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What causes marketing landing page crashes?

Guest Blog by Doug Tangwall *

The National Marketing Safety Board (NMSB*) reviewed evidence from more than 1,000 crashes that occurred between January 2009 and September 2010. Its latest report identifies ten critical errors:

Fatal mistake #1 : Flying backward

It's hard to make a successful landing when you're coming in tail-first.

Lesson learned: Point your message in the right direction: Design customer-centric landing pages and employ appropriate [nurture marketing](#) techniques.

Fatal mistake #2: Attempting to land in the driveway

Using the home page of your website as a landing page keeps bounce rates high.

Lesson learned: Don't require prospects to make unnecessary adjustments: For a soft landing, build context into your pages that recognizes where potential customers came from—and where you'd like them to go.

Fatal mistake #3: Flying past the airport

Like [two distracted pilots that flew 150 miles past their destination](#), without focus your marketing is left in fly-over land...and eventually runs out of fuel.

Lesson learned: Don't try to be everything to everybody: Narrow your destinations to prospects with similar interests and your content to what's relevant for the one or two keywords that brought them there in the first place. (Remember: More specific offers yield higher response rates and more qualified prospects.)

Fatal mistake #4: Ignoring the gauges

Flying without instruments is a downfall of many interactive marketers.

A few words on automation: In the past, I discovered the secrets of successful landing pages by studying metrics in the context of content—combining information and using tools such as spreadsheets, marketing customer information files and data warehouses. But today’s technology provides more sophisticated navigation than simply “looking out the window.”

[Kevin Lindsay](#), director of conversion product marketing for Adobe Systems, and an expert on optimization software such as Adobe Test&Target, powered by [Omniture](#), says, “The beauty of interactive marketing is its ability to be measured and refined to optimize your online business. Our clients use A/B testing and multivariate analyses to design the most effective landing pages. They achieve key business objectives by measuring page views, sign-up and conversion rates—and even deep-funnel metrics such as return on investment and lifetime value of a customer.”

Lesson learned: Be certain your landing page is working: Define important metrics, measure and monitor success.

Fatal mistake #5: Confusion over airport codes

According to [The Best and Worst of Paid Search](#) by [Forrester Research](#), digital marketers receive failing grades on their calls to action for four out of six industries studied (financial services, business services, consumer packaged goods and travel).

Lesson learned: Spell out landing instructions: Have a compelling call to action on your landing page. (If necessary, provide multiple, context-specific landing pages to guide different prospects to appropriate destinations.)

Fatal mistake #6: Experiencing spatial disorientation

Pilots have internal senses that help them detect the position, motion and attitude of a plane, but if conditions aren’t optimal, misinterpretations can lead to disastrous consequences.

Lesson learned: Show prospects where they fit in your space: Consumers should be able to “see themselves” in your landing page content and experience a sense of [relatedness](#). (Address goals or points of pain and deliver it in ways that resonate with your target audience [some examples: case studies, interviews, video, images or educational pieces]).

Fatal mistake #7: Runway too short

Your marketing page should be long enough that prospects don't abort the landing—with enough content to draw them in and convince them to take the next step on their marketing journey.

A few words on long-copy landing pages: I admit to a bias against long landing pages. They remind me of infomercials. But many infomercials are successful, and while trying to open my mind to this concept, I found I do use them—mostly in the context of [social media](#) and [business consultant](#) profiles where prospects with diverse backgrounds and different needs touch down.

In his book, [Free: The Future of a Radical Price](#), [Chris Anderson](#) draws a parallel to the low cost and vast reach of the Internet:

Imagine a desert landscape with two pools of water separated by some distance. If you're a plant growing next to one of those pools, ...you can drop seeds near your roots...[o]r you can toss the seeds into the air and let them float far away. This means that almost all will die, but [some will]... find that second pool of water...

This is similar to how supersized landing pages can work. [Michael Stelzner](#), founder and executive editor of [Social Media Examiner](#), says, “Long form sales pages work when you have a product or service that is not an impulse purchase. The goal is to present a compelling case in a logical fashion. For example, we use this tactic to sell tickets to our summits. The price point is \$297 to \$597. Our most recent event, Facebook Success Summit, has sold more than 1,900 tickets.”

Lesson learned: Leave enough room to land: Optimize the length of your landing pages. (If you see opportunities to expand into new markets with longer “runways,” this is a great application for automated testing. IMPORTANT: Be sure to include multiple calls to action when using long-copy landing pages.)

Fatal mistake #8: Problems with radar

Interactive marketers have sped up the evolutionary process, so that, over time, wary consumers have developed “radar systems” to detect marketing hyperbole.

A few words on bells and whistles: Call me “old-school,” but when I see pop-up screens and spinning icons on a landing page, my internal radar sets off an alert. I have used high-tech devices like interactive quizzes, scoring thermometers, and customized feedback and calculators but always *after* the prospect completes the call to action. There are exceptions, like video. And, if your testing validates an approach, by all means use it. But consumers are sensitive in online environments, so my advice is don't get too fancy up front. Engage...Build trust...Initiate action...Then wow...

Lesson learned: Let prospects see what's on the horizon and provide [certainty](#): Your landing pages should be open, honest and complete on details. Include bonus offers, warranties and policies on returns, privacy and opt-out to give prospects a peace-of-mind "parachute." (Some marketers say landing pages should have no "outs"—links to leave the landing page—but I am a believer in consumer choice and self-education and generally include the Website navigation bar within the landing pages I design.)

Fatal mistake #9: Requiring extraneous paperwork

Internet pilots are already "overworked." They're often sleep-deprived and have limited attention spans. While some paperwork is necessary, gathering too much can cause fatigue and put your marketing in danger.

A few words on registration forms: I see many recommendations to use *squeeze pages*—registration landing pages placed between desired content—with only an email address field (or email plus first and last name). While I have no hard data to back this up, I believe consumer sign-up rates on landing pages are declining due to abusive marketing practices, limited time and attention spans, and poorly designed landing pages. I ran across a post saying that, according to collective wisdom, you'll lose 30% of your sign-ups for each field you add to your registration form.

Recently, I designed a 10-field form for a business-to-business client that achieved a 73% sign-up rate consisting of highly qualified leads. (Depending on how you interpret "conventional wisdom," this form should have pulled either a 2% or a negative 200% sign-up rate.) How is this possible?...by having personalized educational content of high interest to a specific audience combined with a well-designed "connecting flight" reached through a trusted location.

Lesson learned: Only collect information necessary to keep flights moving: Design registration forms that achieve your objectives and align with perceptions of relevance for your audience. (One-field forms may or may not be your answer. Also, consider your infrastructure and the needs of complementary initiatives in designing forms [for example, the size, make-up and outreach of your sales staff.])

Fatal mistake #10: Depressurization in the cabin (a.k.a. cursing out passengers, grabbing a beer and sliding down the emergency chute)

While this may be a short-cut to achieving folk-hero status, I find myself impressed but reluctant to share the work of a number of social media aficionados who use foul language. Perhaps the vast emotion within this segment of the industry is behind their need to use profanity online.

Lesson learned: Use the intercom for positive purposes: Avoid offensive language and use an *encore page*—a landing page prospects see after completing your initial call to action—to thank them for their business, build good will and invite additional interaction, cross-selling or up-selling through a second call to action.

Many avenues exist to drive consumer interaction and many factors affect landing page design, so it's impossible to give across-the-board advice. But with a little planning, you can avoid these common mistakes.

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