

Case Study Series: What's Working in Marketing & Selling Professional Services

Landing Page Testing Doubles Conversion Rates and Results in \$65k Cost Savings

By M. Sharon Baker

Overview

Erika Blaney leads online marketing for Axway, a B2B software and services company that manages, secures and monitors business processes and communications for 11,000 customers in 100 countries.

As vice president of corporate marketing, she's responsible for attracting new customers through the company websites, helping fill the sales and demand generation funnel for the \$300 million public company. Because Axway operates across many industries, has more than 40 product categories, and draws customers from around the world, targeted landing pages direct customers to the right place.

These landing pages put the customer on the right path to information and ultimately products that might help them.

Among other marketing efforts, Blaney manages a pay-per-click advertising budget of about \$65,000 a month for some 6,000 landing pages. Many of these pages were "good enough" and built on a template that worked well, Blaney said. But she knew they could perform better, especially among technical and business buyers who conduct most of their primary research online.

Situation

In the past two years, competition and the cost of B2B keywords in major pay-per click networks and display networks increased the cost of leads significantly.

With a marketing budget that was already tight, Blaney wanted to find a way to significantly lower the cost per lead of Axway's lead generation campaigns, and generate higher qualified leads.

"We're always looking to get more performance out of every dollar," she said. "We looked at pages that were performing well and said, 'Let's see if we can improve this performance and drive down the cost per lead.'"

Approach

Hire an Expert

Because search engines constantly change the way they serve ads and search results, Blaney knew she didn't have the manpower in-house to lead testing on her landing pages. So she looked for an expert firm to help.

After participating in a webinar and being impressed with the staff's expertise, Blaney hired Anvil Media, Inc., based in Portland, OR, to run testing on landing pages.

"Having someone who understands the complete online strategy and works with you to make sure they look at all of the levers is really crucial," Blaney said. "You need an outside provider who you can have a deep relationship with."

When companies try to tackle landing page testing internally, it rarely performs as well because even the best webmasters are focused on the technical capabilities and information architecture of their core. They don't have the bandwidth to simultaneously increase prospect traffic, click-thru rates, and test multiple landing pages.

"There's a huge difference between running landing page testing programs versus dabbling in landing page testing," she said.

Fix Common Landing Page Problems

Many companies view landing pages as a necessity and create a single template for all of their landing pages, said Nick Herinckx, senior account executive at Anvil. Most marketers don't have the expertise to design each page so that 1) prospects are interested and stay on the page, and then 2) urge the prospect to take the desired action.

"Most also follow the same style with the same approach to headlines," he said. "This is very common. There's a science and a little art to" increasing page performance.

Axway's landing pages were built on a single template that they used for different industries and customer types. To avoid adding work to the Axway IT team, Anvil moved Axway's landing pages onto a system that allowed them to change and manipulate page elements at will, although they still looked like they resided on Axway's web site.

To test the effectiveness of an overall page, Anvil created a new landing page and tested it against Axway's current page. After verifying that the new page outperformed the old one, Anvil began testing multiple parts of the new page, which is known as multivariate testing.

After testing the overall template, Anvil then began testing other elements; the first being the headline. "One of the things we implemented was dynamic keyword insertion on the landing pages, whereby the keyword entered in the search (or ad clicked on) automatically shows up on the headline of the landing page," Herinckx said. Doing so created a huge improvement.

This is important because first, it allows the prospect to immediately connect with the page because it has the same keywords they were searching for. In addition, it also increases the quality score search engines give to the landing page, which lowers the cost of the ad serving the page.

Add Unconscious Trust

Anvil then tackled the trust element on a page, which can be a logo, a testimonial, a Better Business Bureau (BBB) or other official seal, to see if it is placed and performing optimally. “The trust level is one of the unconscious questions people ask when they visit a page,” Herinckx said. “They wonder, ‘Is this trust worthy’ and have a feel test to make sure there’s nothing shady going on.”

Logos, testimonials, and other trust symbols, as well as other page elements, have varying degrees of importance to prospects in different industries. The length of a headline in B2B pages needs to be short while those for healthcare can be rather long, and plain headlines at the top of a page generally outperform fancy headers, Herinckx said.

Layout, use, specific words or content, and even colors, fonts and font size all make a difference and those differences vary depending upon the target audience.

“There are all these little levers to pull and play with that help you understand what you can change,” Axway’s Blaney said. She was surprised with some of the findings, including how much impact moving a headline higher up or changing the size of an image had on conversion rates.

Results

Blaney is only half way through the testing process, but said they have seen a huge return in the number of leads generated and the amount of money saved to acquire those leads.

“We’ve basically saved a full month’s marketing spend on our full pull campaign while getting the same or better amount of leads,” she said. “Those results are tremendous and we’re only half way through.”

Blaney estimates she spends roughly \$60,000 to \$70,000 on online advertising campaigns a month.

A typical conversion rate for landing pages – where the prospect enters contact information to learn more – is 1-2%, Blaney said. “We went from pages that had conversion rates of 3-4% to 7.5%, which is astounding and almost unheard of in the industry.”

“And we’ve decreased our cost per lead by half and the number of leads is that much higher,” she said.

Additional Insights from Axway’s Erika Blaney:

- **Make sure your offer – a case study, a white paper, a checklist or article – is compelling** and has some interest to your prospective customers before you try to launch a testing campaign. Poor content won’t help you learn what you need to know.
- **Be open to the unexpected and to trying new things.** It’s not easy for marketers with tight control of their brands to adopt landing page layout or design changes. But you need to be flexible and open to pushing the limits with what you are comfortable with and learning from what the changes reveal.

- **Have patience and let the results reveal themselves over time.** It will take longer than you expect to learn what you need. “It’s like planting a garden,” Blaney said. “You can feed, water and add sunshine but at a certain point the plants need to grow on their own. It takes patience and perseverance to focus and tend the garden so you can see the results in the end. It is not a quick fix; it’s about investing in long-term scalability and the success of your business. The best things in marketing often take time.”

Resources:

Axway website: www.axway.com

Anvil Media, Inc., search engine marketing agency: www.anvilmediainc.com

Sample Landing Page Before

Sample Landing Page After