this complex regulation.
Lawyers aren’t the only place you can get some help.

“Become informed and stay on top of it. If you are using an ESP and they are providing any sort of CASL assistance, take advantage of it,” suggested James Koons, Chief Privacy Officer, Listrak.

**Lesson #2. Don’t overreact**

Trusting any blog post or other content at this point is especially fraught because, while CASL is law, interpretation and enforcement of the law is still ongoing. It’s still all very new.

“I think you have to use some common sense.”

That’s what Shaun Brown, a lawyer and partner at nNovation LLP, a Canadian law firm, advised when I spoke with him about CASL. Shaun also went on to say:

“Fortunately, the government decided to delay the private right of action, because the private right of action is a whole other ballgame. It creates incentives for lawyers to find technical violations. The CRTC, we have to assume and I do believe that they’re going to be reasonable and it’s not their goal to try and catch legitimate businesses in technical violations or in a gray area and to really try to punish them. I think it’s going to be their goal to try and reduce some of the worst practices we see out there.

So where there are a lot of gray areas, I don’t want to see people being scared to use email marketing because of these gray areas and lack of certainty. We do have to have a little bit of faith and assume that the CRTC is going to be reasonable on some of these issues.”

**Lesson #3. Keep doing the basics**

There are a few basics in how you send your emails that you should be doing anyway, thanks to CAN-SPAM and being a savvy, successful and ethical marketer who cares about deliverability.
I say *should*, because last time we surveyed marketers about their email practices, only 62% provided an easy unsubscribe process—as the rest simply beg recipients to hit the “SPAM” button and cause major deliverability problems.

Does your email template (perhaps in the footer) include:

- The ability to unsubscribe?
- Your company’s physical address?
- An email address, telephone number or Web address?

**Lesson #4. Understand the Two Types of Consent**

Implied consent and express consent.

Implied consent tends to be when you’ve had a business relationship with recipients in the past, like a purchase or donation.

Express consent is when they specifically opt-in to your list. *It’s a good idea to check your opt-in forms and make sure you are now getting express consent.*

“Make sure you put expiration processes in place to remove subscribers that you are unable to get express consent from or when the time limit for implied consent runs out. Basically, you should have a solid, auditable process in place that shows your CASL compliance in the event of an enforcement action,” James said.

**Lesson #5. Request Further Consent from Some People on Your List**

This is the part marketers tend to be most worried about and for good reason.

As James explained, you may need to send a specific CASL opt-in email message to people on your email list (and gain their express consent through that email) before sending further commercial messages if:

- They are Canadian
- You are sending commercial electronic messages (see Lesson #7 for more on that)
- You do not have a record of express or implied consent

“When launching such a campaign ... target only those recipients who you feel you do not have a verifiable consent for. This will ensure you don’t risk losing a good portion of your subscribers and you are only targeting the ones that you need consent for,” James said.
For those of you doing email, James suggested you “honor unsubscribe requests from folks who don’t wish to receive your communications and remove those who simply don’t respond.”

**Lesson #6. Take the Opportunity to Cleanse Your List**

“I like to remind marketers that if they are sending prior to CASL’s enactment (July 1, 2014) with implied consent, they have until July 1, 2017, to move these subscribers to express consent should they so choose – they can keep sending,” James advised.

Even so, win-back campaigns and list cleansing can have many benefits. CASL could be a good opportunity for you to audit your list and see how active it is, even if you aren’t forced to by CASL.

“This is a great time to review your database and see who you are really sending out to,” said Ben Baker, President, CMYK Solutions.

**Lesson #7. Evaluate Your Newsletters to See If They Are Promotional**

This isn’t a legal opinion, but not every email you send is necessarily a commercial electronic message (CEM).

Marketing, promotional and sales messages likely are CEMs.

However, newsletters that are **content-only** likely aren’t and wouldn’t require a re-opt-in send to comply with CASL.

**Lesson #8. Apply This Law to Other Messages**

CASL covers all commercial electronic messages, including text messages.

**Lesson #9. See the Forest for the (maple) Trees**

While CASL is a law and it is easy to get bogged down in the details, you should understand the spirit of the law, not just the letter of the law.

Really, what the government of Canada came up with is a good idea for every marketer – only send emails to people who want to receive them from you. Everyone should agree on that.
The challenge with CASL isn’t the spirit of the law, then. Instead, it is the record-keeping and restrictions on how you get email opt-ins that may be difficult for many companies.

“Make sure you are keeping an audit trail when collecting consents (IP address, date/time, URL/location, etc.) as the burden of proof lies on the sender. You should be keeping track of the date of your inquiries, purchases or contracts. Also, track the type of consent,” James said.

While some lawyers can be myopic and only focused on legal regulations and risk reduction, I really appreciated how Shaun was able to see the big picture from a marketer’s point of view. I’ll leave the final words on the topic to him:

"Think about what these consumers will expect. Don’t surprise consumers. If it feels right, then maybe do it. If it doesn’t feel right, regardless of the fact that it’s technically compliant, then it’s probably something you shouldn’t be doing."
Overcoming the digital disconnect between the legal space and technology is the mission of The Expert Institute, a New York City-based legal service platform startup. To help combat this challenge, the marketing team wanted to put a name and face to brand communications.

By instituting a monthly email series from the vice president of client relations, the team was able to decrease the unsubscribe rate and increase conversions by 200%.

**Challenge**

Founded in 2010, legal service platform startup The Expert Institute has been growing rapidly — not just in staffing, but also in marketing tactics.

Connecting leading experts from its database with attorneys and investment firms interested in litigation support and investment research is the mission of The Expert Institute, according to Michael Morgenstern, Vice President of Marketing, The Expert Institute.

“The goal of the business is to provide our clients with the most qualified and relevant experts for their professional duties. So if you’re an attorney, and you’re litigating a patent infringement case against a cell phone manufacturer, we want to provide the expert witness who will help win the case,” he said.

The Expert Institute is in a different position than its competitors, he added, simply because “for the most part, our competition, we feel, are older companies, older individuals at the helm of these companies. They’re really not [as] light on their feet as we are.”

With a startup culture combined with recent growth that Morgenstern attributed to the team’s online marketing efforts, he believes they’re overcoming the historical “disconnect between technology and the legal space. That’s where we’re looking to infiltrate to change things.”

Content strategy is one of the most integral parts of online marketing for The Expert Institute, he said. The team works with clients, experts and other thought leaders to produce “insightful content for our audience, who are primarily attorneys actively hiring experts for litigation support.”

The team curates an email newsletter that covers their top content, which is released on a weekly basis to subscribers.

“The reason this ancillary marketing campaign came about is because we were very interested in further capitalizing on this already profitable channel,” he said.
Morgenstern’s team saw examples of personalized outreach coming from other B2B companies and recognized an opportunity for themselves.

It gave them the idea that “while we’re trying to provide as much value with our email newsletter, we can also position ourselves to politely and somewhat softly engage our users and let them know that we’re more than our content, our newsletter,” he said.

In this effort, The Expert Institute team implemented a one-on-one marketing campaign from Vice President of Client Relations George Cuchural. The campaign consisted of a personalized text-focused email from Cuchural introducing himself and the brand, as well as “letting subscribers know that there is actually a person ready and willing to speak with them about their legal practice and their expert witness needs,” Morgenstern said.

Once a month, a personalized message from Cuchural is sent out to subscribers explaining new service features and sharing exclusive content, such as evergreen blog posts and white papers.

**Step #1. Clean the Database**

“We’re trying to offer this unique, one-on-one experience for our subscribers. Really value them. Running these campaigns wasn’t easy,” Morgenstern said.

As part of making the interaction more meaningful and personal, prior to sending the first email, the team wanted to clean up the database and address all subscribers by their first name as accurately as possible.

In order to do this, they ran a check with the most common 4,000 first names and were able to match up 95% of the first names for all subscribers. So far, they haven’t received a single response regarding incorrect first names.

“The goal is obviously to generate more engagement, to generate more revenue and to grow our business. People felt that they were connecting with a high-level member of our team and really speaking to them one-on-one,” he said.

**Step #2. Develop Welcome Email for Series**

The first email from Cuchural was designed to be an introduction, with him personally introducing himself and putting a name and voice to the brand.
The email (seen right) was plain to ensure it kept the soft and polite touch the team was striving for and addressed the recipient by name before introducing Cuchural as “your primary point of contact here at The Expert Institute.”

It went on to say, “I’d be happy to answer any questions you may have about our company, and can help you take the first steps toward engaging our award winning referral services. In the meantime, here’s a complimentary white paper that offers some insightful tips for choosing the right expert,” and then linked to content titled: “10 Warning Signs When Selecting an Expert Witness.”

“We have a really great writer on staff who just joined our team,” Morgenstern said about the email development process, adding that, “We also all participate in a lot of the writing and putting these messages together.”

**STEP #3. SEGMENT MESSAGES FOR VARYING LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT**

Since all of The Expert Institute’s subscribers are at various parts of the sales funnel, the team decided to segment the recipients of this series.

After sending the first email, the team split the email list into three segments:

- Most engaged
- Moderately engaged
- Least engaged

Each segment received a slightly different send from Cuchural. For instance, the less engaged group received soft outreach messages that included free white papers or evergreen content with “zero marketing language” focused on providing value, Morgenstern said.
The moderately engaged group received a similar message to the least engaged group but had links to evergreen blog posts and a call-to-action button.

The most engaged group received personalized messages (seen left) that addressed the service and the potential need for expert witness services the prospect most likely had.

“These emails need to keep in touch while not pushing prospects before they’re ready to move ahead,” he said.

**Track engagement metrics**

A majority of the engagement was measured through subscriber engagement with the newsletter, such as open rates, clickthrough rates, and the team also collects browsing data.

“If the subscriber is opening our emails 30% of the time over a six-month period, then they’re falling into our higher engaged group,” Morgenstern said.

All of the emails contained tracking links so the team can look at on-site browsing behavior and tie that back to the subscriber’s email address.

For instance, the team looked at users who had heavy browsing activity and page views on specific pages that the team deemed highly valuable, such as viewing the “About Us” page or “How It Works” page or even viewing a page called “Find an Expert,” which Morgenstern classified as “the hottest page for a user to click on if they have a very ready need for engaging with our service.”

**Test subject lines**

Subject line testing is a big part of this effort, Morgenstern said. At the beginning of this effort, the newsletter was achieving open rates of about 30% on average.
With enough subject line testing, he added, “We were able to push our open rates up near 60% for these personalized messages."

The team also tested the cadence of the emails in terms of how often they were being sent out. Initially, they were sending a message once every two weeks, then a three-week period and finally to once a week.

They weren’t seeing any increases in conversions, but the unsubscribe rate was higher.

“We brought it down to about one message a month, where we felt like we had reached a good equilibrium between conversions and lowered our unsubscribe rate quite considerably,” he said.

Subscribers were also receiving a weekly newsletter from The Expert Institute as well, so slowing down the frequency was important to find a “really good balance for ourselves and the subscribers,” he said.

**STEP #4. BUILD A POST-EMAIL LEAD PROCESS**

The emails allowed people to go through to the website and convert through a form submission, but, at the same time, “George [Cuchural] was getting direct replies from all of these emails from our subscribers,” Morgenstern said.

Subscribers were writing back with notes such as “I appreciate the outreach. I don’t happen to need it at this time,” or “Yes, I have a direct need at the moment; let’s set up a call to speak further about it,” he said.

This type of personal response email is not the traditional way of converting prospects, Morgenstern said, and the process involved “tracking replies and conversations a little bit differently than what we’re used to,” with a Google Docs spreadsheet to organize all of the replies.

“If they’re really in direct need and George has any availability, he’ll get on the phone and call them right back,” he said.

Otherwise, he said, a member of the sales team will access the Google Doc and contact the person directly, provide information about the service and respond to the person’s need if they can.

**RESULTS**

“We were thrilled with the rates and the growth we experienced. And as a result, we just had our biggest quarter ever this past quarter, and our biggest month ever was June,” Morgenstern said.
The results they were able to garner include:

- 200% increase in conversions
- 60% open rate
- 20% clickthrough rate
- 3% conversion rate

The team was able to drive the unsubscribe rate down 48% from the regular newsletter. The average open rate for The Expert Institute’s email program also saw a 100% improvement upon introducing these personalized emails.

The conversion rate at 3% was much higher than the 1% rate from the regular newsletter, which Morgenstern attributes to the “soft language” of the personalized emails.

This effort was groundbreaking for the team and “really got the gears turning for us,” he said, adding that they have also now implemented a series of personalized outreach to active clients.

“We had lots of personalized emails that were triggered automatically from our database to clients who had active opportunities with us. So they were getting automatic updates based on various stages of their opportunities,” he said.

These status updates were seeing encouraging engagement, he added, but after this campaign, they integrated a cross-selling campaign to active clients.

“For each engagement, there’s a specific need for a specific kind of expert, and while they might need one particular expert on engagement, the need also arises many times where they might need two to three to four different experts for one engagement,” he said.

So the team has automated the process of sending out periodic emails letting clients know that if “you’re working on a products liability case, well, we also have a really great expert who ... [is] a warning labels expert.”

“We’re doing a lot more cross-selling that’s automated and personalized from our sales team, and we’re getting great results. We’re seeing an increase in business based on these cross-selling email campaigns,” Morgenstern concluded.
For this MarketingSherpa Blog post, I thought I would examine some email research. This chart from the *MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Report* focuses on the effectiveness of sending emails on different days of the week:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 Most Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at the results of this survey, you can see a wide range of effectiveness, along with a few clear patterns. Tuesday and Wednesday look pretty good, but Sunday looks to be the least effective.

What’s left off of this highly aggregated data is the fact there is no “best” day – or time of day – to send emails that work across the board for all email marketers.
The reality? Testing your email sends is paramount to effective email marketing. What might work for one industry, or business category, or maybe even your direct competitor might not – no, make that probably won’t – work for you.

Your email list is unique to your business (unless you’ve bought the entire list, and if so, shame on you). Only by testing your sends and tracking open rates, clickthroughs and other engagement metrics will you learn what works best for your list.

For example, when I was interviewing for a MarketingSherpa case study, I spoke with a marketing team leader about a campaign that targeted very high level IT people at the target companies – think C-suite, vice president and executive vice president levels.

To reach this audience, the team extensively tested its email sends before launching the campaign, segmenting to various job titles in the company’s database.

The team found that the highest level job title segment had the highest open rate, by a pretty wide margin, at Sunday morning between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m.

Sounds counterintuitive, right? If this team took our chart as their only guideline instead of testing their list and learning what really worked, those executives would have probably never seen those email sends. The team would have completely missed what turned out to be a golden two-hour window into the campaign’s target audience.

The lesson here is it never hurts to check out research on email timing. Those results can provide a great starting point when you begin a testing and optimization cycle on your email program. But nothing beats testing your list, learning something and then testing your list again – and again.

Your email subscriber list really is a unique snowflake and ought to be treated as such with email send times, content and calls-to-action tailored specifically to your audience.
When writing an email message, it’s easy to break the goal down to one thing – just trying to write compelling enough copy to get a click.

But how do you actually earn that click?

If you really want to optimize your email marketing, you have to think like the customer and walk through the cognitive process that potential customers subconsciously go through when interacting with your email.

To achieve that click, your email copy must accomplish these six key objectives:
Objective #1. Arrest Attention

Once you’ve captured an email subscriber and gotten them to open the email, the next thing you have to do is stop them.

Basically, you need to stop them from quickly deleting. Stop them in their tracks to an extent.

By stopping them and grabbing their attention, you’re buying a few moments of their time to make a case for your conversion goal.

You can arrest their attention with a striking visual (although, with image blocking technology in many email readers, this can be reduced to a big blank space with a little red X) or a compelling headline.

Our testing suggests two effective strategies for writing a compelling headline.

The first is making a promise. For example, the above headline was one element of an email that increased conversion 181% (the headline has been anonymized).

The second is identifying a problem. For example, the above headline was one of the elements that generated a 75% higher clickthrough rate.

Objective #2. Build a Connection

At this point, you’ve basically shouted, “Hey!” and stopped the prospect in their tracks.

Now you must build a connection with that prospect. You can start by bridging the gap between the headline or visual that caught their attention and something that is meaningful to their lives.
This is why it is so important not to overpromise or mislead with a headline. If you’ve caught their attention but failed to connect with the prospect, you have only alienated him.

**Objective #3. Build the problem**

The hero of the movie does not embark on the journey to battle the bad guys because he wants to. There is the Call to Adventure – his family gets kidnapped, droids let him know that the princess needs saving, two dudes can’t find their car. (If you’re really interested in storytelling, see Joseph Campbell’s monomyth: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monomyth)

The analog for email copywriting is building the problem. What pain points does the customer have? What is that situation of the world before your product, service or nonprofit comes into their lives?

Their interaction with your service or product will ultimately solve this problem – the “resolution” and “denouement” of the narrative arc, to use another storytelling analogy – but first, you must tell them why they should care.

It is not always an obvious pain point in their lives. Like a good story writer, you must help your ideal customer feel this pain viscerally. This is what Flint McGlaughlin, Managing Director and CEO, MECLABS (parent company of MarketingExperiments), refers to as “raising the stakes.”

“In certain situations, where the perceived problem is not painful enough, we must intensify that factor. We do this by raising the stakes. It is a matter of showing the broader or deeper ramifications of the problem,” Flint said.

**Objective #4. Build interest**

Much like in storytelling, there can be a Refusal of that Call by our hero (the hero doesn’t want to be bothered or doesn’t think he’s up to the task). Just because you build a problem doesn’t mean your hero wants to solve it, or even thinks he can.

You must build interest in solving that problem and show how it can be solved by your company.

For example, you may build a problem that customers should install antivirus software on their computers so their bank account information does not get stolen.

However, you must then build the interest in actually solving that problem – mentioning how easy it is to install your product or how effective your product is at keeping important information safe.
**Objective #5. Build Suspense**

The hero never moves through a story or movie flawlessly, or you wouldn’t wonder what comes next and have no incentive to stick around and keep watching. “The Empire Strikes Back” even ends with the bad guys winning.

Now, of course, the good guys (your customers) will win in the end – but you need to keep them on the hook to get them to the landing page since, after all, the conversion is not going to happen in the email. You just need to get the click to ultimately convert them on the landing page. That’s where the actual sale should happen.

So on the landing page, they will “run a quick, free check of your computer’s hard drive to see if you have any viruses” or in some other way help get the information and meet the conversion goal that helps them ultimately resolve the conflict that was created by building the problem.

**Objective #6. Transfer Momentum**

Make sure wherever you send them to resolve the conflict created in your email copy – likely a landing page – continues the dialogue initiated by your email. You want a natural flow from one channel to the next, not a disjunctive change in the conversation.

So if the suspense you built was to run that quick check of a computer’s hard drive, the headline of the landing page should be “3 steps to scan your computer” or something similar, not “Buy our antivirus software for only $49.99.”
\[c = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a\]

\[eme = rv(of + i) - (f + a)\]
Marketing Optimization
Global ecommerce is growing.

With that growth comes two insights:

One is satisfaction on my part in seeing fellow anthropologists land jobs at Microsoft and Absolut Vodka to aid in marketing research.

The other part of that growth is the realization among savvy ecommerce marketers that delivering a consistent brand experience in a multi-cultural global marketplace is not going to be easy.

I say this in light of the recent interview between MarketingSherpa Reporter Allison Banko and Rob Garf, Vice President, Industry Strategy, Demandware, in the MarketingSherpa Media Center at the Internet Retailer Conference and Exhibition.

Rob, who spoke at IRCE 2014 in Chicago, shared his thoughts on how preserving brand value and relevance across multiple cultures will be vital to delivering a consistent brand experience in new markets.

You can watch the video here: mecla.bs/BrandValue
Brands looking to expand their reach into new cultures need to understand: It’s not about you; it’s about the locals.

“It comes down to really being entrenched in how consumers behave and how they want to interact with the brand,” Rob explained. “One key aspect is to have a local presence.”

If you want to see more interviews from ecommerce experts and in-the-trenches marketers, visit MarketingSherpa.com/IRCE.

Want to dig deeper into what’s working in ecommerce today? Download the *MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study* ([marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce](http://marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce)) for insights gathered from 4,346 marketers on everything from what’s happening to the ecommerce landscape to which strategies successful ecommerce companies are employing.
As marketers, we see lots of benchmark data and statistics that we base our business decisions on.

At MarketingSherpa, we recently conducted a nine-month study on the state of ecommerce.

You’ll see the results of our research conducted with 4,346 marketers across 95 in-depth charts.

Obviously, this data didn’t come out of thin air. There was a survey that our MECLABS research team carefully constructed to gather those insights.

Crafting effective surveys is potentially the most important part of collecting useful data, whether you’re fielding research for a report or simply gaining customer feedback.

Diana Sindicich, Senior Manager, Data Sciences, MECLABS (parent company of MarketingSherpa), played an integral part in the *MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study* and provided some tips on how to produce the most effective survey for your needs.

**Survey Tip #1. Evaluate your situation**

There’s a good time, and a not-so-good time, for everything. This rule of life applies to surveys as well.

In surveys, situations may exist for you that make it a good idea to field a survey, Diana explained.

This could include scenarios when you want to understand your customers’ motivations or characteristics. Maybe you’re looking to expand your product lines and want to know what your customers would like to see offered.

On the other hand, there are times when a survey may not be the best idea for what you want to accomplish. Perhaps you have a very personalized service with a small group of customers. Surveys can be perceived as impersonal — conversely, an interview would make the customer feel special and valued.
**Survey Tip #2. Understand Bias in Surveys**

As much as you try to make your survey as scientifically accurate and objective as possible, without random sampling, it’s not accurate.

Random sampling, by its definition, is a subset of individuals chosen from a larger set, and each individual is **chosen randomly and entirely by chance**.

No survey is truly random, and that is even truer in marketing. You’re probably surveying your customers or, like the MarketingSherpa Benchmark Studies, your audience.

As Diana explained, you cannot force people to take your survey, and you’ll only get responses from people who want to participate.

“The audience that you get is dependent on the incentive you offer, be it perceived or monetary value,” Diana said.

Perceived value, in the example of the Benchmark Study, would be leveraging the fact that respondents would be contributing to research. These incentives will affect the types of people you get to take your survey.

Always understand the predispositions your survey respondents most likely have. The tendency is to see some responses at the extreme ends of the spectrum — either very positive or very negative:

- The happiest people might respond
- The unhappiest will respond
- The neutral people won’t bother without perceiving value to participate in the survey

Understand that survey results are a measure of the respondents’ perceptions of your topic.

Design and analyze the survey with that in mind. If you can identify extreme groups, such as happiest and unhappiest customers, you can analyze the responses to other questions separately, often leading to very helpful insights into why customers are behaving as they do.

**Survey Tip #3. Conduct Background Research and Formulate Research Questions**

Before you start to build your survey, utilize what you already know that could help your research and formulate your research questions.
Finding information from past surveys, online review sites and third-party information on industry trends or population characteristics could hold troves of valuable information, Diana advised.

Based on what your background research reveals, what do you want to find out? What do you plan to do with the information you gain through the survey?

This is when you should develop your research questions. These are different than your actual survey questions, which we’ll address in Tip #5. A research question should be something you want to answer through your survey. This might include questions such as:

- What confuses visitors on this page?
- What kind of people are going to this site?
- What information are prospects using in their decision process?

**Survey Tip #4. Finalize methodology**

Two of the biggest questions in survey methodology include: Where will your responses be solicited? And, how?

According to Diana, depending on the research questions you developed, it might become obvious to you at this point who can tell you what you need to know.

As for the number of responses, “ideally, you want a lot, but a lot is relative,” Diana explained.

For surveys with primarily multiple choice questions, Diana advised, “You want to have a big enough number of responses that even the most unpopular answer options receive some responses.”

It is not unusual to see response rates on emailed surveys below 10%, so start with as big a list as possible.

**Survey Tip #5. Construct your survey questions**

Diana suggested for every research question you have, write down all of the possible survey questions you can think of. Don’t worry about having different versions of the same question; this is all part of the process of finding the best way to ask a question.

As you’re crafting your questions, remember to not lead your respondents to answer one way or another.
Diana gave a great example of taking a leading question and making it more objective:

*Question: In which stores do you shop for shoes (e.g., Rack Room)?*

This question would prompt many people to respond they shop at Rack Room because you’ve just reminded them about that store.

To change this question to make it non-leading, she suggested asking instead:

*Where do you shop for shoes?*

This question can be asked without providing a set response or giving a long list of store names that are in randomized order for each respondent.

This way, the respondent is recalling their experience rather than being led to respond a certain way.

Don’t forget to include “Other” and “N/A” as a response, as some survey takers may simply not know the answer or do not fit into the ones you have given. If they don’t see the answer that fits them and have no alternative response choices, they could leave the question blank or pick something randomly that won’t be accurate.

**Survey Tip #6. Practice fielding your survey**

Test your survey before you begin by giving it to your intended audience. By doing a trial run, you can see how the survey will be experienced by people who have never seen it before.

Diana advised finding a group between five and 10 people to take your survey, so you can discover things like:

- How long did it take to complete the survey?
- Were any questions confusing?
- Were there any technical glitches?
- Did all of the questions record properly when data was exported?
Omnichannel is a word that many marketers have become familiar with in the past year or so. It’s the evolution of multichannel marketing and, some argue, an overused buzzword.

Lisa Butler, Head of Enterprise Solutions Enablement, eBay, agrees with that statement. In the MarketingSherpa Media Center at IRCE, she sat down with Allison Banko, Reporter, MarketingSherpa, to discuss omnichannel and what it should really mean to marketers.

“So we went from multichannel, to omnichannel, to all channels — what it really means is just allowing customers to shop however they want,” Lisa said.

In its essence, the prefix *omni-* means “all.” For Lisa, this means “allowing customers to shop anywhere they want, receive their purchases whenever they want and giving them the best customer service.”

In her interview, Lisa explained the key to providing this engaging experience: developing creative new ways for customers to engage with a brand.

You can watch the video here: mecla.bs/BeyondOmnichannel

Lisa provided some examples of companies that are doing this well, such as Boxpark.
Boxpark is a company in the U.K. that sets up pop-up stores for clothing brands in a unique way — the stores are a network of shipping containers.

For retailers, this is a creative solution for giving the customer the best (and coolest) experience, according to Lisa.

**Think Outside the Shipping Container**

You don’t have to sell exciting products, or even be a B2C company, to find creative ways to allow your customers to shop the way they want and get them excited about your brand.

Prisma, a B2B marketing services provider, took its clients on a road trip with a multichannel campaign that resulted in a 45% response rate. The marketers sent direct mail pieces and emails that reflected their campaign by showing their capabilities to print on almost any material, a service they call grand format printing.

Clients were sent on a virtual adventure to “grand” locations, which aligned with how the company wanted to showcase grand format printing.

**Make Online Shopping Easy for the Customer**

But being creative is only half the battle; you also need to be where the customer is.

JAM Paper & Envelope, a small office supply company, developed a segmented email campaign consisting of a retargeting, welcome and cart abandonment series. For the cart abandonment series, the team made sure that if a customer abandoned their cart at work, when they checked their tablet or phone at home, their items would be there and the customer would be able to restore their cart from any device.

This is just one of the many ways to leverage multichannel (or omnichannel, depending on who you’re talking to) marketing to let your customers shop no matter where they are.
\[ c = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a \]

\[ \text{eme} = rv(of + i) - (f + a) \]
Customer Management
Lead Management: How a B2B SaaS Nonprofit Decreased Its Sales Cycle 99%  
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

At MECLABS Institute, we’re always trying to answer why customers say, “yes.” We conduct this research in many ways. Throughout the Research Digest, you can find Web clinics and articles detailing what we’ve discovered through testing with our Research Partners, as well as research charts examining the state of ecommerce.

We also run a live A/B test each year at MarketingSherpa Email Summit, where the audience helps craft the experiment. We then run, validate, close the experiment and share the results during Summit as a way to teach about marketing experimentation. In past years, we’ve used MarketingSherpa, owned by MECLABS, as the “client.” This year, we interviewed three national nonprofits to find a new client for our test. We wanted to answer the question, “How do already effective marketers get even better?” That meant a key quality we were looking for was a marketing program that was already doing well.

After careful consideration, VolunteerMatch was selected. It’s a unique nonprofit organization that gets most of its funding by selling a SaaS product to a B2B audience. To introduce our client for the Email Summit 2015 Live Test, Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, MECLABS, shared a case study with the MarketingSherpa audience about how the nonprofit has decreased its sales cycle — featuring some of the nonprofit’s previous success. After Email Summit, we’ll share the results of our test with VolunteerMatch.

Cleanliness of data and clarity of process tend to degrade over time in most organizations. However, making small tweaks to these two aspects of a program can dramatically impact the success of lead generation and conversion to sale.

VolunteerMatch made improvements in both of these areas, influenced internal adoption of the new processes and tools and saw astonishing results in just a couple of years — all while working within the budget and time constraints of a nonprofit.
THE CUSTOMER

“We’re really connecting to people’s and companies’ passions for making an impact in communities, regardless of what the specific cause area might be that they’re most passionate about,” said Lauren Wagner, Senior Manager of Engagement, VolunteerMatch.

As the Web’s largest volunteer engagement network, VolunteerMatch has three customers:

- People interested in volunteering — there are 7 million of them registered on VolunteerMatch
- Nonprofits looking for volunteers — 100,000 nonprofits from around the globe use VolunteerMatch
- Employee volunteer programs, mostly at multi-location companies with at least 10,000 employees — companies such as JetBlue, Charles Schwab, Johnson & Johnson and Gap, Inc.

To this third audience, VolunteerMatch operates similarly to a B2B SaaS company. “As a nonprofit that is also a SaaS tech company and a B2B marketing organization, we straddle a really exciting space,” said Shari Tishman, Director of Engagement, VolunteerMatch.

While VolunteerMatch is a nonprofit, it does not rely on donors. Much like any other for-profit B2B corporation, it relies on revenue from sales of its SaaS product — an employee engagement platform that corporate social responsibility and human resources departments can include in their intranet to make it easier to manage volunteer initiatives.

“It frees up the managers of these programs time to really be out in the communities talking to nonprofits, developing those relationships with other organizations in the communities, which is really where they should be spending their time rather than researching all of the different places that people can volunteer all over the world,” Wagner said.

CHALLENGE

As VolunteerMatch grew, its lead generation and management process did not grow with it.

There was only one lead form on the site. Not only was this the key inbound lead generation form for the SaaS product, but it was also the only way anyone from any of VolunteerMatch’s three audiences could contact the nonprofit on the site.
More than 60% of the leads for corporate solutions were confused nonprofits or individuals looking for an opportunity to volunteer.

When VolunteerMatch was smaller, the lead flow was low enough that this process was manageable, but as it grew, this process wasted a lot of time internally.

Instead of focusing on marketing, the team spent more and more time trying to determine which inquiries were true “leads” to hand over to Sales. This process resulted in an average sales cycle that was 491 days long because there was a lack of nurturing for companies not ready to buy, and many leads were lost in all the noise.

**Campaign**

The team wanted to create a centralized, trusted source of information that could easily be leveraged by both the Sales and Marketing teams to gain better insight into where potential customers were in the funnel.

**Step #1: Clean and Optimize CRM Data**

Wagner describes herself as “strangely passionate about database management,” so the team’s first investment was using staff resources and budget to clean and optimize the data in its CRM (customer relationship management) platform.

VolunteerMatch had used the same CRM for 13 years. When the system was first set up, the company was operating under a different business model that focused on donations as well as foundation and corporate grants.
Not to mention, the data had become messy over time: “A CRM is a really powerful tool, [but] the database can get really huge, and if there’s nobody working at updating it, making it more effective as part of their job and keeping it clean, it can turn into a real disaster,” Wagner said.

To help remedy this problem, the team found a data quality toolset to perform data hygiene and remove duplicates from the database, which had grown to more than 20,000 records. This is one area where being a nonprofit paid off — the vendor they found donates their full suite of tools to nonprofits for five years at a time.

However, as a scientist studying entropy or any parent of a child with a messy bedroom will tell you, cleaning something once is not enough. Without a better process in place, there will always be a gradual decline back into disorder.

**Step #2: Add tools so key stakeholders want to use the CRM**

Once the database was cleaner “we needed to change the system to really work for the people that are using it, so I started interviewing all of the different teams,” Wagner said.

She asked them:

- What they need in a CRM
- How they were currently using it
- What was working for them
- What wasn’t working for them
- What information they would like to be able to get to that they can’t now
- In their dream world, how would they like to be able to use the CRM

Based on the feedback, the team focused on improving the usability of the now more organized data, which is crucial to adoption. After all, a CRM is like a safe deposit box — it is only as valuable as the assets people put in it, and without trust, they will not waste time putting anything worthwhile in it.

One way the team built that trust was by investing in tools that helped make the process easier. For example, they employed a tool that integrates the CRM with sales representatives’ email, calendar and contacts. This made it easy to add to and use CRM data with a single click and made the reps more willing to build the database and more effectively use it to identify and convert leads.
They also reorganized the CRM:

- Access levels were set up for each rep, so they only saw what information was applicable to their roles, instead of being overwhelmed with data.

- They organized the data to reflect the sales progression of customers for the new go-to-market strategy. For example, opportunities were split into new business and renewals.

“[It] really helps them to be able to easily see where they need to be spending their time, who needs to be followed up with because it was all actually being tracked and then reflected in their dashboards,” Wagner said.

**STEP #3: FEED BETTER DATA INTO THE CRM**

Once the data was clean in the CRM, the team had to keep it that way. Some of this happened by working with Sales, as described above, but the team also had to make sure better data was coming from lead forms.

To do that, they grew their website from the single lead form to 10 different forms, such as:

- General contact form
- Newsletter signup form
- Webinar signup form
- “Learn more” form
- Request to view a demo

They varied the information required on each form from simply asking for a first name, last name and email address for a white paper download to nine required fields for the hand-raiser “learn more” form.

They also better communicated on their website which contact forms were meant for which type of customer, and what they could expect to receive by completing each form.

For example, if customers click on the self-direct link that says “I am a nonprofit looking to engage volunteers,” they are taken to a learning center page to help them get registered with VolunteerMatch.org.
Visitors who were a good lead for the SaaS product would self-select “I am looking for tools to support my company’s employee volunteering program,” which would then route them to a lead form with lead qualification questions about their company headquarters location and volunteer objectives (e.g., “engage consumer in volunteering/cause marketing” and “support local nonprofits”).
In addition to the forms, the team produced more content on the site to reduce the number of people filling out forms for general information.

“On the public side of things, we’ve built out the help center, learning center areas so that the nonprofits and volunteers can find the help they need there the way that they should be able to,” Wagner said. “On the corporate side of things there are ... 10 [forms].”

STEP #4: AUTOMATE SEGMENTED LEAD NURTURING CONTENT

Since the leads were increasing drastically, it was no longer practical to efficiently follow up with each inquiry manually.

“The odyssey really began at the [MarketingSherpa] Email Summit 2012. Lauren and I attended, and we, I think it opened our eyes to the way that email, strategic email marketing could really serve different business functions,” Tishman said. “I think the presentation at that Summit by the guy [Jermaine Griggs] was such a great example for us because it really showed step by step what could be done with a system like that.”

Previously, Wagner said, the team would “pull everyone that we’ve talked to at all in the past year into a campaign in [the CRM] and send a mass email. We didn’t know anything about what they were interested in other than they had contacted us at some point or we had been in contact with them at some point.”

“You get three or four out of an email send of 500 that would say, ‘Yeah, cool. I’ll talk to you about VolunteerMatch.’ That isn’t effective nor is it helping your cause with them in the future. That also definitely influenced our decision to move to the marketing automation side of things,” Wagner explained.

The team used its new leads forms and marketing automation tool to begin some triggered email marketing. At the most basic level, they created a triggered thank you email for the new Web lead form from a geo-specific business development representative.
They also created drip campaigns. For example, when a prospect fills out a form to receive a white paper entitled “How to Build a Sustainable Employee Volunteer Program,” they are automatically signed up to be added to a drip email program that includes these emails:

1. “Make the best choice for your employee volunteer program”

2. “The most innovative technology for your employee engagement program”

3. “Choose a technology that will be there for YOU and your employee volunteer program”

Drip Email 1 - “Make the best choice for your employee volunteer program”

Drip Email 2 - “The most innovative technology for your employee engagement program”
But triggered forms are only one way the team uses content.

“Our strategy relies heavily on content marketing to build trusted relationships with our community — whether it’s a nonprofit looking to connect with volunteers, a volunteer finding ways to make a difference or a company needing ways to engage employees,” Tishman said.

She added, “We provide value, enable them to explore who we are and what we do ... we are very much multi-channel, with blogs, email marketing, social media, webinars, white papers and all sorts of cool partnerships.”

**Results**

This effort helped bridge a gap between Marketing as well as Sales and Business Development. Before this effort, the bad data and lack of tools hindered the marketing team.
The marketing team wasn’t able to “really get an understanding of how engaged people were with us because we didn’t have the ability to look at different actions that they’ve taken,” Wagner said. “That’s been one of the biggest changes over the past few years — really being able to get at where people are in the process, which was something we were never able to do before.”

VolunteerMatch is now able to find more hot leads and convert them faster.

The average lead age at time of conversion has decreased from 491 days before the project started to an average of six days in 2013. That’s a decrease of 99%.

The team shortened the sales cycle because of cleaner data and the increased ability of the sales team to record activities. The average duration an opportunity remained in a given stage of the sales cycle decreased from 185 days to an average of 74 days — a decrease of 60%.

The team was able to increase the quality of leads handed to Sales as well. The percentage of converted leads that were lost decreased from 40% to 16% — another decrease of 60%.

What is the biggest lesson the team learned to share with other marketers? With complex sales processes, it helps to think through all the different elements affecting internal and external audiences. “Everyone really needs to be working together and thinking together about the best way to set it up to achieve the goals,” stated Tishman.

“You should have access to, and input from, all [the] other pieces of the organization,” Tishman continued, “because otherwise you’re going to miss things, they’re going to miss things, and in the end it’s the customers and community members that really miss out.”

“Don’t let the fact that something hasn’t been done before stop you from making your case and pushing forward and trying to make things work,” Wagner added.
In teleprospecting, it’s not just about what you “ask” prospects; it’s about when you ask them.

This is where a lot of teleprospecting gets it wrong. Intuitively, fast, upfront and to-the-point seems like a sound approach, and I’m a big fan of brevity.

However, I also believe in timing and sequence, as both can make or break conversion.

In this B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post, we’ll break down a call script used for voicemails from a lead nurturing experiment to better understand how positioning your “ask” at the right time can aid your lead nurturing efforts.

**Breaking down your script into sections can help you diagnose problems**

1. Hello, ____, my name is Lisa and I am calling with [Insurance Company].
2. We are currently the fifth largest life insurance carrier in the nation offering competitive rates and solutions to help ease administration burdens.
3. When we last spoke, you told me that you work with a broker for your price quotes for the group life benefits.
4. I would like to get your broker contact information in order to be in consideration when they next do their evaluations for you.

In the control for this experiment, the voicemail script could be divided into four sections:

1. An introduction
2. The company identifier
3. The follow-up from previous touch point
4. The “ask”
**Know when to flip (and rip up) the script**

1. Hello, ____, my name is Lisa and I am calling with [Insurance Company].
2. We are currently the fifth largest life insurance carrier in the nation offering competitive rates and solutions to help ease administration burdens.
3. When we last spoke, you told me that you work with a broker for your price quotes for the group life benefits.
4. I would like to get your broker contact information in order to be in consideration when they next do their evaluations for you.

The MECLABS research team hypothesized the follow-up section, or part 3 in the control, was buried too deep in script and should be moved up in the treatment.

Hello, ____, my name is Lisa and I am calling with [Insurance Company].

2. When we last spoke, you told me that you work with a broker for your price quotes for the group life benefits.
3. Since we do not nationally advertise and may not have had the opportunity to work with your consultant; we would like to share our information with them.

I would like to get your broker contact information in order to be in consideration when they next do their evaluations for you.
The team also included a new sentence that further justified the reason for calling. The copy changes were hypothesized to deliver a prospect-level appeal of letting us “work with your consultant” instead of “doing the work yourself.”

Hello, ____, my name is Lisa and I am calling with [Insurance Company].

When we last spoke, you told me that you work with a broker for your price quotes for the group life insurance.

Since we do not advertise and may not have had the opportunity to work with your consultant, we would like to share our information with them.

I would like to get your broker contact information in order to be in consideration when they next do their evaluations for you.

The new treatment script aligned every sentence into a carefully crafted argument that increased conversion 31%.

BUILD SCRIPTS TO TELL PROSPECTS YOUR STORY

Ultimately, the big takeaway here is people arrange their thoughts in story format.

As a consequence, how you arrange the story in your marketing efforts will make the difference between delivering information of true value or just another frustrating sales pitch prospects don’t want to hear.

Value craves sequence, for sequence is the mother of perfect timing.
Putting customers first in lead generation.

As marketers, we have more ways to observe our customers’ behavior and can leverage tools like marketing automation, Web analytics and CRM systems to help us manage all this complexity.

Complexity found in things like Marketing-qualified leads (MQLs), Sales-qualified leads (SQLs), opportunities, lead engagement scores and other KPIs are helpful to see trends and measure what we deem important to us, but something is often missing.

That missing piece is customer empathy.

Unfortunately, empathy is often ignored or lost when we start to become overly clever and complex with lead generation.

We can get so caught up in our systems, tools and investments that we lose sight of empathy.

To build that empathy, I recommend:

**Push the acronyms aside and actually talk to your customers**

Sadly, I’ve found that marketers don’t talk directly with the very people they are reaching out to with lead generation messages. All too often, customer service agents and sales reps are the only ones talking to customers live or in real life.

Here’s some ways to fix that:

- Pick up the phone
- Survey customers on your email list
- Get out in the field with your sales team and meet customers face-to-face
It is critical to know what customers want in order to serve them better.

Businesses often take understanding the customer for granted when this is one thing that should be always valued. For ideas on the questions to ask your customers, read this post from the B2B Lead Roundable Blog: “8 Questions to Steer Your Marketing Priorities” (mecla.bs/CustomerInterviews).

**Use those conversations to understand what customers care about**

Instead of worrying about being interesting, you need to first be interested in your customer. Your goal is to understand your customer’s motivation (what they want) and make sure that’s aligned with what you can deliver.

It is most effective to actively listen with empathy to consciously try to understand and see the world from the other person’s perspective.

Avoid “hearing” through a filter formed by your own worldview as a marketer, and do not impose your preconceived ideas on what you hear because doing so will inhibit your efforts to put yourself in your customers’ shoes.

**Use that understanding to anticipate what they want next from your organization**

You need to move from company logic to customer logic.

Customers want to work with people and companies that can step in their shoes and understand the results they are trying to achieve. But before you can do this, you must first actively listen to them and understand their situation and concerns.

At its core, **lead generation is really about relationships**.

I’m wondering what would happen if we stopped treating people as leads (dehumanizing) and instead treated them as human beings or future customers. What would happen if we put ourselves in our future customers’ shoes and looked at our messages from their perspective, trying to feel what they are feeling when they hear from us?
If you want to improve your influence and empathetic connection with people, watch this RSA short: mecla.bs/RSAshort

In this three-minute animated video, Dr. Brené Brown reminds us that we can only create a genuine empathetic connection if we are brave enough to really get in touch with our own fragilities.
A previous MarketingSherpa B2B Newsletter case study — “Lead Generation: Content and email combine for high-quality list building” (http://mecla.bs/digest0762) — covered an effort by cloud replication and disaster recovery startup company, CloudEndure. The overall basis of the campaign was a process created by CloudEndure’s Vice President of Marketing, Ramel Levin, before he joined the startup. This process Ramel called BYOL, or “build your own list.”

The case study features some of the steps involved in Ramel’s lead gen idea, but since he developed it for a company he worked for before joining CloudEndure, the exact steps he took in putting the process together were not part of the case study.

For this MarketingSherpa Blog post, I wanted to provide more detail on how Ramel created his BYOL concept.

Ramel said he was in a business setting speaking with a startup company that did website translations when the BYOL idea came to him.

“I was asking them, ‘How do you generate leads for websites that need translations?’ [One employee at the startup] started telling me about all the different ways he was doing it, and he talked about the traditional ways of doing email blasts, going to conferences and doing advertising for pay-per-lead and PPC,” Ramel said.

**One method for building high-quality lists**

After a bit of thought, Ramel decided that building a list of higher-quality leads would be more effective for this company, and here is the process he developed to do just that.

**Step #1: Identify the first stage of target companies**

Ramel stated, “So I told him, ‘How about doing the following? How about scanning the top one million websites, based on Alexa or Quantcast, or any other ranking service ... and find out how many of those websites have only one language’.

He said, for example, scan the top sites in Germany, and make sure they only have pages in the local language. If the company is in the United States, its website only features pages in English.
**STEP #2: ADDRESS AN UNTAPPED MARKET**

Ramel suggested using a tool such as SimilarWeb or Google Trends to find out what countries visitors of those targeted websites are coming from.

By crossing the list from Step #1 with the list from Step #2, the website translation company was able to see what companies in that top one million group had pages only in the local language and also what percentage of its visitors were coming from a different region or country with a different native language.

**STEP #3: REACH OUT TO THE TARGETED COMPANIES WITH A SOLUTION**

Ramel said after crossing the first list with the second, the website translation company could tell German websites, for example, “Listen, I noticed that you have 5% of your visitors from France, but you don’t have any pages in French.”

He added at this stage it is important to be very specific with the numbers so that whoever receives that email message — CEO, product manager, sales person, etc. — will be surprised because of the level of insight into their website. It is also important to offer suggestions on how to leverage that knowledge with, in this case, a tool that provides website translations.

**HOW CAN YOU GET THAT CONTACT INFORMATION?**

Once Ramel joined CloudEndure and implemented the same process to uncover which companies hosting applications in the cloud were most likely suffering from occasional downtime, he used an online freelance service to go to publicly available databases, such as LinkedIn, and find contact information for actual people at every targeted company — 66,000 websites in this case — so that every email could be personalized to each recipient.

Obviously, the details on what type of company and pain point you would be searching for will be specific to your marketing needs, but by making use of Ramel’s “build your own list” concept, the companies you uncover will most likely generate very high-quality leads. You know you are reaching potential customers who most likely fall into an ideal prospect category in terms of needing what you are offering. Anyone who responds to the personalized email is raising their hand and telling you that they are interested.
\[ c = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a \]

\[ \text{eme} = rv(of + i) - (f + a) \]
Pay-per-click advertising has two features that make it ideal for marketers wanting to optimize their campaigns:

1. It often commands a significant budget, which means even incremental improvements can pay large dividends.
2. Testing is easy due to built-in tracking software and simple editing processes.

With the stage already set for a prime optimizing experience, where should we start? We need a set of principles to guide our optimization process — principles that apply across the vast spectrum of PPC campaigns. To help us find those principles, we ran experiments for multiple Partners.

**PPC Experiments: Which ad will produce higher clickthrough?**

Let’s test your marketing intuition with a couple of our PPC split tests. Look at Figures 1.1 and 1.2 (on the next page), and decide which of the two options for each test you think most people would click on:

**The Results:**
- Experiment 1: Version A produced a 47% increase in conversion
- Experiment 2: Version B produced a 289% increase in conversion

How can such minor changes have such a large impact on conversion, particularly in the case of Experiment 2, where we changed just one word? In our analysis, we discovered **two basic principles that can be used to guide the creation of any PPC ad** as well as split testing for optimization.
How to Create an Effective PPC Ad

Key Principle #1. Connotation

Every word has a denotative and connotative meaning. The denotative meaning is essentially the dictionary definition of the word. Here are the denotative meanings of the words “clinic” and “center,” the only changes in Experiment 2 that yielded a 289% increase:

**Clinic:** a place or hospital department where patients are given medical treatment or advice.

**Center:** an office or other facility providing a specific service or dealing with a particular emergency.

The meanings are fairly similar, yet they produced incredibly different results. This is because their connotative meanings vary greatly.
For most people, images like those in Figure 2.1 are conjured by the word “clinic.” Yet the majority of people imagine images like those in Figure 2.2 at the mention of the word “center.”

The ideas and images attached to a word make up its connotation. If we are to succeed at optimizing our PPC campaigns, we must be aware of the difference between connotation and denotation and ensure that each word of our PPC ad implies the most accurate and impactful meaning possible.

**Key Principle #2. Motivation**

If you look classically at pain versus pleasure as motivation, it’s been proven that avoidance of pain is usually a higher motivator than seeking some incremental pleasure. Looking at Experiment 1, we see the essential difference is the focus on relief from back pain versus avoiding open-back surgery. The results bear out the idea that the avoidance of pain is the greater motivator.
The original ad focused on solving the problem of back pain and is specifically focused on convincing the searcher to learn more about back pain relief. The treatment ad, on the other hand, assumed the searcher had already decided to get back surgery and is mostly worried about the surgery itself. It focused on the ease of the operation.

To further investigate this idea of motivation, we turn to Test Protocol 1214 in the MECLABS Research Library, in which we worked with a large CRM company to increase the conversion of their PPC campaigns. You can see the control and treatment ad copy in Figure 3.1.

The original ad emphasized the fact that the software is award-winning and can be fully integrated into a business. The treatment ad instead emphasized popularity of the software suite, resulting in a 21% increase in conversion. Once we learned that the software’s popularity and large customer base was the greater motivating factor, we were able to conform the landing page copy and form page copy to echo that message, resulting in a combined 272% lift throughout the funnel.

The goal of a test is not to get a lift — although that is a great benefit; the goal is to gain a discovery. The discovery, or customer insight, from this test allowed us to exponentially increase conversion all throughout the site.

ASSESSING AND LEVERAGING A CUSTOMER’S MOTIVATION

We’ve seen the result of motivation, but how can we leverage it in our PPC ads?

Three elements can intensify a customer’s motivation: relevance, importance and urgency. If possible, your best PPC ad will address all three.
1. **Relevance is the degree to which your offer is connected to a recipient’s situational motivations.**

   Your ad should pertain to what the searcher is looking for. You should use all available targeting mechanisms to ensure your ads display only when highly relevant to the customer’s search query.

2. **Importance is the degree to which an offer is essential to a recipient’s livelihood.**

   In many cases, factors outside your control dictate this. However, sometimes customers are simply not aware of how much their life can be improved by a particular service or product. Demonstrating this importance increases motivation.

3. **Urgency is the degree of immediacy associated with an offer imposed by either the recipient’s situation or the nature of the offer itself.**

   Again, this is occasionally out of your control. However, there are ways to manufacture urgency without being insincere. If there is a natural urgency regarding the situation — be it a sale that is ending or a window of opportunity that is closing — this urgency can be leveraged to increase the customer’s motivation.

**CHECKLIST FOR CREATING WINNING PPC CAMPAIGNS**

We have been able to identify two key principles that drive successful PPC campaigns:

1. **The Principle of Connotation** — We must be aware of the difference between connotation and denotation and ensure that each word of our PPC ad implies the most accurate and impactful meaning possible.

2. **The Principle of Motivation** — Motivation is the most influential aspect of conversion. The more intensely connected a PPC ad is to the true motivation of the searcher, the more intense the response will be.
To help you apply these principles in your own campaigns, we created a checklist you can use while assessing your PPC ads:

☐ Are there any words in your PPC campaign that have a negative connotation?
☐ Are there any words that can help the customer get a better picture of the offer?
☐ Is your PPC ad relevant to the term that has been searched?
☐ Have you connected your PPC ad to the most important and urgent problem in the mind of the searcher?
☐ Are you using general and qualitative language in your PPC ad? Can your PPC ad be more specific?
☐ Is there anything that you do not know about your searcher? Can you create a PPC ad to discover potential insights about the customer?

If you have been hesitant to begin the testing and optimization process, let the ease with which you can do it through PPC spur you to action. Then, track the results and let us know how it went.

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i  Check out a past Web clinic on “Converting PPC Traffic”:
   http://www.marketingexperiments.com/marketing-optimization/converting-ppc-traffic.html

ii  Learn more about understanding the motivation of your customers in this MarketingExperiments Blog post:
    http://www.marketingexperiments.com/blog/marketing-insights/stop-thinking-like-a-marketer.html

iii  Check out the MECLABS Research Catalog to learn about other experiments:
    http://meclabs.com/research/publication/research-catalog

iv  Learn how urgency increased conversion 6% in this MarketingExperiments Blog post:
    http://www.marketingexperiments.com/blog/research-topics/lead-generation/urgency-increases-lead-gen-conversion.html
\[ c = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a \]

\[ \text{eme} = rv(\delta f + \delta t) - (f + \delta f) \]
C = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a
eme = rv(of + i) – (f + a)

Content Marketing
Leveraging Content to Generate Leads
3 Simple Tactics One Company Used to Achieve a 96% Increase in Leads

In terms of value exchange, content marketing acts as a gold mine for digital marketers. For many industries, marketers can generate leads simply by offering their knowledge and expertise in the form of a written report, video tutorial or infographic.

For the marketer, the cost of creating the content is outweighed by the value of generating leads. For the consumer, the cost of giving up their contact information is outweighed by the benefit of obtaining vital information with no monetary outlay.

This natural balance led to the explosion in popularity of the content marketing strategy, but as many marketers have discovered, it’s not always easy to find the balance between cost and value. Additionally, the way in which content is promoted and presented has a massive effect on the success of the strategy.

With these things in mind, we decided to run an experiment to identify which factors on your content’s landing page have the greatest impact on success.

Experiment: Which Content Marketing Landing Page Will Generate the Most Leads?

The goal of Test Protocol 1877 from the MECLABS Research Library was to uncover the best way to present content on the landing page to maximize conversion. Our Research Partner for this test is a company that produces thermal imaging cameras, and the content in question is a report that provides seven reasons why users choose the company over its competitors.
In Figure 1.1, you see the control landing page. It is a fairly standard landing page design that includes many best practices, including:

- A headline
- A graphic giving the digital report a physical representation
- An image of the device in work
- Bullet points for easy digest of the content
- Value-added call-to-action button copy
- A link to the privacy policy

Figure 1.2 shows the treatment design, which also includes all the elements mentioned previously. No elements are added or removed, but each of the elements mentioned are slightly tweaked based on our hypotheses.
Do the small changes add up to make a difference? Yes, the treatment outperformed the control page by 96% in terms of clickthrough rate.

Clearly the tweaks impacted the mental process of the visitor. But why? How can we parlay this result into success for our own landing pages? We must note three key observations.

**How to present content for maximum conversion**

*Key Observation #1.* The treatment features an image that illustrates the essential problem to the customer.

The job of imagery on a webpage is to reinforce the value proposition of the page. It should immediately help the visitor understand what the page has to offer and help them visualize how the product will improve their life. In this case, seeing the product in action is more effective than simply seeing the product itself.

If you look at the control and treatment images side-by-side (Figure 2.1), you will notice some subtle differences. The control image focuses on the technician, which relegates the role of the product to that of a prop. In the treatment image, the product is clearly the focus, which also allows us as viewers to get a better view of the product and its screen — to envision ourselves using it.

![Figure 2.1 - Control and Treatment 1](image_url)
Peoples’ thoughts arrange themselves in a story. Because of this, effective content is tightly synchronized to the internal and external story of the customer. In this case, essentially, the old image says, “You use this product to do your job.” The new image says, “This product helps you do your job better.” The difference is subtle but crucial to the story unfolding in the mind of the prospect.

Key Observation #2. The treatment shifts the focus from what the company offers to how the customer experience will be improved.

A common copywriting error found in our tests is the failure to view the product or service through the eyes of the customer. Beware of company logic — succumbing to the illusion that the prospect sees your company the way you see it. They do not. Copy written from this viewpoint will range between self-serving and irrelevant, but it will never be helpful.

The messaging in the control primarily focused on the company and doesn’t make the immediate connection to customer experience. Read over the copy in Figures 3.1 and 3.2, and you will immediately see the difference between company-centric copy and customer-centric copy. The treatment shifts the focus to what the customer wants: to find the right infrared camera. The tone of the copy also shifted to an angle of “enabling the customer” to find the solution.

Figure 3.1 - Control

Figure 3.2 - Treatment
High-converting landing page and content copy is helpful, not boastful. The only way to produce this kind of copy is to come to the writing table in the shoes of your customers, not your company.

Key Observation #3. The treatment reduces as much of the mental cost associated with downloading the content as possible.

Free content is not actually free. It may not require a monetary exchange, but there is always a cost involved. For every action a customer takes, they perform an often subconscious and simple mental equation: Is the value equal to or greater than the cost? Your goal, then, is to tip this equation in favor of the value, whether than be by increasing value or decreasing cost.

There are two kinds of mental costs involved in filling out forms online:

1. Effort — The psychological and physical effort required to actually fill out the fields.
2. Anxiety — The psychological concern associated with the action of providing information online.

The control form requires more mental cost from the customer in both areas. There are more fields to fill out, and the privacy policy is not protective so much as it is just another thing to agree to.

In the treatment, we reduce the number of form fields to the minimum needed by the company. We also reword the privacy policy messaging from simply “Privacy Policy” to “Your personal information is protected by our Privacy Policy,” which helps relieve mental anxiety.

In some industries and situations, the minimum necessary form fields may still require high mental cost in terms of effort. In these cases, the best way to tip the mental value-equation in your favor is to increase the value of the content being offered. This added value works to counteract the increased mental cost.

**Checklist for Presenting and Promoting Content**

Our experiment revealed three ways to improve conversion for your online content: **Use images that reinforce the value proposition, write copy that focuses on the customer’s needs and build forms that tip the mental cost versus value equation™ in your favor.** To help you do this consistently, we created a checklist you can use while building landing pages:

- Are the images connecting to the story of the customer?
- Do your images illustrate the problem or the solution you are offering?
- Is your copy customer-centric? Is it focused on what the customer is getting?
□ Does the copy talk about your company in such a way that it is connected to the resulting customer experience?
□ Do you have any unnecessary form fields? Can you remove any?
□ Have you addressed the anxiety around giving up personal information?

These tips will set you on the right path toward optimizing your content landing pages, but the only true path to optimization is through testing. Run a test, record the results, and let us know how it goes.

i  Learn how a consulting firm netted 388% more leads with a 4-step content marketing strategy: http://www.marketingsherpa.com/article/case-study/content-marketing-leads-4-step-strategy

ii MECLABS uses a scientific methodology in its testing. Learn about the defining characteristics of it: http://www.meclabs.com/methodology

iii Find out how to work with MECLABS research analyst to increase your company’s revenue through a Research Partnership: http://www.meclabs.com/about/research-partnerships

iv Watch the Web clinic “Copywriting on Tight Deadlines” to learn how story connects to the conversion process: http://www.marketingexperiments.com/site-optimization/copywriting-on-tight-deadlines.html

v In this MarketingExperiment Blog post, learn how to address customer anxiety: http://www.marketingexperiments.com/blog/research-topics/landing-page-optimization-research-topics/addressing-customer-anxiety.html

vi To learn more about the value exchange, read this MarketingExperiments Blog post: http://www.marketingexperiments.com/blog/research-topics/copywriting-research-topics/value-proposition-in-copy.html
At the Internet Retailer Conference and Exhibition (IRCE) 2014 in Chicago, Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, and Allison Banko, Reporter, both of MECLABS, interviewed event speakers and attendees in the MarketingSherpa Media Center.

In this 11-minute video, watch as Daniel spoke with Wikipedia CEO and Founder Jimmy Wales on how to encourage user-generated content – a powerful element within an overall content marketing strategy. Jimmy also discussed why Wikipedia is the only top 50 website in a *Wall Street Journal* study covering companies that do not engage in any visitor tracking.

You can watch the video here: mecla.bs/UserContent

**Empower people to provide the content they want to provide**

Jimmy explained that user-generated content is not free labor for marketers and that he dislikes the term “crowdsourcing” for that reason.

Retailers think, “I want people to do this work – I want them to write reviews for me.”
He explained, “Instead, they should turn it around and say, ‘What do my customers want to accomplish? What is it they are trying to express, and how can I help them express that?’”

Jimmy continued to say that this mindset might lead you in new and different ways. Maybe reviewing products is boring for your customers, but what they are really interested in is discussing your products or services in a more general way in which they can add their expertise to a community.

“That’s the first idea I would give – flip it on its head,” Jimmy said. “Don’t think about the work you would like people to do; think about what it is people want to do and how you can empower them to do that.”

BUILDING HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT THAT’S NOT SPAM-FILLED OR SELF-PROMOTIONAL

A challenge with an ecommerce site where you do want reviews and product feedback is that there’s a huge incentive for the bad parties to come in and spam you, Jimmy said. There’s a huge incentive for people with ulterior motives to say the product is great or the product is bad.

He provided TripAdvisor as an example:

“They’ve struggled with this [type of user-generated content] for years, and they’ve done a pretty good job of dealing with it. But in part they’ve dealt with it by being big enough and so popular that you sort of know some of the reviewers aren’t honest, but there’s enough people reviewing it’s kind of OK. But they actively have to police it, and it’s not cheap. It’s not easy,” he explained.

One suggestion Jimmy offered was to attempt to build more of a community among site visitors and customers, rather than have an area of the site where people just go, post a review and then forget about the contribution.

He said this idea doesn’t apply to all ecommerce websites but can be effective depending on the customer base and website audience. For example, a niche ecommerce site might have customers who want to get to know, and interact with, each other.

WHY WIKIPEDIA DOESN’T TRACK ITS SITE VISITORS

For a final question, Daniel pointed out a recent Wall Street Journal study of the top 50 Internet sites that found Wikipedia was the sole member of that group that conducted zero website visitor tracking. He added that Wikipedia does have conversion objectives, such as providing information and garnering donations.
With that in mind, Daniel asked, “What do you know that the other 49 sites don’t?”

A core belief at Wikipedia, Jimmy said, is “not spying on people” and the concept that “what you read is your business.”

He added the organization does not sell or share data with third parties, even though user browsing history on Wikipedia pages would probably be fairly valuable information for advertising algorithms.

Currently, the site only records one out of every 1,000 site visits to a log to be broken down statistically. This was done because of capacity reasons, but now the organization is moving toward logging every visit (but still not tracking individual users) for analytics.

Jimmy added Wikipedia is beginning to see the value in understanding how visitors navigate the website – particularly how entry editors use the site, such as abandoning an edit and other similar metrics.

**Check out all the IRCE Media Center videos**

Our team conducted 32 interviews during two days on the exhibitor floor at IRCE. Check out more of these videos featuring a wide range of event speakers representing brands including: Fathead, Website Magazine, Digital River, Save-A-Lot, Demandware, Joyus and eBay, among many others: MarketingSherpa.com/IRCE

Interested in more ecommerce insights? After you check out IRCE interviews, download your free copy of the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study for 95 charts on what’s working in ecommerce in 2014 and insights for future efforts: MarketingSherpa.com/ecommerce
Many marketers think of content marketing as a top-of-the-funnel activity. This could include a video to build brand awareness or an e-book to grow the email list.

But what about using content to encourage sales and upsells at the point of purchase?

On a recent trip to Maine, I came across a great example of point-of-purchase content marketing, although I’m not sure the content’s author would have labeled it as such.

**How to Eat a Lobster**

This is a great example of where point-of-purchase content marketing can help: when you have a product that novice customers might not know how to use.

For a tourist who has never eaten a lobster, a placemat like this could be the tipping point between:

- Buying the less expensive (and easier to eat) lobster roll or lobster meat salad or something more familiar, like a steak

  or

- Buying the premium-priced product with the higher margin – lobster

No one wants to order a lobster (or any product) and look like a fool because they don’t know how to eat it. They are less likely to order because they don’t see the value in it.

That’s why this placemat is true content marketing, by my definition. This isn’t an overt sales piece; it was executed in a way that teaches someone how to do something.
Even for myself, as I have eaten a lobster before and was going to order one anyway, it helped me enjoy it more as a refresher for exactly how to eat the lobster since it had been a few years since I had eaten one.

**Opportunities for Point-of-Purchase Content Marketing**

The great opportunity for point-of-purchase content marketing is this:

*When a customer needs to be taught about the product to make a decision that is better for them.*

This likely falls into two major buckets: product education and product differentiation.

**Product Education: Using Content Marketing to Teach Customers How to Use the Product**

There are many reasons customers may want to use a product but have to overcome the friction and anxiety of being unsure how to use it:

- **Cultural** – Tourists are a great example of this. “How to eat a lobster” in Maine, but also “how to hail a cab” in New York City or “how to order sushi” in San Francisco.

- **New** – You can encourage early adopters and even laggards by showing them how to do things in a new way, along with the value prop of doing it. Examples might include making a payment with a smartphone or using a car hailing app instead of hailing that cab on the street.

- **Rules-based** – You may be selling something that relates to a game or hobby that they simply haven’t tried yet. Many gambling games are a great example. A simple sign or video in a casino might encourage more people to try their luck. Or if it’s a hobby, a magazine about archery next to an archery display in a store might convince shoppers to take the plunge and try it.

- **Too cool** – How do you order a hand-crafted cocktail in a hipster bar and look like you fit in? When you think about it, this is the main reason behind the sommelier – a great example of content marketing that encourages a larger purchase and helps people understand and enjoy the purchase more.
PRODUCT DIFFERENTIATION: CHOICE IS REQUIRED

Sometimes shoppers are sold on buying the product, but they are unsure which option to choose. The $20, $40 or $60 option. The tablet with Wi-Fi or Wi-Fi and 4G. Silver, gold or platinum. A, B or C package.

Content marketing can help introduce and explain why there are different options and which customers are a best fit for various levels of offerings.

CONTENT LOBSTER

Like the B-52’s “Rock Lobster,” perhaps the Content Lobster can serve as a reminder to take a good, hard look at what your customers experience at the point of purchase – both online and in the real world – and question if content can help them make better choices.
"We often feel like we have a sales force of thousands of loyal customers looking out for our best interest."

We’ll get to how content marketing enabled the example in that quote in just a minute, but first, let’s start with the incredible, edible egg market.

The egg market is a perfect example of how value, and marketing’s role in the communication of that value, can be added to what was previously a commodity in order to produce higher margins.


Of course, there is a range of prices for these different attributes, ranging from $2.78 per dozen to $5.49 per dozen in a recent Consumer Reports article, for example.

This creates a dilemma for the consumer and a challenge (and opportunity) for the marketer.

**The Marketer’s Challenge and Opportunity: Communicating value when markets are filled with choice**

This is, after all, the heart of marketing: enabling choice and communicating the value of those choices.

So let’s look back at the egg market. Remember, not too long ago, eggs were just a commodity. Then, all of these product claims came along. One could argue that all of those claims create more value for customers, and thus, justify the higher price. That may in fact be true, but they would miss the point.

The real ability to charge a premium price for having any of those words on an egg carton is the customer’s *perception* of that value. After all, how many customers really understand what goes into raising an organic egg?
It was beauty (the content) that killed the beast (the commodity)

Commodity products are very dangerous for companies. It means their only lever of survival is to focus on operational excellence and cost-cutting to constantly stay one step ahead of expenses and the competition.

This is where content can be so powerful. Companies that really are producing something of greater value (e.g., the organic egg) can use content to show the story of how their products are made so the customer can see for themselves what the value is (e.g., justifying the higher cost for an organic egg).

Effective content marketing isn’t only happening online. Let’s take a look at an example of how one egg company is using content marketing to show this distinguishing value.

In-package newsletter

If you buy Country Hen eggs off your grocer’s shelf, when you open the carton, you will see “The Country Hen Farm News.”
Content marketing = show your work

At first glance, it’s easy to miss how profound this in-package newsletter is. After all, the company basically bought a truck. So what?

Surely, customers must assume that their eggs make it from point A to point B to eventually their grocery store shelves in a truck of some sort. How does that add value?

“We like to see people working on our behalf,” Michael Norton, Associate Professor, Harvard Business School, explained at Web Optimization Summit 2014. (You can read a 15-second synopsis of his research in Takeaway #2 of “Web Optimization Summit 2014 Wrap-up: Top 5 takeaways to improve your testing and optimization:” http://mecla.bs/digest0662.)

The difference between showing and telling

It’s not simply the fact that The Country Hen bought a truck that adds value, but rather, how it uses the newsletter to show product value. The magic is in the writing. This newsletter shows the value in three subtle, but brilliant, ways:

- **Shows the work** – As mentioned above, it shows how these farmers are working hard to get your eggs to you.
- **Shows the passion** – This isn’t some mega-corporation with commodity eggs. These people really care. For example, “Our girls will not have their vital nutrients in the care of a less than reliable vehicle.”
- **Establishes its place in the market** – Again, this isn’t a mega-corporation. They’re the underdog, the little guy. By spending more to buy Country Hen eggs, you are supporting the small farmer. After all, it’s quite charming how proud they are of a used truck: “The truck has only 188,000 miles and is capable of transporting 24,000 pounds of our certified organic cuisine.”

This company could have ran a TV ad campaign with stock farm footage of dewy mornings and hay bales being loaded into trucks and a ruddy-voiced announcer reading lines like, “We’re working a little harder for you.”

That would be *telling*. It would be hype. I would argue, it wouldn’t have been as effective because it wouldn’t be real. It wouldn’t win over today’s skeptical customer.

Pamela Jesseau, Senior Director of Marketing, MECLABS, is the person who gave me this newsletter and suggested this blog post. She described it like this: “I spend twice as much money on these eggs because they tell me about their truck. I’m never going to buy another egg ever again as long as The Country Hen is on the shelf. I want to find out what is next. I feel like they are my hens, too.”
After reading the newsletter, I wanted to share some insights from The Country Hen with you to help improve your own content marketing. So I reached out to Kathy Moran, the signatory of the newsletter, to get some background and tips for you.

As with any marketing department we write about, they aren’t perfect by any means. They still have work to do on their digital side. But I thought it would be helpful to hear how they create content with a small team and limited budget. Her responses were so good and real, I didn’t even pick up my editing pen.

**You are doing something right if your customers are talking to you — worry when they are not**

*MarketingSherpa: Why do you have in-carton newsletters? How did you get the idea to create them? How does the newsletter support your product’s value proposition?*

*Kathy Moran: The Country Hen is the original, organic omega-3 egg. Our founder, George Bass, started the company in 1988. The very first carton of eggs he sold contained a newsletter as did every carton after that. We do a lot of things a little different to produce what, we believe, is the world’s best egg.

Our hens roam freely through sunlit barns with windows down the entire length of both sides of the barns. They have outdoor access onto specially designed porches. They have 24-hour access to feed and water and have the ability to nest, perch, socialize, sunbathe, dustbathe, spread their wings, etc.

We mill our own feed at our farm in Hubbardston, Mass. We have a proprietary feed formula that gives our eggs their higher counts of omega-3s (DHA, EPA, ALA), lutein and zeaxanthin, choline and vitamin D.

We were also the first egg producer to insert a newsletter into the cartons. No doubt, this is a costly program: the cost of the inserts, the inserter machines are custom made, maintaining these machines, etc.

However, the benefits to our company greatly diminish any cost to run this program. The Country Hen receives almost as much feedback from customers regarding the newsletter as we do regarding our eggs.

*MS: The one I saw was dated 2014. Do you have a regular newsletter? If so, how often do you publish and how do you decide what to write about?*

*KM: Our newsletter changes every four to six weeks. Any topic is fair game as long as it pertains to The Country Hen and will be of interest to our customers. Popular subjects include: egg nutrition, organic farming, humane farming practices, team members, customer letters, new buildings and/or farm equipment, organic legislation, changes to our carton, funny farm stories, etc.*
**MS:** With content marketing, the challenge many companies and marketers face is resources. You seem like a small company from looking at your website. How do you have the resources to produce these? What process do you go through to write them?

**KM:** For many years, our founder, George Bass, wrote every newsletter. That job has been relinquished to another team member. However, topics and input are a team effort and part of the creative fun of the office staff.

Ultimately, the newsletter is signed off on by two members of the management team before going to print. We also have had the great fortune of working with a local printer, who is very talented and accommodating. He has produced the newsletter for us from the beginning.

**MS:** It looks like you do not have a blog or other digital content marketing, and your Facebook page hasn’t been updated since 2013. Why have you focused on print for your content marketing?

**KM:** As you mentioned above, we are a very small business with limited staff. That being said, one of our short-term goals is to have a daily presence in various social media platforms.

**MS:** What results have you seen from the newsletters? How do you know you’re getting an ROI on them?

**KM:** The number-crunchers out there would like a hard number to quantify the success of a newsletter program. The Country Hen (TCH) only produces a premium organic egg from hens which are fed organic feed. We have to charge a premium price to offset the costs of producing eggs of this quality. We ship our product to many parts of the U.S. The price of organic feed, freight, etc., has skyrocketed over the past several years. We are constantly looking to reduce our costs to simply maintain our pricing structure or to minimize any and all price increases.

Probably the best way I can explain it is that we have NEVER contemplated changing (I am not even able to type the word eliminate) this program in order to save costs.

The only substantial marketing or advertising TCH has ever done has been this newsletter. The rest has been word of mouth from loyal consumers. We believe the newsletter gives our customers a connection to the farm. Whether a customer buys TCH in Hubbardston, Mass., or in California, they think of TCH as their local egg producer.

They are more knowledgeable about TCH and our eggs and feel confident recommending our eggs to their friends and family. They are also comfortable enough to contact us to tell us when they have a story to share, when they are concerned about quality, when they can no longer find our eggs at their favorite store, when they want to comment on the newsletter, etc.
We get **A LOT** of feedback and greatly appreciate all of it. We often feel like we have a sales force of thousands of loyal customers looking out for our best interest.

How can you go wrong with that? The hard number that the crunchers are looking for is simply: PRICELESS! You are doing something right if your customers are talking to you — worry when they are not.

**MS**: *What other advice would you give marketers and companies that I’ve overlooked?*

**KM**:

1. Use whatever means you can to **get your customers talking to you and about you**: social media, newsletters, etc.
2. Please remember it does not help to do all of this if you don’t **do the basics** like answering the phone. Customers want someone to pick up the phone when they take the time to call. And yes, many still call.

TCH gets the majority of correspondence through emails, next is phone calls, and we still get a significant amount of mailed letters.

I think many companies and people would be surprised at the amount of point of sale phone calls we take. Customers that are standing in the grocery store and have a question regarding our eggs or farming practices before they feel comfortable purchasing. If we did not answer the phone, we would not have made these sales.
Red Bull is running circles around every other name in the content marketing game.

Currently, the energy drink company has its wings dipped in a whole gamut of media channels — we’re talking digital, mobile, TV, print and music. People — millions of people — are actually consuming this content. (What a concept, right?)

But audiences aren’t tuning in because the company is marketing its energy drink. In fact, Red Bull continues to rise above the rest in content marketing by doing somewhat of the opposite. The company earned its spot on the content marketing throne by pushing its product to the side and its audience to the front in an extreme way.

Instead of a skinny aluminum can, Red Bull focuses its content on the sports, culture and lifestyle of its adventurous drinkers. In 2007, the company even launched Red Bull Media House — its very own media company that develops all of the company’s content pieces and manages its social media channels.
Some of the media house’s highlights? Take a look at Red Bull’s YouTube page: https://www.youtube.com/user/redbull (if you haven’t already as one of its 3.7 million subscribers). These sports action videos have views that rank in the thousands — some in the millions.

On the day this blog post was published, Danny MacAskill — “Way Back Home” had 32,988,764 views: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cj6ho1-G6tw

While the Wingsuit flying over the Turkish mountains had 38,839 views: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6HAE_S2oCU
But let’s not forget about the Red Bull Stratos Space Jump back in 2012 when daredevil Felix Baumgartner free-fell from the edge of space.

This viral video had 37,005,846 views: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHtvDA0W34I

More recently, Red Bull further tapped into its audience by partnering with C3 Presents to host live-streams of Lollapalooza, broadcasting the music festival live on Red Bull TV. The Chicago music fest is one of the largest of its kind, always featuring a jam-packed lineup of artists. In 2014, this included performances by Eminem, Iggy Azalea and Lorde.

Moving into the print realm, Red Bull has its own monthly action, sports, travel, culture and music magazine, The Red Bulletin, which boasts a 2.2 million circulation and is available in English, German, French, Spanish and Portuguese.

As you can see, Red Bull reigns king of content for a reason.
PUTTING THE CUSTOMER FIRST

Author Mack Collier featured Red Bull as a case study in his book, *Think Like a Rock Star: How to Create Social Media and Marketing Strategies that Turn Customers into Fans*.

In one of his website blog posts, titled “The Power of Being Second: How Red Bull is winning the (content) marketing wars,” he wrote:

“Everything about the brand’s content, marketing and communication efforts is about its customers and what’s important to them. The product itself is secondary to the activities that the customer engages in and cherishes.”

That’s a page from Red Bull’s book we can all take away: Put the customer first.

To help you with your own content marketing strategies, I reached out to Red Bull Media House to try to garner some key tips, but Red Bull puts itself second so much that I was told that, due to its corporate philosophy, Red Bull Media House puts its employees “behind the curtain” to let its “artists, athletes, products and events speak for themselves.”

Letting your work speak for itself? Love it.

Lucky for me (and you) the folks at Red Bull Media House were kind enough to work with me to offer some content marketing advice so long as I kept them behind the curtain, not attributing the advice to any one person. Well, this is fitting because what’s below is a collaboration of various departments at Red Bull Media House.

Go ahead, drink up.

*MarketingSherpa:* Red Bull seems to have been entrenched in content marketing from the beginning. Why did the brand feel this was an area of importance?

*Red Bull Media House:* Red Bull has been filming, photographing and providing the highest quality content for broadcast, print and digital media partners ever since its market launch in 1987. Since then, Red Bull has supported remarkable people in achieving their dreams and, in doing so, has documented their experiences. Sharing their inspiring, real-life stories with a worldwide audience that’s perpetually hungry for compelling content was a logical consequence.
**MS:** In 2007, the Red Bull Media House was founded. Why did the company choose to found an entire entity to focus on this type of marketing?

**RBMH:** After two decades of filming, photographing and storytelling, Red Bull had built an extensive portfolio of high-quality sport, music, lifestyle and entertainment content. Formalizing content production, collection and distribution — leveraging the assets and building on the expertise by establishing an independent media company — was a natural extension of the work Red Bull had been doing.

But to address the wording of the question: Red Bull Media House wasn’t founded to focus on marketing. From the outset, content itself has been the focus, specifically, quality content that fully engages audiences.

Since its launch in 2007, the overall mission of Red Bull Media House has been to share real-life stories of fascinating personalities from sport, music and lifestyle that inspire audiences from all over the world. So its main objective is first and foremost to produce, distribute and broadcast premium content that meets the highest expectations in both production technology and storytelling quality.

**MS:** Now, Red Bull has a presence across a multitude of channels whether it’s video, print or online. However, where did Red Bull first focus its content marketing efforts?

**RBMH:** Because Red Bull Media House is in the business of creating and delivering content, the product being marketed actually is content itself. Red Bull Media House has, of course, from the beginning been the exclusive source for all the action and excitement Red Bull athletes, projects and events deliver, but besides from the area of “Sport & Lifestyle,” the company now also produces and distributes programming from other realms — “Nature & Science” and “Tradition & Inspiration” — for an ideal mix.

Furthermore, Red Bull Media House now maintains digital products, print magazines, a print publishing company and a TV channel as well as a professional network of communication experts in countries around the world. In addition, Red Bull Media House produces original web series, TV programs, feature films and music that media companies and industry partners can license to enrich their program experience and to fulfill their target groups’ demand for authentic, relevant content.

**MS:** If a company wanted to get its feet wet in content marketing, where should it begin? What advice would you give them?

**RBMH:** No matter how large or small your target audience may be, the content needs to be relevant to them, and it needs to be easily accessible. Plus, because today’s environment offers more platforms than ever for sharing your content, think about what you can do to make your content stand out in that vast and cluttered landscape so that it gets seen in the first place.
**MS:** How do you measure content marketing to determine its results and benefits for your company?

**RBMH:** For Red Bull Media House, success equates to audience engagement. Audiences who are engaged in content and who find the content easy to access on the platforms that matter to them will then be eager for the next story — be it a movie, TV programming, a web series, a magazine article, music, an event streamed live ... That’s the best result possible for Red Bull Media House and for its partners.

Some examples of those partners who are looking to engage audiences, by the way, include media companies like the NBC Sports Group, which just renewed its partnership with Red Bull Media House to continue to create the Red Bull Signature Series; and sporting organizations such as the IFSC (the worldwide governing body of sport-climbing competition), as well as “C3 Presents” with its legendary Lollapalooza festival, which are partnering with Red Bull Media House to host event live-streams on Red Bull’s digital channels, such as RedBull.com or Red Bull TV, to heighten awareness and increase the audience for their events.

**MS:** What’s the most important thing for a company to keep in mind when it comes to content marketing?

**RBMH:** In the case of Red Bull Media House, where the product being marketed is content, it’s all about the audience. Red Bull Media House is always looking for new ways and channels to engage and inspire them. So, as mentioned in the previous answer, in both partnerships and the kinds of events and subjects Red Bull Media House covers, it’s all about delivering the best, most engaging content — content that’s authentic and relevant to today’s audiences around the world — on platforms that fit their lifestyles.

**MS:** Red Bull does a fantastic job of ensuring its marketing is customer-centric and that selling the product is secondary. How do you achieve this while achieving the company’s marketing needs?

**RBMH:** Being customer-centric — or audience-centric, in terms of content — is most relevant, not only in the media industry. One way of achieving that is through compelling storytelling. Empowering people to live their dream is part of the Red Bull brand heritage, and sharing compelling stories of remarkable people and their real-life dreams, creations and adventures to inspire others is a cornerstone of the Red Bull Media House business.

The stories that the media company shares are based on the vision, goals and journeys of more than 700 outstanding athletes, musicians and groundbreaking artists — not only capturing their professional achievements but also opening a window into their personal experiences and emotions. That way, Red Bull Media House builds bridges between their lives and the audience.
APPENDIX A:
MARKETING RESEARCH CHARTS OF THE WEEK
**What should online stores show on product pages?**

*Q: What information does your website display alongside each product? (Select all that apply)*

Week of July 1, 2014
From the *Ecommerce Benchmark Study*
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

In the *MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study*, we asked:

*Q. What information does your website display alongside each product? (Select all that apply)*

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**3.3 What do Successful and Unsuccessful Ecommerce Companies Show on Their Product Pages?**

![Graph showing product page elements by success score]

N=1,827

*Copyright: MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study 2014*
More is better (with one notable exception)

For 19 of the page elements, the more successful companies (you can learn more about how the success scores were calculated in the Benchmark Study) were more likely to have these elements — everything from price and images to product credibility indicators and videos — on product pages.

The one notable exception was links to external sites.

While perhaps companies use links to external sites to help with SEO or provide third-party credibility, before sending customers off your site and out of your funnel from product pages, consider how it could hurt conversion.

Ratings and reviews used more frequently by successful companies

As we look deeper into the chart’s data and compare specific product page elements, we can identify the elements that have especially large differences in how often they are displayed by the more and less successful companies.

With any product a customer buys, there is always concern that it will not live up to their expectations.

This caveat emptor, or buyer beware, is even greater when a customer buys from an online store and cannot touch and feel the product — especially if they are a new customer.

Ratings and reviews can help reduce that anxiety.

In the survey that informed this Benchmark Study, one marketer replied about overcoming her online store’s critical challenge: “Not proving credibility was a key factor, which we improved upon by offering up reviews from credible sources, and providing a generous money-back guarantee.”

When using ratings and reviews to reduce anxiety, make sure you are doing so honestly:

- Do not “goose up” the ratings artificially or publish fake reviews
- Do not delete negative reviews

Ratings and reviews reduce anxiety and build credibility when they are honest — including both the good and the bad.

In addition, customers can find other reviews and ratings about most products from other sources — from the gold standard of Consumer Reports to countless blogs, review sites, social networks and even other ecommerce stores — so if the information your store provides paints an overly rosy picture of a faulty product, you will lose trust.
Shipping Information Displayed More Frequently on Product Pages by Successful Companies

“How much will this cost? And when can I get it?”

These are two fundamental questions customers have when they are on your product pages.

It shouldn’t be surprising that more successful companies are also more likely to display shipping time and cost on product pages.

What is surprising is how infrequently even the successful companies display this information, with only about one-third displaying shipping and handling cost and even fewer successful ecommerce sites displaying shipping time.

Test What Works for Your Site

Hopefully, the above data will give you ideas for product page split tests on your own ecommerce site to learn what really works for your unique customers.

To learn how split testing can help determine which product page elements are most effective on your site, you can watch “Product Pages Tested: How carefully pinpointing customer anxiety led to a 78% increase in conversion” (mecla.bs/digest0717).

In this MarketingExperiments Web clinic, we explained how we tested four elements from the above chart — shipping (or access) time, site security indicators, description and product specifications — with a large e-book retailer. We also showed which elements increased conversion the most.
How Marketing Budgets are Changing for Successful Companies

Q: Please indicate the 2013 level of the following metrics and their ongoing trend. Please report all monetary values in U.S. dollars.

Week of July 8, 2014
From the Ecommerce Benchmark Study
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

Sometimes, it takes a complex set of steps to reach a simple and powerful answer. I’ll start this MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week with all of the steps we took to get the simple answers to these questions: Are successful companies changing marketing budgets? And, really, in which direction?

First, let me help you understand how we collected the data. In the recently fielded MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study survey, we asked marketers to:

Q. Please indicate the 2013 level of the following metrics and their ongoing trend. Please report all monetary values in U.S. dollars. If you cannot give a reasonably accurate response or are not comfortable disclosing the information, please leave the space blank.

1.33 Are Successful Companies Changing Marketing Budgets?

N=1,745

Copyright: MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study 2014
One of the values respondents filled in was “marketing spend,” and they could choose if the spend was rising, steady or falling.

We then wanted to understand not just how all companies were changing marketing budgets, but specifically, what the most successful companies were doing that was different from other companies.

So we correlated this data with a success model computed by Diana Sindicich, Senior Manager of Data Sciences, MECLABS, parent company of MarketingSherpa. To determine which companies were most successful, Sindicich gave weight to 12 factors, with data like “year-over-year difference in annual and ecommerce revenue” and “margin percentage.”

You can see more information about the success model in the complimentary MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study (marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce), in which the chart (shown on the preceding page) appeared, constructed based on the Benchmark Study survey responses. The most successful companies in the chart received a success score ranging from nine to 12.

Many marketers in the Benchmark Study survey mentioned they felt limited by their budgets, like the respondent who said, “Budget restrictions meant we couldn’t develop the online presence we wanted. We developed better customer relations to encourage referrals.”

**THE MOST SUCCESSFUL COMPANIES ARE MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A RISING MARKETING BUDGET**

The above chart should be very reassuring to anyone who works in marketing, and could be used as one data point in an internal campaign to grow your marketing budget.

The more successful a company is, the more likely it is to have a rising budget, and the less likely it is to have a falling budget. As you can see in the chart, 58% of the most successful companies reported a rising marketing spend, while only 6% of companies in the top two success groupings reported a falling marketing spend.

One caveat to consider: Correlation is not necessarily causation. We cannot confidently deduce from this data that the marketing spend is creating or limiting success. It may be that less successful companies have less money to invest in marketing.

Or, it may be that the most successful companies are more likely to invest in general, and the rising marketing budget is but one indication of a focus on investing in and improving the overall company and the way it serves customers.
REQUESTING THE BUDGET YOU NEED

Hopefully, this chart is empowering to you. Perhaps you can use it as a good proof point to help you achieve the budget you need to reach your objectives.

But how much should you budget? There are no easy answers to that massive question, but keep this one last point in mind from a survey respondent:

“Whatever budget you arrive at to cover an ecommerce project, multiply it by at least three and you may begin to get somewhere near the reality. However, the ROI can still be totally unbeatable by a similar spend on other activities in the market.”
Which department owns the mobile experience?

Q: Which functional department controls each portion of your online presence?

Week of July 15, 2014
From the Ecommerce Benchmark Study
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

In the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study, we asked:

Q. Which functional department controls each portion of your online presence?
Marketing Department Most Likely to Own Social Media and Email Campaigns

At more than half of companies, the marketing department was most likely to own social media (55% of companies) and email campaigns (54%).

However, not every ecommerce company has a marketing department, as this survey respondent mentioned, “Since we no longer have a marketing department, many things were a challenge, and we missed out on a lot of profitable opportunities.”

For both social media (13%) and email campaigns (15%), a general ecommerce department was the second-most likely department to own these functions.

IT Department Has a Role in the Mobile Experience

The IT department can be an internal challenge for many marketers. For example, one survey respondent remarked, “Our marketing department is moving too fast for IT to keep up with our needs.”

For marketers interested in optimizing the mobile experience, a good relationship with IT is essential. While the marketing department was still the most likely to own the mobile experience, only 26% of marketing departments did. The second-most likely department to own mobile was IT, with 24% of companies putting this department in charge of mobile.

For a deeper look into which departments own different aspects of the online presence, download your complimentary copy of the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study (marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce), made possible by a research grant from Magento, an eBay company. In the Benchmark Study, we explored how the ownership of these five functions changes as a company’s revenue grows.
**Acquisition Cost per Customer**

*Q: Please indicate the 2013 level of the following metrics and their ongoing trend.*

Week of July 22, 2014
From the *Ecommerce Benchmark Study*
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

In the *MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study*, we asked respondents to:

*Q. Please indicate the 2013 level of the following metrics and their ongoing trend.*

One of the metrics we asked about was acquisition cost per customer, not only for the monetary value, but also if that cost was rising, steady or falling. You can see the resulting data below.

3.4 Acquisition Cost per Customer (by Trend)

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N=168

Copyright: MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study 2014
ACQUISITION COST TRENDS

Overall, the acquisition cost trends skewed toward rising costs:

- Rising — 31%
- Steady — 54%
- Falling — 16%

ACQUISITION COST FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Marketers often ask about metrics like average acquisition cost, and what reasonable costs they can target, which is why we provide this information.

However, first let me provide a giant caveat — the most effective cost level for your company may have nothing to do with the overall average for ecommerce sites. Having these averages helps only if you ask this essential question: Why is our cost different?

There are many valid reasons why your costs may be different, which include:

- How expensive your product is
- Whether it is a highly considered purchase
- How established your brand and ecommerce site is
- How competitive your marketplace is
- What your overall company strategy is (e.g., do you choose to sacrifice margin or even profit in the short term to grow customer base for the long term?)

So, for example, if your average cost is higher and you are selling diamond jewelry in your ecommerce store, that makes sense. It is an expensive, considered purchase where you really have to build trust with customers, so your company should have a higher cost than the general ecommerce average.

AVERAGE ACQUISITION COST PER CUSTOMER

Here are the numbers that are represented in the chart:

- Rising: Median $25, Mean $109
- Steady: Median $12, Mean $82
- Falling: Median $14, Mean $72
You’ll see that the mean (average) is very different from the median (50th percentile). This indicates that there are some ecommerce companies with very high acquisition costs that are skewing the average.

Overall, there is a divide between the companies facing rising acquisition costs and companies facing steady or falling costs — which may be due to market pressures for certain products, or simply inefficient strategies at some companies.

Or, it may be due to changes in the channels they use to market their ecommerce sites, as this Benchmark Survey respondent indicated:

“Pre ecommerce, we had almost total control over our marketing. Now we [feel] the effect of changing and unknown algorithms, and conflicting interests. For example, our AdWords PPC went up since we can no longer have separate campaigns for mobile and tablets. Our cause-effect ratio is slowly and steadily shifting. Since our PPC was incredibly granular it gave us an edge we no longer have as they and other sites, in their short-term best interest, continue to level the playing field. This has resulted in a steady increase in CPA over the years.”

For more data about how acquisition costs are changing by channel use, download your free copy of the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study (marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce), made possible by a generous research grant from Magento, an eBay company.
OVERALL CONVERSION RATES

Q: What is your average conversion rate for ecommerce sales (%)?

Week of July 28, 2014
From the Ecommerce Benchmark Study
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

In the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study, we asked:

Q. What is your average conversion rate for ecommerce sales (%)?
When we evaluated the 2,912 responses, we saw that overall conversion rates were most frequently less than 5%, with many responses below 1% (and even a few, incredulously, approaching 100%).

This is not to say that your company’s conversion rate should be any of those numbers, but it gives you a general idea of how other companies are performing.

Beyond focusing on specific conversion rates of competitors, here are a few important principles to keep in mind about conversion.

**DON’T JUST FOCUS ON YOUR CURRENT CONVERSION RATE; FOCUS ON HOW YOU CAN IMPROVE IT**

Yes, understanding the competition’s conversion rate can be insightful.

But, the more important question is: How can you improve your company’s conversion rate?

It may come from reducing steps in the funnel and improving messaging, which worked for this Benchmark Study survey respondent: “We have seen improvements in the conversion rates by reducing clicks and improving calls-to-action (CTAs). Instead of ‘View,’ we used ‘Buy’ and that proved to be a stronger CTA for conversions.”

Or, you might increase trust and credibility in your overall company’s value proposition: “Small companies have very low conversion rates so creating a strong, recognized brand, that can be trusted, from scratch, is a must.”

Or (and these should be used sparingly, with a bigger focus on improving your product’s value proposition and the messaging of the value prop), by using incentives, as this Benchmark Study survey respondent indicated, “It is difficult to increase conversion rate without using incentives like discounts and offers.”

**UNDERSTAND WHAT STEPS IN THE FUNNEL HELP (AND HURT) CONVERSION**

How many steps do you absolutely need in your checkout process? Do customers have to register for an account to purchase?

There may be bigger strategic reasons to take some of these steps that hurt conversion, but understanding their impact is helpful.
Even if there are business reasons for using them, it doesn’t necessarily sound the death knell for conversion, as indicated by this Benchmark Study survey respondent, “Our conversion rate is surprisingly good for a website that requires users to register before checking out.”

**Understand which channels impact conversion**

This gets to the basics of channel selection — you do not want to invest in “hot” or buzzworthy channels; you should invest in the channels that help impact your specific customer’s decision-making process.

Once you gain an understanding of these channels, you may decide to make investments many steps up the customer’s buying journey from purchase to help increase final conversion, as indicated by this Benchmark Study survey respondent:

We have three key items we check almost daily:

- Number of visitors
- Conversion rate
- Average order value (AOV)

We see that number of visitors is increasing; conversion rate and AOV is more or less stable. By far the most successful marketing instrument is our weekly newsletter with some special offers. That boosts sales dramatically. So we are also quite keen on having customers sign up for the newsletter.

**Your company does not have a conversion rate**

It has several conversion rates. The more granularly you understand those conversion rates, the better you can improve them. There are conversion rates for individual products, of course, but also for different customer segments and channels as well.

As this Benchmark Study survey respondent remarked, they experience different conversion rates for different devices: “With a classic design, conversion rate is 3.2% on PC, 1.4% on tablet, 1.05% on smartphone.”
CUSTOMER FEEDBACK AND ECOMMERCE SUCCESS

Q: How often do you make changes to the following based on customer feedback?

Week of August 5, 2014
From the Ecommerce Benchmark Study
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

In the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study, 1,755 marketers answered this question:

Q. How often do you make changes to the following based on customer feedback?

3.31 How Successful are Companies that Frequently Evaluate Customer Experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Process</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services or Policies</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=1,755

Copyright: MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study 2014
Customer-centric organizations are more successful

We then correlated the frequency of making changes based on customer feedback with the responding organization’s median weighted success score.

*Ed. Note: The weighted success score was created by Diana Sindicich, Senior Manager, Data Sciences, MECLABS (parent company of MarketingSherpa). It includes factors like financial metrics (e.g., year-over-year difference in annual and ecommerce revenue), and you can read more about it on page 9 of the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study ([marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce](http://marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce)).*

As you can see in the chart above, the more frequently companies took customer feedback into account, the more likely they were to be successful.

For example, companies that frequently made changes to their website based on customer feedback had a success score of almost 8, while companies that never made changes to their website based on customer feedback had a roughly 25% lower success score of 6.

The customer experience can be a key differentiator for ecommerce companies

While at a gut level, we all might assume that more customer-focused organizations would be more successful, let’s take a quick look at the reason why.

Many ecommerce sites are resellers of one kind of another, so they rarely can compete on product differentiation. Customers can easily find the exact same, or at least similar enough, products on many different websites.

That leaves only two ways for ecommerce companies to compete:

1. Price
2. Experience

If you’re not the low-cost leader (goodbye, margins), you must create and message a better experience to customers. This can happen in many ways (often combined), for example:

- Customer service
- Content marketing that tells your company’s unique story
- Product and service guarantees
- Speed of delivery
- Brand affinity and strength
- Community building
IT CAN’T HAPPEN IF YOU IGNORE POTENTIAL AND CURRENT CUSTOMERS

All of these improvements to the customer experience are predicated on understanding customer motivations, listening to customers, and constantly improving the experience to better serve customers.

CUSTOMER CENTRICITY IS EASIER SAID THAN DONE

Of course, it’s one thing to know what practices will be effective, it’s quite another to actually be able to execute on them. If this wasn’t true, every ecommerce site would be doing it, right?

As one Benchmark Study survey respondent remarked, “The challenge I’m facing right now is integration with social media to get a rich awareness and feedback loop.”

From learning what your customers really want through tactics like listening to social media and A/B testing, to actually being able to deliver an improved experience with a more responsive website or products that better serve customers, an exceptional customer experience doesn’t happen by accident.

So hopefully, this week’s chart can serve as a key data point to get the budget, resources and buy-in you need to respond to customer needs, better serve the customer and achieve successful results for your company.
INDUSTRY BENCHMARK CONVERSION RATES FOR 25 RETAIL CATEGORIES

Q: Which product categories does your organization sell through ecommerce? (Select all that apply)

Week of August 12, 2014
From the Ecommerce Benchmark Study
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

In the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study, we asked:

Q. What is your average conversion rate for ecommerce sales (%)?

We also asked:

Q. Which product categories does your organization sell through ecommerce? (Select all that apply)

Below is the chart of responses from 2,885 marketers to these questions. Keep reading for analysis of the data, and feel free to comment with your own analysis as well.
Companies selling more products tend to have higher conversion rates …

What is the best way to compete with the mega retailers like Amazon and Walmart?

Some business strategists have suggested to go niche — focus very narrowly on a specific product type and better serve that audience.

While that may work in some instances, the above data suggests there could be flaws in that strategy. We found that the average conversion rate for companies selling only one product was 16.3%, while those selling multiple product categories had a higher conversion rate at 17.2%.

…but not always

This wasn’t the case for all product categories, so there could still be opportunities to have a successful niche-focused value proposition — if you choose the product category wisely.

These six product categories had average conversion rates exceeding the multiple category group:

• Electronics — 24.1%
• Business services — 22.8%
• Publishing, media and entertainment — 22.4%
• Computer software and video games — 19.5%
• Financial services and insurance — 18.3%
• Office supplies or stationery — 18.3%

It should be noted that three product categories had insufficient responses for analysis and were not included in the above chart.

How to interpret this data

You should not view the above conversion rate data in a vacuum. To see the data in context, it helps to download the free MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study (marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce), made possible by a research grant from Magento, an eBay company.

You must understand that the above data shows averages, which have been skewed up due to some responses that were much higher than average. You can gain an understanding of the distribution of conversion rate responses by reading previous MarketingSherpa Charts of the Week:

• Ecommerce Research Chart: Overall conversion rates - mecla.bs/digest0796
• Marketing Research Chart: Do conversion rates predict success? - mecla.bs/digest0678

**There are many ways to slice and dice conversion rates**

The entire point of tracking conversion rates should be to identify opportunities for improvement.

While this Chart of the Week focuses on conversion rates by product type, you will get the most value from your conversion rate data if you segment it in a way that illuminates these opportunities.

This will vary by company, but here are a few examples to get you thinking on which view of conversion rates will help you improve performance.

**By channel**

Which channels overperform and underperform the investment your company makes in them?

**By stage in the funnel**

Where in the buyer’s journey are customers dropping off and how can you increase conversion in that stage?

**By customer segment**

How can you better focus on the needs of specific customer segments to increase conversion? Which customer segments are you currently targeting aren’t really ideal prospects?

Stop investing resources on these areas, and focus on the customers you can best serve.

As one Benchmark Study survey respondent replied:

“We segment our customer base on the basis of end use of the product. We have several product categories, and hence, market products specific to their end-use customers.”
RETURNING VISITORS

Q: Please indicate the 2013 level of the following metrics and their ongoing trend.

Week of August 19, 2014
From the Ecommerce Benchmark Study
- Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content

In the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study, we asked marketers to:

Q. Please indicate the 2013 level of the following metrics and their ongoing trend.

One of the metrics we asked about was percentage of returning visitors. We also wanted to know if the percentage was rising, steady or falling to help determine how ecommerce metrics were trending.

This chart shows how marketers responded, and then keep reading below for further analysis of the research.
IT IS RARE FOR RETURNING VISITORS TO BE FALLING

A little background on the above chart: Only 3% of marketers reported a drop in returning visitors, while 44% of respondents said their company’s percentage of returning visitors was rising, and 53% said their percentage of returning visitors was steady.

ECOMMERCE COMPANIES REPORT APPROXIMATELY ONE-THIRD OF VISITORS ARE RETURNING

If you look at the above chart, you can see the breakdown of percentage of returning visitors within these trend groups:

- Rising — Average: 39.06%, Median: 35%
- Steady— Average: 35.22%, Median: 30%
- Falling — Average: 29.46%, Median: 30%

So to make a broad generalization of the data, companies report roughly one-third of visitors are returning visitors, with companies reporting a rising percentage of returning visitors doing somewhat better and companies with a falling percentage of returning visitors doing slightly worse.

When we broke the out data by revenue, companies with lower revenue reported a much wider disparity of responses than high-revenue companies, perhaps suggesting that as companies increase revenue, they are able to grow a more consistent base of visitors as opposed to the wild fluctuations of smaller companies.

These companies may be greatly influenced by stop-and-start customer acquisition campaigns constrained by limited budgets.

HOW YOU CAN USE RETURNING VISITOR DATA

While percentage of returning customers is a more valuable metric than returning visitors, returning visitors can give you a general idea of how enticing your website is to potential customers.

Also, the more complex or competitive your industry is, the more important returning visitors are because customers may not, in their typical buyer’s journey, be prepared to buy from you on the first visit.

They also may be conducting significant comparison shopping or even basic research and return to your site one or many times before deciding which e-retail (or even brick-and-mortar) store to purchase from.
Also, it tends to be more difficult and expensive to stand out and drive new traffic for a brand potential customers have never heard of in competitive products and industries, so having a site, remarketing campaign or cart abandonment program that lures visitors back is even more important.

Successful companies use returning visitor data to segment website traffic and provide targeted content.

New visitors may receive a general welcome explaining the value proposition of the site while returning visitors may simply see the latest content, offers or targeted information and products based on their behavior in their last visit.

One Benchmark Study survey respondent targeted her site traffic as “returning vs. new” in which “returning can get special offers.”

Another respondent used both transactional and site analytics data, segmenting his site among “returning customers, new customers, returning potential customers (haven’t bought, but have visited).”
Using data from the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study survey, Diana Sindicich, Senior Manager, Data Sciences, MECLABS (parent company of MarketingSherpa), created a weighted success score to determine which factors, tactics and strategies made ecommerce companies the most successful. You can read more about it on page 9 of the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study (marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce), made possible by a research grant from Magento, an eBay company.

Where were the biggest opportunities to become more successful relative to the competition?

This analysis identified a few factors that best differentiated survey respondents’ success scores:

- Order trends
- Value of products and service compared to competitors
- Gross margin level
- Product and service guarantees compared to competitors

If you are interested in the math behind these opportunities, here it is — mathematically, these factors contribute to 44% (19%, 6%, 14% and 5% respectively) of the total score, but together, they accounted for 69% of variation in success score. This means that positive changes in these factors should be the fastest way to improve your company’s success.

In this Chart of the Week, let’s look at the data about one of those factors. In the Ecommerce Benchmark Study survey, we asked:

Q. How does your company compare to your competitors in the following?

One of the factors we asked about was value.
In the above chart, you can see the answers to this question correlated with the computed success score referenced above.

**The best marketing is a great product**

While only 1% of the companies with better-than-average product value had a success score below 3, 53% of the companies that offered better-than-average value to customers had a success score between 6 and 9 and 27% of the companies that provided better-than-average value had a success score between 9 and 12.

This data shouldn’t be shocking to you and, I would personally argue, it is what most people would like to see in the world: better products produce better financial results.

**Choosing where to invest in the business for maximum ROI**

However, business leaders have a choice where to invest (or not) in companies. The data suggested that when making those choices, leaders should factor in product and service value as an element that helps sell products.
For example, if investments like research and development, customer service, warranties or higher-quality ingredients for more durable products were looked at as marketing investments instead of costs of goods sold, would it change how business leaders allocate budgets?

With fundamental shifts in marketing and publishing over the last decade, word of mouth can spread quicker and be far more powerful than at any other time in the era of mass production and consumption.

The importance of having better product and service value than competitors is even more important for an ecommerce site than a brick-and-mortar store, since it is so easy for online shoppers to check reviews, ratings and customer feedback (or complaints).

So when you’re conducting a competitive analysis, don’t just stop at the marketing messages and strategies of your competitors. Also, it’s important to truly understand how much value they are providing to customers, and if you can not only out-advertise them, but also serve your customers even better than they serve theirs.

I think one Benchmark Study survey respondent summed it up nicely by saying, “Challenge: Competing sites started offering better services. How Overcame: Adding value-added services.”
After analyzing the data from the 4,346 ecommerce marketing professionals who participated in the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study survey, we identified four factors that differentiated the most and least successful companies.

Recently, we shared data about product value. For this chart, here is some of the data we collected about another one of those key differentiating factors — gross margin level.

Keep reading below the chart for our analysis, which may be helpful to consider as you set gross margins for your company’s products.

In the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study survey, we asked:

Q. Please indicate the 2013 level of the following metrics and their ongoing trend.

One of the metrics we asked about was gross margin percentage.

Gross margins tended to increase as companies’ overall revenue increased. However, once companies reached a certain critical mass — in this case, roughly $1 million in overall revenue — margins tended to hold steady.

So while companies earning more than $1 million in revenue reported a median gross margin of 40%, companies with under $100,000 reported a median gross margin of 30%.

To oversimplify a complex business decision, when it comes to gross margins, companies have two options.
YOU CAN COMPETE ON PRICE …

Ecommerce as a whole is growing at the expense of brick-and-mortar stores thanks to its convenience, lower capital and low overhead requirements, but that same convenience comes with a downside.

While buyers in the past have had to overcome the friction of going to multiple stores (or at least calling or looking in multiple newspaper circulars), today’s buyers can find competitive prices easily online.

Ecommerce websites are responding to this transparent marketplace and price sensitivity. For example, Thad Rueter recently reported in Internet Retailer (“The price is right — then it’s not”) that 20% of prices change daily on competitive products.

While price competitiveness can be a business model in itself, you must focus on operational efficiency to be successful. As one Benchmark Study survey respondent shared, “Margins was the challenge; negotiations with vendors was the solution.”
This is an incredibly hard model to execute successfully in the face of very large competitors with logistics excellence and pricing power over wholesalers and suppliers, like Amazon and Wal-Mart.

Another goal with intentionally low margins and price competition for many companies is new customer acquisition. While you can lower margins to increase business, keep this fundamental point in mind: **What disruptively positive customer experience have you created?**

Let’s walk through the customer’s progression of thinking to show you what I mean:

1. Customer is looking for a product to overcome a challenge or fulfill a desire
2. Customer searches for cheapest price of said product
3. Customer finds lower price on your site, makes a purchase
4. Customer receives product
5. Customer does another price comparison across the Web for the next product they need or desire

Without a disruptively positive experience to show the enhanced value of purchasing from your site, you have not acquired a new customer with your lower margins — defined as someone who now prefers your site and will consider it above others (even, sometimes, as just a tiebreaker when confronted with two similar prices).

You have only acquired a one-time buyer who will not remember your site and will only buy from you again by random chance, or possibly if you happen to have the lower price again.

This disruptive positive experience can come in many ways. For example, in our analysis of the most and least successful companies, two differentiating factors were:

- Value of products and service compared to competitors
- Product and service guarantees compared to competitors

This could even be a piece of in-product content. Here’s a nontraditional example from the brick-and-mortar world to get you thinking: Content Marketing: How a farm justifies premium pricing (mecla.bs/digest0780).

**… OR YOU CAN COMPETE ON VALUE**

One Benchmark Study survey respondent lamented, “Margins are under significant pressure, and sooner or later customers will have to choose between price and service — they can’t get Rolls-Royce products at Trabant prices forever!”


Which brings up the question: “Why can Rolls-Royce charge more than Trabant (which is a former East German automaker)?”

The answer for Rolls is the same answer for your ecommerce store — value proposition.

Your company’s value proposition is the answer to the question, “If I am your ideal prospect, why should I buy from you instead of any of your competitors?”

If you can’t simply answer, “We have the lowest price,” you need an answer that demonstrates the enhanced value of shopping on your site.

Content marketing can support this value proposition by showing the work behind the increased value your company offers. There is more information about both of these topics in the Related Resources section below.
Discover your unique ecommerce success score

In this very special edition of the MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we’re turning the tables and letting you dictate the data.

Week of September 9, 2014
From the Ecommerce Benchmark Study
- Erin Hogg, Reporter

How do you define success in ecommerce?

It’s not an easy question to answer. High growth in sales may come from discounting products, while conversely, low margins may be due to a long-term growth strategy outweighing short-term profits.

For the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study, we set out to define success as accurately as possible through a weighted success score. Each respondent with sufficient data was tagged with a success score based on their responses in key areas such as annual revenue, market share, ROI for marketing spend and much more.

Through our research, we identified four factors that best differentiated survey respondents’ success scores:

- Order trends
- Gross margin level
- How the value of products and services compared to competitors
- How your product and service guarantees compared to competitors

In this special MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we’re sharing a 12-question tool based on the four most important factors of ecommerce success so you can discover your own unique success score.

(mecla.bs/SuccessScore)

When you complete the survey, you’ll get your unique success score based on your answers, as well as strategies to improve your score. You’ll also receive a breakdown of the math behind the success score, created by Dr. Diana Sindicich, Senior Manager, Data Sciences, MECLABS (parent company of MarketingSherpa).

Note: You will remain anonymous. We will not ask for your personal information in this survey.
INTERESTED IN IMPROVING YOUR SUCCESS SCORE?

Since I’ve personally read every MarketingSherpa case study, Chart of the Week and blog post over the past 18 months — that’s 403 pieces of content designed to help you overcome the challenges you may be facing — I thought it might be helpful to share a few articles and blog posts that could assist you in improving your success score:

- **Order trends** — E-commerce: Edible Arrangements’ countdown ad lifts same-day orders 8%
  
  Learn how Edible Arrangements increased the number of orders it received for same-day deliveries by utilizing a countdown timer on the site - mecla.bs/digest0402.

- **Gross margin level** — Ecommerce Research Chart: Average gross margins for small, medium and large companies
  
  View the chart to see average gross margins across different company sizes - mecla.bs/digest0801.

- **Value of products and services** — Email Marketing: Dell lifts revenue 109% via GIF-centric campaign
  
  Discover how Dell better expressed the value of a product via email, all through a simple GIF - mecla.bs/digest0511.

- **Product and service guarantees** — Social Media Marketing: Focus on consumer reviews increases Facebook fans 100% for Playtex Baby
  
  Read how Playtex Baby leveraged transparent product reviews and increased its number of Facebook fans 100% - mecla.bs/digest0751

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE SUCCESS SCORE MODEL?

Check out page 9 of the *MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study* (marketingsherpa.com/ecommerce) to see all of the factors calculated and weighed in the success score and how success in ecommerce relates to revenue growth, daily site visits and more.

WANT TO SHARE YOUR SCORE AND INVITE YOUR PEERS TO TAKE THE SURVEY FOR A LITTLE HEALTHY COMPETITION?

You can share your score on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn right at the bottom of your results page.
c = 4m + 3v + 2(i-f) - 2a

eme = rv(of + i) - (f + a)
Appendix B: Content Directory
CONTENT DIRECTORY FOR THE THIRD QUARTER OF 2014

This directory includes all of the content published by MECLABS through its brands, MarketingSherpa, MarketingExperiments and B2B Lead Roundtable, during the third quarter of 2014. You can browse the titles and summaries of this content, and see the full case study, article, video or publication by visiting a content piece’s URL.

You can also view more content by visiting one of MECLABS’ websites:
MarketingSherpa.com – View additional case studies and how-to articles
MarketingExperiments.com – See the latest discoveries found in the MarketingExperiments laboratory
B2B Lead Roundtable Blog – Learn more about lead generation, lead nurturing, lead management and more

For a reference of selected content produced by MECLABS from 2008 through 2012, download the MECLABS Research Catalog. The catalog represents more than 80,000 hours of our MECLABS analysts’ and scientists’ thoughtful labor. For the serious practitioner or the interested scholar, it is a window into the work of our institution and may prove helpful as a starting point for new work.

URL: meclabs.com/catalog

MARKETINGSHERPA CASE STUDIES

Segmentation: How a small office supply ecommerce site boosted revenue 25% by sending more emails
Date: Tuesday, July 1, 2014
Summary: The ecommerce team at JAM Paper applied underutilized behavioral data to the email program to develop a welcome series, retargeting series and cart abandonment campaign. Read on to learn how the small team went from one to 100 email designs per week and achieved a 25% increase in revenue from this email transformation.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0738
Lead Nurturing: How intent data lifted a B2B email campaign’s CTR 248% and forwarding rate more than 400%

Date: Wednesday, July 2, 2014

Summary: Computer software company TeamQuest Corporation had previously invested in marketing automation, but wasn’t experiencing the fruitful results it anticipated. To shake things up, the company began utilizing intent data to better target its prospects. Discover how TeamQuest’s first email effort to test the technology resulted in a 248% lift in clickthrough and a more than 400% increase in forwarding rate.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0739

Social Media Marketing: 300,000 direct referrals driven by merging social media and brick-and-mortar programs

Date: Thursday, July 3, 2014

Summary: As 24 Hour Fitness continued an expansion, the marketing team wanted to use social media to drive new memberships. Unlike their current brick-and-mortar system, social media allowed a more powerful referral, directly from a friend or family member. See how this effort was able to drive more than 300,000 direct referrals while integrating social media with the existing in-store system.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0740

Content Marketing: How an IT solutions company generated $8 million from a thought leadership campaign

Date: Wednesday, July 9, 2014

Summary: This B2B case study details how an IT solutions provider launched a campaign featuring a thought leadership e-book instead of a sales pitch. Dive in to learn how Logicalis’ content marketing program generated $8 million in business.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0741

Email Marketing: Jewelry retailer integrates product recommendations into email campaigns to lift opens 9%

Date: Tuesday, July 15, 2014

Summary: To survive its subscribers’ cluttered inboxes, fine jewelry retailer Heirlume integrated a feature into its email programs that was already present on its ecommerce website: product recommendations. Read on to learn how Heirlume’s personalization helped it stand out like a diamond in the rough.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0742
B2B Project Management: How ATB Financial boosted employee productivity 30%

**Date:** Wednesday, July 16, 2014

**Summary:** Whether it’s a marketing campaign, service or sale, it starts within the company. See how ATB Financial optimized its internal project management processes to lift its employee productivity 30% and increase the number of monthly projects 20%.

**URL:** [http://mecla.bs/digest0743](http://mecla.bs/digest0743)

Marketing Analytics: How a drip email campaign transformed National Instruments’ data management

**Date:** Tuesday, July 22, 2014

**Summary:** Metrics, and the data behind those metrics, are the lifeblood of digital marketing and email campaigns. But, the initial analysis of the raw data sets is not as straightforward as it might seem, as National Instruments found out with the global rollout of a drip email campaign. Read on to find out why a change in analysts caused a precipitous drop in conversion rate, and how the team reacted to the challenge to create a more robust and consistent data handling and management process.

**URL:** [http://mecla.bs/digest0744](http://mecla.bs/digest0744)

Customer-centric Marketing: How New England Biolabs increased time spent on site more than 74%

**Date:** Wednesday, July 23, 2014

**Summary:** New England Biolabs’ growing pain came in the form of its website. To adapt, the company implemented a redesign effort driven by customer experience. See how both the research and the redesign stimulated a 7.5% decrease in bounce rate, 13% increase in page visits and more than a 74% lift in time spent on the New England Biolabs website.

**URL:** [http://mecla.bs/digest0745](http://mecla.bs/digest0745)

Email Marketing: How a B2B company lifted conversion 200% with personalized email messages

**Date:** Tuesday, July 29, 2014

**Summary:** Overcoming the digital disconnect between the legal space and technology is the mission of The Expert Institute, a New York City-based legal service platform startup. To help combat this challenge, the marketing team wanted to put a name and face to brand communications. By instituting a monthly email series from the vice president of client relations, the team was able to decrease the unsubscribe rate and increase conversions by 200%.

**URL:** [http://mecla.bs/digest0746](http://mecla.bs/digest0746)

Inbound Marketing: How Infochimps grew its database 94% in one year

**Date:** Thursday, July 31, 2014

**Summary:** This article covers how the marketing team at Infochimps built an inbound marketing structure that could support their new venture and enable the sales team to grow business into the Fortune 1000.

**URL:** [http://mecla.bs/digest0747](http://mecla.bs/digest0747)
Email Marketing: Simplifying email content increases open rates 48% for B2B company
Date: Tuesday, August 12, 2014
Summary: As consumers, his team was experiencing email fatigue and knew their newsletter was part of the problem. Read on to learn how they combated this by simplifying email content and design, and renamed the newsletter to represent a refocus on idea cultivation and problem-solving.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0749

Video Marketing: How VMware’s Google Plus Hangout produced a 1,600% ROI
Date: Wednesday, August 13, 2014
Summary: With videos, however, engagement can emerge as a major pain point. When content is playing freely behind a screen, it can be a struggle to turn that monologue into a dialogue. Learn how VMware interacted with its video audience by hosting a Google Plus Hangout that not only actively engaged customers, but resulted in a 1,600% ROI.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0750

Social Media Marketing: Focus on consumer reviews increases Facebook fans 100% for Playtex Baby
Date: Thursday, August 14, 2014
Summary: Aware that word of mouth and recommendations are the primary way that mothers make decisions on buying baby products, the marketers behind the Playtex Baby brand decided they needed to foster mom-to-mom social media interactions. In this Inbound Marketing case study, learn how building up reviews in its Facebook community through a “Review-to-Win” contest garnered more than 2,000 product reviews in just seven months.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0751

Email Marketing: Unique send times for micro-personalization [Video]
Date: Friday, August 15, 2014
Summary: Watch this excerpt video of an Email Summit 2014 session featuring Dave Sierk of Dell, revealing how he leveraged personalized send times to deliver the right message at the right time for his audience.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0752

Email Marketing: Behavior-triggered emails and corporate partnerships boost email list 2,400% in three months for nonprofit
Date: Tuesday, August 19, 2014
Summary: Statewide program Healthier Tennessee has the goal to inspire people to eat better, move more and quit using tobacco. To do this, the marketing team developed a “Small Starts” initiative, buoyed by behavior-triggered email sends and a “Fresh Starts” giveaway. Beginning with only the short list of coalition partners and a small subscriber base, this case study will show you how the campaign realized an email database spike of 2,400% during the initial three-month launch period.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0753
Ecommerce: How an online retailer achieved a 17% conversion lift with faster page loading  
**Date:** Thursday, August 21, 2014  
**Summary:** This ecommerce team increased conversion rates nearly 17% sitewide by reordering when content displayed on its pages. Find out why your social sharing buttons might be costing you sales.  
**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0754

Email Marketing: 400% webinar attendance increase for B2B company through relevance and A/B testing  
**Date:** Tuesday, August 26, 2014  
**Summary:** Struggling with client education and lagging registration and attendance for its monthly webinars, International SOS committed to a multi-year effort to improve its webinar registration email series. Through consistent A/B testing and a renewed focus on relevance for clients, the marketing team was able to increase webinar attendance 400% from 2011 to 2014 and increase registration 352%.  
**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0755

Content Marketing: How an energy data company’s content strategy increased leads by 733%  
**Date:** Wednesday, August 27, 2014  
**Summary:** “Content marketing is like wrapping your sales pitch in bacon,” said Lauren Patrick, Marketing Content Manager, Urjanet. “It’s not an advertisement. It’s not, ‘Buy me now! Here’s why.’ It’s, ‘Here’s a really interesting problem, and here’s a way to solve it. Here’s our solution.’” Discover how Urjanet’s new marketing team developed a sizzling content marketing strategy for this energy data company.  
**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0756

Internal Marketing: B2B’s employee-exclusive video series fosters team morale  
**Date:** Tuesday, September 2, 2014  
**Summary:** This MarketingSherpa case study features an internal marketing effort, targeting team morale by enhancing company culture. Learn how Nextiva’s company-exclusive weekly video series serves as a fun-filled tool to foster communication, excitement and plenty of laughs.  
**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0757

Customer-centric Marketing: How Emmanuel College boosted mobile traffic 94% with website redesign  
**Date:** Thursday, September 4, 2014  
**Summary:** Learn how Emmanuel College’s team collaborated with students and faculty to fuel a website redesign that upped campus visits and deposits while boosting mobile traffic 94%.  
**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0758
Email Marketing: Cold testing subject line symbols leads to increased open rates for health care company
Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2014
Summary: When the marketing team at DaVita Kidney Care started taking notice of symbols popping up in the subject lines of their personal inboxes, they began questioning whether or not these symbols could be implemented in their own email program. Read on to find out how the team set out to integrate this new and off-beat tactic into their testing and how they discovered for themselves whether or not this strategy provided any results from their consumers.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0759

Social Media Marketing: Small sporting goods store sees 1,100% ROI increase with Facebook coupon
Date: Thursday, September 11, 2014
Summary: Family-owned goods store Hesselson’s was looking to adapt and grow with its customers, so it decided to branch out beyond its traditional advertising and experiment with social media. See how a three-week Facebook coupon campaign generated over $5,500 in store sales and increased the online-to-offline conversion rate by 23%.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0760

Email Marketing: Engaging contest keeps 80% of original list in CASL transition for nutrition company
Date: Tuesday, September 16, 2014
Summary: When the deadline for the Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation started approaching, Vega marketers were anxious to show subscribers the value of confirming their subscription through personalized and engaging campaigns focused on education and the community. See how the marketers were able to confirm 80% of the original list with a “Vega Love” campaign.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0761

Lead Generation: Content and email combine for high-quality list building
Date: Wednesday, September 17, 2014
Summary: This case study explores a process developed by CloudEndure’s Vice President of Marketing and put into practice at the technology startup. The entire campaign includes a deep dive into prospects’ websites, a content piece based on that analysis and structured as a report, and finally, a personalized email, which not only achieved a 58% open rate, but also helped generate high-quality leads that produced immediate pipeline results.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0762
Personalization Marketing: 630% ROI for Portland Trail Blazers via dynamic ticket pricing
Date: Thursday, September 18, 2014
Summary: Up until October 2013, the Portland Trail Blazers’ online ticketing process was anything but trail blazing. The NBA team had several disjointed and outdated sites, none of which were under the NBA.com platform. Beyond just a site facelift, the marketing team wanted to provide an intuitive and extremely personalized experience through dynamic ticket pricing. Read how the team accomplished their goal of bringing in a new generation of fans and achieved a 630% ROI from the effort.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0763

Content Marketing: Campaign-driven strategy increases Marketing-qualified leads 102%
Date: Wednesday, September 24, 2014
Summary: UrbanBound, a B2B relocation management software company, realized that all content and social media data was tracked, but the metrics were too broad to provide any useful information for improving future marketing efforts. The team shifted its focus, and through content-rich campaigns and inbound marketing, the team increased leads 35%.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0764

Content Marketing: B2B ecommerce blog post garners 2,000 likes in first week via strategic Facebook Promoted Posts
Date: Thursday, September 25, 2014
Summary: Company Folders built a blog of rich and useful information targeted at its intended audience — prospects with a graphic design background — and shared it via PPC ads and Twitter. When the blog was not garnering the engagement it should, the company determined the content wasn’t lacking; it was the blog promotion. Learn how the company shifted to using Facebook Promoted Posts for sharing blog content and achieved more than 2,000 Facebook likes its first week.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0765

Email Marketing: Pinterest-focused email campaign draws a 124% increase in social sharing
Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2014
Summary: By creating a campaign focused on Pinterest content, followed by another campaign that rewarded subscribers for sharing content, True Citrus created a campaign that resulted in 4,000% more shares than any other effort and increased their overall social sharing by 124%.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0766

How a B2B Marketing Team Used Zombies to Win Over the C-Suite
Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2014
Summary: This video from the MarketingSherpa archive explains how SunGard Availability Services took advantage of a pop culture meme to triple its deal size and attributed 40% of its revenue to Marketing.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0767
**MARKETING SHERPA HOW-TO ARTICLES**

**Email Marketing: Combining design and content for mobile success**  
*Date:* Tuesday, July 1, 2014  
*Summary:* As email opens significantly increase on mobile devices each year, it’s important to create a mobile experience your subscribers enjoy interacting with. Watch Justine Jordan, Marketing Director, Litmus, discuss mobile email in an exclusive interview and see an example of how Litmus uses responsive design in an Email Summit panel discussion excerpt.  
*URL:* [http://mecla.bs/digest0768](http://mecla.bs/digest0768)

**Ecommerce: Why going global really means going local**  
*Date:* Tuesday, July 8, 2014  
*Summary:* Global ecommerce is growing, and the key for brands looking to extend into new markets will be understanding the local culture in those markets. Watch this video from the MarketingSherpa Media Center at IRCE to learn from Rob Garf, Vice President, Industry Strategy, Demandware, on how preserving brand value and relevance across multiple cultures will be vital to delivering a consistent brand experience.  
*URL:* [http://mecla.bs/digest0769](http://mecla.bs/digest0769)

**Email Marketing: Don’t let email own the ecommerce showroom floor**  
*Date:* Friday, July 11, 2014  
*Summary:* Email marketing is one of the most frequent sources of ecommerce traffic for organizations across every revenue range. Read this MarketingSherpa Blog post to learn from Ben Pressley, Head of Worldwide Sales, Magento, about why you shouldn’t let email own the ecommerce showroom floor.  
*URL:* [http://mecla.bs/digest0770](http://mecla.bs/digest0770)

**Content Marketing: User-generated content tips from Jimmy Wales of Wikipedia**  
*Date:* Tuesday, July 15, 2014  
*Summary:* In this 11-minute video, watch as Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, spoke with Wikipedia CEO and Founder, Jimmy Wales, on how to encourage user-generated content – a powerful element within an overall content marketing strategy. Jimmy also discussed why Wikipedia is the only top 50 website in a Wall Street Journal study covering companies that do not engage in any visitor tracking.  
*URL:* [http://mecla.bs/digest0771](http://mecla.bs/digest0771)

**Ecommerce: 3 vital marketing resources to explore before your next email send**  
*Date:* Friday, July 18, 2014  
*Summary:* Email marketing has emerged as a staple in ecommerce as countless companies now utilize the channel to flood inboxes with a galaxy of promotions and product offers. Check out this MarketingSherpa Blog post learn more about three marketing resources you can use to aid your email marketing efforts.  
*URL:* [http://mecla.bs/digest0772](http://mecla.bs/digest0772)
Video Ecommerce: Getting up close and personal with products
Date: Tuesday, July 22, 2014
Summary: MarketingSherpa was on the scene at IRCE, hosting the official Media Center of the more than 10,000-attendee event. Watch this interview with Sukhinder Singh Cassidy, CEO and Founder, Joyus, to learn how to effectively use video marketing to showcase content to users.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0773

Email Deliverability: 9 lessons about Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation
Date: Friday, July 25, 2014
Summary: The Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation (CASL) has been the cause for alarm for some marketers given if your company breaks the law, it can be legally liable and prosecuted. Read this MarketingSherpa Blog post for more details on CASL to help you in your compliance efforts.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0774

Social Media: Mass personalization starts with Catsies
Date: Tuesday, July 29, 2014
Summary: In this MarketingSherpa Blog post, see how Virgin Mobile USA leveraged “Catsies” to generate buzz and foster mass personalization. You’ll also hear some top takeaways from the effort to tackle mass personalization in your own campaigns.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0775

Social Media: Leveraging visual marketing on Instagram and Pinterest
Date: Friday, August 1, 2014
Summary: Creating your social media marketing strategy takes a dedicated effort where success is built one customer at a time. Watch this video from the MarketingSherpa Media Center at IRCE to learn more from Jason Miles, Co-founder, Liberty Jane Clothing, and Aimee Schwartz, Digital Marketing Manager, King Arthur Flour, about where to start your social media efforts with Instagram and Pinterest.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0776

Content Marketing: Encouraging sales and upsells at the point of purchase
Date: Tuesday, August 5, 2014
Summary: Many marketers think of content marketing as a top-of-the-funnel activity. But what about using content to encourage sales and upsells at the point of purchase? Read on to learn what a restaurant placemat can teach you about encouraging upsells at just right the right time.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0777

Mobile Marketing: 3 tips from ModCloth on mobile app engagement
Date: Friday, August 8, 2014
Summary: Watch this video to learn how fashion retailer ModCloth integrated customer selfies into its mobile app to drive engagement and social sharing. You’ll also gain three transferable tips to improve your mobile marketing efforts.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0778
Email Marketing: What is the best day to send an email?
Date: Tuesday, August 12, 2014
Summary: What is the best day of the week to send an email? This post has the answer, featuring the “Daily email effectiveness” chart from the MarketingSherpa Email Marketing Benchmark Report. Read on to see why it’s more important than ever to test your list and discover when subscribers want to receive your emails.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0779

Content Marketing: How a farm justifies premium pricing
Date: Tuesday, August 19, 2014
Summary: In this MarketingSherpa Blog post, find out how an egg farm shows value in its content marketing, rather than “telling” its customers about value, and why that approach is both real and helps to win over today’s skeptical consumer.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0780

3 Tips to Improve Your Marketing from Doctor Who
Date: Friday, August 22, 2014
Summary: Sometimes taking a different perspective on marketing challenges can help shake up the conventional approach to those challenges. This fun and informative MarketingSherpa Blog post uses three quotes from the BBC television show “Doctor Who” to set up some tips that can improve your approach to marketing.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0781

Social Media Marketing: Setting expectations both internally and externally [Video]
Date: Tuesday, August 26, 2014
Summary: In this MarketingSherpa Blog post, discover two strategies for preventing social media fails from Andrew Jones, Industry Analyst, Altimeter Group. The key is managing expectations both internally and also externally. Watch this video from the MarketingSherpa Media Center at IRCE to learn how to address, and prevent, social media fails.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0782

Social Media Marketing: Tools and takeaways to implement today
Date: Friday, August 29, 2014
Summary: Featuring tips on social media marketing, this post takes insights from three speakers and the organizer of the recently held DFW Rocks Social Media Day event held in Dallas, Texas. Find out what these social media experts have to share and take advantage of a number of useful links to no-cost social media analytics tools.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0783

6 Tips for Creating an Effective Survey
Date: Tuesday, September 2, 2014
Summary: Behind all benchmark studies and customer feedback reports is a survey for collecting all of that valuable data. Read this MarketingSherpa Blog post for six tips to help you develop a survey and craft effective questions.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0784
Value Proposition for Startups: 3 questions every startup must have the courage to answer
Date: Friday, September 5, 2014
Summary: When creating a value proposition, especially for a startup company, sometimes it’s more important to ask the negative questions and define what you are not, rather than defining what you are. This MarketingSherpa Blog post covers three “no’s” startups should have the courage to say.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0785

Ecommerce: Going beyond omnichannel for creative customer experiences
Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2014
Summary: “Omnichannel” is a phrase that many marketers are now familiar with. But is it an overused buzzword? What does it really mean? Watch this video interview from the MarketingSherpa Media Center at IRCE to learn the answer from Lisa Butler, Head of Enterprise Solutions Enablement, eBay.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0786

How a Single Source of Data Truth Can Improve Business Decisions
Date: Friday, September 12, 2014
Summary: Reviewing a data management process for a large global enterprise is complicated, especially when the numbers just don’t add up. Read this post from a past MarketingSherpa case study to learn how National Instruments, a global B2B company, solved this problem and discovered the value of applying a single data truth to all business decisions.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0787

Email Marketing: Taking advantage of responsive design [Video]
Date: Tuesday, September 16, 2014
Summary: Watch this excerpt from a MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2014 panel discussion on responsive email design for tips on how to improve your customer’s user experience on any device — mobile or otherwise.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0788

Red Bull Media House’s Advice for Successful Content Marketing
Date: Friday, September 19, 2014
Summary: When you’re talking about leaders of content marketing, Red Bull is one of the first names that come to mind. Read about how the energy drink company’s focus on people and stories, rather than its product, helped turn its customers into fans.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0789

Email Personalization: Craft forms with purpose
Date: Tuesday, September 23, 2014
Summary: In this brief video from MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2014, see how to implement effective email sign-up forms to tailor personalized email content for your subscribers.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0790
Lead Generation: How to build your own list
Date: Friday, September 26, 2014
Summary: When a B2B’s email list wasn’t producing quality leads, Ramel Levin, Vice President of Marketing, CloudEndure, decided to develop his own list. Learn how to implement Levin’s BYOL, or “build your own list,” campaign, which resulted in a 58% open rate for this startup.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0791

MarketingSherpa Marketing Research Charts of the Week

Ecommerce Research Chart: What should online stores show on product pages?
Date: Tuesday, July 1, 2014
Summary: There are many elements Internet retailers can display on product pages. In fact, we surveyed ecommerce companies about 20 different items that could possibly be included on product pages. In this chart, see what 1,827 marketers said they display on product pages and compare those results by success score.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0792

Ecommerce Research Chart: How marketing budgets are changing for successful companies
Date: Tuesday, July 8, 2014
Summary: Is there a correlation between changes in a marketing budget, either up or down, and success? In this MarketingSherpa Research Chart of the Week, take a look at data from 1,745 marketers to help you make the budget case with your business leaders.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0793

Ecommerce Research Chart: Which department owns the mobile experience?
Date: Tuesday, July 15, 2014
Summary: In this MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we’ll share our discoveries from 2,435 respondents concerning five aspects of the online presence – including social and mobile, of course.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0794

Ecommerce Research Chart: Acquisition cost per customer
Date: Tuesday, July 22, 2014
Summary: How much should it cost to acquire a customer? There is no single correct answer. However, in this MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we’ll take a look at your peers’ overall trends to give you a rough idea of where acquisition costs are trending.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0795

Ecommerce Research Chart: Overall conversion rates
Date: Tuesday, July 28, 2014
Summary: In this MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we’ll take a look at overall conversion rates with a few caveats about how you should think about conversion rates.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0796
Ecommerce Research Chart: Customer feedback and ecommerce success
Date: Tuesday, August 5, 2014
Summary: Customer centricity. Is it just a buzzword, or does it have a real impact on ecommerce success? In this MarketingSherpa Research Chart of the Week, we'll share what we learned from 1,755 marketers about their ecommerce success and how it relates to the customer experience.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0797

Ecommerce Research Chart: Industry benchmark conversion rates for 25 retail categories
Date: Tuesday, August 12, 2014
Summary: In a previous MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we shared overall ecommerce conversion rates. MarketingSherpa readers asked for more. So in this chart, we will explore ecommerce conversion rates broken down by product type based on responses from 2,885 marketers. Read on to see how your conversion rate compares.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0798

Ecommerce Research Chart: Returning visitors
Date: Tuesday, August 19, 2014
Summary: Open your website analytics report and there are many numbers staring you in the face. But are they good or bad? Wouldn’t you love to peek into the analytics reports for other companies and see what numbers they are experiencing? In this MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we do just that, and explore the percentage of returning visitors reported by 1,950 marketers.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0799

Ecommerce Research Chart: Using data to justify product and service improvements
Date: Tuesday, August 26, 2014
Summary: In the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study survey, we conducted research with 4,346 ecommerce marketing professionals. In so doing, we identified four factors that most differentiated survey respondents’ success. In this MarketingSherpa Chart of the Week, we’ll explore data around one of those factors.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0800

Ecommerce Research Chart: Average gross margins for small, medium and large companies
Date: Tuesday, September 2, 2014
Summary: Pricing is critical to ecommerce success. After all, customers can get a range of prices for the same or similar products in a matter of seconds. To help you gain a sense of how your peers in the industry handle this challenge, in this Marketing Research Chart, we’ll share gross margins at different company revenue levels.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0801
Ecommerce Research Chart: Discover your unique ecommerce success score
Date: Tuesday, September 9, 2014
Summary: You can take the 12-question Ecommerce Success Score Survey to discover how your performance measures up in ecommerce, no form fill required. Along with your results, which are based on an analysis of 4,346 ecommerce marketing professional conducted by Dr. Diana Sindicich, you’ll receive insights on how to improve your success score and where your score falls in relation to your peers.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0802

Ecommerce Research Chart: Online order trends
Date: Tuesday, September 16, 2014
Summary: Which metrics should you track and which should you work on to increase your company’s success? After surveying 4,346 ecommerce marketers, we identified the key factors that set the most successful companies apart from the least successful companies. This chart, the third in a series, explores one of those key metrics — order trends.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0803

Ecommerce Research Chart: Website usability and revenue growth
Date: Tuesday, September 23, 2014
Summary: According to recent data from 2,456 marketers that we’re sharing in this chart, the ease of use that online shopping provides is a major element that may also impact revenue growth.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0804

Ecommerce Research Chart: ROI on marketing spend
Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2014
Summary: How can marketers get bigger budgets? More resources? More buy-in and authority from business leaders? Read on to see median ROI data from companies at different revenue levels, ranging from just under $10,000 per year to nearly $1 billion in overall revenue.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0805

MarketingExperiments

Online Testing: 3 resources to inspire your ecommerce optimization
Date: Thursday, July 3, 2014
Summary: Optimizing to improve a customer experience can be a little overwhelming when you consider all the nuts and bolts that make up an entire ecommerce property in its entirety. In this MarketingExperiments Blog post, we’ll take a look at three ecommerce resources from our testing library that will hopefully spark a few ideas that you can to add to your testing queue.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0806

For permissions: research@meclabs.com
Landing Page Optimization: What a 29% drop in conversion can teach you about friction
Date: Monday, July 7, 2014
Summary: Optimization is not a process without risk when it comes to the subtle dangers in optimizing with no perspective on how the big picture is potentially impacted by changes. Read this MarketingExperiments Blog post to learn about what a 29% drop in conversion can teach you about reducing friction in your checkout process.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0807

Copywriting: How to tip the scale so customers act
Date: Thursday, July 10, 2014
Summary: Writing effective copy can be a struggle between finding the ideal balance of creativity and communication. Read this MarketingExperiments Blog post to learn how crafting customer-first copy can help your content deliver value.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0808

Ecommerce: 3 landing page elements to help increase product emphasis
Date: Monday, July 14, 2014
Summary: The elements on a product page are often one of the most underutilized tools a marketer has at their disposal. In this MarketingExperiments Blog post, learn about three elements you can tweak to help emphasize important products and maybe even increase your revenue along the way.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0809

2 Vital Questions Every Marketer Should Ask of Lead Gen Forms
Date: Thursday, July 17, 2014
Summary: We’ve all seen exhaustive Web forms that tax prospects’ patience far more than they should. Read this MarketingExperiments Blog post to learn more about two vital questions every marketer should ask of lead gen forms to help find an ideal balance of value exchange.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0810

Value Proposition: 4 key questions to help you slice through hype
Date: Monday, July 21, 2014
Summary: Customers in today’s market have no tolerance for hype, so your marketing claims should be devoid of any promises your team can’t deliver. Read on to discover four questions you need to ask about your marketing claims to help you slice through the hype.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0811

Ecommerce: How parent brands can reduce user friction and anxiety
Date: Monday, July 28, 2014
Summary: In this MarketingExperiments Blog post, we’ll take a look how one ecommerce retailer leveraged the credibility of its parent brand to ease friction and turn interest into conversions on the sign-up page.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0813
Why Responsive Design Does Not Care About Your Customers

Date: Thursday, July 31, 2014

Summary: Responsive design, like any new technology or technique, does not necessarily increase conversion. This is because when practicing Web optimization, you are not simply optimizing a design; you are optimizing a customer’s thought sequence. In this experiment, we discovered the impact responsive design has on friction experienced by the customer.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0814

Stock Images Tested: Does ethnicity in marketing images impact purchases?

Date: Monday, August 4, 2014

Summary: Does ethnicity in marketing images affect a campaign’s performance? Besides being an important marketing question, it’s also an interesting social question. Read this MarketingExperiments Blog post to learn more about how one newspaper used image testing to learn more about the impact of stock images on customer behavior.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0815

5 Traits the Best Calls-to-action All Share in Common

Date: Thursday, August 7, 2014

Summary: How can you make your calls-to-action more effective for generating interest and conversion? Check out today’s MarketingExperiments Blog post for five traits effective CTAs have in common, along with examples for implementing those traits on your own CTAs.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0816

Email Marketing: Does your copywriting accomplish these 6 key objectives?

Date: Monday, August 11, 2014

Summary: The goal of an email is to get that clickthrough to the landing page. Copy is important, but the customer’s thought process is what takes them from opening your email to finally clicking through. Here are six key objectives that email copy must accomplish to optimize the chances of gaining that click from an email send.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0817

Marketing Analytics: Show your work

Date: Thursday, August 14, 2014

Summary: In this MarketingExperiments Blog post, learn how National Instruments tackled a data management challenge and extended an effective, transparent data management approach across the enterprise.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0818
Landing Page Optimization: 5 factors that lead to (and prevent) conversion
Date: Monday, August 18, 2014
Summary: Conversion – whether it be a click, a registration form sign-up or even a sale – is a goal and key metric for marketers. In this MarketingExperiments Blog post, learn the basics of the MECLABS Conversion Sequence Heuristic and how it can serve as a thought tool for marketers to help increase conversion.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0819

Lead Generation: How one company increased leads 96% by changing the presentation of incentive content
Date: Thursday, August 21, 2014
Summary: Many B2B marketers use free content as an incentive to gain prospect information. How can we improve lead capture on landing pages with free content? In this experiment, we look at how a few changes in the manner of how a free guide was presented increased leads generated by 96%.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0820

Subscription Checkouts Optimized: How experimentation led to compounding gains at the revenue level
Date: Monday, August 25, 2014
Summary: Complex or confusing checkout processes can negatively impact ecommerce conversion rates. A process that’s not clear or logical to a customer can have them saying “yes” one moment, and “no” the next. Read on to find out the results of a three-stage testing and optimization cycle on a large media publication’s checkout process.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0821

Lead Generation: Simple text change leads to 104% lead capture increase
Date: Thursday, August 28, 2014
Summary: This MarketingExperiments Blog post features an optimization process highlighting a website copy change to match the copy on a direct mail piece that led to a 104% increase in lead capture. Learn more about how this case study applies to using customer motivation when making changes to your marketing material.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0822

Email Marketing: Compliance-related re-engagement campaign messaging increases conversion 49%
Date: Thursday, September 4, 2014
Summary: A large email subscriber database might look impressive, but an engaged email subscriber database leads to effective campaigns. This blog post covers a test we ran to re-engage with our Canadian subscribers in light of the Canadian Anti-Spam Legislation, which required a double opt-in for subscribers in that geographic area to continue receiving MarketingExperiments emails.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0823
Email Marketing: 3 resources to help you optimize your next campaign  
Date: Monday, September 8, 2014  
Summary: Optimizing to improve your email marketing efforts can be a little overwhelming when you consider all of the moving pieces involved. Read on for three resources to help you optimize your email marketing program.  
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0824

Website Optimization: Testing your navigation  
Date: Thursday, September 11, 2014  
Summary: Testing for websites often focuses on pages – such as homepages and landing pages – that can show immediate results in metrics like conversion or bounce rate. One potentially overlooked aspect for website testing is the site’s navigation. Read on for some testing opportunities you can experiment with on your own pages.  
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0825

Ecommerce: 2 tips I learned from a garage sale  
Date: Monday, September 15, 2014  
Summary: This author’s experience with garage sales was minimal, but his experience with website optimization was extensive. Nevertheless, when it comes to any kind of sale, prominence, eye-path and customer theory can close even the most unlikely deal.  
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0826

Search Marketing: How a simple copy change increased conversion 21%  
Date: Thursday, September 18, 2014  
Summary: PPC ads are often a missed opportunity when it comes to utilizing paid search as a channel. Read about how a recent PPC ad experiment can show you how to better use testing and optimization to help you understand your customers’ needs and ultimately help you build a deeper connection with your customers.  
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0827

Website Optimization: 6 tips for effective 404 pages  
Date: Thursday, September 25, 2014  
Summary: While some marketers leave 404 pages for the Web designer to create, that could be a mistake. The 404 error pages shouldn’t be a dead end for visitors. Instead, it should properly inform visitors where they are and guide them to a page of value. Read on for six tips to designing more effective 404 pages.  
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0829
Why Subtle Changes in Button Copy Can Significantly Influence Clicks
Date: Monday, September 29, 2014
Summary: Call-to-action button copy can make a significant difference in clickthrough performance. This MarketingExperiments Blog post features Jon Powell covering what seems like a very simple test that illustrates the power of call-to-action button copy.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0830

MarketingExperiments Web Clinics

Leveraging Content to Generate Leads: 3 simple tactics one company used to achieve a 96% increase in leads
Date: Thursday, August 21, 2014
Summary: Producing content takes a lot of dedication, time and resources. Valuable content invites your audience to get to know your company and products in a more personal and in-depth way. In this Web clinic replay, the research team gleaned three observations from a recent experiment that you can apply to content presentation on your site to increase lead generation.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0832

Optimizing PPC Campaigns: Simple copy changes that increased clickthrough rate by 289% (and more)
Date: Thursday, September 18, 2014
Summary: How do you effectively market your product, service or company in 130 characters or less? Each word and character must work toward communicating value in a PPC ad, as these ads directly compete with those around them. In this Web clinic replay, the research team shares two key principles from several real-world examples that you can use to optimize your own PPC ads.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0833

B2B Lead Roundtable

3 Factors that Connect Value Prop to Prospects
Date: Monday, July 7, 2014
Summary: There is one question at the heart of lead generation: If I am you ideal prospect, why should I buy from you rather than your competitors? How effectively you answer this will impact the performance of your marketing. Read on to learn three factors to consider when crafting value propositions that you can use to aid your lead gen efforts.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0834
Lead Nurturing: Why good call scripts are built on storytelling
Date: Monday, July 14, 2014
Summary: In teleprospecting, it’s not just about what you “ask” prospects; it’s about when. Read this B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post to see a recent MarketingExperiments Web clinic that examined a call script experiment that drove a 31% response increase.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0835

Lead Capture: How undermining value impacts conversion
Date: Monday, July 21, 2014
Summary: Less is not always necessarily more when it comes to testing and optimizing a lead capture process. Read this B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post for a recent experiment in which the MECLABS research team explored how undermining the value you offer prospects can potentially impact your conversion.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0836

Now, Go and Do: Create standardized, well-understood metrics for your organization
Date: Monday, July 28, 2014
Summary: Data management is an issue that affects many marketers in the digital marketing world, who are awash in data and overwhelmed with added duties of interpretation and reporting. Check out this B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post to learn more from a recent case study featuring Stephanie Logerot, Database Marketing Specialist; and Jordan Hefton, Global Database Marketing Analyst; both of National Instruments, on how you can tackle and master analytics reporting.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0837

Lead Generation: It’s all about building relationships
Date: Monday, August 4, 2014
Summary: The world of lead generation is changing, but building relationships with customers remains one of the key fundamentals of B2B marketing that still has a lot of room for improvement. Listen to this podcast featuring Steve Gershik of LeadSpace, and Brian Carroll, Executive Director of Revenue Optimization, MECLABS, to learn more about changes in the world of the complex sales.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0838

How to Put the Customer First in Lead Generation
Date: Monday, August 11, 2014
Summary: What would happen if we stopped treating people as leads, and instead, treated them as human beings or future customers? What would happen if we put ourselves in our future customers’ shoes and looked at our messages from their perspective and tried to feel what they feel when they hear from us? Read on for insights into empathy marketing from Brian Carroll.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0839
Why Servant Marketing Matters
Date: Monday, August 18, 2014
Summary: The days of pitches, corporate speak, buzzwords and hype are over. Today’s customer is sophisticated and has access to more information than ever. This means marketers must take the time to truly understand their customer and then help them identify and solve their problems. Brian Carroll lays out the concept he calls servant marketing in this B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0840

Lead Gen Tactics from 4 MarketingSherpa Case Studies
Date: Monday, August 25, 2014
Summary: Read this B2B Roundtable Blog post for four MarketingSherpa case studies on lead generation for the complex sale. These four articles feature marketing automation and CRM technology, event marketing, teleprospecting, email marketing, paid search and SEO.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0841

Stop Cold Calling and Start Lead Nurturing
Date: Monday, September 8, 2014
Summary: Cold calling and interruption marketing no longer work, so how should Sales approach prospects throughout the buying cycle? In this post, learn why nurturing prospects and providing content that addresses their needs and concerns builds trust and gets your customers to come to you when they are ready to buy.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0842

The Most Important B2B Marketing Metrics for CEOs
Date: Monday, September 15, 2014
Summary: Many CEOs struggle to see the ROI from marketing activities. In truth, it’s not as obvious as numbers that Sales can provide, but that doesn’t mean marketing’s efforts cannot be monetized. Read on for some big picture questions that marketers must be able to answer to aid in showing Marketing’s contributions to overall sales.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0843

5 Ways to Deal with Change for Successful Marketing
Date: Monday, September 22, 2014
Summary: Change is an ongoing part of life, and the world of marketing is no exception. In this B2B Lead Roundtable Blog post, Brian Carroll offers five tips on dealing with the changing landscape of the business and marketing world.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0844

6 Ideas to Create More Relevant Lead Nurturing Emails
Date: Monday, September 29, 2014
Summary: In this post, learn six ideas that will help add relevance to your lead-nurturing campaigns, including solving customer pain points, meeting prospects within the buying cycle, targeting the correct business spaces, taking advantage of trigger events and conducting testing and optimization.
URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0845
**Video Presentations**

**Web Optimization: How one company implements an entire testing strategy every day**

**Date:** Thursday, July 10, 2014

**Summary:** As Director of Marketing of VactionRoost, Hutchings presented his story to a live Summit audience for a session that doubled as a MarketingSherpa webinar. Hutchings’ presentation set out to answer the question, “How can marketers systematically run tests to achieve consistent lifts?” Watch this webinar replay to learn the benefits of continual testing and how you can apply Hutchings’ efforts to your own situation.

**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0846

**Live from IRCE: Key insights from the MarketingSherpa Ecommerce Benchmark Study**

**Date:** Thursday, July 24, 2014

**Summary:** Ben Pressley, Head of Worldwide Sales, Magento, and Pete Prestipino, Editor-in-Chief, Website Magazine, joined Daniel Burstein, Director of Editorial Content, MECLABS, at the MarketingSherpa Media Center at IRCE to discuss the state of ecommerce in 2014. Watch the replay to get the pulse on ecommerce marketing and the top takeaways you can implement to further your efforts in 2014.

**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0847

**Omnichannel Marketing: Optimizing digital content efforts to maximize growth in ecommerce**

**Date:** Thursday, August 7, 2014

**Summary:** In a MarketingSherpa webinar, Courtney Eckerle, Manager of Editorial Content, MECLABS, was joined by Tom Davis, Global Head of Ecommerce, Puma, to discuss how the company embraced an omnichannel marketing strategy to thrive in the global marketplace. Watch this webinar to learn how Davis tackled several obstacles and the top takeaways from this effort.

**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0848

**Segmentation and Personalization: How Eventful transformed its email program and increased purchases by 66%**

**Date:** Tuesday, August 8, 2014

**Summary:** At MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2014, Eventful was awarded the Ecommerce Best in Show in Email Awards 2014, presented by ExactTarget. Paul Ramirez and Ryan Blomberg, both of Eventful, took to the stage, revealing to the Summit audience their transformation to personalized email marketing with a data-driven campaign. See how Eventful made this personalization transformation happen and the impressive results of this campaign, including a 12% increase in site traffic without spending a dime in advertising.

**URL:** http://mecla.bs/digest0849
B2B Email Marketing: How a global information company transformed from batch-and-blast to persona-driven email marketing

Date: Wednesday, August 20, 2014

Summary: IHS needed to find a way to help grow and engage its database of more than 140,000 prospects. A content-based lead nurturing program relevant to the audience emerged as the answer, with personas painstakingly developed by the marketing team. Learn how IHS was able to increase its lead generating engagement by 10 times over the legacy contact process through persona-driven email marketing.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0850

Email Design Panel: Responsive email design with multi-device customers in mind

Date: Tuesday, September 2, 2014

Summary: This 45-minute session from the MarketingSherpa Email Summit 2014 features four industry experts discussing responsive email design and why that tactic is key to effectively reaching multi-device customers.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0851

Above the Noise: How an IT company leveraged a multichannel campaign to ‘wake the dead’

Date: Wednesday, September 10, 2014

Summary: At MarketingSherpa’ Email Summit 2014, Christine Nurnberger, Vice President, Marketing, SunGard Availability Services, revealed how smart content marketing — built on intense research, analyses and creativity — dramatically improved alignment between Marketing and Sales at SunGard. Watch SunGard’s full presentation to find out how the right message presented at the right time to the right audience produced remarkable results.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0852

List Cleanup: How 3M Canada increased open rates by 160%

Date: Tuesday, September 23, 2014

Summary: The team at 3M Canada had the idea of running a campaign with a contest as an incentive for subscribers to stay on the list and update their contact information. Using this campaign, the team trimmed their list by an impressive 64%, ensuring that 3M Canada is in touch with the people who want to be in touch with them. Learn about the campaign from Laura Mihai, Email Marketing Specialist, 3M Canada, during her session at Email Summit 2014 in Las Vegas.

URL: http://mecla.bs/digest0853
HOW MARKETINGSHERPA AND MECLABS SERVE MARKETERS LIKE YOU

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The MECLABS Quarterly Research Digest features a selection of our most useful discoveries from Q3 of 2014. The goal of the Research Digest is to provide a simple reference to our latest experiments and case studies from marketers like you.

The job of imagery on a webpage is to reinforce the value proposition of the page. ... In the treatment image, the product is clearly the focus, which also allows us as viewers to get a better view of the product and its screen — to envision ourselves using it.

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It’s been proven that avoidance of pain is usually a higher motivator than seeking some incremental pleasure. ... We see the essential difference is the focus on relief from back pain versus avoiding open-back surgery. The results bear out the idea that the avoidance of pain is the greater motivator.

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