Crafting Email Messages that Convert

Copywriting lessons gleaned from 15 years of testing

Jon Powell

Sr. Manager, Exec. R&D

MECLABS Institute

AN EXPERIMENT

Experiment: Background

Experiment ID: (protected)
Location: MarketingExperiments Research Library
Test Protocol Number: TP2061

Background: An established financial institution offering online savings accounts.

Goal: To increase clickthrough from an email message to the landing page.

Primary research question: Which email design will produce the most clickthrough?

Approach: A/B email split test (variable cluster)

Experiment: Control

- Note the following things about the control:
  - Utilizes graphical imagery throughout email
  - Provides multiple calls-to-action
  - Follows a typical clean landing page format
  - Copy is difficult to read in some places

Experiment: Treatment 1

- Note the following things about Treatment 1:
  - Not many graphical elements
  - Relies on copy-rich messaging
  - Has a personal letter feel
  - Links are embedded within the copy

Experiment: Treatment 2

- Note the following things about Treatment 2:
  - Utilizes graphical header to catch visitors' eyes
  - Organizes the content in a clean, easy-to-scan format
  - Displays security guarantee seal
  - Single, clear call-to-action

Experiment: Treatment 3

- Note the following things about Treatment 3:
  - Similar to Treatment 2
  - However, does not utilize graphical header
  - Organizes the content in a clean, easy-to-scan format
  - Displays security guarantee seal
  - Single, clear call-to-action

Experiment: Side by Side

Control

Treatment 1

Treatment 2

Treatment 3

Experiment: Results

42% **Increase in Clickthrough**

Treatment 1 (copy-rich) outperformed the control by 42.34%.

Email	CTR	Rel. Diff.
C – Control email	0.51%	
T1 – Copy-rich email	**0.73%**	**42.34%**
T2 – Single CTA (w/ header)	0.63%	24.12%
T3 – Single CTA (w/o header)	0.65%	26.27%

DMA 2014

Experiment: Results

High Intrest eSavings account

Hello Monica,

Thank you for being an [ ] account holder.

If you're saving for your next vacation, home or just because, and you'd like a faster, more convenient way to reach your savings goals, our [ ] High Interest eSavings® account is for you.

The [ ] High Interest eSavings Account will help you reach your goals faster with:

- A high interest rate[1]
- Instant online transfers between your [ ] Royal Bank accounts[2]
- 24/7 secure online access
- No minimum balance to maintain
- No monthly fees[3]

Click here to earn more today!

Sincerely,

The [ ] Team

Questions? Simply call one of our Online Banking specialists 24/7 at [ ]

What was it about this email that generated the most response?

Rules vs. Science

Two general ways to approach creation and optimization

RULE-BASED:

- Emphasize hero shots
- Keep it above the fold
- Avoid too much copy
- Emphasize the benefits
- Don't use reverse text
- Don't rely too much on Flash
- Implement basket recovery emails
- Avoid auto-on audio

SCIENCE-BASED:

Practice

Methodology

Meta-theory

DMA 2014
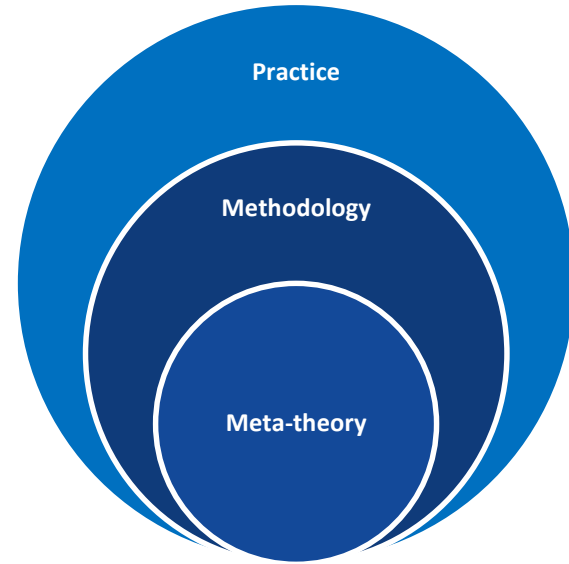
The Research: Some history

MarketingExperiments was the first Internet-based research lab to conduct experiments in optimizing the conversion rate of sales and marketing processes.

1992	Preliminary Research Begins
1997	Research Program Established
2001	First Research Report Published
2002	Testing of Research Partnership Model Begins
2003	Offer Response Optimization Theory Validated
2006	Patent Filings for Research Findings (10 Heuristics)

The Discovery: A broken model
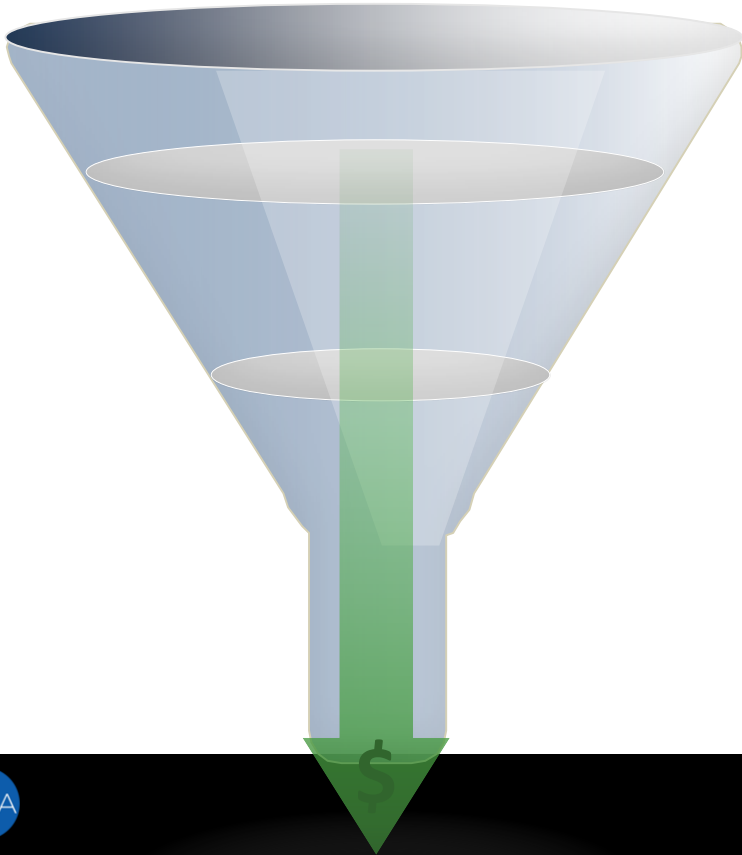
ASSUMPTION

Consumers will complete if we just shape their direction and stay out of the way.

The Discovery: A more accurate view

$g = 9.81 \text{ m/s}^2$
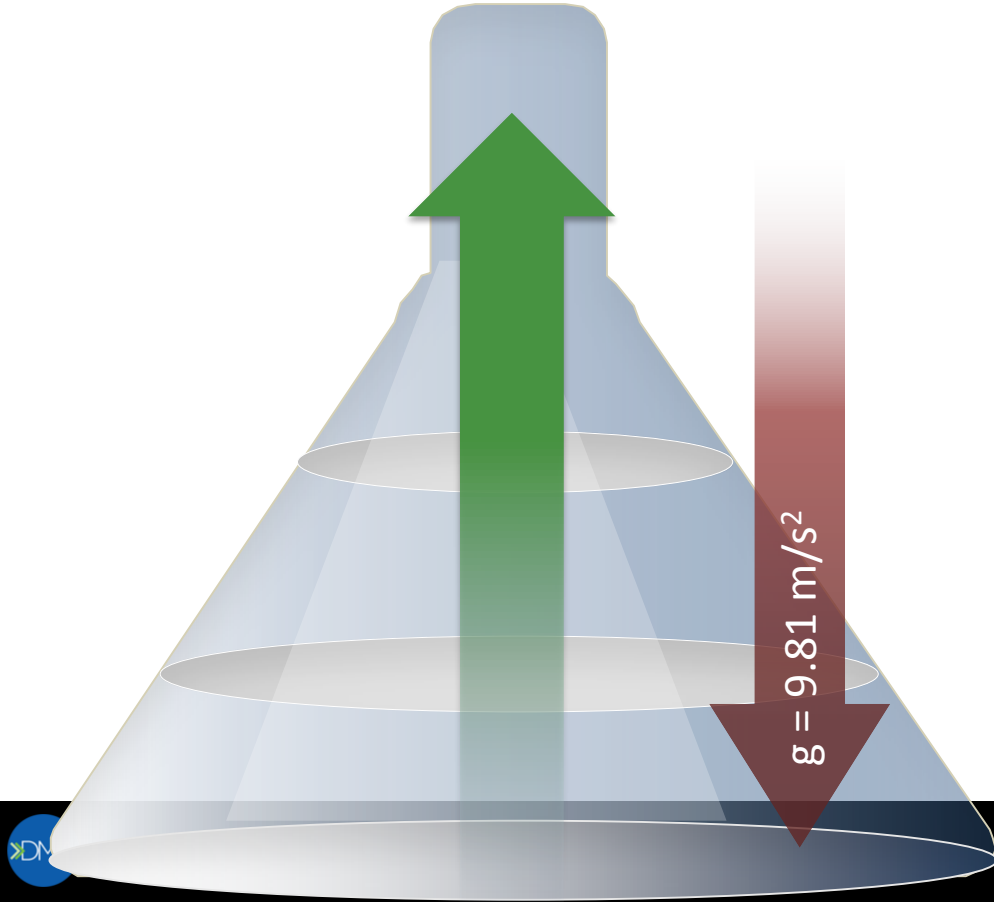
REALITY

"Postmodern consumers just don't believe us anymore.

They've endured too many ***empty promises****, too many* ***exaggerated benefits*** *and too many* ***artful disclaimers.****"*

- Flint McGlaughlin, Transparent Marketing

The Result: A new approach

Email Messaging Optimization Heuristic

$$eme = rv(of + i) - (f + a) \text{ }^{©}$$

eme = email messaging effectiveness index
  rv = relevance to the consumer
  of = offer value (why)
   i = incentive to take action
   f = friction elements of process
   a = anxiety elements of process

The Result: A new approach

eme = rv(of+i) − (f+a)

The Result: A new approach

Perceived Value
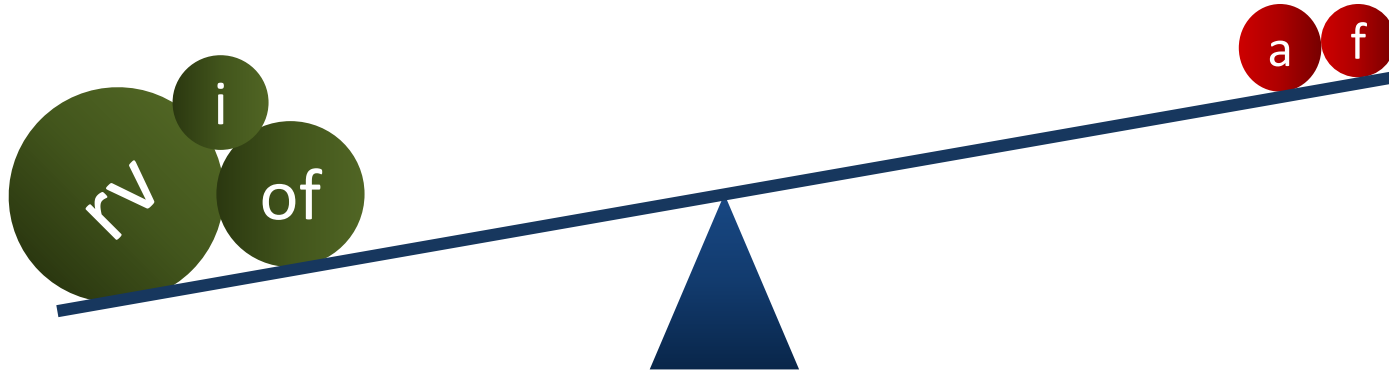
$$eme = rv(of + i) - (f + a)^{©}$$

PERCEIVED VALUE
Relevance [rv]

Relevance

$$eme = \boxed{\textbf{rv}}(of + i) - (f + a)^{©}$$

Definition —— The compatibility of the email message to the recipient's motivations.

Relevance

High Intrest eSavings account

Hello Monica,

Thank you for being an ▓▓▓▓▓ account holder.

If you're saving for your next vacation, home or just because, and you'd like a faster, more convenient way to reach your savings goals, our ▓ High Interest eSavings® account is for you.

The ▓ High Interest eSavings Account will help you reach your goals faster with:

- A high interest rate[1]
- Instant online transfers between your ▓ Royal Bank accounts[2]
- 24/7 secure online access
- No minimum balance to maintain
- No monthly fees[3]

Click here to earn more today!

Sincerely,

The ▓▓▓▓ Team

Questions? Simply call one of our Online Banking specialists 24/7 at ▓▓▓▓

Simple key statements are used to generate a relevant connection to the user:

- References to previous purchase patterns — "being a XXXXX account holder"

- Personal name "Monica" is used in the greeting

- Reference to personal behavior "saving for next your vacation, home, etc."

Relevance

☞ *Key Principle*

- The relevance of an email can be based upon:
  - The internal motivations of the recipient
  - The external events surrounding a recipient

Relevance

Internal Relevance

- Personal interests
- Demographics
- Shopping habits
- Personality
- Communication styles
- Level of engagement

External Relevance

- Seasonality
- Special discounts
- Limited-time offers
- News events
- Competitive initiatives

PERCEIVED VALUE

Offer [of]

Offer

$$eme = rv(\textbf{of} + i) - (f + a)^{©}$$

Definition — The value you promise in your email in exchange for a click

Value is the primary reason an ideal prospect would respond to you.

Offer

$$eme = rv(\textbf{\color{red}{of}}+i) - (f+a)$$

Control CTA

Learn more and open an account ❯

Treatment CTA

[Click here to earn more today!](#)

Original: The call-to-action in the control is focused on what the prospect has to do ("learn and open") rather than what they might get. This just creates anticipated Friction and Anxiety rather than Value.

Optimized: The new call-to-action focuses on what the email client gets ("earn more money") if they are willing to click to the next step.

Offer

What is **really** the offer?

- You may think that the offer is the product that you want to sell, when in reality it is the additional information they receive in exchange for a click.

- What is the objective of your email? Is it to sell product or to get a click?

- If the goal is to get a click, then why are you trying to sell your product twice (email and landing page)? If we conflate our purpose, then we mitigate conversion.

Offer

👉 *Key Principles*

- Your communication of Value begins in your subject lines and should be maintained throughout the entire conversion process.

- In the body of the email, it is important to distinguish the difference between **the product offer** and **the clickthrough offer**. In many cases we conflate the two.

PERCEIVED COST
Friction [f]

Friction

$$eme = rv(of + i) - (f + a) ^{©}$$

Friction — Psychological resistance to a given element in the email

Friction

In the original email, Friction is potentially caused by three factors:

- Multiple visual elements competing for the recipient's attention

- The eye-path in this email is not being directed in the proper order

- Multiple unique calls-to-action from which the recipient must choose between

Friction

👉 *Key Principles*

- Two common elements that create Friction in body copy are:
  - Length
  - Difficulty

- Friction is also generated by email messages **that do not match proper thought sequence**. Therefore, body copy must be specifically crafted to **synchronize to the decision patterns** of the recipient.

PERCEIVED COST
Anxiety [a]

Anxiety

$$eme = rv(of + i) - (f + \boxed{a})^{©}$$

Anxiety — Psychological **concern** stimulated by a given (or missing) element in the email process

Anxiety

In the original email, anxiety is potentially caused by over-categorization due to an excess emphasis on graphics and additional ads.

Anxiety

👉 *Key Principle*

- While website visitors are skeptical and cautious, the natural level of concern is even **greater** for email offer recipients.

Anxiety

Why is concern greater for emails?

- Are you more likely to be skeptical about a company **you called** for information or one who **called you** at home with the same offer?

- The very nature of email, as an outbound or "push" marketing channel, causes it to need to overcome the extra measure of distrust and skepticism.

- We need an extraordinary amount of over-correction to overcome this extra measure of anxiety and distrust.