

THE WEB AS A

By Flint McGlaughlin

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The Web as a Living Laboratory BY FLINT MCGLAUGHLIN

The Web as a Living Laboratory

"The next CMO is going to come NOT from a television or radio background, but rather from a digital media background"

The man speaking was a senior leader from one of the largest companies in the world. Their marketing budget was more than four billion dollars. And his statement, though simple enough, had profound implications. **The world was changing.**

Indeed, his world was about to change radically. Over the next 24 months, he would transform the digital division of his business, shifting the Web from its role as an "important channel" to a central dynamic of the entire business ecosystem. **The Web would become a living laboratory** through which the company would experiment their way into a more profound understanding of the customer.¹

In the process, revenue from ecommerce would **more than double**, with vital product groups growing by more than **300%**. All the while, this leader would gain in stature, not just from the remarkable financial results he would produce, but from the remarkable customer insights he would garner.

Moreover, the executive team would acknowledge this remarkable achievement with two tangible actions: First, they would **promote him**, publicly recognizing his success at a major meeting in London.² Second (and perhaps more meaningful), they would **triple his division's head-count**, empowering him with the personnel needed to sustain his success.

Now an anecdote does not make an argument. Business books are replete with stories and one more is hardly persuasive. **But there is something revolutionary happening in the heart of enterprise everywhere** and this simple account is an important (and quite personal) example. The man described is my friend. I cannot reveal his name because this story unfolded just seven days ago, and because I suspect that my friend may soon be promoted again. His words, uttered two years before this remarkable transformation, were prophetic.

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Why Do People Say "Yes"?

The world is changing. In the research lab where I work, MECLABS, we have witnessed this transformation first-hand. Over the last **20 years**, we have conducted more than **10,000 path experiments**, recorded and analyzed more the **five million phone calls**, interviewed more than **500,000 decision-makers**, and we have benchmarked within **36,000 companies** – all in an effort to understand the answer to a single, essential question: *Why do people say "yes"*?

The question is particularly fascinating when we consider that for the first time in the history of the world, scientists and marketers can **peer deeply into the thought-sequence of consumers**, observing their decision process across millions

of transactions. The data is staggering, and it becomes especially meaningful when one views it not with a "how much" mentality, but rather a "why so" mentality. Why do people say "yes"? What can we learn from these cognitive buying patterns?

The sales and marketing funnel is not constructed with ads and pages; it is comprised of thoughts and conclusions. J

The question transcends the medium; it informs our thinking regarding social, mobile, search, and even the future technology breakthroughs that will redefine the digital landscape. It is the very same question which drove the transformation in the company described above. This leader was one of my students, and he was quick to grasp **three essential findings** from the many years of research inside MECLABS, and he was just as quick to implement those findings in a way that has had measurable impact.³ A brief discussion of each of these points could help you.

People don't buy from websites; people buy from people

First, the sales and marketing funnel is not constructed with ads and pages; it is comprised of thoughts and conclusions. People don't buy from websites; people buy from people.⁴ **The task of marketing is not to craft collateral, but rather to guide thinking.**⁵ All marketing should influence a decision.⁶ Thus, the marketer begins their work not with a sequence of ads, but with a sequence of thoughts.⁷

In practical terms, this means that we must see through the page into the mind.

And what we are attempting to see is only this: the series of micro-yes(s) that are necessary to achieve a macro-yes. A macro-yes represents an ultimate objective, most likely a sale. A micro-yes represents each (even tiny) decision necessary to the ultimate macro-yes.

It may be easier to understand this point with an illustration.

What if your team was tasked to improve the performance of the email in **figure 1.1**? How would you frame your analysis? Most marketers would recall various maxims that they have learned in conferences or read in blogs or books. They would bring those maxims to the table for discussion. Others would weigh in with their own



^{*}Brand has been blurred to protect confidentiality



Figure 1.3 - Conflated Objectives

opinions and preferences eventually yielding a **"design-by-committee"** – with the most influential person at the table having a disproportionate impact on the process. **This is the product of a social dynamic rather than a science dynamic.**⁸

There is another way. This email may be analyzed through a different prism. It can be seen as a series of micro-veses. We are asking people to move from the headline to the first paragraph, from the first paragraph to the bullet-points, from the bullet-points to the offer paragraph and so on. Eventually, we are asking people to click on the call-to-action button. And for every "ask", implied or not, there is a necessary "yes", conscious or not. When the email is considered within this framework it becomes easier to detect a problem with its chain of "asks". Indeed. it seems to be conflating its objective (to get a click) with the objective of the landing page (to get a lead).⁹ It is asking for too much, too soon in the process (see figure 1.2).

Viewed through this thought-sequence prism, it becomes easier to move from diagnosis to treatment. A new email is designed that steps very intentionally through each micro-yes, careful not to ask for too much, not to ask too soon, and not to ask out of order (see figure 1.3). Does this methodical approach yield a favorable result? Yes it does: a carefully validated 104% increase in conversion (see figure 1.4). It is important to note that this is a microcosm of the entire series of micro**veses**, beginning from the channel and flowing all the way through the landing pages and into the call center. It is also important to note that this simple case study is truly representative; its findings may be demonstrated in hundreds of other experiments.

The point is simple: we need to transcend our conversation about emails, ads, pages, even about "online versus offline" with a conversation focused on the prospect's sequence of thoughts. **We need to beware** of company-centric logic and we need to embrace customer-centric logic.¹⁰



Figure 1.4 - Results

By changing the email messaging to better guide the reader, we were able to generate a 104% lift in clickthrough rate.



Gravity is not the marketer's friend

Second, **people aren't falling into our funnel, they are falling out.** Gravity is not the marketer's friend. More people are falling out than are flowing in. The way the funnel is currently presented distorts reality. The image of the funnel must be inverted. Thomas Kuhn said "...the scientist who embraces a new paradigm is like the man wearing inverting lenses" (The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, pp.122).

Marketers need a new. more accurate paradigm. They need to see with Kuhn's "inverting lenses". More to the point, we need to see the funnel in a new way - the funnel itself must be inverted (see figure 2.1). With this new perspective, we can better fathom the nature of our work. Let gravity represent the organic resistance in the marketplace: white noise, competing offers, distractions, and so on. The marketer's task is to overcome this force. to counter it. and thus to win the macro**ves**. Yet, when one hundred people flow into our funnel, we are often satisfied if just two complete the journey (excited that our conversion rate has moved from 1.5% to 2.0%). Why? Why do we expect so little?

There are billions of dollars leaking in our flawed processes. We must not think of the internet as just a new opportunity. Responsible leaders need to acknowledge that we are losing unacceptable amounts of money in our legacy sales and marketing processes. The internet is a



Figure 2.1 - Inverted Funnel

laboratory; it is a way to discern each micro-yes, and thus, to tune our approach until we achieve the maximum number of macro-yes(s) – online and offline.¹¹ **The inverted funnel is not a physical construct, it is a mental construct.** Indeed, it is a message stretched like a cognitive fabric around the frame of the medium. And we can use it to solve the essential business challenge: How can we get more people to say "yes"?

The essence of our message is the value proposition

Third, marketers don't drive traffic; we attract it. And the value proposition is the force which draws people up the inverted funnel.¹² Your value proposition is the primary justification for the existence of your enterprise (see figure 2.1).¹³ Indeed,

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the business which cannot articulate a rational value proposition is just surviving on pockets of ignorance. The essence of our message is the value proposition.

The marketer communicates with a particular type of message – an offer. It comes in the form of a three-part dialogue: The offer-from-agent asks (Q1) "Will you choose...?" The offer-to-agent counters, (Q2) "Why should I...?" And the offer-from-agent promises, (P1) "Because I will..." (P1) is the ultimate determinant of an offer's success. The marketer must present an argument that takes the form of an ultimate reason supported by "evidentials". This is the value proposition.¹⁴

Researchers at MECLABS have been striving for the last 15 years to develop a framework for the concept of value proposition. Indeed, there is no generally accepted definition in academic or commercial literature. We have reviewed **1,100+ academic articles**, we have constructed a **100 year timeline of related terms**, and we have conducted more than **10,000 path tests** to measure the efficacy of our framework. The most efficient way to communicate our findings in this short article is with one vital question: *If I am your ideal customer, why should I purchase from you rather than any of your competitors?* The question appears simple. But it is easy to miss the import of its construct. It may be best to unpack this interrogative.

- "If I" denotes that we are answering a first-person question. The marketer must learn not to see in a better way, but to see with new eyes – the eyes of the customer.
- "your ideal prospect" denotes that we are focused on a specific customer segment. The marketer must face trade-offs. We must choose who we will not serve to discover who we can best serve.
- "why should I" denotes that the epicenter of the value proposition is an ultimate reason. It is the culmination of a careful argument.
- "rather than your competitors" denotes that your value proposition must have an only-factor. The marketer justifies the company's existence by demonstrating that the company uniquely serves a unique set of customers.

The strength of the marketer's message is grounded in a single word – "because". **Every time you ask a prospect to take an action, you must justify the ask.** And for every ask, there is a cognitive calculation. Essentially the prospect, even if at a sub-



Figure 3.1 - Exchange Fulcrum

opt Marcol	100% Satisfaction Guarantee Our data may not be perfect, but we think our guarantee is pretty close.	Figure 4.1 - Page Contr The page is relying on
Searching for the Most		vague statements of qu ity rather than specific statements of quantity
Accurate Mailing Lists? Your Hunt is Over! Get 500 Free Leads Today	Register Today To Get Your 500 Free Leads!	Much of the real quant fied value statements a hidden in the right-han column and in the vide
with Qualifying Purchase	Why Should You Market Today?	(see full image on pag 14).
We Have the Best Data Guranteed!	The industry leader in database marketing, offers the freshest most accurate business and consumer sales lead- and mailing lists available anywhere Nearly 4 million	
To receive your '500 Free Leads, fill out and submit the form below. Once received you will be contacted by one of our business consultants.	customers use our services to find new customers provide their sales, and for other direct marketing, telemarketing, customer analysis and credit reference purposes.	
*FirstName	Why Choose ? Safe & Secure online shopping Expert advice to help you succeed Privacy & Do Not Call compliant	
*Company Name	Free counts & guotes Free Business Resource Center	
*Email Address		100% Satisfaction Guaran
*Phone Number Once your information is submitted your password w emailed to you.	We Make 26 Million Phone Calls a Year to The most Accurate Mailing L	Prourceceve any bad data, we will refer dry one money, no questions asked Learn More >>> Ensure You Get
Number Once your information is submitted your password w emailed to you.	The most Accurate Mailing L To ded since 1972, has compiled the most stabases in the industry including 210 million U.S. million U.S. businesses, 13 million executives and n	Ensure You Get ists Available! st comprehensive consumers, 14
Number Once your information is submitted your password v emailed to you. © Click Here gure 4.2 - Page Treatment	The most Accurate Mailing L Tr led since 1972, has compiled the most stabases in the industry including 210 million U.S	Ensure You Get ists Available! st comprehensive consumers, 14
Number Once your information is submitted your password we mailed to you. Click Here gure 4.2 - Page Treatment ey specifics (e.g., "26 illion Phone Calls," trusted since 1972," "210 illion U.S. consumers") eutilized to credibly ex-	The most Accurate Mailing L To led since 1972, has compiled the most stabases in the industry including 210 million U.S million U.S businesses, 13 million executives and n duplicates and phone verified. Why choose 600 full-time researchers dedicated to building Our tele-research associates make over 80e000 100% money-back guarantee on even single	Procreace any bad data, we will refer d you money, no questions asked Learn More 22 Ensure You Get ists Available! at comprehensive consumers, 14 more, all cleaned for which is the state of the state of the state of the state of the state of the state of the state of the state which is the state of the
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Aumber Once your information is submitted your password v emailed to you. Click Here gure 4.2 - Page Treatment ry specifics (e.g., "26 illion Phone Calls," rusted since 1972," "210 illion U.S. consumers") eutilized to credibly ex- ess the value of this offer the headline.	The most Accurate Mailing L To led since 1972, has compiled the most million U.S businesses, 13 million executives and n duplicates and phone verified. Why choose 600 full-time researchers dedicated to building Our tele-research associates make over 80000 100% money-back guarantee on every single Money-back guarantee on every single	Procreecte any bad data we well referred you money, no questions asked Learn More 22 Ensure You Get ists Available! sconsumers, 14 nore, all cleaned for the enflying, and updating your data calls a day to phone verify your data calls a day to phone verify your data lead ed to your purchase!* What Our Customers Are Sayy It's a powerful tool for small businesses market like the bag guys. Hydens Sparta, New Jersey
Author Once your information is submitted your password v emailed to you. Click Here gure 4.2 - Page Treatment ry specifics (e.g., "26 illion Phone Calls," rusted since 1972," "210 illion U.S. consumers") eutilized to credibly ex- ess the value of this offer the headline. ry statements are highlight- throughout the copy to	The most Accurate Mailing L The disince 1972, has compiled the most matabases in the industry including 210 million US. Smillion U.S. businesses, 13 million executives and n duplicates and phone verified. My choose • 600 full-time researchers dedicated to building of • Our tele-research associates make over 80±000 • 100% money-back guarantee on even single • Plus, get 500 FPLE leads added Set up your FPLE access to • Search our buildings and commond lists • Predex loss, get a quote, and download lists • Build mill 24 hours a day 7 days a week	Procreacies any bad data, we will refer you money, no questions asked Learn More 25 Ensure You Get ists Available! aconsumers, 14 nore, all cleaned for the enfying, and updating your data calls a day to phone verify your data lead ed to your purchase!* What Our Customers Are Say It's a powerful tool for small businesses market like the big guys. Hydens Sparta, New Jersey



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conscious level, engages in elementary math: Vf_{Ac} - Cf_{Ac} which is to say, they subtract the perceived cost-force from the perceived value-force.¹⁵ If the sum is negative, a micro-yes is unlikely. Think of the challenge as a fulcrum.¹⁶ Marketers must tip that fulcrum so that the perceived value outweighs the perceived cost (see figure 3.1).

Consider the following page (figure 4.1). It was submitted by a student - a marketing leader from a Fortune 500 company. Her words belied her frustration, "Flint, I know we have a value proposition, but for the life of me, I can't figure out how to say it". She had made a noble effort and this page represents that effort. It was the company's best performing offer. Still, adequacy is the enemy of excellence and this page was barely adequate. The researchers at MECLABS decided to help her. And their first step was to challenge this page with a simple question: "If I am the ideal customer, why would I purchase my list from you rather than your competitors?"

One may discern the answer "Because we have the most accurate mailing lists." But the claim lacked force. Again, people don't buy from websites people buy from people. How effective is this headline within the true context of relationship? Imagine a single man approaching a girl at a party, "Searching for the most eligible bachelor? Your hunt is over." It's not hard to envision the response... And the "envisioning" is important, for a headline is really just a "pick-up" line. Its job is to draw someone into a (mental) conversation. If our headlines do not work re-envisioned in the context of relationship, they are likely not going to work in the context of a product offer.17

And the problem continues: The "500 free lead incentive" with its red italicized text, only fosters anxiety.¹⁸ The "aw shucks" tone of the best data guaranteed seems impotent.¹⁹ The promise on the form field feels more like a threat.²⁰ The two-column layout interferes with the linear thoughtsequence, and so on.²¹ **The page is failing to communicate an effective value proposition.** Thus a new page must be designed, transcending the diagnosis with a (testing) treatment (figure 4.2). What is the result?

The new page **outperforms the old by 201.3%** (figure 4.3). Quality leads double, and the impact goes straight to the P&L. What is the reason for this dramatic difference? The value proposition is communicated with more force by fine -tuning the four elements which underlie its strength: **appeal**, **exclusivity**, **clarity**, and **credibility**. Essentially, the "because factor" is intensified and so the velocity



Figure 4.3 - Results

By changing the landing page to better express the value proposition, we were able to generate a 201% lift in conversion. through the sequence of micro-yes(s) is also intensified. This translates into more people saying "yes".

The Internet is More than a Channel; It's a Laboratory

This last case study brings together the simple construct of this article. The internet is more than a channel; **it is a laboratory through which we can experiment our way into optimal messaging**. To do that we must recognize three points: **First**, the sales and marketing funnel is not constructed with ads and pages; it is comprised of thoughts and conclusions. **Second,** people aren't falling into our funnel, they are falling out. The image of the funnel must be inverted. **Third,** marketers don't drive traffic; we attract it. And the value proposition is the force which draws people up the inverted funnel.

Indeed—Henry James, the Pulitzer prizewinning author said "ideas are in truth, forces. Infinite, too, is the power of personality. A union of the two always makes history." To reprise James, we may relate "the idea" to the value proposition and the "personality" to the brand. When the idea and the personality come together, the marketer makes history (read Apple). ■

¹ "What Your Customers Want - How to predict customer behavior for maximum ROI," last modified April 5, 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/marketing-optimization/ what-your-customers-want.html

² City has been anonymized to preserve confidentiality

³ "Five Steps to Better Metrics: How one marketer leveraged Web analytics for an annual revenue *increase of \$500,000"* last modified July 19 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/siteoptimization/five-steps-to-better-metrics.html

⁴ "Transparent Marketing: How to earn the trust of a skeptical consumer" last modified June 1, 2003, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/ improving-website-conversion/transparentmarketing.html

⁵ "Nonprofit Marketing: How a long, ugly page generated 274% more revenue," last modified June 15, 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/blog/research-topics/ landing-page-optimization-research-topics/call-toaction-location.html

⁶ "Email Marketing Video: Crafting effective email messages," last modified December 3, 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/ blog/research-topics/email-marketing/craftingeffective-email-messages-video.html

⁷ "Online Course: Landing page optimization, Session 1," http://www.meclabs.com/training/ online-course/landing-page-optimization/ overview

⁸ "How to Increase Conversion in 2012: The last 20,000 hours of marketing research distilled into 60 minutes," last modified December 15, 2011, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/marketing-optimization/increase-conversion-2012.html

⁹ "Email Messaging: How overcoming 3 common errors increased clickthrough 104%" last modified November 16, 2011, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/email-optimization/email-messaging. html

¹⁰ "Quick Win Clinic (Part I): The 5 easiest changes to make to your landing pages right now," last modified May 3, 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/landing-page-optimization/ quick-win-clinic-part-i-.html

¹¹ "Integrate Your Marketing - How one company combined offline and online marketing to increase subscriptions by 124%," MarketingExperiments Journal Volume I, Issue 2, 2010, 6-19, http:// www.marketingexperiments.com/marketingoptimization/q22010.html

¹² "Powerful Value Propositions: How to Optimize this Critical Marketing Element – and Lift Your Results," last modified October 16, 2008, http:// www.marketingexperiments.com/improvingwebsite-conversion/powerful-value-propositions. html

¹³ "Marketing Career: Why a value propositiomakes marketing 'good'," last modified October 28, 2011, http://www.marketingexperiments. com/blog/marketing-insights/value-propositioncareer.html

¹⁴ "Discovering Your Value Proposition: 6 ways to stand out in a crowded marketplace," last modified August 16, 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/marketing-optimization/ discovering-your-value-proposition.html

¹⁵ "Online Course: Value Proposition Development," http://www.meclabs.com/training/online-course/ value-proposition-development/overview

¹⁶ "Optimizing Landing Pages: The four key tactics that drove a 189% lift," last modified August 19, 2010, http://www.marketingexperiments. com/improving-website-conversion/optimizinglanding-pages.html

¹⁷ "Headline Optimization: How testing 10 headlines revealed a 3-letter word that improved conversion more than major changes," last modified June 23, 2011, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/marketing-optimization/ optimizing-headlines.html

¹⁸ "263% Higher Conversion Rate: How reducing anxiety helped one company improve conversion rate three-fold," last modified August 30, 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/landingpage-optimization/reduce-customer-anxiety.html

¹⁹ "Copywriting on Tight Deadlines: How ordinary marketers are achieving 103% gains with a step-by-step framework," last modified June 15, 2012, http://www.marketingexperiments.com/ site-optimization/copywriting-on-tight-deadlines. html

²⁰ "Form Optimization: 3 case studies to help convince your boss (and Sales) to reduce form fields," last modified March 30, 2012, http:// www.marketingexperiments.com/blog/practicalapplication/form-optimization-case-studies.html

²¹ "Hidden Friction: The 6 silent killers of conversion," last modified March 22, 2012, http:// www.marketingexperiments.com/landing-pageoptimization/hidden-friction.html

Further Resources:

MECLABS Research Catalog http://meclabs.com/catalog

MarketingExperiments Research Directory: http://marketingexperiments.com/research

MarketingSherpa Library:

http://marketingsherpa.com/library

Appendix: Figure 1.1 (Full)

is the largest online	physician community with mor	e than 115,000 members
Logo		
Engage for your pl	nysician social media s	strategy
Need to engage practicing phys media tools to conduct research 30-minute demo.		
According to Manhattan Resea the past three months to discus and therapies.		
Use advanced online to community:	ools to reach this highly ac	tive physicians-only
• Target physicians agains	st a matched list or by dem	ographic criteria
 Engage physicians quick 	dy using unique s	ocial media tools
 Analyze the results of yo 	ur campaigns in days, not	weeks
Get started with a 30-minute de	mo. Have questions? Call	or <u>email us</u> .
	Get Started	
FST@MPANY	BusinessWeek	manhattanRESEARCH
Top 10 most innovative healthcare company.	Lists among the 50 best tech startups.	24% of online MDs have visited
To unsubscrib	e <u>click here</u> or via post by sending you	request to:
10 (1805(1)		

*Brand has been blurred to protect confidentiality

Appendix: Figure 1.2 (Full)

Gives You Immediate Access to Over 120,000 I	Doctors
is the largest social network of verified US physicians, rep Physicians spend 35,000 hours per month on discussing and procedures as well as exchanging clinical insights on difficul	drugs, medical products
Engage physicians in the following ways:	manhattanRESEARCH
Survey MDs in real time using your own screening criteria	24% of online MDs have visited
Observe and mine what physicians are saying about your products and those of your competitors	FST@MPANY Top 10 most innovative
 Promote your message by stimulating peer-to-peer interaction 	healthcare company.
Start connecting with physicians today.	BusinessWeek
Con How Minder	Lists among the 50 best tech startups.
See How Works	

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Appendix: Figure 4.1 (Full)

100% Satisfaction Guarantee Our data may not be perfect, but we think our guarantee is pretty close.	
Searching for th Accurate Mailing Your Hunt is	g Lists? Register Today To Get Your
Get 500 Free Lea with Qualifying Po We Have the Best Data	Urchase Why Should You Market Today?
To receive your '500 Free Leads, the form below. Once received you wi one of our business consultants.	
*First Name	Why Choose ?
	Safe & Secure online shopping
*Last Name	Expert advice to help you succeed Privacy & Do Not Call compliant
*Company	 Free counts & guotes
Name	Free Business Resource Center 100% Satisfaction Guaranteed
*Email Address	· IVVA Savalavovi Guaraniego
*Phone	Plus Phone Verified Data!
Number	We make more than 26 million phone calls each year to verify and enhance our business databases. Why? To ensure you
Once your information is submitted yo emailed to you.	
» Click Here	How Can We Help? From mailing lists to email marketing, we're your one-stop shop to grow your sales. We'll focus on your marketing needs so you can focus on your business and grow your sales!

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Appendix: Figure 4.2 (Full)



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