



## The Landing Page: The What, Why and Best Practices

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### What is a landing page and why do you need one?

For our purposes, a landing page is where users arrive when they click on a digital advertisement. A landing page serves a number of purposes which we will discuss below but a key component of the landing page is to provide the user a payoff for clicking on your ad and to allow the user to ease into your brand experience/messaging and marketing funnel in a manner that meets the user's needs.

Your advertisement, as compelling as it is, is really an interruption of the user's online experience. Ideally the interruption is welcome and aligned with the interests and immediate research needs of the user, but it is still an interruption. Your user is reading about his favorite ETF and your ad beckons with an offer to learn more about a related idea. Great; this is a win/win. But your ad has made an implicit promise and the user needs to receive his payoff. Your landing page needs to immediately and clearly provide that payoff. It needs to be immediate and clear because the back button will return your user to his previous path with one easy click.

### Landing page goals

Your landing page may have a wide variety of objectives, some of which we list here.

User Goals	Your Marketing Objectives	Notes
Arrive at inviting destination without discomfort and get payoff for clicking on ad.	Tell user as much as necessary to move towards purchase.	Make user welcome and don't send message that he has a burden in front of him. Translation: light copy but provide payoff.
Learn more about your offering.	Get the user to engage with your product/brand message.	These goals are largely aligned. At least in theory.
Collect free premium.	Capture an email address or other contact information.	Should these be codependent? We think generally not. More below.
Follow user's own path to get more information.	Get user in funnel; start sales process.	We believe user goal has priority here.

Understand what action you hope user takes.	Make it clear what action you hope user takes.	These goals are in line but give user feeling of control. (Best way is to give user control.)
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We use the phrase sales process and funnel above slightly metaphorically. The ETF/fund industry doesn't align with modern Internet commerce as well as we might like, meaning we don't have a shopping cart and can't take orders on line in the way that online retailers can. Further, we can't offer discounts or specials or coupons. That said, there are some things we can do to build a bit of a process into the marketing effort. Examples include capturing an email address (or other contact information, particularly for advisors, *i.e.* lead generation), show users how they can research further away from your site (e.g., send them to a Morningstar page or to a NY Times article about your fund), provide your symbol so they can conduct research easily on their own (particularly important for ETFs) and send them to other resources on your site that will engage them and move them closer to an investment. An example here is an engaging video that tells your story in a way that text cannot.

Of these, getting the email or other contact information is a priority as it will give you the ability to do outbound marketing.

## Landing Page Best Practices

Now that we know the what and the why of the landing page, let's look at what we believe are best practices. Note these are our informed opinions. We say informed because we test and review results from ads and landing pages. You may have a different opinion on some of these points. We don't take umbrage. We advise you test these elements and see for yourself. More on testing later.

### 1. The Payoff

The landing page should be seen as a payoff for the call to action in the ad. This shouldn't be too difficult to do even with multiple creative treatments leading to one landing page. By payoff, we mean the landing page will deliver on the call to action, even if the call to action isn't super specific (e.g., click to learn more). Obviously if the call to action is very specific then the landing page needs to deliver on that promise. For example, if the call to action is an offer of a free report then the landing page needs to feature the report. This seems simple (and it is) but we do see ads and landing pages that seem disconnected.

### 2. Brevity is Key

The landing page needs to be brief; too much copy is a killer. We've tested this and while we have some theories regarding copy heavy presentations the fact of the matter is test results overwhelmingly show more engagement and lower bounce rates from light copy landing pages. If you think about the user experience, our ad has interrupted (in a good way) the user's browsing and a landing page that overwhelms the user will be more of an interruption than the user is likely to permit.

### 3. Provide Full Site Navigation (Put the User in Control)

Allow the user to access your entire site with easy navigation. Some will argue here that if you have an action you want the user to take you should limit their other options. We get that in theory but believe in putting the user in charge and letting the users follow their own path. The easiest way to do this is to have a link to the home page plus some key navigation elements. The landing page doesn't need a full menu of navigation options as the link to the home page will provide that but there will be key destinations that should be available to the user.

### 4. The Form

Have a form of some sort to get the user to give you some information if desired. An email sign up is the obvious easy option. But you could have a form that provides for the mailing of a written information (few need or want this) or otherwise gets a postal address and maybe a phone number. The type of form is driven by your business needs. If your sales force needs leads then your form needs to be more robust...as does your offer. See number 5 below. We have more to say on forms in the technology section below.

### 5. The Premium

Offer a free premium in the ad and the landing page (white paper or other research report are most common). When clients ask us for ideas on increasing response rates our number one piece of advice is to offer a premium. We prefer to offer this without requiring any sort of registration or user data. Some will disagree with this point but we generally want as much user engagement with the brand/message and don't want to lose anyone because they don't wish to register. If you do have a required registration then we recommend A/B testing to see what sort of cost there is to requiring registration. Initially your business needs will determine which course to start with. Specifically, if your main objective is to generate leads then it might be best to force the registration to get to the premium.

We will argue against this up to a point, meaning we think the user experience and engagement is more valuable than the leads. This opinion is (nearly) worthless without the ability to quantify the cost of the user information requirement which is why we suggest A/B testing.

### 6. Make Your Intentions Clear

Help your user know what you want them to do by making the most important thing the most obvious thing. Normally we don't like to confuse our goals with our users' goals but at some point users like to know what is expected of them. If the form is the top priority action make the form obvious.

### 7. Design Is Important

You'll see we're suggesting a non-cluttered landing page but then suggest adding all sorts of elements. The landing page is an exercise in compromise and balance and good design will help with that balance. Your campaign goals/objectives should drive the layout and copy for the landing pages. Good creative design can help make all of this work. A good design will invite and draw the user in. Clean and uncluttered is good. Busy and with too many elements is bad. Clear and understandable is good.

## Technology & Tracking

One of the great things about digital advertising is that it allows for the tracking of a whole host of response metrics. These metrics can be used to optimize your results. As this piece focuses on the landing page we'll focus on the technology, tracking and metrics for the landing page and, importantly, the form.

Landing Page Metric	Description	Comments
Bounce Rate	Percentage of users that leave after the landing page without visiting another page.	While important, this metric isn't the be all and end all of landing pages. If done right, your landing page may send your visitor off to do research elsewhere. That said, a high bounce rate isn't a good sign. We've seen these range from 40% to 95% plus. Lower numbers are better here.
Time on site	Just like it sounds.	Not the most reliable metric as data is often suspect.
Form completions	Percentage of users that complete the form.	This is particularly important for lead generation programs. Any form should capture hidden field data which means data not entered by the user. This should include placement and creative level details.
Additional page views	This is a key engagement metric that measures page views beyond the landing page.	This is a key metric for us. But, a lot goes into this besides landing page design. Media placement and creative are important here.

### A/B Testing

We've referred a number of times to A/B testing which, as the name suggests, is testing two different versions of a landing page against each other to determine which is more effective. Goal elements could be form completion rate, download rate, bounce rate etc.

There are a lot of elements that can be tested on a landing page including simple things like the color of the "click here" button, the headline, graphics or body copy. Multi-variate testing is difficult without significant traffic because it takes considerable traffic—and user actions—to generate statistically reliable data. But in theory you could engage in multi-variate landing page tests. Most users will likely find that sequential A/B testing where the winning page faces a challenge page.