WTF principles to optimize your Home & Landing pages

by Sergei Nikolaev   *June 17, 2021*

The point of having a business website is to guide visitors on the journey through a marketing funnel with the ultimate goal of conversion. The conversion is a transition or a transformation from one state into another. A visitor can become a follower, a follower can become a customer and a customer can become a tribesman. Our job as prudent decision makers is to facilitate this transition.

The days of random people showing up at your digital doors — your website — are long gone. Nowadays, no one will *just type* your domain name out of the blue if they haven't heard about your company before. Those who had come, always have a goal.

New visitors would typically access your company website through one of the following entry points: direct emails, paid online ads, external links or organic search. As a business leader or a manager, you might not have a total control over all of the entry points, but what happens next, once people have decided to pay your website a visit, is entirely in your hands.

Depending on the point of entry, the landing spots might vary. More often than not, the most frequently visited locations are the home page and landing pages. The home page is generic by design and it tends to get most of the incoming direct and organic traffic. Landing pages, however, are designed for specific target audience's segments with specific objectives in mind and therefore have a fair amount of targeted traffic.

The visitors of the website have needs and goals; companies have business objectives. Whenever a user enters the website, these objectives manifest themselves in the form of call-to-action buttons, pop-ups, notifications, sounds and other attention-grabbers. Unfortunately, on most websites these objectives do not concord with visitors' goals.

The question is — how do you align your business objectives with users' needs & wants whilst having variable entry points and landing spots?

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What is the reason behind this conversion optimization guide?

Having asked ourselves the above question on alignment, we had decided to examine home & landing pages of random companies from different industries. Though not entirely unexpected, to our surprise, the current state of affairs is rather dismal — the conversion rates reported by several studies aren't impressive and in some industries are as low as 3% for their landing pages.

As a side note — a typical **home page** usually has more generic content, intent and many competing objectives and so the conversion rates are expected to be lower than that of the **landing pages**.

Creating websites, polishing home pages and crafting landing pages is a time-consuming, resource-demanding endeavour — unless you're into procuring a *this-will-do*, *free-for-all* template for your business — thus, it would seem obvious to want to have a reasonable return on investment. Anything below 10% conversion rate is a cry for improvement.

It is not unusual for a typical **brick & mortar retail store**, for example, to have a conversion rate above 20% — something **online stores** should strive to attain. So, when 10 people walk into your brick & mortar store (read — visit your website) you would want to expect at least one of them to complete a transaction. If other retailers can do it, why shouldn't you?

We think there is a tremendous opportunity that most companies aren't taking seriously enough. The reason, of course, is quite simple — everyone is copying the average — a mistake as old as the world.

Who is this landing page optimization checklist for?

These are the best practices of conversion rate optimization that are meant for <u>founders</u>, <u>executives</u> and <u>key stakeholders</u> who are experienced in digital marketing. This checklist serves as a guide towards understanding the process behind the creation of conversion optimization strategies using the techniques and principles outlined further.

This guide is thorough, yet might not be complete. It contains thought-provoking concepts that require experience and patience to go through, and it will transform along with our knowledge about the facilitation of the conversion.

Those who are looking for a quick *show-me-how-in-a-minute* solution would probably find this guide to be intimidating. There are plenty of look-alike landing page templates out there, so, please, don't let us hold you up.

Websites Worth Making

All the remaining astute risktakers, courageous wayfinders and valiant captains — let's dive right in!

W.T.F. Web principles

WTF Web principles are a series of questions or problems that has to be addressed, if not solved, in order to maximize the effects of conversion rate optimization. Understanding these principles will allow you to compose a landing page that both speaks to the target audience and follows through with your business objectives. In other words — achieve alignment.

It makes it much easier to explain why companies need to increase conversion rates on their landing pages rather than any other web page, because landing pages are typically viewed as a separate job with separate metrics and expectations. The principles outlined here, however, can be applied to every single page on the company website.

In order to find an alignment between the target audience and business, we need to keep both perspectives in mind — the user perspective and the company perspective. We will exert empathy. We shall put their spectacles on to see the world through their lenses. We will step into their shoes.

We shall examine the landing page from the user's perspective first.

W.T.F. Web — user's perspective

Where <u>am I</u>? This is the first question that pops into user's mind. *I was in one place and now I am somewhere else; what is this place?* The landing page should be able to address this question immediately. An image, a video or a concise headline should answer this question fast, on the first screen the user will see, typically — in the "hero section", but not necessarily. If it's a dental service, the user should probably see some happy teeth or non-intimidating doctors. If it's a legal advice, the user should probably see an experienced lawyer who is ready to start a conversation.

What <u>does this company do</u>? The answer to this question can come through the headline or subheading; images and video can reinforce this. The user wants to know what is being offered. A concise and to-the-point answer is very helpful.

> "*Expert legal advice in divorce, real estate and child custody.*"

Websites Worth Making

Who <u>is this for</u>? *Am I the right person, can I afford it, is this for me*? The copy, images, taglines, messaging — these things have to speak to the particular target audience. If the ad had a price tag in the title, the user should be able to find the exact price on the landing page. If the service is for the dog owners, perhaps it isn't prudent to display cats even though you might be fond of a particular kitten.

Why <u>should it matter</u>? This has to be more about the problem the product or service is supposed to solve. What are the benefits of this offer to this particular visitor? What are the pain points that could be soothed by the service or product?

What <u>do I have to do</u>? A call to action (CTA) buttons that stand out is a good way to let the user know exactly what you want them to do. Another important thing is to make sure the user understands what is going to happen when they take that action. What happens afterwards is very important indeed. People want to be aware of what's coming next. The fear of the unknown could prevent them from taking action.

When <u>do I need to act</u>? When is the best time to take action and why? There has to be a genuine urgency — maybe the stock is limited or, perhaps, due to a low season, the prices are reduced for a certain period of time. Make sure the rush isn't artificial. Counters that tick seconds before the deal expires are ridiculous and harmful if after reloading the page they reset.

Now, the problem is — where exactly do you place the answers to these questions on the landing page? Vendors that sell templates will tell you that there is only one way of doing it right — their way, using their templates. I am sure, that if you have experience in business, you know that there are <u>always</u> multiple ways of getting similar results.

Sometimes a template could work well. Sometimes you might get lucky — turn up at the right place and at the right time. For us to increase your chances of success, you'd want to invest time and effort into thinking these questions through: rigorously, thoroughly, prudently.

Knowing your target audience well, understanding their pain points, will allow you to emphasize the most crucial parts first and put them at the most prominent places. Bear in mind that you can make users land on a particular spot on the landing page and not necessarily at the top of it.

W.T.F. Web — user's perspective

Time — how long does it take for the landing page to load? When it comes to time — no one wants to wait. This applies to every page on the website. The studies have shown that there is a three second threshold. After this threshold, users start to leave without seeing the contents of the page. Our job is to make sure the pages are loading fast. Here is an article that investigates the importance of optimizing page speed.

Trust — how trustworthy is this company? Are there any reliable reviews? Not some random, unsubstantiated numbers, but real, honest reviews. Users want to see social proof, number of customers, testimonials, endorsements or references. Our job is to portray the company, the service and the product as the ones deserving people's trust. A solid, clean web design will help to achieve this. Consistency is a must. Security — when it comes to payments. Pleasant, thought-through user experience would never go amiss either.

Trouble — is this going to be troublesome? We should address the question of how difficult it is going to be to work with your product and your team. Users can get a gist of it by going through the content, scrolling and clicking buttons — if it is challenging to find the information they seek, it's probably going to be too much of a trouble to start working with the company as well. User experience should be seamless. The issues potential troubles should be addresses in the copy. Thorough video tutorials are of great help as well.

Transformation — how will it make me better? This one's super important. People buy products and services because they want to become a better version of selves. Customers will select the product that they feel can do a better job of making this transformation happen.

> *"The summer is coming and I'm looking for a date; the beach is where I can examine my options better. I will need to make an impression. But I am embarrassed to go to the beach, because my toenails have fungus. What should I do; can anyone help?"*

Following this user's thought process, companies can craft landing pages that will address the pain points and increase conversion rates.

Thoroughness — how thorough is this company with their work? This is the question of expertise, experience and approach with regards to the product or service. But it's also a marker of attitude towards the potential client. Visitors want to be sure you know what you are doing and you will follow through with your promise. Description of a step-by-step process will help with addressing this issue.

Totality — how complete is the product or service? This one is an extension of the Thoroughness, of course. Users want to know that they're not going to be on their own, face-

to-face with the unknown. What kind of customer support can they expect? Visitors want to have access to additional information, tutorials, demos, etc.

Treatment — <u>how will they treat me</u>; how do they treat their customers? People want to feel special, because they know they are unique. No one wants to feel they've been taken advantage of — yet another victory of clever marketers. Our job on the landing page is to convince the visitor that the company actually cares about them.

Transactions — <u>how easy it is to make simple transactions</u>? If it is challenging for the user to perform simple tasks on the landing page, then maybe the whole process isn't worth going through. If the application form has too many fields or has some irrelevant questions in it, people might want to ditch the page.

W.T.F. Web — user's perspective

Focus – <u>what should I focus on</u>? The landing page has to have one objective that is easy to understand and act upon. Users have to intuitively grasp what needs done — which form to fill in, which button to click or which phone number to dial. Our job is to remove distractions that obscure the focus and implement visual hierarchy along with contrast to draw attention towards the most important elements.

Feasibility – <u>is this offer affordable and attainable</u>? This goes back to the "*Who is this for?*" question. We need to help the user figure out whether they can afford this product or service. It is important to be clear and specific about prices. When prices are subject to further communication, the user has to become aware of that. Neither your business, nor the prospect customer is going to benefit from spending time talking about the product or service when it's not attainable.

Finesse — <u>how competent are they</u>? If your company has an expertise in a certain field, it should be conveyed to the users on the landing page. Every subject has a layered structure to it. It would be great to show the visitor how deep your knowledge of the subject goes. People prefer to have an expert opinion and best value for their money. Our goal is to make sure this is communicated to the potential customer on the landing page.

Fears — <u>how will it all turn out</u>? There are common and industry specific fears we'd have to contend with. For instance, a potential customer might have a fear of regret — they've already dealt with another vendor and the outcome was terrible. Your company has to know these pain points and address them. To mitigate the fears, your business can offer money-back guarantees, warranties, customer support, replacements, refunds, insurances, etc. Description of use cases where other customers had done something in a wrong way and how the problem

had been solved would show the visitor that you are aware of the potential problems and you don't shy away from challenges.

Failure — <u>what if something goes wrong</u>? The user might feel uncomfortable for numerous reasons. They might be bad at something or clumsy, they might have very limited budget and will not be able to afford a redo, they might be afraid of the social pressure and so on. It is our responsibility to let the user know that we understand their concerns and that we are here to help, support and make things work no matter what.

Feelings — <u>can you feel my pain</u>? This is a subtle area that requires particular attention in order not to mess it up. A good copy with storytelling techniques works best.

> *"Friday night. Rain. Empty street. Cold. Bar. Loneliness. Why not? Brand Beer. Better. Another Brand beer. Laughs. Friends. Party. Sunny Saturday."*

Fickleness — <u>are they consistent</u>? So many companies fail on this one. It's not uncommon to click on the add promising a 35% discount only to find yourself on the landing page that offers a 30% discount, but then discover a page title up there — in the browser tab — saying that there is a "45% discount, congrats". Seeing things like that will drop the level of trust below the absolute zero and will make that company look ridiculous. Being consistent is hard but very important.

Faces — <u>are there any real people</u>? Some services, more than products, require to have real people to back up the offer. This is especially true for dentists and lawyers. The problem, of course, is that the visitor might not like the person they see. A solution is to have pictures of different people, keeping in mind the preferences of the target audience. It is best to refrain from using stock photos and show the employees of the company. It is even better if the people could be traced through social media. The potential customer would want to know whether they like the people they see.

Features and Benefits — <u>how are you better</u>? This one is rather obvious, of course. Everyone would pour a ton of benefits and features on the visitor. The job of a prudent business manager is to figure out what matters most for the specific segment of the target audience and concentrate on that. Features should be easy to understand and relate to. For example, talking about the number of songs the device can play is better than boasting about the number of megabytes. Benefits should be enticing.

> *"This device has a 10 megapixel camera, <u>unique</u> filters and after-effects that will allow you to take <u>stunning</u> photos everywhere you go. Your <u>friends</u> will keep your photos on their profile. Finally — with Y you can become a <u>better</u> photographer."*

This is already a handful of questions and principles right there. Do you need to apply all of them? Probably not, but neither of them is irrelevant. Keeping in mind these principles, aimed at improving conversion rates on your web pages, will allow you to craft different variants of your landing pages to AB test against your specific target audience.

And now let us look at the WTF Web principles from the business perspective.

W.T.F. Web — business perspective

Who is this? For a business owner or a manager it is beneficial to know who is visiting the digital premises — your website. The information on the demographics of your online visitors is very important for your company. It is possible to add third-party analytics to your landing pages to collect this data.

Where did they come from? This a rather important piece of data — perhaps your visitors are coming not from an online ad, but from a blog or a public comment — it would be wise to reinforce those entry points. You can also get the data from the geographical location and time zone which is important for your server optimization and time of communication. It is possible to know the type of device and operating system in use which allows you to make certain guesses about the lifestyle of your target audience. The place where they navigate next on your website is also a gold mine of information.

What do they want? Depending on the entry point you can make a good guess about the goals of the visitors. You can create different landing pages for different segments of the target audience for each entry point, thus, maximizing conversions.

Which elements they interact with? Knowing where your visitors scroll to, where they click, where they move the mouse to is rather important. Every element on your landing page can have a unique identifier that would respond to all of the above mentioned events.

When do we want the visitor to take action? Users are often confused about the best time to act. It is our responsibility to provide options and hint at better ones. The preferable option, of course, is always the one that works best for both parties. For example, a low season suggests lower prices — a customer could save some money, the business could fill in the gap.

W.T.F. Web — business perspective

Target audience — <u>is this the right person</u>? Your landing pages are supposed to be tailored to the needs and wants of the particular segment of your target audience. But for one reason or another, the visitor might turn out to belong to a different, adjacent segment. Our job is to plan for such happenstance and make sure there are ways for the visitor to navigate away from the current landing page towards a more appropriate one.

Time — <u>how long does it take</u>? Here you want to know at least these two things: loading time and time on page. The industry benchmark is three seconds for the page speed; if your landing pages are slower than this threshold, not all of the initial visitors will end up on your website — statistics suggest that some of them will leave. Bear in mind that a paid click will still count regardless. Read this [article to understand the consequences of having slow web pages](#). The second important metric to keep an eye on — how long does a user spend on the most important pages. You would want to know whether the visitor had spent enough time to evaluate your offer. Tracking helps with figuring this out.

Tracking — <u>what do we need to track</u>? Keep record of all important actions users have taken to analyze their behaviour in order to improve your website and business based on that data. Your landing pages can track events like clicks, hovers, touches, scrolls, orientation changes, inputs, etc. You can utilize cookies and sessions to identify returning users and act upon this knowledge.

Targets — <u>what are the main objectives</u>? There are certain business objectives you want to attain. Call to action buttons and messaging facilitate that. Placing CTAs at strategic places, repeating them, amplifying them, always helps with getting closer to the attainment of your business goals. When your objectives concord with those of the visitor — it's a win-win. Our utmost priority is to align your business goals with the goals of your target audience.

Testing — <u>what can be improved</u>? Sometimes things can turn out great even with a common landing page template. There's luck, the right moment, the right people. To increase your chances of success, however, you should rely on tests. AB testing is a great way to optimize your conversion rates. Our job is to examine the target audience, make assumptions, set the goals and test our hypothesis by iterating through variations of landing pages.

Tension — <u>how to make change enticing</u>? The moment of making decision to purchase your service or product is the moment of change. People don't usually like changes. Especially when the outcome of the change is unpredictable, which is always the case given an opportunity to try something new. Creating tension is tricky but quite necessary. Tension is a forerunner of transformation.

> *"In six months time, you won't have to hide your smile anymore if you schedule your appointment now. Your life will change. We have X spots left next month."*

Traffic — <u>what are the channels of acquisition</u>? Understanding your incoming traffic is very important. You <u>don't want your business to rely too much on boosted social media posts</u> and pay-per-click (PPC) ads. You want to increase the traffic coming from organic search, free social media posts and email marketing. To do that, you should distribute the links to your various landing pages through different channels for different target audience segments.

Teach — <u>can we educate our users</u>? Explain the process. Let your potential customers know why your product or service will work. Let them know you are an expert. Become irreplaceable. Your landing pages can include links to additional resources or could have an educational video. Even when they're unable to afford your offer, being an authority in the field is always helpful. Every person is connected to at least a hundred other people; they will spread the word.

Tell the Tale — <u>can we share a story</u>? Stories are great and they work. Create a short, yet compelling story of someone relatable; describe the challenges they had and how they transformed into a better version of themselves by using the product or service. Do it in a truthful, genuine way. A video shoot with a real customer is a great way of telling a genuine story.

W.T.F. Web — business perspective

Feedback — <u>how can we learn from our users</u>? Getting feedback is super important for businesses that operate in a smart way. You can offer to take a survey and reward the visitor for doing so by offering a discount or a freebie. Our job is to figure out what information we need to know about our target audience and come up with creative ways of gathering this type of first-party data.

Freebies — <u>do they need to try it out</u>? Your company wants to have loyal customers, but it is you who have to start being loyal to your customers first. True loyalty can never be imposed, it can only be earned. True loyalty only happens when it works both ways. It is you who should make the first step. One of the ways is to offer something for free — as a nice gesture towards a mutually beneficial relationship. It can be a book, a guide, a sample or free consultation — anything that is valuable and portrays your company in a professional, reliable way. It's OK to discover that your offer is not for them — it will save your business a lot of time and effort in the long run.

Focus — <u>what is of utmost importance</u>? Again, keeping focus on just one easy-to-accomplish task will increase the conversion rates on your landing page. We will define our objectives and use visual hierarchy, contrast and messaging to make sure the visitor knows what needs to be done and takes action.

Frustrations — <u>what's bothering them</u>? We need to look into the most painful experiences this particular segment of the target audience has with similar products and services. Our job is to address the most frustrating issues. We have to show that we are aware of them and know how to counter that. The user wants to believe that this time, with this company, things will be different. Each industry has its own set of most common problems that can get customers infuriated. It is our responsibility to make sure we know what to do about that.

Friction — <u>what's stopping them?</u> Some things can get really annoying and prevent the user from completing an action. Forms might have too many input fields. The page might be as slow as a sloth. Images and video files might be missing. Links might not work. So many things can go wrong and create unnecessary friction. Our job is to evaluate and remove obviously stupid barriers. Remove everything secondary and leave only the most important stuff on the landing page. Getting rid of distractions, like annoying pop-ups or inappropriate requests for tracking, is a good start. Everything that slows the conversion process down — must go. Objections have to be addressed as well.

Forms — <u>do we need lengthy forms</u>? You should consider this very seriously and test. The benefits of having more information through an extra input field might not outweigh the cons. Multiple studies have shown that the more fields there are, the more intimidating the form looks and the more users drop the process. Our jobs is to make it easy for users to get to the next step. Lengthy forms are an impediment.

Fine print — <u>do we absolutely need obscure clauses</u>? People don't like the fine print. It suggests a catch. Your service or product might seem complex for them as it already is; inconspicuous disclosures, conditions and terms make things more intricate. This is a domain of lawyers, of course, but you should consider the ways of making things simpler.

FAQs — <u>do they have questions</u>? This does two things well: saves you time by not having to talk about the same questions all over again, but secondly it provides the answers to questions your visitor might not have considered yet. So, on one hand, you are educating your visitors and on the other hand, saving your business some money. If done right, these FAQs can also rank well in SERPs, which is great for your SEO strategy. Make sure to incorporate FAQ section to your landing page to optimize its conversion rates.

Forwards — <u>can they spread the word</u>? Is it possible that the person who is looking at your landing page could think of someone they know who might be interested in your offer? You would never know unless you ask them to share the content with relevant people. Word of mouth is the most effective way of marketing your business. The benefit for your company is obvious — the recipient will circumvent the PPC campaign saving you money. The main challenge, of course, is to provide the right incentive for the user to share your link, image or message.

Do you need to apply all of the WTF Web principles to the landing page or any other web page?

There is no reason why you shouldn't, except this one — don't overdo it. Too much information can do as much harm as the lack of information. Placing the CTA buttons in strategic places will help improve conversion rates. You can always provide links to additional resources or add buttons that will make hidden elements visible should a user decide they'd want to know more.

Going through these WTF Web principles together with your team will help you craft a solid landing page optimized for great conversion rates. Bear in mind — this checklist will help you improve conversion rates on all of your pages; the landing page is just the most common example.

The more users your website has, the more iterations you'd need to conduct. Testing and making changes to your landing pages will help you company make the most out of each visit. You will never achieve a 100% conversion rate, however — you have to be realistic. But if your current rate of conversion as around 3%, you should aim at five, then at seven, nine and so forth. We believe that a 10% conversion rate is quite attainable for online businesses.

Keep this [conversion rate optimization checklist](#) close next time you'd need to create a landing page for your business and increase its conversion rates.

Should you like to have a deep, meaningful conversation about your company goals and business objectives for your landing pages, contact our awezzom team. Folks who know this much about conversion rates must be amazing at what they do, mustn't they?

Websites Worth Making