Creating Conversion
Four Essential Steps to Creating Online Customers

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Creating Conversion

Customer conversion is where the rubber meets the road in online marketing. It's the complex process of taking a tire kicker and turning them into a customer. Along the way, there are four essential elements that will transition someone who needs your offering into someone who buys it.

Both B2B and B2C buyers go through distinct stages as they make their final selection—needs assessment, requirements analysis, evaluation, and purchasing. Each stage in your customer's buying cycle has one definitive response on your part that will address their needs at that time, allowing you to construct the bridge that moves them from interest to acquisition.

The four elements of successful online customer conversion are:

- Search engine dominance
- Empathic design,
- Targeted content
- Development.

Let's explore why.

The Studio Technology and Cheskin Research study concluded that, "quality of design is a major contributing factor in building trust online."

Converting Customers Through The Entire Buying Process

Buying Cycle	Buyer's Concern	How to address it
Needs Identification	What do I need?	*Search engine strategy*
Requirements Specification	Which companies can provide what I need? Who can I trust?	*Customer-centered design*
Research and Evaluation	Of the companies I can trust, who has the best value?	*Superior, targeted content*
Selection and Purchase	How do I make it happen?	*Clear path to purchasing—an easy shopping cart, a contact form, or other tools to support conversion*

1. Search Engine Dominance: Luring The Largest Audience

The better your search engine marketing, the bigger the base of potential clients you attract. After all, your search engine strategy isn't about *searching* for you—it's about *finding* you.

Take it from Don Westall, CEO of The Lab Depot. This Spring, when he cut the ribbon on his new state-of-the-art facility in the foothills of North Georgia, he credited search engine marketing for introducing him to new customers, like Harvard and MIT. By maintaining the number one position for over 200 search terms, he's seen Web traffic increase from a few hundred visitors to over 100,000 a month, and that has translated into a 113% increase in online orders. "Red Clay Interactive has easily doubled the value of my company," he says, referring to the online marketing agency he retained to re-design his Web site and create his search engine strategy.

The Lab Depot's B2B online marketing success is indicative of a larger trend in business buying. According to a recent survey by Marketing Sherpa and Enquiro, 93.4% said they would use the Internet to research a major business decision.

That's exactly what Atlanta-based NewsRx has found. In the last few years, the world's largest biotech and health publisher has seen its electronic publication sales grow to 80% of its business. Since implementing their own search engine marketing strategy, publisher Susan Hasty says they've seen fifteen times the monthly article sales and three times the number of sign-ups for free content.

Two specific searching behaviors are of particular interest to marketers. First, buyers use generic search terms in the learning phase of their buying decision, and then refine with increasingly narrower searches. This spiral search process underscores why creating dominance across a broad range of keywords is critical—you need to make sure your next customer finds you on the first pass, before they learn terms that distract their search away from you.

Second, the size of the purchase influences the length of time spent searching, according to a study from MarketingSherpa and Enquiro. For purchases valued at $1000 or less, 79 percent took place within just one month of the initial search. For purchases valued at over $50,000, 73 percent were made from *two months up to a year* after the initial search. Likewise, the time devoted to searching increases with the size of the purchase.

2. Empathic Design Builds Trust

Search engine dominance gets qualified traffic to your site. But once that's happened, your design and brand identity give you the traction you need to move the user closer to conversion.

"We had a real disconnect between who we are, and the way our old Web site portrayed who we are," says Jeremy Edmondson, IT Director for Free Chapel, an Atlanta-based ministry with a world-wide following. The credibility gap was addressed by a complete Web redesign. "Now when people find us online and come to our new facility, they experience a synergy between our online presence and our physical presence."

The redesigned Web site has only been live for six months. In that time, site traffic has increased 75%, church attendance has increased 55%, and 1,500 new subscribers have signed up for the church's newsletter.

These kinds of results are in line with research from Stanford University. Their *Guidelines for Web Credibility*, based on a three-year study with 4,500 participants, says that, "we find that people quickly evaluate a site by visual design alone." Your brand presentation, typography, layout, imagery and consistency all visually cue the visitor that this is, or is not, a professional organization. Design convinces prospects that you're a contender for their business and that they can trust you with their purchasing needs. The Studio Technology and Cheskin Research study also concluded that, "quality of design is a major contributing factor in building trust online."

3. Targeted Content Creates Confidence

Once a prospect has been persuaded through your design, it's up to your content structure to take them to the next level. That was the situation for William Greene, M.D, CEO of Lakeshore Tubal Reversal Center in Gainesville, Georgia.

"My patients frequently tell me the main reason they came here is because of the Web site," says Dr. Greene. He reports that almost one quarter of serious online contacts become customers.

One look (*www.pregnantagain.org*) will show you why—instead of a clinical appearance, the site connects emotionally through content directed at families that want to have children again, with images of babies and copy full of hope and promise. The content lets the prospect know that the practice understands their needs and will speak to them in their language. In fact, visitors find the information so compelling that they

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5. **Link Text** – Be sure when linking to other pages to use keywords in the text of your hyperlink instead of "Click Here."

6. **Bold & Italic Text** – Although not as important, it's a good idea to sprinkle in a few emphasized keywords in your body copy.

7. **Image ALT Tags** – When appropriate, use keywords in the alternate text tag that is displayed when you hover over an image on a web page.

Re-writing Web content so it was more concise, scan-able, and objective (rather than sales-oriented) created a 159% increase in measured usability.

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Red Clay Interactive blends design, technology, and strategy into a dominant market position for your organization. Our clients benefit from growing awareness, profitability, and market share grounded in a sustainable online presence. From identity to development, we partner with our clients to create industry leaders.

come to the site an average of 1.8 times before making first contact. "In the four years since our site launched," says Dr Greene, "our business has increased eight-fold."

Addressing content for your prospective customer is more than about writing to their needs—it's also about writing for the Web. In a study conducted by John Morkes and Jakob Nielson, re-writing Web content so it was more concise, scan-able, and objective (rather than sales-oriented) created a 159% increase in measured usability.

4. Development Cinches the Sale

Jakob Nielson, cofounder of the consultancy Nielsen Norman Group, points out that, "There is a difference between the *look* and *feel* of a website. Feel is what happens while you're using a site, and it is important to adapt the site's task flow to the individual user's problems."

Your next customer needs to feel they have ownership and control of the buying process in order to commit. For PeopleCheck, a Southeast background verification company, custom Web application development was key.

Michael Moye, VP of Business Development, says since its launch, the company has enjoyed twice the order processing capability and a 33% growth in sales thanks to custom application development by their interactive agency. While all the other factors are also in place, when it comes to placing the click that creates the order, PeopleCheck's site includes a robust application toolset that puts users in charge.

After you've been discovered by your prospects through search engines, appealed to them through design, and persuaded them with content, it's the "business end" of your site that creates the easy interactivity that finally converts them into customers.

Brian Dempsey is Co-founder and Vice President of Client Strategy with Red Clay Interactive, an online marketing solution provider that blends design, technology, and strategy into dominant marketing positions for companies just like yours. From identity to development, Red Clay partners with their clients to create industry leaders. Find out more at www.redclayinteractive.com.

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