The LEAD MACHINE

The Small Business Guide to Digital Marketing

"Want more traffic? Need better leads? Then let this amazing book be your guide."—Michael Stelzner, Founder Social Media Examiner

RICH BROOKS

How to Increase Conversions

Imagine trying to fill a colander with water. No matter how much water you pour in, no matter how strong the water pressure is, it doesn't matter. Water comes in, and water goes out just as quickly.

In the next section we'll talk about the art of Attraction and driving more people to your site. However, if your website isn't set up to convert traffic into leads, it doesn't matter how many visitors you get...you'll be like that colander, leaking just as much traffic as you attract.

Build Trust Immediately

Years ago, a plastic surgeon hired us to increase his search visibility and traffic. He didn't want us to change anything on the site, just improve his SEO. The only thing he would allow us to change were the title tags and converting his image-based navigation to text.

I was less experienced then, so I agreed to having our hands tied when it came to helping him.

Six months later he emailed me, very upset. He said he had paid us to optimize his site, but he wasn't getting any more traffic than he had before.

This was in the early days of Google Analytics, so before I called him back, I checked his analytics. It turns out those little changes we made had increased his search traffic by an astounding 600%!

However, the problem was that almost all of his traffic, a whopping 95%, left within 10 seconds of arriving at his site. They came, they saw, they were disappointed. So they left.

The site didn't have a lot of copy, so it had no way to address the questions and concerns of the potential patient. Nor did it explain why you should choose this particular doctor. The copy it did have wasn't persuasive.

The site had very little photography. No pictures that showed how clean and welcoming his office was. One tiny picture of him and no picture of his staff. You had no idea if his office was in the nicest building in town or a run-down warehouse by the railroad tracks. It did have a few questionable before and after photos, as all cosmetic surgeon sites are "required" to, but these were poorly lit and the "after" pictures were taken just days after surgery, when the scars were still fresh.

Pro tip for plastic surgeons: "After" photos should be taken at least six months after the surgery, when people look their best.

And although beauty is subjective, this site was ugly. In an objective, *I-think-we-can-all-agree-on-this-one* sort of way.

If you're going to ask people to spend thousands or tens of thousands of dollars on elective surgery to make themselves look beautiful, you need to prove to them that you understand what beauty is!

In short, the site didn't build trust with the site visitors, so they went elsewhere.

If you want to increase conversions, you need to build trust right out of the gate.

Making a Good First Impression

Before I started flyte new media, I was a traveling salesman. I spent a lot of time going from nursing home to nursing

home, selling medical products. I ate out a lot. Often I chose McDonald's because I was 25 years younger, nothing I ate would put weight on me, and I hadn't seen the movie *Super-size Me* yet.

But in certain towns there was no McDonald's, or I had just eaten there the day before, or I had eaten there for breakfast. In those cases, I needed to choose a place to eat that I had never heard of before. (As you can imagine, this was eons before apps like Yelp.)

So how did I decide? First impressions.

Was it in a safe neighborhood? Did the place appear clean? How was the signage?

Honestly, I probably chose more unknown restaurants based on the signage alone. I figured, if they spent enough money to have a really kickass sign, they probably took pride in what they made, even if it was just sandwiches.

And you know what? A good sign rarely steered me wrong.

When people arrive at your website, they are going to make a snap decision on whether or not to trust you.

They're going to make this decision before they read your content. Before they click through to a second page. And definitely before they sign up for your email newsletter.

The photos, the colors, and the layout of the page will send subconscious messages to your site visitors on whether they should trust or distrust you. Whether they should stick around or flee.

One thing to keep in mind is that not all first impressions should be the same. The first impression for a toy store should be markedly different than that of an august law firm. If you switched the branding of these two companies, they'd both fail.

Making a good first impression means showing off your best side, not pretending to be something that you are not. If I want a greasy spoon diner experience, I won't be happy if I show up and the place looks like an upscale restaurant with cloth napkins and white linen service.

Making a Good First Impression from Search

Some of your traffic will come from the search engines. In this case, the first impression they'll have of your business is the big, blue link on the search engine results page, as well as the descriptive text below.

To make a good first impression here, don't just cram all your keywords in the title (which appears as the big blue link.) Think about what you might what to say to get a potential customer's attention without turning them off.

The black text below comes from your meta-description (more often than not). This is an opportunity to say a little more about your company or the topic at hand, and to reinforce the idea that you are a trusted resource and worthy of their click.

Making a Good First Impression from Social

Some social media sites allow you a certain amount of visual branding in your profile. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are obvious examples, but almost all sites allow you to customize and choose your avatar or profile picture.

If you can include a custom header image, try and make it complementary or identical to the header image on your website's home page. That way, if they travel from your Facebook page to your website to check you out, there's not a visual disconnect when they get there.

Making a Good First Impression from Mobile

Make sure you have a mobile-friendly website. If visitors arrive at your site and they have to pinch, zoom, stretch, double-tap...

in other words, if they have to treat your website like a ball of dough, then it's not mobile-friendly.

Now I have heard from some business owners that they actually prefer that experience over what the rest of us refer to as mobile-friendly. While everyone is entitled to their opinion, keep in mind that the vast majority of your site visitors won't appreciate that. And your website isn't about you, it's about your site visitors.

Also, you're disagreeing with Google. And Google has made it abundantly clear that they are going to be penalizing sites that aren't mobile-friendly. So, if your preference for a non-mobile friendly website outweighs your customers' desires and Google driving traffic to your site, then by all means....

It may seem unfair that people will judge us before they even read our content—that they'll judge us first by our looks and not by our brains—but that's human nature. To increase conversions, you'll need to be firing on all cylinders: you'll need to have a good-looking site and valuable content.

Social Proof

Have you ever tried that social experiment where you get a bunch of people to all look up? Suddenly everyone around them is looking up, even if they don't know why.

We visit review sites, ask friends, and form a queue even when we're not 100% sure that we're really in line to get into the concert. This is in part because we don't have time to assess every situation, so we look to other people to get clues on what's valuable and what's not.

Sometimes visitors come to our site already holding social proof, because they were referred by a friend. But for everyone else, we need to prove that we're the right choice, and to do it as quickly as possible.

Testimonials

One way to show social proof is to show people who have used your product or service and gotten good results from it.

When it comes to displaying testimonials at your site, the more you can do to tie a positive sentiment to a real person, the better. This is because your site visitor may not know you from Adam. Or Eve. So if you have a nice quote from "A. Smith," or worse, "a doctor," it won't mean as much as having that person's full name and city attached. That additional information makes it feel more real. Sure, you could have made up all that information, but since someone could more easily track down Alex Smith from Cooperstown, NY, to ask if he really said that, there's added legitimacy to the quote.

It can also be beneficial if this person is well known in your industry or city. Years ago, when I first discovered Derek Halpern's SocialTriggers.com website, I had no idea who he was. But in the top banner, next to the email signup box was a quote from Chris Brogan: "I'm totally digging Social Triggers!"

Chris is a respected leader in our industry, and I figured if he liked this site, so would I. Needless to say, I signed up.

Even more powerful than a written testimonial is a video testimonial. If you have an actual customer talking to the viewer, telling her how much better their business, life, or marriage is after working with you, that's incredibly persuasive.

One final word about website testimonials: no one ever wants to go read an entire page of testimonials. Instead, sprinkle them throughout the site. A quote here, another quote there. It's especially powerful if you offer different services and the quotes are relevant to the content on that page.

Social Shares

Another way you can show off social proof is through social sharing buttons. You'll find these at the top of most blog posts

and product pages. Many—if not most—of these buttons include share counts, which will give your site visitor an immediate indication of whether other people thought your post or product was valuable.

Blog Comments

This is another way to learn if people are engaged with your content. If people are leaving comments, it means that they had a strong reaction to your post and wanted to weigh in. (Or, they were just trying to increase their own visibility and hijack some of your traffic, but let's ignore that for now.)

Audience Size

Recently I visited the website of Basecamp, a project management software we use. On the right column was a free trial signup that announced:

> Just last week, 7,586 companies got started with Basecamp 3!

I mean, if over 7,500 companies just got started with this software last week, it must be good, right? It's encouraging that so many other companies are taking the plunge. It reduces the apparent risk in trying the product out.

Similarly, I've seen websites share how many people are on their mailing list as a reason to subscribe: "Join 10,000/20,000/50,000 other marketers/authors/bail bondsmen (bondspersons?) who get critical information delivered right to their inbox each week!" Whether these numbers are real or not is almost beside the point: social proof is being built.

While not all site visitors will rely on social proof to make a buying decision, showing that your product or service worked for other, similar people can provide you with the benefit of the doubt.

Using Authority Sites

Similar to the celebrity endorsement mentioned above, many site owners like showing off a bunch of shiny, authoritative logos.

Small businesses might include the BBB (Better Business Bureau), a local chamber of commerce, or badge from an industry certification board.

A speaker or consultant might include places they've been interviewed or quoted, like CNN, *the Wall Street Journal,* or *Inc. Magazine*.

While I believe that Authority Buttons mean more to the site owner than to the visitor, for the educated prospect, they can alleviate worries about risk and increase the chances someone choosing you. However, they're much more valuable when your audience is familiar with the brand or certification. I once worked with a plastic surgeon (not the same one) who was adamant that we show off his board certification. I asked, "Don't all cosmetic surgeons have to be board certified?" Apparently they don't, but for me, as a lay person, that meant nothing as I would assume that all surgeons are board certified.

You may be inclined to link offsite to the certifying bodies.

Don't.

All that does is take the site visitor—who you've worked so hard to get—and send them away, likely never to return again. What value are you providing to your visitor if you link to that certifying site? To throw them into a site that might link back out to you...and all of your competitors?

If your visitor is so interested in finding out more about The Association of Michigan-Based Naturopaths, then let her Google it!

Site Speed

Site speed, or how fast your site loads, is becoming more critical as time goes on. First, if a visitor has to wait too long for a page to load, they'll become frustrated and hit the back button. There's no chance at conversion if your visitor isn't going to wait long enough for your Buy Now button to load.

Second, site speed impacts your search visibility. Google has been tracking site speed statistics for years and has confirmed that it is a factor in how your site is ranked. In your Google Analytics, there's even a report on site speed, along with suggestions on how to make your pages load faster.

Faster loading sites mean more conversions.

Simplify

Site owners unnecessarily complicate their sites. Too many buttons. Too many moving images. Too many fonts. Too many colors. Too many offers.

Or they accidentally hide the information visitors want most, whether it's hours, directions, pricing, or a way to contact the site owner.

Or they get too clever with what they name things, leading to a *What's Behind Link #2* feeling for their site visitors.

In short, they add unneeded complication to their websites, confusing their visitors.

All of these things are points of friction. Friction slows down conversion. See what you can do to remove any friction from your website.

For most small businesses, it doesn't matter how many pages a visitor looks at, or how much time they spend on your site. It

only matters if they sign up for your email newsletter, fill out your contact form, or pick up the phone.

Photos

Another way to guide visitors to take a desired action is by purposeful use of photography. Human beings are wired to look at faces, but also to look where people are looking...to see what holds *their* attention.

In a fascinating eye-tracking study, James Breeze, a usability specialist, compared two diaper ads. The first one had a baby looking straight out while the second one turned the baby towards the advertising copy. The difference was astounding! People spent much more time looking at the ad copy and the logo in the second ad.

As Breeze states, "You look where they look."

You can use this knowledge to help guide people around your website. If you're using photos (or illustrations) of people on your site, they should be facing towards the page, not away from it. They should be looking at action items, such as signups and links, to direct the visitor's attention towards what you want her to focus on.

Action Color

In the early days of the web, unvisited links were blue and underlined, and visited links were purple and underlined. It was simple and straightforward.

But as talented print designers with backgrounds in branding came to the scene, they demanded more choice. Soon, any color could represent a visited or unvisited link, underlines were optional, **bolding** a link was a possibility, and even just rolling over a link might create an action (changing its color, changing the background behind it, or underlining it, for example.)

While this may be good for an individual company's branding, it has made navigating different websites more confusing. Is a bold phrase a link, or is the site just adding emphasis? Does a purple word mean the page has already been visited, or is that just their company color scheme?

Therefore, colors can play an important role in guiding visitors and helping them navigate what may be unfamiliar territory.

I recommend choosing ***one*** Action Color for your website. This is a color that will be used for links, buttons, and all calls to action. It should be reserved for these desired activities. In other words, don't make your headers and your action color the same.

There's only one red X that marks the spot on a treasure map, and your color scheme should be similar.

Limit Choices

In one of my favorite pieces of research, a team led by psychologists Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper, set up a tasting station at an upscale grocery store. At one point, they put out six flavors of jam. Later, they put out twenty-four flavors of jam. The bigger display, with more choices, attracted more people.

However, when it came to making a purchase, those who saw the bigger display were only *one tenth* as likely to buy jam as the group who saw the smaller display.

It's as if they were overwhelmed by the number of "wrong choices" they could make and so made no choice at all.

And it was jam! There is no wrong choice with jam!

This phenomenon is often referred to as the paradox of choice. Sure, people say they want choice, but what they really want is guidance.

This idea is incredibly important when it comes to your website. If you offer too many choices, more site visitors will choose the back button.

Choices on websites come in many flavors. You might have too many links. Too many photos in your slideshow. Too many buttons. Too many offers.

While certain sites, like Amazon, Target, or Home Depot, might benefit from having a nearly unlimited amount of choices, these are known brands. For most small businesses, it's important to simplify the decision-making and buying process.

If you have a lot of products or services to offer, try following the rule of threes. Divvy up your offerings into three distinct categories. Once your visitor chooses a category, show them another three choices, and so on.

There's another idea, popularized in the book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein. It's that we can help people make the right decisions ***and*** offer choices by having a default or recommended choice.

One great example of this is when software as a service companies offer different tiers of service. Basecamp used to offer three tiers with the benefits and prices of each listed in columns on their web page.

The middle tier, called Plus, was in a wider, center column and was labeled their "Most Popular Plan." In no small part, I'm sure, because it was big and in the middle! At the same time, the low-end offering was "For Small Groups" and the high-end offering was for "For Power Users," allowing people to self-select.

It's my belief that if all three tiers were given the same weight, a lot of people would have held off on making a decision, not sure

if they were a small group or power user. It's that ***uncertainty*** that will send your site visitor heading for the hills.

To increase your conversion rate, limit the number of choices and promote one as your "most popular" or "best value" to reduce confusion and alleviate anxiety in your prospects.

Wrapping Up

Launching your website is actually the beginning, not the end, of the process.

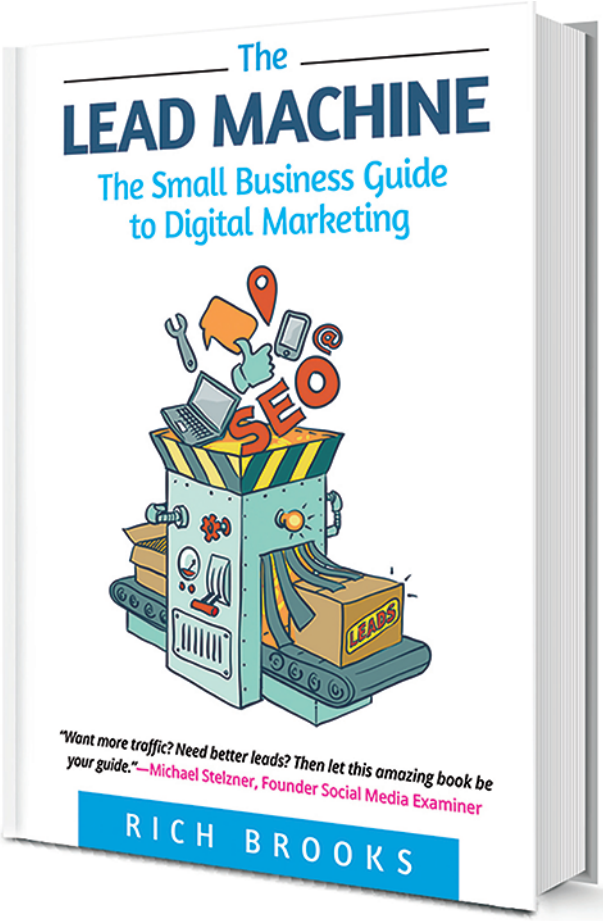
Even with killer design, persuasive copy, and seemingly irresistible calls to action, not everything will be perfect. You might have limited your visitor's choices, selected photos to direct their gaze and attention, and used an action color perfectly, but there are still going to be places where your site fails. Where it leaks rather than converts.

And that's OK. In fact, it's to be expected.

By measuring and evaluating how people find your site and how people behave once they get there, you can continually improve its performance and conversion rate. You'll learn how to measure and analyze that traffic in the Evaluate section at the end of this book.

So go ahead and launch that baby! And in the next section we'll talk about how to bring the masses—or better yet, the qualified minority—to your website.

I hope you enjoyed that selection from my new book, and it provided you with some help to generate more leads online.

To unlock all the secrets of lead generation, grab the full copy at Amazon now!

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