

# Principles That Will Boost Your Conversions

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*Conversion optimization is not about random guesses or hunches. The best results always come from a systematic approach. I put together this handy guide you can use as a cheat sheet to evaluate your own site (or your competitors) and to identify what needs improvement, so you could fix it.*

*Your website is like a leaking bucket (with money pouring out). This guide will help you find the leaks and plug the holes (and keep the money!).*

*Thanks for reading.*

*Peep Laja, ConversionXL*

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## **1. PEOPLE JUDGE BOOKS BY THE COVER**

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Look at these 2 men:



- Which one would you rather have sit next to you on an airplane?
- Which one would you rather have babysit your kids?
- Which one would you rather ask advice from?
- Which one would you rather buy a car from?

You don't know \*anything\* about these men, yet you made a judgment call based on their looks. The same thing happens every single day on your website. People judge it by its looks.

Amateur and outdated design work against you more than you think. There is a study titled "Trust and mistrust of online health sites." In it, participants were directed to google (as in search on Google) health information that was relevant to them. Afterwards they were asked to discuss their first impressions about the sites they had just visited.

Here comes the kicker: out of all the factor mentioned for rejecting and/or mistrusting a website, 94% were design related. **94%**.

**Design matters. A lot.** It has a strong impact on your conversions, the user experience and customer loyalty. The bar for web design keeps getting higher and higher. Don't get left behind.

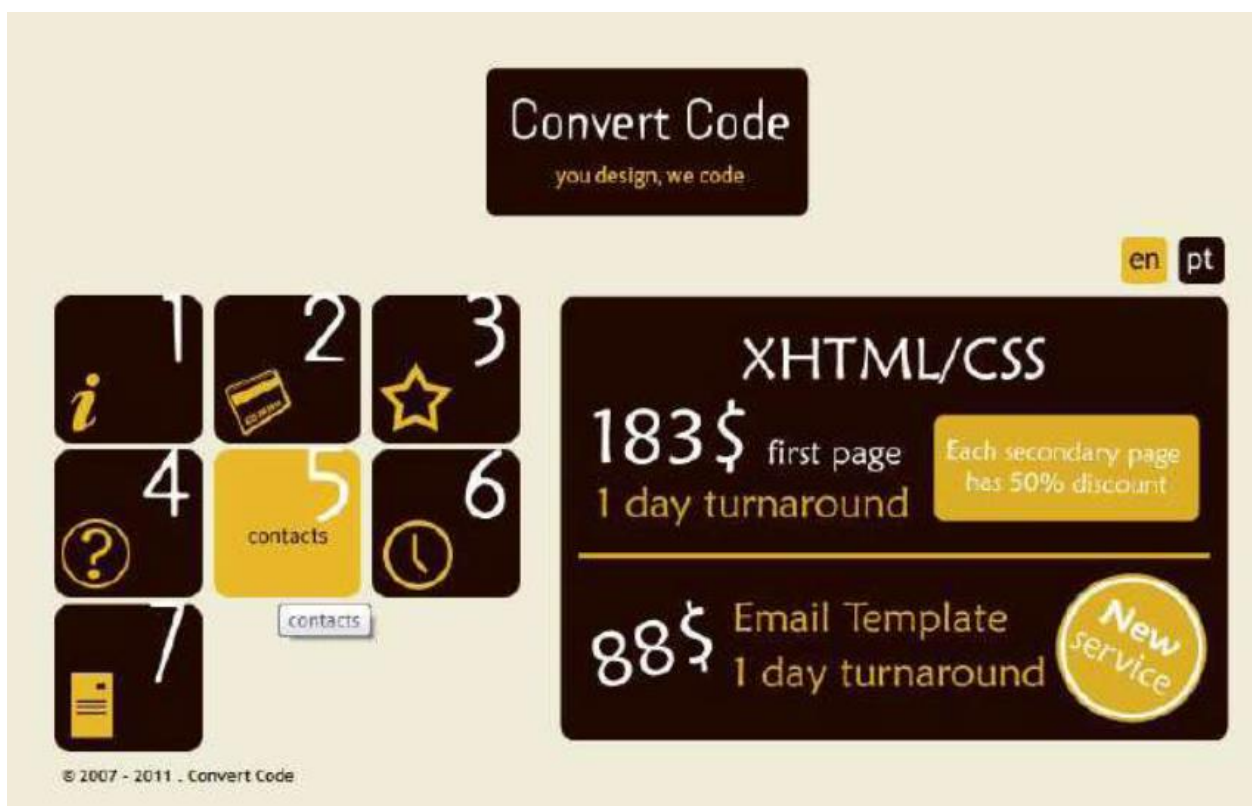
My best design advice: never try to save money on design. It will hurt you for years. Get it right.

Related reading: [\*First Impressions Matter: The Importance of Great Visual Design\*](#)

## 2. DON'T RE-INVENT THE WHEEL. PEOPLE EXPECT IT TO BE ROUND.

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This used to be a real website:



Used to be – they’re not around anymore. No wonder. They broke **rule #2: don’t mess with convention**. Instead of a normal menu, they had these numbers – and you had to hover over one to see what lies underneath. What a terrible, terrible idea.

Question: where do people spend most of their time online? Answer: on other websites!

People are used to websites being a certain. If you mess with convention, you’re asking for trouble.

Google studied what makes people like websites. The [key findings](#) from their study were that websites with low visual complexity and high prototypicality (how representative a design looks for a certain category of websites) were perceived as highly appealing.

Make your web design simple and familiar (follow conventions – e.g. people have a fixed idea what an e-commerce site should be like). If you go for innovative, unconventional layouts – people are less likely to like them.

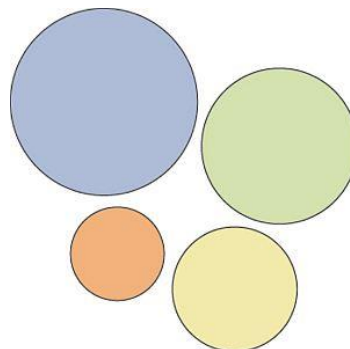
*Related reading: [How to make your website intuitive to use](#)*

### 3. MAKE IMPORTANT THINGS STAND OUT, AND LESS IMPORTANT THINGS NOT

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Squeaky wheels get the grease and prominent visuals get the attention. Visual hierarchy is one of the most important principles behind effective web design. It’s the order in which the human eye perceives what it sees.

Exercise. Please rank the circles in the order of importance:



Without knowing ANYTHING about these circles, you were easily able to rank them. That’s visual hierarchy.

Certain parts of your website are more important than others (forms, calls to action, value proposition etc), and you want those to get more attention than the less important parts. If you website menu has 10 items, are all of them equally important? Where do you want the user to click? Make important links more prominent.

Hierarchy does not only come from size. Amazon makes the 'Add to cart' button more prominent by using color:



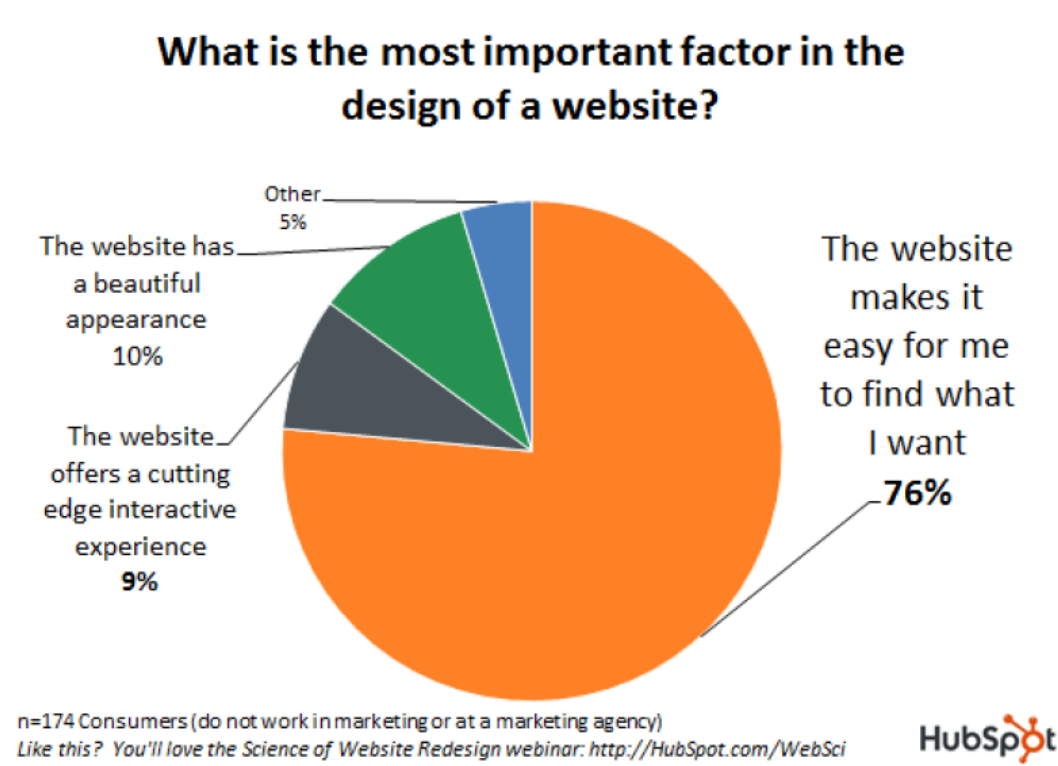
Surf the web and consciously rank the elements in the visual hierarchy. Then go look at your own site. Is there something important (key information points that visitors are likely seeking) that is not high enough in the hierarchy? Change that.

*Related reading: [8 Universal Web Design Principles You Should Know](#)*

## 4. MAKE IT ABOUT THE USER

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People were asked this question:



If your website starts off with “Our company was created...” or “Welcome to our website” or “We offer ...”, you’re doing it wrong. People only care about one thing: themselves and their needs.

Hence your **website copy should be focused on what’s in it for them**. User-centric, not ego-centric.

Copy is super important. **So is usability** – whether it’s easy to use and people can find what they want. The only way to assess this is through usability testing.

Website usability testing helps you identify all the main sources of friction, and thus boost conversions. The premise is simple: observe real users use and interact with your website, pay attention to their experiences and try to spot patterns. Once you have the results, iterate your site design and copy to minimize any barriers to accomplishing their on-site goals. This in turn will also lead to increase in conversions.

Jakob Nielsen was able to show in an analysis that the mean increase of conversion rates with usability optimization was 87%!

With tools like usertesting.com or TryMyUI it’s super easy and affordable. No excuses.

*Recommended reading: [Website Usability Testing: A Must for Boosting Conversions](#)*

## **5. RELEVANCY: THE ONLY WAY TO MAKE MONEY**

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I run a conversion optimization agency. If you send me 50 000 people from a classic tractor repair website and 500 from a prominent marketing site, which one is going to be better for my business?

Unless you’re in the pageview business, what you should first and foremost care about is conversions. **Conversions take place when targeted traffic meets relevant offer**. So your job as a marketer is to find the right sources traffic and to make sure your website is relevant for them. Relevancy leads to sales.

*The aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well the product or service fits him and sells itself.*

- [Peter Drucker](#), influential business thinker of the 20th century

If you want to increase conversions, you have to figure out who exactly is your primary target audience, what they want, what matters to them and what are the sources of friction for them.

If you know...

- **who the people are**, you know how to get to them (the blogs they read, the sites they visit, the stuff they search in Google etc)
- **how they describe the type of services they offer**, you can word the copy on your site to match the conversation in their head (very important!)
- **how they choose and compare products** in your category, you know how to structure and prioritize content on your site
- **what they want**, your value proposition can state exactly that and the whole site can be 98% relevant to them
- **what they don't care about**, you can dismiss and cut it from the site
- **how their life is better** thanks to your service, you know which end-benefits to communicate

... and so on and so forth. It's all about relevancy – if what you offer and how you present it matches their state of mind, you have gained a customer. **Learn who they are, what they want and how they want it.**

Recommended reading: [\*How to Identify Your Online Target Audience and Sell More\*](#)

## 6. UNDERSTAND BUYING PHASES

Let's say you surf the web and come across this site:



What stands out is that they go straight for the sale – asking to register right away. The only thing people know about them at this point is “Create attractive articles. Quick. Easy. Profitable.” – which says absolutely nothing.

It's like when you see a pretty girl / handsome boy walk by, approach him/her with a meaningless sentence and then go for the kiss. What would be the success rate of that? Zero. We know this, yet people do it all the time online.

Understanding buying phases is all about understanding how people work.

## Largely, customers fall into 3 groups:

- People who have a problem / need, but they don't know it
- People who are researching different options, comparison shopping
- People who have made the decision

The first group is pretty much hopeless and it's very difficult to sell them anything, since you need to sell the problem first.

Second group wants to understand why your stuff is the best fit. If you rush the sale – ask for a sign-up before they have enough information, you will scare them away. Here's a good case for [burying your signup or buy button](#). One company removed the sign up call to action from the top of the homepage, and [sign-ups increased 350%](#).

Third group – just get out of their way. They're looking for clearly visible call to action buttons (add to cart) or links with trigger words (sign up) – but they don't need to be prominent.

## 7. MOST PEOPLE DON'T BUY ON THEIR FIRST VISIT

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What's your conversion rate? 1%? 3%? Even if it's a high 5%, that'd mean that 95% of the visitors don't buy anything.

They came to your site (maybe even through paid advertising), bought nothing and left... now what? Have you lost them for good? Not necessarily.

In a lot of cases the best way to increase sales is to avoid one at first. Remember buying phases? Instead of asking for money, try to engage them in some way and ideally collect their email address so you can keep talking to them (it might also be free trial, some sort of a test, sweepstakes etc).

**General rule:** the more expensive and/or complicated the product, the more time people need to make a decision.

If you're selling cars or computers, it's highly unlikely that someone will buy one online on their first visit. This is why you should get their email first, add value, prove your expertise, get them to like you, etc. BEFORE you ask for the sale.

[Think Traffic](#) wants to sell you different infoproducts. But much, much later. They go for the email first:



So don't even try to sell to first-time visitors. Engage them instead.

Recommended reading: [Lead Magnets: Email List Building on Steroids](#)

## 8. CLARITY: WHAT IS IT AND HOW IS IT USEFUL TO ME?

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People won't buy what they don't understand. In fact, people fear what they don't understand. Racism, xenophobia and all that comes from the fear of the unknown.

Whatever you're selling, the buyer is a human. Doesn't matter if it's your grandma or a top exec from PwC. They're all humans. If the text (or video) on your site is easy to understand and in a compelling language, your conversions will go up.

## What does this company do?

Pretty clear, isn't it. No fancy schmancy stuff. You don't need big words. You need to be clear.

If the text on your website is not fun to read and takes effort to understand, you're doing it wrong. Found this on an actual website:

*Our Point of Sale Systems Integrate Hardware, Software and Internet Social Media Marketing Into One Giant Revenue Super System.*

What do they do? Would you pay \$399 for this? Didn't think so.

You can always avoid this kind of jargon by using the "friend" test. Read the text on your website out loud and imagine it's a conversation with your friend. If there's a word or a sentence you wouldn't use, re-word it.

*Recommended reading: [What I Learned From Reviewing 45+ Websites \(Are You Making The](#)*



*[Same Mistakes?](#)*

## 9. REDUCE FRICTION

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Whenever you ask people to do something or commit to something, there's friction. It's impossible to remove friction completely in a business transaction, you can only minimize it.

(A free Ferrari would come with zero friction, but not really a profitable deal).

Friction is all the doubts, hesitations and second thoughts people have about giving you money for a product.

Is it really worth the money? Will it break? Can I trust this guy? Will it work? What if it doesn't fit? Is this a scam? Is it the right choice for me? Will she like it?

The way to convert an infidel to a believer is to address all of their doubts and give them full information, so they are able to convince themselves.

### **The usual suspects – elements that add friction:**

- **Long and/or complicated process.** This is “get a quote” forms with 10 fields, 3-page applications, etc
- **Websites with horrible usability** where people don't understand how to buy or can't find any contact info.
- **Anonymous site:** no names, photos, phone numbers or physical address published. If it seems you're trying to hide, you must have something to hide. If you don't publish photos of yourself, is it that you don't want your customers to recognize you?
- **Ugly, amateur website.**
- **Insufficient evidence.** This is where you make a bunch of claims, but don't [back them up](#).
- **Insufficient information.** A chair, 2 ft tall, black, \$5000. There are thousands of sites that hardly provide any information about the products they sell. Research says 50% of purchases are not completed due to lack of information.
- **FUDs.** Fears, uncertainties, doubts. Much like the list of questions above, every person has some doubts in a form of a question. The way to overcome these is to address those FUDs in your sales copy. Interview your customers to find out what they are.

There are so many things you can do to reduce friction. First of all make it easy to buy from you. See this [demo page by Gumroad](#) to see what easy checkout should look like.

Ask as little questions as you can, reduce the number of steps in the buying process as much as you can. Provide proof, show photo and video testimonials, case studies, user reviews.

Make sure the sales copy answers every question your prospect might have (product info, shipping info, returns & exchanges, guarantees, price objections and so on).

## **10. URGENCY**

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Urgency is a powerful motivator, if done well.

Most of us have seen something like this:

The image shows two identical screenshots of a flight booking interface. Each screenshot displays a roundtrip flight from Austin to San Francisco for \$289 per person, including taxes and fees. The flight is operated by multiple airlines: US Airways 2773, EXPRESS-MESA AIRLINES, US Airways 180, and Continental 853 operated by UNITED. The flight duration is 7h 56m with 2 stops. A yellow box highlights the text 'Only 3 tickets left at this price!'. Below the flight details are links for 'Show Flight Details', 'Seat Preview', and 'Baggage Fee Information'. A yellow 'SELECT' button is prominently displayed on the right side of each card.

Act now or you miss this super deal!

There are 3 ways to create urgency:

- Quantity limitations (Only 3 tickets left at this price)
- Time limitations (Discounted tickets until July 1st)
- Contextual limitations (Father's Day is coming, get a gift now)

As long as the reason for the urgency is believable, it will work.

Too many marketers abuse it and try to add urgency to everything. It's not just possible. People will spot a fake scarcity from a mile away. What does this do to your credibility? Not much, except people stop believing you. And that's kind of important.

But when it makes sense to use it, it will produce a ton of results.

## 11. ELIMINATE DISTRACTION AND NOISE

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There's an adage for outdoor billboard design – it's ready when there's nothing left to remove. In a way this also applies for websites.

The more choice you give to people, the harder it is to choose anything. When there are too many options to choose from, it's easiest to choose nothing at all. There's tons of research to confirm this. In addition, [greater choice makes us unhappy](#).

If you have a ton of products, you have to provide great filters to help people narrow down the choice.

Noise and distraction is not just about how many products you have. It's how busy your layout is, how many competing design elements there are, all asking for attention.

**Rule of noise:** The closer you get to closing the sale, the less things you should have on your screen. Once they get to checkout screen, you shouldn't have ANYTHING on the page that doesn't directly contribute to conversion.

Look at Amazon checkout screen. No sidebar, no menu, no related products. They just really want you to click the "Place your order" button.



Have a single most wanted action for each screen, and make sure the important stuff stands out. Don't have anything in the layout that isn't absolutely necessary. Simple works.

# Conversion optimization is the science of doing marketing better

If you apply these 11 principles on your site, I'm confident that your conversions will shoot up – radically.

Thanks for reading. Drop me a line: [peep@conversionxl.com](mailto:peep@conversionxl.com)

Peep Laja