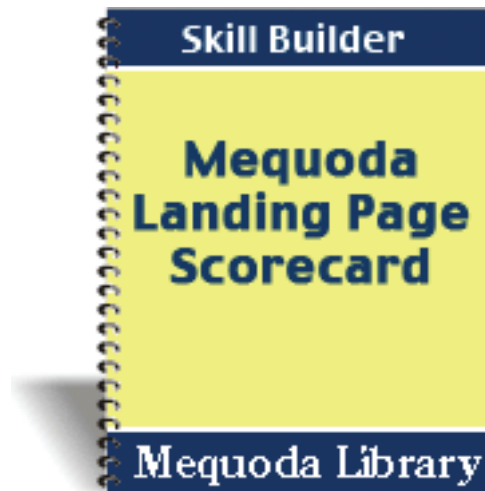


Mequoda Landing Page Scorecard™

A guide for how to rate a sales letter landing
page using the Mequoda Landing Page
Scorecard™



By Don Nicholas

with John Clausen, Peter A. Schaible and Robert W. Bly

Copyright © 2005 by the Mequoda Group, LLC

Terms of Use:

All rights reserved. No part of this report may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, faxing, emailing, posting online or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the Publisher.

All trademarks and brands referred to herein are the property of their respective owners. All references to Mequoda™ and the seven Mequoda Website Publishing Models™ are trademarks of the Mequoda Group, LLC.

Contact Information

Mequoda Library
Customer Service
(401) 396-9677
215 High St.
Bristol, RI 02809 USA

To purchase additional copies of this report, visit MequodaLibrary.com or contact Kim Mateus at 401.396.9677 or Kim@DMApeople.com.

Legal Notices

While all attempts have been made to verify information provided in this publication, neither the author nor the publisher assumes any responsibility for error, omissions or contrary interpretations of the subject matter contained herein.

The purchaser or reader of this publication assumes responsibility for the use of these materials and information. Adherence to all applicable laws and regulations, both referral and state and local, governing professional licensing, business practices, advertising and all other aspects of doing business in the United States or any other jurisdiction, is the sole responsibility of the purchaser or reader. The author and publisher assume no responsibility or liability whatsoever on the behalf of any purchaser or reader of these materials.

Any perceived slights of specific people or organizations are unintentional.

Table of Contents

MEQUODA LIBRARY

The Interactive Resource for
Building Better Websites

DON NICHOLAS
Editor

KIM MATEUS
Managing Editor

PETER SCHAIBLE
Editor-At-Large

ALLISYN DEYO
Webmaster

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

JOHN ALEXANDER

LIZZIE BABARCZY

MICAH BALDWIN

ROBERT W. BLY

ALEXANDRIA K. BROWN

JOHN CLAUSEN

TERRI EDMONSTON

FRED GLEECK

LARRY KERSTEIN

STEVE LALIBERTE

ROBIN NOBLES

ROXANNE O'CONNELL

ROGER C. PARKER

JIM SINKINSON

JANE ZAREM

Building A Better Sales Letter Landing Page	4
1. Headline (Strategic Intent)	5
2. Story and Content	6
3. Content Webification	7
4. Email Capture (Relationship Building)	8
5. User Testimonials	9
6. Links to Order Flow	10
7. Labeling and Language	11
8. Readability and Content Density	12
9. Content Freshness and Urgency	13
10. Load Time	14
11. Aesthetics	15
12. Order Options	16
Conclusion	17
About the Authors	18

Building a Better Sales Letter Landing Page

“Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don't know which half.” — John Wanamaker (1838-1922)

“*What the online community needs is an objective way of looking at landing page sales letters, so that is what we are offering with our Mequoda Landing Page Scorecard.*”

Evaluating any kind of advertising or sales pitch has always been a difficult task, subject to a host of unruly variables and seasoned by one's own sense of what might work. The advent of advertising on the Internet has only made it more difficult, with hyperlinks and streaming video and all the other electronic gizmos available to an enthusiastic programmer/designer.

What the online community needs is an objective way of looking at landing page sales letters... a scorecard that would help us make sure we've covered our bases and not made any truly egregious mistakes. So that is what we are offering with our Mequoda Landing Page Scorecard.

We constructed the Scorecard by asking a panel of online marketing experts what they felt constitutes a well-done landing page. Each of the experts is a recognized industry leader with an impressive portfolio. As you might imagine it was a lively series of conversations. At the end of the exercise, the panel had isolated 12 essential elements for a landing page sales letter to be successful. Using their recommendations, we created four true or false criteria to use when evaluating each of the elements. The result is an easy-to-understand framework you will find below. We are confident that you will find it an invaluable tool with which to improve the conversion rates of your sales letter landing pages.

The grading system operates thusly. An answer of “true” to any of the four points constitutes a single point, with each category having a possible best score of four points. After answering all of the true or false questions, we average the number of points and assign a letter grade. Four points equal an “A,” three points a “B,” two points a “C” and a single point a “D.” An “F” would be granted if none of the objectives were met.

Here are the categories and criteria.

1. Headline (Strategic Intent)

It may seem hard to believe, but far too many landing pages fail almost immediately by offering up lackluster headlines and subheads. Think benefits and features when putting up your headlines. The visitor who's reading your landing page wants nothing more than the answer to this question: "What's in this for me?" Answer that question well and you will make a sale.

“
*Far too many
landing pages fail
almost
immediately by
offering up
lackluster
headlines and
subheads. Think
benefits and
features when
putting up your
headlines.*

Headline (Strategic Intent)

- The headline engages the target user with a compelling user benefit.
- The headline calls attention to the product or service by name.
- The headline is clear and easy to read.
- The headline establishes the need to buy the product or service.

2. Story and Content

Make sure your landing page contains an interesting, engaging, believable story told by someone your audience can relate to and appreciate. After all, you're asking them to spend their valuable time reading your pitch... you owe them a good time. Plus, a compelling story will move them smoothly along to the purchasing decision.

“*Make sure your landing page contains an interesting, engaging, believable story told by someone your audience can relate to and appreciate.*”

Story and Content

- The sales letter tells a story.
- The storyteller is credible and clearly identified.
- The story has a compelling, believable lead.
- The story has a conclusion that moves the user to buy.

3. Content Webification

By “Webification” we mean the most efficient use of all the multimedia and interactive technology available. This does not, however, mean using technology just because it’s there. Never let the technology outshine the sales message. Don’t let your readers be so dazzled by the bells and whistles that they forget to buy. Technology should be used to enhance the sales message, not to replace it.

“By
“Webification” we
mean the most
efficient use of all
the multimedia
and interactive
technology
available. But,
technology should
be used to enhance
the sales message,
not to replace it.”

Content Webification

- Text has been webified.
- Graphics are webified.
- The landing page makes innovative use of multi-media technology.
- The landing page makes innovative use of interactive technology.

4. Email Capture (Relationship Building)

Once you've captured your prospect's interest, it's important to keep your name, product, and/or service in front of them. Offering a free newsletter or a free report is a handy, non-invasive way to accomplish that. These items have a high-perceived value and are amazingly cheap to produce and distribute. Using effective pop-uppers as a mechanism for drawing them in once they've decided to abandon you is crucial.

“
Once you've captured your prospect's interest, it's important to keep your name, product, and/or service in front of them.

Email Capture (Relationship Building)

- There is a free downloadable report in exchange for an email address.
- There is a free newsletter offer in exchange for an email address.
- Effective pop-under to capture visitor's email address when they leave.
- Effective pop-under to capture email as a fall back to abandoned order flow.

5. User Testimonials

A good, credible testimonial is an extremely valuable part of any sales letter. The most credible testimonial messages are those told in the individual's own words and include a full identification of the person giving the testimonial. Kind words from Tom S. in North Carolina are obviously less valuable than those from Tom Smith in Boone, North Carolina. In fact, under-identified testimonials can inspire suspicion and work against your sales message.

“
*A good,
credible
testimonial is an
extremely valuable
part of any sales
letter.*

User Testimonials

- User testimonials are credible and each user is clearly identified.
- Testimonials feature compelling results and benefits.
- Testimonials are integrated into the sales letter flow.
- Testimonials reflect the target users and their heroes.

6. Links to Order Flow

Links and buttons are the vehicles that allow a prospect to navigate your landing page. Make them as easy as possible to understand and use.

“*Links and buttons are the vehicles that allow a prospect to navigate your landing page.*”

Links to Order Flow

- The landing page includes well-designed button on landing screen.
- The landing page includes well-designed button in closing.
- The landing page includes numerous blue, underlined links.
- The landing page links and buttons are contextual.

7. Labeling and Language

Have you ever seen a sales letter that included a bulleted list of items... and the last item in the list said, “and much, much more?” Well, here’s a news flash...nobody with a higher than room temperature IQ believes that there is “much, much more.” If you actually have more benefits or features, put them in the list. Clear language and good grammar are part of good storytelling and so is telling the truth. Don’t try to bamboozle your prospect with tired ad copy cliches.

“
*Clear
language and
good grammar are
part of good
storytelling and so
is telling the truth.*

Labeling and Language

- The sales letter uses clear language and good grammar.
- The sales letter avoids terms not commonly understood by target user.
- The sales letter uses “power words” to create excitement and urgency.
- Sales letter terminology is consistent.

8. Readability and Content Density

This is fairly self-explanatory. If a page is comfortable and easy to read, prospects are far more likely to keep reading and take in your sales message.

“
If a page is comfortable and easy to read, prospects are far more likely to keep reading and take in your sales message.

Readability and Content Density

- The typeface is familiar, comforting and easy to read online.
- The layout is uncluttered and easy to follow.
- The landing page makes adequate use of white space.
- Graphics are well integrated with sales letter flow.

9. Content Freshness and Urgency

Few things destroy the credibility of a landing page sales letter more quickly and effectively than content that's out of date. How can we expect the prospect to take our message seriously if we're not even interested enough in the content to keep it up to date?

“*Few things destroy the credibility of a landing page sales letter more quickly and effectively than content that's out of date.*”

Content Freshness and Urgency

- The content and references are accurate and up to date.
- The sales letter includes date stamp in opening screen.
- The sales letter includes reply by date in call to action.
- The sales letter appears to have newly added content.

10. Load Time

Nobody wants to wait for any website to load. Call us spoiled or impatient, but the fact is that the Web-using public doesn't want to wait at all. If your landing page loads with anything less than instant gratification, you run a serious risk of losing your customer.

“
*If your
landing page
loads with
anything less than
instant
gratification, you
run a serious risk
of losing your
customer.*

Load Time

- Under 15 seconds on 56K connection.
- Under 25 seconds on 56K connection.
- Under 35 seconds on 56K connection.
- Under 55 seconds on 56K connection.

11. Aesthetics

The way a landing page looks and feels is almost as important as what it says. A favorable decision to purchase your product or service is almost always the result of a sales effort that made the customer feel comfortable and safe.

“
*The way a
landing page looks
and feels is almost
as important as
what it says.*

Aesthetics

- The graphic design is comforting and trustworthy for the target user.
- The graphic design is consistent with target user mental models.
- The look and feel supports and reinforces the sales letters flow.
- The look and feel supports and reinforces the product or service brand.

12. Order Options

Posting a landing page with a confusing or inadequate order mechanism is like opening a new Walmart, but forgetting to install cash registers. What's the point? In direct mail advertising, it is generally conceded that one of the two most important elements of the package is the order form (the other being the outer envelope). If you get everything else right and blow the order mechanism, your sales letter landing page will almost certainly fail miserably.

“
If you get everything else right and blow the order mechanism, your sales letter landing page will almost certainly fail miserably.

Order Options

- Sales letter is followed by usable online order flow.
- Sales letter includes 1-800 number for phone orders.
- Sales letter includes printable order form for fax orders.
- Sales letter offers option to have sales rep contact user to place orders.

Conclusion

The Mequoda Landing Page Scorecard™ encourages you to score your own landing page using each of the 12 Mequoda Best Practice Guidelines, add them together and arrive at a cumulative score. The goal is to emphasize the importance of effective landing pages that sell. Your landing page should achieve respectable scores in all areas, rather than over-emphasizing a single area or two, or omitting other areas completely. Beginning in June of 2005, we will begin publishing two to three Mequoda Landing Page Reviews each month. Over the next year, these reviews will create a reference library of the best and worst landing pages. A perfect "A" Mequoda Landing Page Score is 48 or 4 points for each 12 Best Practice Guidelines.

“*The goal is to emphasize the importance of effective landing pages that sell. Your landing page should achieve respectable scores in all areas, rather than over-emphasizing a single area or two, or omitting other areas completely.*”

About the Author

Don Nicholas

Editor, [Mequoda Library](#)

Managing Director, [Mequoda Group](#)

Don Nicholas is America's leading expert on website publishing strategy. He is the inventor of the Mequoda Method™, the SmartSub Ecommerce System™ and the Lighthouse Publishing Model™. He is a highly successful Internet entrepreneur, coach, speaker and author. Don currently serves as editor of [Mequoda Library](#), Managing Director for [Mequoda Group](#), LLC, and President of Track Research Group, LLC. He is the founder of the Mequoda Library, Mequoda Group LLC, Blue Dolphin Group, [Writing for Money.com](#), *Editorial Strategies*, *Subscription Marketing*, *Internet Voyager*, *MagazineWeek* and Lighthouse Software.

Don is currently advising on Mequoda™ website development projects for the Asay Media Network, [DailyWord.com](#), [FirstClassFlyer.com](#), [Highlights.com](#), [MotherEarthNews.com](#) and [PetPlace.com](#). Since 1994, he has worked on the launch of hundreds of successful websites for media and retail organizations of all sizes including [ConsumerReports.org](#), [BlueDolphin.com](#), [Morningstar.com](#) and [TechRepublic.com](#). He has authored hundreds of articles and reports for leading magazines and journals, plus four books on consumer behavior, media and technology. His fifth book, The Mequoda Method™, will be published later this year. Don is a frequent speaker and seminar leader for leading universities, trade associations and private media companies including Harvard University, NEPA, SWEPA and Time, Inc.

About the Author

John Clausen

Contributing Editor, [Mequoda Library](#)

John Clausen is a 25-year veteran direct response copywriter, journalist and author. He is editor of [Writing for Money](#), an online journal for freelance writers. He is also contributing editor for the Library on topics related to Internet marketing and copywriting.

John primarily works with clients who want to promote their business via the Internet. He helps both online and print publications better their sales and promotional copy.

He owned and operated a Sacramento, California-based advertising agency, taught advertising at the University of California, Davis, and has written many articles for various publications. His book, [Too Lazy to Work, Too Nervous to Steal](#), was a Writer's Digest Book Club book of the month.

To learn more about John Clausen's services, please visit his [site](#).

About the Author

Robert W. Bly

Contributing Editor, [Mequoda Library](#)

Robert W. Bly is an independent copywriter and consultant with more than 20 years of experience in B2B, high-tech, industrial, and direct marketing. Robert has written copy for over 100 clients including Network Solutions, ITT Fluid Technology, Medical Economics, Intuit, Business & Legal Reports and Brooklyn Union Gas.

Robert is the author of more than 50 books including [*The Complete Idiot's Guide to Direct Marketing*](#) and [*The Copywriter's Handbook*](#). He writes sales letters, direct mail packages, email marketing campaigns, websites, and other marketing materials for his clients. He consults on marketing strategy, mail order selling, and lead generation programs

Robert has presented marketing, sales, and writing seminars for various associations, including the U.S Army and the American Marketing Association. He also taught B2B copywriting and technical writing at New York University.

Please visit his [website](#) for more information.

About the Author

Peter A. Schaible

Editor-At-Large, [Mequoda Library](#)

Peter A. Schaible is Editor-at-Large for the Mequoda Group. Prior to its merger with the Mequoda Library, he was director of the Subscription Website Publishers Association and executive editor of www.SWEPA.com, the association's website.

Schaible has extensive experience in marketing communications, including stints as an editor of newsletters for the National Exchange Carrier Association, AT&T and IBM Corporation. For more than 20 years he has been president of SunDance New Media, a marketing communications consulting firm. Previously he was director of communications for the United States Golf Association.