



Nailing the Landing

*Four Steps For Optimizing Landing Pages
and Forms To Improve Conversions*

The Web-Empowered Prospect

Not so very long ago the litmus to a successful first-time business meeting involved the time-honored exchange of business cards. That card and its contents represented a tacit agreement that one or more follow up meetings were likely to occur, leading at least to the prospect of a sale. Today, however, those same initial steps in the corporate courtship process often can be condensed to a Web page and, if all goes according to plan, a single mouse click on the “submit” button at the end of an online Web form.

What a difference an Internet makes.

In much the same way those early business card exchanges were based on the degree of trust and confidence a prospect had in the sales executive, so too are those same attributes a must in an organization’s landing page—especially if you want that prospect to honestly and accurately fill out a Web form.

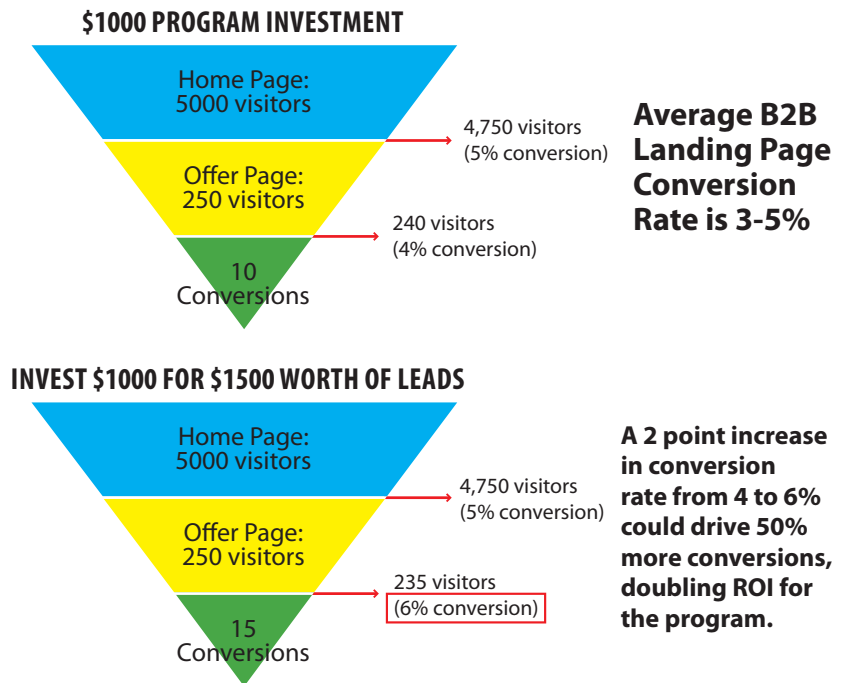
The challenge, however, is that prospects are becoming increasingly reluctant to share their personal information for a number of reasons including, among other things:

- Like all of us, they are saturated with requests for contact information;
- They know they can discover a lot about your products and services via Web-based message boards, forums, social media channels, etc.;
- They may not find your conversion offer a sufficient tradeoff for the information you ask for in your Web form.

This means that as buyers’ research methods change, the B2Bs eager for their business must also change. Money and resources are dedicated to driving traffic to offer pages, but without optimizing the pages and forms for conversion much of that money is wasted. Fortunately, there are a number of marketing best practices and powerful new identification technologies that can be used not only to optimize your campaign landing forms but also improve your form conversion rates.

The Changing Digital Arena

As the “face” of the modern corporation, the corporate website is where first impressions are formed, persuasive



itches are delivered and, if all goes according to plan, some form of prospect “conversion” takes place.

Today a significant amount of new business originates via Internet searches and despite the pervasive growth of social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, the company website remains the “hub” through which most corporate marketing, communication, and customer contact takes place. In fact, studies from DemandGen Report have indicated that not a single B2B sale occurs without the prospect visiting the corporate website.

Not surprisingly, a growing number of consumers and businesses conduct product research independently and silently, gathering the research that will inform the decision about whether to engage their subject at all. This premeditated research has the illusory affect of shortening sales cycles since prospects increasingly are entering the cycle more deeply informed, engaged, and prepared than in years past. This, in turn, means companies must take great pains to ensure their campaign landing pages, contact forms, and other tools of engagement are properly attuned to identify, understand, measure and ultimately meet the needs of this new breed of customer, sometimes described as “Buyer 2.0.”

Since these individuals know a lot more about what they’re looking for, the B2B may truly get only one shot at making that all important good first impression.



Consider, for example, a marketing campaign where bundles of time and money are invested in driving a large volume of leads to a landing page, but little or nothing is done to optimize said page for conversions. The result? Lots of “nibbles” —accounts that take the bait but that you are unable to hook, which translates to wasted opportunity costs and low campaign ROI.

Sometimes those “nibbles” fool you into thinking there is a big fish on the line. Forms may be completed, but with

erroneous information that identify those fish as “red herrings.” (Back-end identification systems help to overcome such challenges, but more on that later in the document.) These “red herrings” drive up your average conversion costs but, more importantly, may have actually represented a prospect who was spooked off by some apparent “friction” on your landing page or form.¹

It is for these reasons, as well as the growing popularity of the Web as a lead-generating resource, that the proper optimization of landing pages and their CTA forms has become a critical component to any B2B marketing and sales effort, and why we have laid out this plan for optimizing your forms and landing pages for conversion.

STEP ONE: Sharpen the Hook

In our metaphorical fishing world the landing page acts as the lure, but no lure is effective without a hook. The hook on a landing page is the Web form, as it is the specific apparatus that delivers the prospect straight into the B2B database. While many B2B marketing organizations invest significant resources in crafting marketing outreach campaigns, engineering effective SEO strategies, and designing provocative websites and landing pages, they erroneously assume that the contact form is little more than a formality.

In reality, the Web form is no less important to the success of your marketing efforts than are all of the previous steps taken to deliver your prospect to that point. The loss is most painful when it occurs here, when you get the fish close to the boat but they slip off the hook. Yet all too often this is indeed where the prospect is most at risk of abandoning his initial engagement with the B2B.

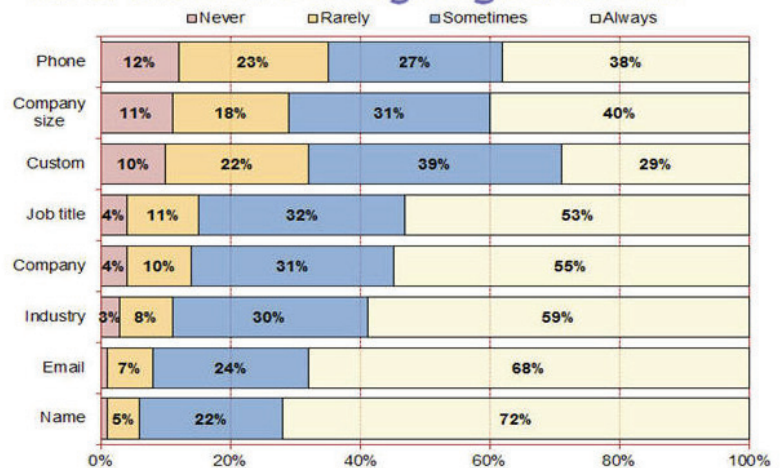
Often, the Web form hook is made dull by data requests from inside the organization, when marketing is squeezed by sales to improve lead quality by demanding more data, such as a ZIP codes (for lead routing/assignment), a phone number (which is the single field proven to have the most devastating impact on conver-

sion rates), or more. Making matters worse, the data that sales often insists on capturing is frequently bad—think Hollywood-style 555 phone numbers and 12345 ZIP codes.

There are a number of steps that can be taken to “sharpen the hook,” including: shortening the form; identifying the optimal fields for your needed sales business intelligence; and going behind the scenes to identify—and speak directly to—those visitors.

Problems With Self-Submitted Data

Do Tech Buyers Provide Accurate Information During Registration?



Source: MarketingSherpa and KnowledgeStorm, Connecting Through Content Phase III, August 2007
Methodology: N = 2,700



¹ Friction is defined by Marketing Experiments as psychological resistance to your conversion offer.

A. Shorten the Form

This is far and away the most important step a marketer can take to improve conversions, and it is a piece of advice every landing page expert will agree on. But there's a catch: shorten the form too much and you risk diluting the value of the lead.

"Finding a balance between gathering relevant information from your leads and not sacrificing your conversion rate can be difficult," says Billy MacDonald at the HubSpot blog. "You want to generate as many leads as possible while hooking your sales team up with information that will help them establish connections, build relationships and close deals."

MacDonald and others suggest the following tips in striking the right balance:

- Survey your sales team for the data they most need to get the sales process rolling and construct your form around those elements
- Ask only for the information that is imperative to that stage of the sales cycle
- Consider drop-down menus, which shorten forms and provide ready-made answers (and also helps to segment and target)

Also, match the form length to the quality of your content offering. If, for example, you're offering a simple newsletter subscription, all that may be required/justified, is an email address request. On the other hand, a lengthy ebook or white paper is of far greater value and can legitimately justify additional contact information. In a sense, the prospect is entering into a compact with your organization that says, "I want this badly so I'm willing to give more of myself in exchange for it."

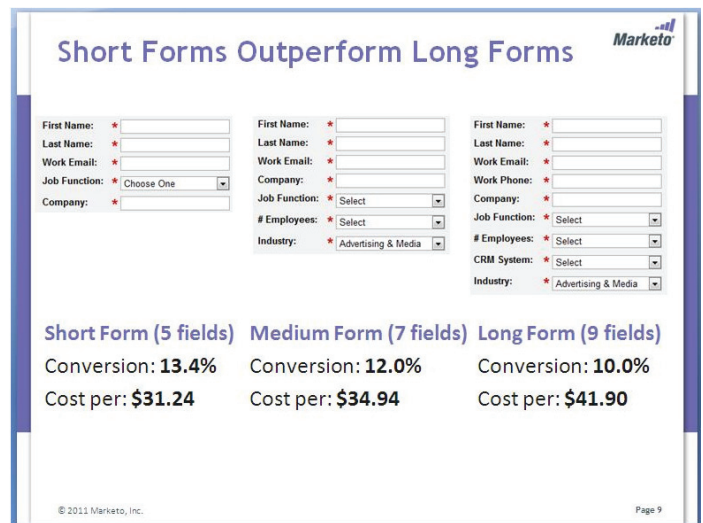
Although many companies might be tempted to choose a longer form to sate the data-rich appetites of sales executives, Jon Miller, Marketo's vice president of Marketing, points out that "people lie on the forms all the time." Meaning that not only will the inclusion of more fields reduce conversion rates, all that additional data won't necessarily translate into more qualified leads. "Why," concludes Miller, "should I ask for data, hurt my conversion rate and get bad data when I can buy it cheaper?"

As Miller points out, it is more cost-effective for his company to enjoy higher conversions through shorter forms

and then use a third-party system to augment the data. For example, companies that use Demandbase to augment the data on leads captured on Web forms are able to supplement those short-form leads with richer data and get accurate, standardized company data into the lead management and scoring queue that much faster.

B. Choose the Best Fields

So just how many fields are ideal? For many industries and organizations the number can vary, but in one study Marketo found that five fields produced the optimal cost-to-conversion rate.



In its own real-world practice of helping B2Bs develop and implement high-converting lead construction practices, Demandbase has identified specific steps and data fields that are critical to most B2B sales operations.

For starters, only ask for the data fields you absolutely need at this stage of the sale cycle. Remember, you aren't trying to close the sale, you're trying to start or facilitate the journey and get more prospects into your lead nurturing programs. And recall that a real-time identification service like Demandbase working behind the scenes can effectively provide the data you want while allowing you to stay true to the shorter form best practices.

Similarly, using backend auto-complete widgets can ensure greater accuracy of input data, reduce abandon rates, and even curry goodwill with the prospect (who appreciates your help in fast-tracking the process).

C. Use the Right Labels

Start at the bottom, with the button.

The often overlooked CTA button should match the conversion offer. If you're offering a white paper, for example, label the button "Download" rather than "Submit." Aside from the psychological implications of selecting a button named "Submit," the word "Download" is a more accurate description of what the prospect expects to happen after they fill out the form.

Moving back to the top of the form, and aside from the requisite first name/last name fields, Demandbase recommends the following data field labels:

Title/Job Function – A key ingredient to any B2B sales process is understanding as much as possible about who, within an account, you are selling to. Simply asking for "Job Title" instead of "Title" will avoid gathering a few of the inevitable Mr./Ms. you may capture along the way.

Business Email – Many people have "junk" email addresses or use personal email addresses. Save your organization a lot of time and money by eliminating unattended email accounts from your database.

Company Name – By employing an auto-complete widget that encourages prospects to simply select their company name, you reduce errors, synchronize more

How To Build a B2B Web Form

The diagram shows a B2B web form with the following fields and callouts:

- First Name:** Brett
- Last Name:** Hansen
- Job Title:** CTO
- Business Email:** BrettH@averydennison.com
- Company:** Avery (with an auto-complete dropdown showing options like Avery Dennison Corp., Avery-Hammer Ins., Avery Weigh-Tronix, Avery Oil & Propane, and Avery Health Care System).
- Hidden Fields:** Revenue Range (Over \$5 Billion), Industry (Manufacturing), Employees (35,700), Address (150 North Orange Grove Blvd), City (Pasadena), State (CA), Zip (91103), Phone number ((626) 304-2000), Audience (Enterprise).
- CTA Button:** Register

Callouts provide the following advice:

- Use "Job Title" for better results in leads scoring.**
- Label this field "Business Email" to increase accuracy.**
- 5 recommended form fields. Only use fields that are necessary to accelerate conversion.**
- Company autocomplete is convenient for the prospect, but also improves accuracy and supports data standardization for lead management and scoring.**
- Capture key profile data behind the scenes in real time for lead scoring and routing without sacrificing volume.**
- Match your CTA button to the action of your user to increase conversion, such as "Register" or "Download" instead of "Submit."**

These B2B Web Form Best Practices Can:

- ✓ Increase conversion rates
- ✓ Improve data quality
- ✓ Provide key firmographic data for lead scoring and routing programs

cleanly with internal CRM and sales automation tools, and assist the prospect in completing the form. (More on this later in the document.)

Lastly, Demandbase recommends you match your questions with your internal needs and scoring criteria, which are essential to testing and determining conversion costs.

STEP TWO: Prepare the Lure

While dedicated landing pages have become commonplace across virtually all types of organizations, they are particularly important to B2Bs. Recall that the B2B is not casting the widest possible net in search of high-volume, low-cost transactions; it is baiting (landing page) a hook (action form) for a select breed of customer.

As such, a landing page is the ideal mechanism for incorporating the disparate elements of design, content, analytics, SEO, testing, and Calls to Action into a tightly insulated, highly targeted, easily measurable package

that delivers the greatest probability of identifying, qualifying and landing targeted leads.

The typical landing page usually can be identified by the absence of any global navigation and the use of dedicated entry points (from PPC, email, banner ads, or unique website offers), says Oli Gardner, co-founder of Unbounce.com.² (While there often are links to those landing pages within the corporate website, most often they are from external campaigns.)

² DIY Landing Page Platform

Most important, the landing page is home to a single objective: to encourage the visitor to take action (convert) on a specific offer.

“Without an objective, optimization is simply pushing things around on a page. Optimization cannot occur in a vacuum. A page, a process, a message, etc., is optimized for a certain desired outcome.”³

That offer may be as simple as a compelling content pitch coupled with a sales contact form, or it could be the promise of a white paper, demo, ebook, webinar or some other piece of content. Regardless of the approach, the goal is the acquisition of personal data about the prospect, captured in the contact form.

Today’s landing page is a far cry from its earlier ancestors. Thanks to increasingly sophisticated analytics and rigorous A/B testing regimes, the modern landing page “incorporates ideas from content marketing, social media marketing, HTML 5 interfaces, marketing automation, and the explosion of mobile marketing.”⁴

But regardless of the content, platform, channel, design mechanisms or interface, there are a number of proven **design** and **content** principles that will help generate higher conversions.

A. Landing Page Content

The presentation is only half the battle, of course. Without compelling content the prospect will not respond to your CTA. Here are some suggested steps to optimize your landing form content.

Focus – If your conversion offer is built around a white paper or webinar, don’t mix your messages, attempt to fast-track the sales process, promote your company or other offers, etc. Instead, tailor the content toward the promoted product and let your sales team take it from there. “When you design a page with a single focused message,” says Gardner, “you create a simplified experience that better represents the expectation created by your upstream [campaign].”

Mix It Up – Remember that different forms of content resonate with different people, industries and organiza-

tions. Test different content types to determine the best response (most often you can repurpose content across multiple media). If you are selling to the C-Level, then eBooks and white papers might perform better than webinars and podcasts. Don’t just test the landing page, test the content offer as well.

Make headlines – It’s a journalistic mainstay—don’t bury the lead. The headline is “...your pickup line,” says Flint McGlaughlin, CEO and managing director of MECLABS, “it is the place where the sales conversation begins.” Adds Chopra: “The headline ... makes the difference between the visitor reading any content and going for the dreaded ‘X’ button.”

Give them what they want – If you are offering a white paper, deliver it. Nothing will sour your fortunes than a bait-and-switch, or linking the prospect to the company homepage and leaving it to him or her to find the white paper.

Honor Their Privacy – Landing page visitors bring with them a modicum of anxiety over the prospect of being marketed/sold to. As such it is extremely important to alleviate any concerns they may have about you sharing their contact information with others. Ensure your privacy policy is readily visible and easily accessible.

Organize – Along the same lines as streamlining the eyepath, B2B marketers should avoid “fragmented or scattered content,” says Hebeisen. Beginning with the headline, the copy should flow toward a singular goal: conversion. “Disorganized copy impedes the prospect’s path through the sales cycle,” adds McGlaughlin, whose company has conducted thousands of optimization related tests.⁵

Validate – Customer quotes, professional affiliations, logos of prominent clients, and other forms of third-party validation should be included as means of reducing prospect anxiety and providing peer-driven “social proof.”⁶

B. Landing Page Design

From its colors and imagery to its layout and functionality, the myriad elements of the landing page must operate as a single, coordinated unit aimed at driving the visitor

³ MarketingSherpa – 2011 Landing Page Optimization Benchmark Study

⁴ Scott Brinker, co-founder and CTO, Ion Interactive.

⁵ *Hidden Friction: The 6 Silent Killers of Conversion*

⁶ Robert Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*

to a desired action: conversion. Some critical and commonly discussed guides to landing page optimization via design elements include:

Build Trust – Your landing page may stand alone, but it is imperative that its design is in line with your corporate brand. “Your search marketing landing pages should be consistent with corporate logo, color, font and language standards,” says Amanda Simmons of SearchEngine Land.⁷

Streamline the Eye-Path – The mind works best when it remains in the flow. Avoid designing landing page elements that force the visitor’s eye to jump horizontally or vertically across the page.⁸

Eliminate Distracting Media – For a time it became popular to auto-play video, Flash, and other multimedia. But in these media-overloaded times, these applications are more likely to drive away than attract prospects. Use a single compelling graphic or compelling headline in place of multimedia.

Focus on the Payoff – “Anytime you ask people to do something, you are creating a point of friction,” notes Lary Stucker of FreshClicks. “Your audience will not continue unless the reward is greater than the friction they are experiencing.” As such, ensure that the page is designed to reinforce the conversion offer, and more specifically the value they will get from your offer if they choose to respond to it.

Limit Navigation – As with every other element on the page, the navigation should serve one purpose: converting the visitor. The best performing landing pages “function like a cattle chute,” says Bob Hebeisen, a Boston-based marketing consultant. “Your landing page will be much more successful at converting if you eliminate links that allow visitors to leave.”

Avoid Discordant Colors – Too many marketers make the mistake of thinking multiple splashes of color will add flavor to their landing pages. “Use color sparingly,” says Taylor Kennedy, research manager at Marketing Experiments, and only use it “to draw attention to a specific section of the page or a call to action.”

BONUS TIP

Consider Going Formless

Consider the lead source. If a prospect is hitting an offer page after clicking through on an email campaign or nurture program, then you already know who they are. “Blind” form submits or simple email click tracking can be used to identify conversions when the target list is full of prospects you have already identified. Another effective practice is called “progressive profiling” and it is typically made possible by using a marketing automation tool to host your Web forms and landing pages. If, for example, a prospect you have already identified clicks on an offer, you can use a customized form to ask them only for information you don’t already have. This additional, unknown information can be used to more accurately score a lead or identify where they are in the buying cycle.

Make it Visible – Studies consistently confirm that above-the-fold designs behave better than do those that bury content and CTAs below the fold. If at all possible design your page with all of its key ingredients where they are immediately visible.

Simplify – Marketers should steal a page from Google and the many new daily offer services (e.g. Groupon, LivingSocial, Woot, et al) in the way they design clean pages around a single objective. “These sites capitalize on the fact that they sell one item per day by featuring it alone,” says Paras Chopra, director of Wingify. “You can borrow their techniques to improve your site.”⁹

⁷ 5 Tips to Improve Conversion on B2B Landing Pages

⁸ Marketing Experiments saw a 47% increase in conversions when it simplified eye-pathways.

⁹ Wingify, owns Visual Website Optimizer.

STEP THREE: Check Your Line

By their very nature, forms and landing pages are not the sexiest of Web properties. But given their immense importance in capturing lead data, it is critical that they not be built and forgotten.

A. Test Your Forms

As with the landing page(s), forms should be tested and retested to ensure, among other things, that the form:

Works – A broken Web form is akin to a retail establishment that forgets to unlock its doors. Test the form to see if a) it captures the lead and b) does it deliver the content that the LP promises.

Matches – If you upgrade your content offering from a newsletter to a white paper, be sure to up the ante on the form as well by adding (or subtracting) the appropriate fields to the form.

Synchs – Many B2Bs run multiple campaigns across different geographies or languages. Ensure that each form works with its local target population.

B. Test Your Design

It's been said more than once that there are no expert marketers, only experienced ones. Every market is different, meaning that response rates will invariably differ. Test design elements to see what performs well with the audience you want to convert. Test often, adjust, and do it again. Your results are almost guaranteed to improve.

C. Test Your Content

As with design, test offers often to determine which headlines and copy resonate best with your target market and specific campaign sources. A white paper that performed well for one content syndication program might not work well for an email campaign to your install base.

STEP FOUR: Use A Fish Finder

In the same way that improved analytics and testing have combined to dramatically improve the effectiveness of landing pages and their forms, the advent of front-end identification and targeting technology like Demandbase is taking landing page and form optimization to entirely new levels. "Without such real-time identification tools," says DemandGen CEO David Lewis, the B2B will continue to "suffer a lot of lead duplication and lack the ability to do the kinds of scoring, nurturing" and other tactics so critical to modern marketing organizations.

With these tools in place a B2B isn't forced to compromise with sales over the number of fields, the size of the form, or which fields it is limited to. By implementing Demandbase, for example, a B2B can recognize a prospect and append a variety of account-based data to that individual visitor, including company size, annual revenue, industry, phone number, address, account status, and more.

By combining this account-specific data with campaign data (e.g. delivery channel, campaign ID, lead source,

etc.) and then integrating it into a marketing automation or CRM tool, the B2B is now able to:

- Increase marketing program ROI by converting more leads
- Improve lead data quality with the standardized data that sales needs
- More accurately route leads in accordance with lead management standards
- Identify which content (lead bait) drove the leads from the most valuable accounts
- Score your channel and lead source effectiveness
- Incorporate lead source and campaign into the lead score

Additionally, Demandbase enables the B2B to convert more of the accounts that are likely to become revenue by removing the Web form friction that has historically been created by sales-driven data requirements.

IN CONCLUSION: **Staying One Step Ahead**

As the Web becomes an increasingly important resource for corporate buyers independently seeking information about specific products and solutions, it is incumbent on B2B marketing organizations to align their websites, campaign landing pages, and action forms to those prospects' unique requirements.

By following some of the form optimization best practices outlined in this document, marketers can improve their landing page conversion rates and, down the road, increase sales. By adding real-time identification tools into that mix, these B2Bs can truly maximize the sales support potential of their landing page properties.

After all, gone are the days when sales engagements literally began with that initial handshake or business card exchange. Step one is now typically a visit to your website, but often only after they are deep into their own sales cycle. If you can simply convert a few more of your top prospects the first time they visit your site, you will have a better shot at influencing how that sales cycle shapes up.

And your content might be the piece that helps to dictate the requirements of their request for proposal. These new real-time identification technologies and form optimization best practices will help your organization meet—and guide—those prospects exactly where you want them to go: your sales database.

Landing page optimization increases conversions, and shorter forms is the most important component of LPO. For more information about Demandbase, or to request a complimentary audit of your Web forms from a lead conversion specialist please go to demandbase.com/landingpage.

About Demandbase

DEMANDBASE

Demandbase is the first real-time targeting and personalization platform for B2B, transforming the effectiveness of marketing programs and Marketing's ability to impact revenue. While personalization tools have long existed for B2C, until now, none were geared specifically to enable B2B marketers to make online interactions more effective, delivering the right message at the right time.

Without the use of cookies, Demandbase's Real-time Identification service bridges the gap between known and anonymous web visitors by identifying and segmenting the companies visiting a website, and providing detailed, targetable business attributes in real-time. Demandbase integrates with other sales and marketing technologies to deliver unique intelligence about web visitors, and better attract, convert and retain the right customers. Enterprise leaders and high-growth companies alike use Demandbase to drive better marketing performance. For more information visit www.demandbase.com.

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