



Beyond The Landing Page.

An Introduction to Post-Click Marketing.

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Click. Click. Click.

As marketing tales go, only about 3% of clicks convert — 97% of online marketing goes nowhere beyond the first click. When did 3% conversion become acceptable?

Keyword purchases. Search engine optimization. Banner ads. Email marketing. We're spending millions in online marketing looking for the holy grail—the click. Hottest of all is search: we spend more on it than any other category, and have fueled record growth for search engine marketers—over \$7 billion for Google alone in 2006. Everyone talks about how many clicks and the cost-per-click. According to industry projections, marketers will spend \$20 billion on e-marketing in 2007. As marketing tales go, only about 3% of these expensive, hard-earned clicks convert—97% of online marketing goes nowhere beyond the first click. When did 3% conversion become acceptable?

Think about all the places we actively work to earn a click:

- Internal and external email marketing
- Paid SEM (Search Engine Marketing) and organic (Search Engine Optimization)
- Intra- or inter-site linking or cross-selling within a site
- Forms (data collection/touch points)
- Online display/banner advertising
- Online classified advertising
- Offline advertising (print, broadcast, cable, radio, outdoor) or direct marketing driving to a URL

The real question is: what happens after the click? Far too often, the answer is nothing. Even with the best of intentions, what happens after the click is seldom a consideration—and even less frequently a priority.

A click is the conscious decision of a unique human being, coming to you with their own interests and expectations, tentatively exploring whether or not you're going to live up to the "hook" that got them there. How well you fulfill their expectations is a critical moment for your credibility. But since those expectations differ widely, based on the profile of each individual and the context in which they clicked, your odds of making a great impression with a generic, one-size fits-all web page are not good.

Your respondents, even if they're arriving from the same traffic source, are not all the same. Particularly with paid search keywords and banner ads, which by their nature have extremely limited message space, respondents click through based on a very small bit of information. That leaves a lot of room for interpretation and this frequently leads to many diverse audiences being channeled through the same web page.

As marketers, we need to think beyond a world in which the click is the final measure of the success of a campaign—it's not.

Ultimately, the measure of a marketing campaign's success is what you say it is. If your objective is to find out who is clicking (segment), increase the quality of converted leads (qualify), or improve the efficiency of your ad buys (convert), your needs go beyond the click. And beyond the click is post-click marketing.

Segment. Qualify. Convert.

What is post-click marketing? It's not just counting clicks. It's engaging each respondent one to one, segmenting them seamlessly, and ushering them to the best online destination. It's the beginning of a real dialogue. Sound familiar? It's a principle grounded in direct marketing 101, and as e-marketers, we've heard it before. With so much effort going into getting the click, of course we're all starting to talk about what happens after the click. But usually, the solution is to put up a hastily-created landing page, or funnel respondents to a page within our website. Post-click marketing is NOT about making better landing pages. Because landing pages and pages on our websites are not enough.

So, what is post-click marketing? It's engaging, segmenting, qualifying and converting those who respond to online marketing. When you practice post-click marketing you:

- match the post-click message with the promise made that solicited the initial click;
- engage the respondent with relevant, compelling content;
- segment respondents into strategically important groups;
- track respondent qualification and segmentation back to traffic sources;
- brand your organization as trustworthy and professional;
- learn strategically critical information from respondents who abandon;
- convert a higher percentage of respondents.

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The path to post-click marketing

The best way to increase your e-marketing ROI isn't by buying more clicks or by making more investments in postmortem software, but by actively managing "what's next" for those clicks as they come to you. While respondents are alive and clicking, your campaigns should automatically adapt, intelligently delivering each individual the right targeted message and fulfillment—and collecting the right information for you.

So, rather than a landing page, put your respondents on a path that leads to conversion. Give them a series of simple choices,

stepping along in wizard-like fashion through a short sequence of pages. At each branch, hone your message ever more finely, delivering deeper and richer content that is right on target. Along the way, collect additional information, tied to the value of your offer, and use it to qualify prospects from lukewarm to red-hot.

Segmenting your respondents is a way to analyze the diversity of your traffic. There are three advantages to segmenting your respondents directly in your conversion paths:

- to—very early on—separate the more desirable respondents from the less desirable respondents
- to tailor your path content on the fly to give each respondent the presentation that will have the most impact
- to determine more precisely who are the different audiences arriving from this traffic source and the degree to which
- this path effectively qualifies and converts each of them

The first advantage helps you quickly identify who you most need to convert. Without early segmentation, it's possible that your conversion path may appear highly effective, when in fact it's not. Say you have a conversion path that's converting 6% of your traffic to leads.

But what of the other 94%? Who are they? Are they better than the 6% you're converting? Using early segmentation you can begin to understand who your abandonments are. Consequently you can begin to assess if you're converting the best respondents—or leaving the best respondents on the table.

The second advantage is really of benefit to your respondents: once someone has self-identified their segment, you can deliver a much more targeted message to them. In turn, this leads to a greater percentage of conversions. The second advantage is all about optimizing

that process to maximize your ROI from online marketing expenditures. You gain more intelligence from every test you run.

Now your segmentation process can go into overdrive. One of the central tenets of post-click marketing is that different conversion paths will be effective in different situations. Depending on the campaign, the traffic source, the medium in which the traffic source was placed, the segments of the respondents, etc., a very different type of path may prove best.

Above all, post-click marketing should enable you to address the ultimate question: which respondent segments, arriving from which traffic sources, are converted most effectively by

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which paths? It's the RTP matrix and it's the cornerstone of post-click marketing analysis. Once you know how to uncover that answer, you can optimize your entire online direct marketing chain, not just the individual components.

Increase ROI using conversion paths

Most websites are random access. You present the choices, your participants choose to click on something and that's where they go. By contrast, landing pages are limiting—perhaps no choices are presented at all. Your only control over where they click comes in your presentation of the choices. But ultimately, you have no control over their course to the conversion point. In the landing page world, you're successful if your user 'lands and jumps'—but then what?

Unlike a random access website or a landing page, a conversion path is a series of screens where the respondent's choices are limited, controlled and purposeful. And for each of those choices, you might want your message to change...subtly or significantly. Because you craft the message for each step along the way, the series of these screens comes together to win trust, build your conversion proposition and ultimately result in a qualified conversion. Imagine a hundred, or a thousand or a hundred-thousand simultaneous respondents getting involved in your conversion paths—that's mass one-to-one conversion communication. Nifty.

Think of conversion paths the same way you think of traditional, offline selling presentations—linear. You take a prospect step by step through a series of points that build up to a purchase decision (or conversion). The order of those points is important and controlled as is the pace of their presentation. These basic truths hold fast in personal selling of everything from lunch to a house. So real selling takes place when a prospect gets moved from point to point, buying in at each step and getting more and more involved along the way. For a sale to take place, the prospect must get moved to the purchase decision a little at a time, so at the end, he or she is sold and there's really no decision to be made.

The web hasn't changed the psychology of selling. It's changed the psychology of marketing. The web psychology of marketing says that you need buy in early on and that you have to befriend and ask permission to get that buy in. A big part of that is the perception of choice and control on the part of the respondent.

What good selling paths do for post-click marketing is to combine web marketing psychology with traditional selling methodology. There are several valid premises on which a path can be presented as a valuable alternative to your random access site or landing page. For example, think of a single page that gives the respondent a choice of what's right for them:

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- Speed: “The fastest way to find the tire that’s right for you.”
- Simplicity: “The easiest way to decide which tire fits your car.”
- Personalization: “Match our tires to your lifestyle.”
- Offer: “Enter to win a set of Roadhugger Supremes.”

Now, from that first click the respondent took you will know something about them—if they are interested in speed, simplicity, personal service or a free chance to win. That is the start of segmentation. Now, whichever premise your respondent chooses you must pay off—right away—in the first screen. Don’t forget why you asked them to click on the path in the first place. Just keep building up your message.

Here are a few tips to get you started on your own paths:

1. A conversion path should not be truly linear. Think of it as limiting the number of choices and outcomes—but not limiting the number of choices to none. That won’t work as it flies in the face of the web psychology of marketing. There should be one, main, incredibly obvious and clear “NEXT” type of choice, but there can also be alternatives—“click here to choose A”, “click here to choose B” scenarios as well. It must appear as though the input the prospect is giving is affecting their results. If your path is simply click-click-click, you’ll get no respondent involvement, no early buy-in and you’ll be no closer to converting them at

the end of the path than you were at the beginning of the path. You’ll also learn nothing about them—because we can’t segment without offering choice.

2. Exude speed and efficiency. Make your first screen short and punchy. Your path needs to load fast, look clean and simple and scream “I promise I won’t waste your time with any meaningless garbage like our CEO’s bio!”.

3. Get smarter at every click. If your respondents need to make choices, give them choices that give you more information so you can narrow the selling message and segment who they are. Let them

choose features they’re looking for, things that interest them, colors they like, etc. Make it all about them and make the questions smart enough that you learn something valuable.

4. Be clear and don’t ask unless you need to. Each choice the respondent makes should impact their next set of choices or certainly the outcome of the conversion. In other words don’t ask them anything that’s irrelevant—they don’t have time for it and you’ll lose their interest. You’ll know right away when you view your path analysis if your message became irrelevant—just look for the point at which most respondents abandoned your path.

Get smarter at every click. If your respondents need to make choices, give them choices that give you more information so you can narrow the selling message and segment who they are.

5. Stay focused. Don't distract them. In other words, don't tell them anything they don't need to know to make the next choice. If you can't resist the temptation to go into the details of how the process works when data travels in and out of the database that functions as the central repository of information related to the migratory flight of cow egrets on which your company based the research and development of the bird seed you're selling, that's fine. But make that detailed path a choice for the respondent who wants to go deeper. The bottom line is to give them the big picture, big selling propositions and make them click for the details as they want them. That type of "purchase decision support" is excellent anyway as it makes your respondent feel involved and like they've done their homework by looking at more information. If you're using your conversion paths for complex selling, then give them the support they need to keep moving closer to conversion. If not, keep it simple.

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6. Don't ramble or waste their time. Limit the number of screens in your path and make your point succinctly on each screen. For simple products, make your case in three steps. For complex concepts, go to no more than seven steps. If you really have a complex sale that requires the web equivalent of the Appalachian Trail, build in pauses that pay off the previous screens with some conclusion before moving on and asking for more. Regardless of the number of screens, limit the copy on each screen and make it pop.

7. Be honest and up front. For longer paths, let them know where they are in the path. Clearly display how many steps there are in total and their current place in the path. This is a key ingredient to building trust and letting them know that they haven't committed to giving you the next 30 minutes of their life just to pick out kitty litter.

8. Barter for information. When you ask for your respondent to give you information, give them something in exchange. You'll be much more likely to get what you're looking for this way, and you'll build trust and equality into the relationship.

9. Sincerity wins the day. Avoid the ad. If your path is nothing but a series of ads linked together, you'll lose your audience early on—probably screen 1 or 2. Try to visualize the medium as an extension of a real, flesh and blood relationship—a good one—where the by-product is your conversion. Remember that trust, mutual respect and mutual freedom need to come across on every screen—after all, you're befriending.

Testing, one, two, three...And now the sweetest piece of the puzzle—you can test every nuance and tweak everything to maximize your yield. Put up multiple simultaneous versions of your path and see which ones convert the best. Once you learn who is responding based on the results of segmentation, tweak your message even further to speak specifically to them.

You will know what works and what doesn't by the choices respondents make and where they drop out of the path. Identify problem areas, make adjustments, watch your results and

adjust some more. Then look at targeting specific segments with specific paths—drive traffic to the promised land, watch the results and tweak some more.

Enough lectures, let's execute

So, now that we have described conversion nirvana, let's be real. Who has time for creating, managing and monitoring all these paths? Right now, few e-marketers spend enough time crafting their landing pages, let alone complex conversion paths with sophisticated analysis for meaningful metrics.

If you extrapolate multi-page conversion path test running simultaneously, you'll quickly get to hundreds of pages. Marketers

don't have time to analyze data from hundreds of pages in order to make real-time adjustments and refinements. Most available mechanisms for effectively landing, tracking and analyzing clicks are archaic, unwieldy to manage and fail to consider the true potential of the person who expressed interest by clicking.

A/B testing—two alternatives, each run on small test audiences to see which is more effective, either by response rate or conversion rate—is the cornerstone of testing in traditional direct marketing, and takes the idea of targeted messaging one step further. But the efforts and costs involved in A/B testing are rooted in old media, generally have to involve the IT department, and don't leverage the immediacy of the web.

These techniques take time, and time is one thing few marketers have.

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