

THE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO

MASTERING THE DESIGN & COPY OF CALLS-TO-ACTION



How to Optimize
the Design &
Copy of Your
Calls-to-Action

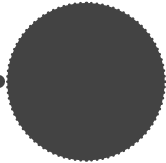
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THE STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO MASTERING THE DESIGN & COPY OF CALLS-TO-ACTION

by Magdalena Georgieva

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Maggie is a regular blogger for the HubSpot blog and has contributed to other sites and publications, such as MarketingProfs, Brian Solis' blog, BostInnovation.com and *The St. Petersburg Times*.



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“Calls-to-action (CTAs) should be used in each and every one of your marketing tactics.”

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Calls-to-action (CTAs) are one of the key lead generation elements, and they should be used in each and every one of your marketing tactics: emails, social media updates, press releases, trade shows ... the list goes on. In fact, whenever you want to ensure your team is moving in the right direction, pose the question, “What’s the call-to-action we’re using to drive people’s behavior?”

This question will guide you in thinking through each of the steps in the sales cycle, from brand awareness to purchase. Before you produce a marketing video, for example, ask yourself what you want viewers to *do* after watching it. Before you post an update to Facebook or Twitter, consider what options for engagement you are giving to your fans and followers.



Naturally, the call-to-action won't always be to purchase your product or service. It can certainly lead people in that direction, but it will rarely follow as a *direct* result of an isolated marketing tactic. That is why you should view your marketing as an integrated system that combines different channels and assets. Social media and blogging might do wonders with attracting traffic to your online real estate, but you need lead generation tools to capture that traffic and marketing automation to nurture it down the sales funnel.

In this context, calls-to-action play a critical role for getting to each step and moving ahead. In this guide we will cover the three major steps in which you can improve your calls-to-action and optimize them for maximum conversions. We'll start by looking at effective CTA designs, then continue by exploring CTA copy options and wrap up with some tips on CTA split (A/B) testing. After going through each of these sections, you'll be in a good shape to increase call-to-action clickthrough rates and visitor-to-lead conversions.

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CHAPTER 1

MASTER THE DESIGN OF COMPELLING CALLS-TO- ACTION



9 tips on

CALL-TO-ACTION DESIGN:

Once you have a strategy in mind for which calls-to-action you'll feature on your website, you'll probably start obsessing over their design. In this section, we present you with some guidelines to master the design of successful calls-to-action.



SIZE MATTERS: MAKE IT BIG

The goal of your call-to-action is to attract the attention of website visitors, and one way to convey its importance is by enlarging it. “You want your button to be large enough to stand out without overwhelming the design,” [writes](#) graphic designer Cameron Chapman.

Size shouldn't be determined independently of other factors – it is tightly related to the context of the page and the other characteristics of your call-to-action. For instance, the CTA will naturally be large if it includes a graphic or an image that strengthens the message. This is what we do for [HubSpot's blog](#): the call-to-action placed at the end of each article is bigger than your standard CTA button because it is contextualized and adds value to the article. [Visit our blog to see a bunch of examples!](#)



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2

SPACIAL EFFECT

You know how they say that, sometimes, less is more? Well, that can definitely be true for calls-to-action. If you want to attract more attention to your CTA, you should give it some breathing space. Don't crowd the language unless the information around it is key to taking the action.

Simple logic dictates the 'amount of white space' decision. Separating the CTA from the rest of the content on a web page will mean it's a separate item. If there is a tight connection between the call-to-action and some other web page element, then maybe there should be less white space between the two.

"The more white space there is in between a call-to-action button versus a surrounding element, the less connected they are," writes [Jacob Gube in SmashingMagazine](#). "Therefore, if you have other elements that can help convince users to take action, reduce the white space in between those elements and the CTA." Another tactic here is to fill your call-to-action with warm background colors, such as red and orange, which appear larger than colors suggesting coldness, blue and green. Warm colors appear closer to the viewer.



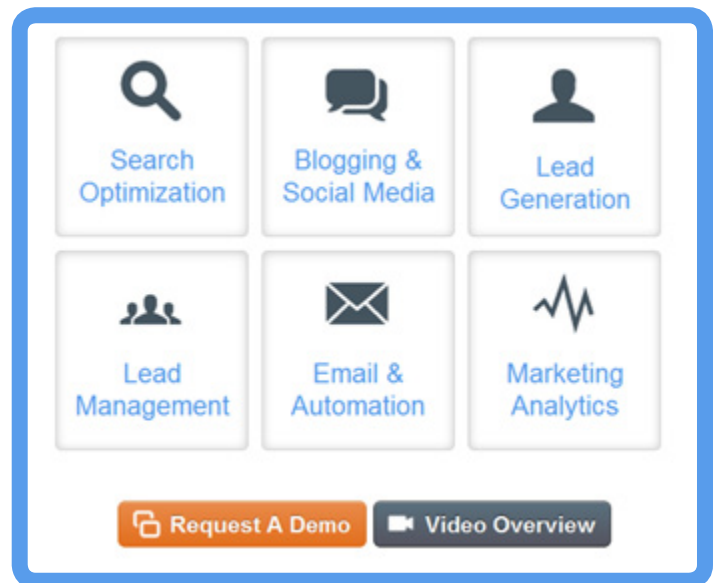


3

PLACEMENT

Your call-to-action needs to be [above the fold](#) so viewers don't have to scroll down in order to spot it. According to an [EyeTrack III study](#), the best placement of online ads is in the top and left position. This tactic, too, is dictated by simple logic. In the English language, we start reading from left to right and from top to bottom.

Copywriter Dean Rieck suggests that once your readers get used to a particular placement, they might start ignoring the call-to-action or ad. "So even the prime upper left area won't work so well if you always put ads there," [he writes](#). The most effective placement could also depend on the context of the rest of the page, so make sure you do some testing.



For instance, test the ideal top and left position versus a placement in which the call-to-action is right beneath the offer description. [Run an A/B test](#) to see if you get more clicks, and pick a winner.





4

CONTRAST

Contrast is one of the most powerful graphical techniques you can apply to calls-to-action. The fastest way to grab someone's attention is by making your CTA stand out from the rest of the page and making it dominant. To achieve that, pick a color for your button that contrasts the background.

There has been a [huge debate](#) revolving around usage of the color red for call-to-action design. Some marketers argue that red can increase click-through rates significantly. Others explain that the context of the web page should determine the color. Whether you decide to use the color of fire, passion, and also the international stop signal or not, be mindful of your overall website design. While you want to keep the colors contrasting, make sure all of them fit in with your general website color scheme and avoid using patterns.

By using visually different font, you can also achieve contrast with your call-to-action: some words might be larger or more emphasized than others. Just ensure that the CTA is easy to read.

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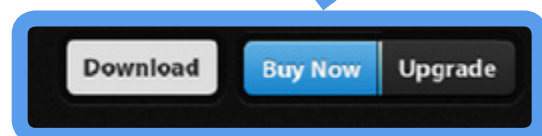




INTERACTIVE EFFECTS

Surely, you've seen calls-to-action that change when you hover over them with your mouse. Such hover effect creates a perception that the CTA is instantly clickable and the visitor is one step closer to taking the action.

Using hover animation, you can make your buttons change color and brightness. You can also give them a shadow or have them zoom in or out. There are many [Adobe Photoshop tutorials](#) out there that can teach you how to create such a hover animation and help you create an even more irresistible call-to-action. Other design styles that you can apply to your call-to-action include drop shadow, text and button bevels and gradient colors. All these options are available through [HubSpot's Call-to-Action Builder](#).



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TRY UNCONVENTIONAL SHAPES

Most calls-to-action have the same shape: that of a standard rectangular box. Shay Howe, designer and user interface engineer at Groupon, [recommends](#) that you give your CTA shape rounded or circular corners to make it more “button-like.”

Square corners, he writes, may signal to visitors that the CTA is an ad or banner, and they might therefore avoid it.

Sometimes you will encounter calls-to-action that have more unconventional shapes. For instance, they might be oval, star-like or assuming the contours of another object. This creative approach creates an element of surprise and might prove to be effective in increasing click-through rates.



“Experiment with call-to-action shapes that are rare, asymmetrical, and out of the ordinary.”

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7

CREATE A SENSE OF DIRECTION

Some of the most successful calls-to-action out there have arrows pointing at them. It creates a sense of direction and guides the visitor to the important element on the page. This is a way of prioritizing information and creating a flow.

In fact, HubSpot Social Media Scientist Dan Zarrella, found out that if you have a picture of a human looking at a lead-capture form or call-to-action on a page, that's where the eye of the visitor will also shift to. So don't add images of people who stare right at your audience; make them stare at what your audience should look at.

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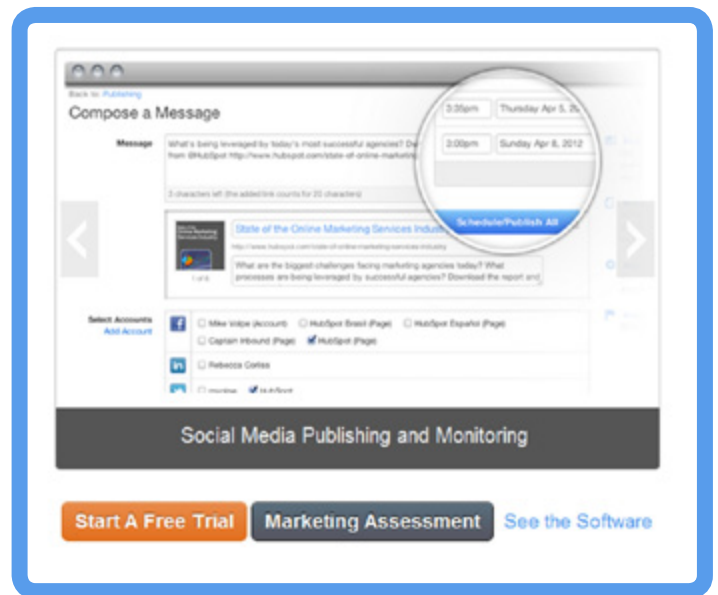


ON MULTIPLE CALLS-TO-ACTION

Often times, you have two or three competing actions that you would like your website visitors to take. For instance, you might want them to request a consultation and try your product.

Or you might want them to sign up for your email newsletter and download a whitepaper. Decide which call-to-action has higher priority, and give it more prominent placement and a bigger size. Also, keep in mind that the context of your page will affect click-through rates, so make sure there is a clear alignment between your call-to-action and the content around it.

Make sure you use different colors to illustrate which alternative is more desirable. For instance, on [HubSpot's homepage](#), you will see that in the center we have three calls-to-action that, from left to right, decrease in importance. The key call-to-action, “Start A Free Trial,” is in orange, followed by the grey “Marketing Assessment” CTA, and then the “See the Software” CTA, which is just hyperlinked text.



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FOCUS ON TEXT, NOT GRAPHICS

The [Eyetrack III study](#) also showed that in ads, website visitors read more text content than graphical content.

“People looking for information are looking for text, not pictures.”

— DEAN RIECK, COPYWRITER

Make sure your wording is clear, specific, and action-oriented. In the next chapter, we will cover some copywriting tips in more detail

While you should focus on your call-to-action text, don't forget that graphics can help convey meaning and strengthen your message. They are especially useful in explaining a concept that is hard to explain with words alone.

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CHAPTER 2

WRITE CALL- TO-ACTION COPY THAT GETS VISITORS CLICKING



“*Being able to articulate ideas clearly is key to capturing the attention of prospects.*”

.....

Good writing matters in marketing; being able to articulate ideas clearly is key to capturing the attention of prospects. This rule is crucial when it comes to calls-to-action. If the copy you craft doesn't draw visitors in, that can hurt your click-through rate, lead conversions, and ultimately, sales.

Visitors focus on the words in text ads more than on the graphics. So what makes your copy compelling? “The number one rule,” says Dr. Flint McGlaughlin, Director of [MECLABS](#), “is clarity trumps persuasion.”

In this section, we will discuss some key copywriting lessons you should apply to the process of crafting successful calls-to-action.

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5 tips on

CALL-TO-ACTION COPYWRITING:



START WITH SUBJECTS & VERBS

The very first piece of advice in the classic book *Writing Tools* encourages writers to start sentences with subjects and verbs. In the English language, we read from left to right, and verbs and subjects help us to quickly glean the meaning of a sentence.

As basic as these tips may be, acknowledging them when crafting your online call-to-action is crucial when the attention of readers is more elusive than the shadow of a flapping bird.

Surprisingly, a lot of companies don't seem to consider this in their call-to-action copywriting. A quick visit to *The New York Times'* website revealed a bunch of paid ads that were missing verbs or hiding them in the bottom right corner. For example, check out the screenshot of an exhibit ad from the site's Arts section.



This call-to-action copy could be drastically improved by adding a vibrant verb at the very top, maybe something along the lines of "Peek into the world of dead sea scrolls."

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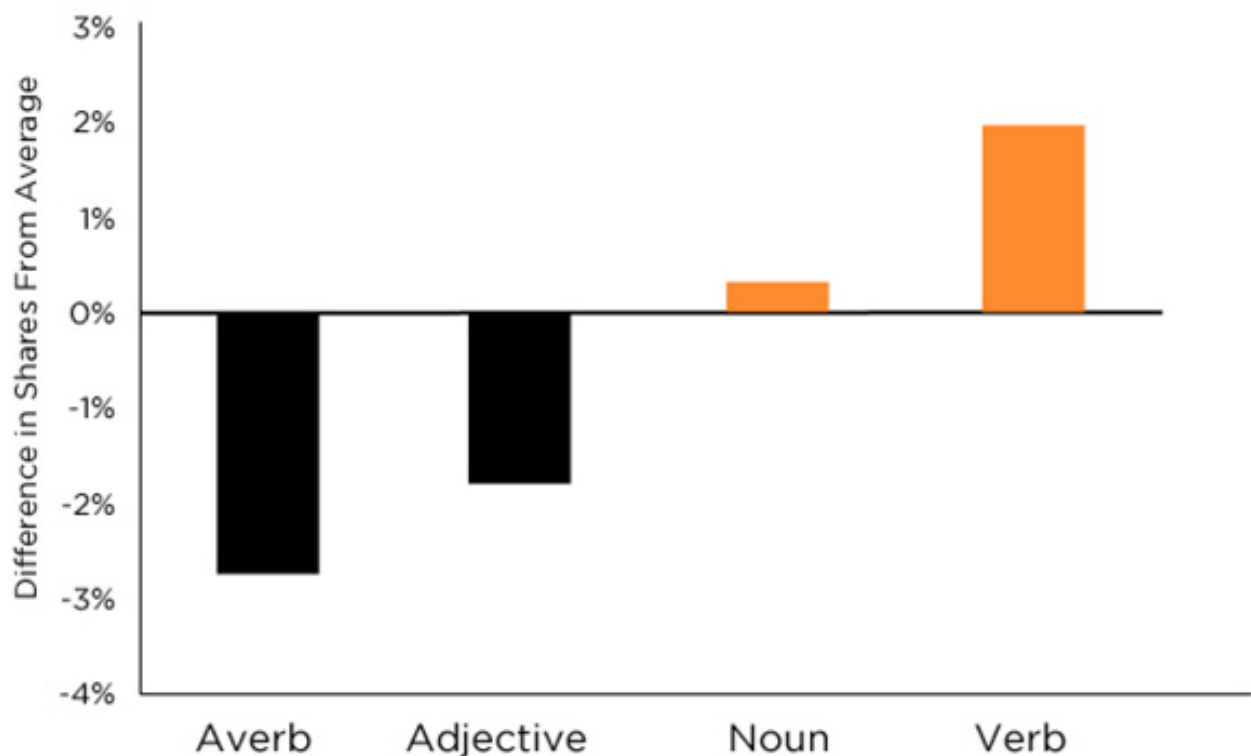


By not including a verb in the CTA copy, you aren't prompting readers to take action, which can hurt the click-through rate of your call-to-action and negatively impact conversions.

“Verbs are the part of speech that generate the most shares on Twitter.”

In fact, verbs are the part of speech that generate the most shares on Twitter, which HubSpot Social Media Scientists Dan Zarrella reported in his [Science of Social Media research](#). Verbs beat adverbs, adjectives, and nouns in terms of their potential to attract Twitter shares!

Shares by Part of Speech



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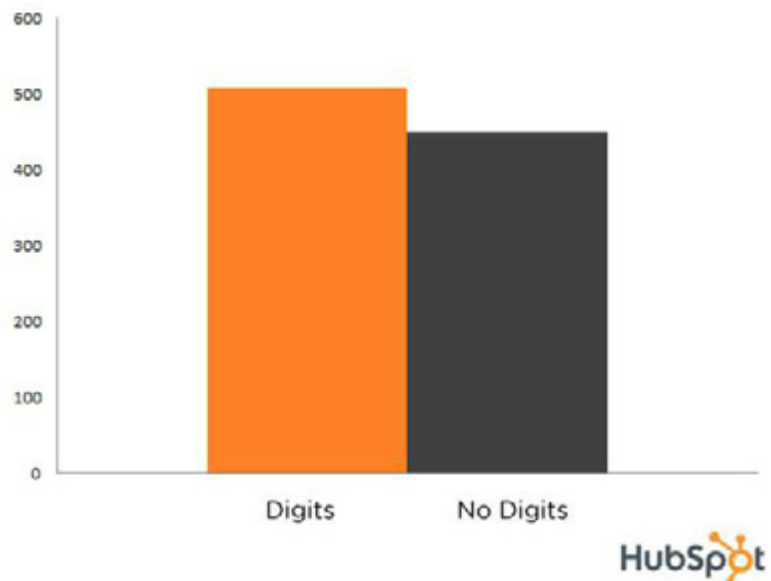
2

INCLUDE NUMBERS

The internet overflows with guesswork and vague statements. That’s why using data and numbers is a great way to demonstrate that your message is clear and to-the-point.

Numbers are a great way to break through the clutter of ambiguity, be specific about your offer, and set the right expectations. A number tells visitors exactly what they’re going to get, how much of it, for how long, etc. This technique has proven successful not only for call-to-action copy, but also for blog post titles, press release headlines, and email subject lines. In fact, in [The Science of PR](#), Dan Zarrella discovered that including digits in your press release headline can help increase total views.

Effect of Digits on Total Views



What numbers can you include in your CTA copy? You can add the page length of the whitepaper you offer, mention a specific discount, or list the numerical impact or benefit of a particular resource you are providing. For instance, HubSpot’s call-to-action for joining our email list is “Get the world’s best marketing resources right to your inbox! Join more than 817,000 inbound marketers!”

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USE ADVERBS SPARINGLY

Most adverbs can be recognized by their “ly” ending, e.g. “finally,” “unfortunately,” and “quietly.” However, there are different types of adverbs (in relation to direction, time, degree, and manner), and their function is to modify “[constituents other than nouns.](#)”

They have no fixed position in a sentence. For instance, you can place the word “finally” at different places in the same sentence.

“Marketers should use adverbs in their call-to-action only if it aids in the understanding of the message.”

Adverbs could help you shorten the copy: you can replace “to the extreme” with “extremely”; “with ease” with “easily”; and “in this place” with “here.” Some of the most frequently used adverbs by marketers in calls-to-action include terms like “now,” “fast,” “today,” and “here.” Actually, adverbs are the part of speech that gets the fewest number of shares on Twitter, according to Dan Zarrella’s [Science of Social Media research](#). They are behind adjectives, nouns, and verbs in shareability.

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4

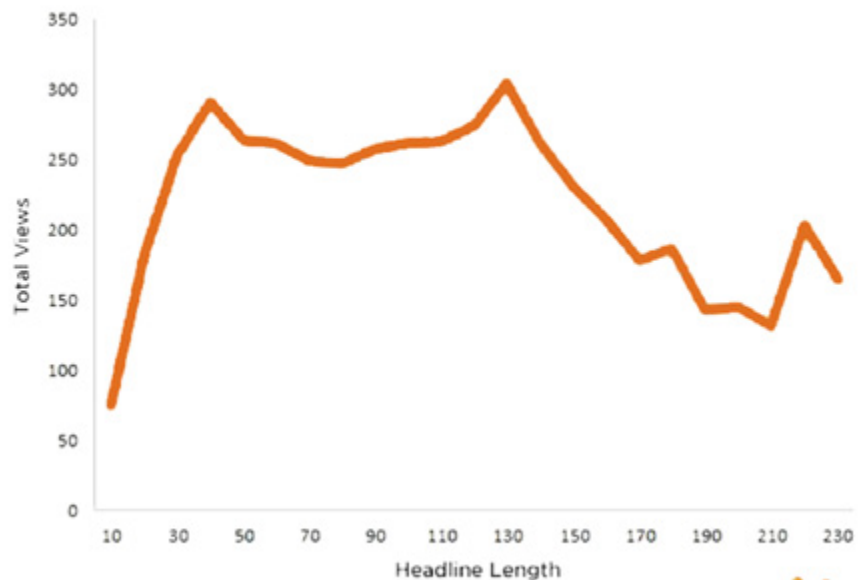
LENGTH: 90-150 CHARACTERS

The standard advice for calls-to-action has been to keep them short and concise. Don't write convoluted copy that will take your visitor a long time to read.

Not surprisingly, this holds true for other marketing activities, such as emails and press releases. "With plenty of competition in the inbox, on the web, and elsewhere, it is wise to assume you have a limited opportunity to catch and keep a recipient's attention," writes [Simms Jenkins](#), CEO of BrightWave Marketing, about emails.

However, your CTA should contain enough information about the benefits and specifics of your offer. Don't shorten it for brevity's sake. In fact, start by writing out a few full sentences that clearly convey the offer's appeal. Then, remove words that don't contribute to your core message.

Effect of Headline Length on Total Views



In [The Science of PR](#), Dan Zarrella reported that the most engaging press release headlines are between 90 and 150 characters. Try to fit your call-to-action copy in these limits, and see how readers react.

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DON'T USE TECHNICAL TERMS

The language in your calls-to-action will most likely reflect industry-specific knowledge. However, there are some best practices that hold true for all CTA copy, regardless of industry.

The terminology that works well for attracting views to blog posts implies expertise and thought leadership. According to [The Science of Blogging](#), some of the words that are most viewed in blog posts include “insights,” “analysis,” “answers,” “questions,” “advice,” “review,” “why,” “product”, “top,” and “best.” These words suggest that the piece of content can improve the reader in some way. The same logic can be applied to crafting call-to-action copy. Emphasize the benefits of the offer and how it can make your prospects smarter.

WHAT TO USE:



INSIGHTS



ADVICE



REVIEW



ANSWERS



ANALYSIS



WHY

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Stay away from overly technical jargon. Some of the words that attract the fewest views in blog posts include “franchise,” “investment,” “virtualization,” and “conferencing.” These terms imply forced complexity and are less appealing to readers. If people don’t even want to view content that includes such technical jargon, you should definitely not include it in your call-to-action copy.

Finally, don’t be boring in your language, and don’t simply copy what the competition is saying. How much value does the standard “click here” and “submit” button convey? Not that much. Instead of gravitating toward the uniform CTA language, use some creative copy that stands out. Make a list of vibrant verbs that suggest benefits to the reader (e.g. “browse,” “compare,” “jump,” and “grab”).

WHAT NOT TO USE:



TECHNICAL

CLICK HERE

SUBMIT

INVESTMENT

VIRTUAL-
IZATION

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CHAPTER 3

OPTIMIZE CALLS-TO- ACTION THROUGH A/B TESTING



“ Sometimes, best practices might not be the best practices for your particular business. ”

A lot of the suggestions in this ebook have represented CTA best practices, but it's important to understand that sometimes, best practices might not be the best practices for your particular business. One business might find that a red button in the top left corner of a web page performs the best for them, while another business might find that red buttons rarely get clicked, and the top right corner of a web page is the optimal placement for their CTAs.



Therefore, marketers who are striving to continually increase their CTA's click-through and conversion rates are constantly conducting A/B tests to determine the best design for their CTAs. Every design element we've mentioned in this post can -- and should -- be tested. And if you're a HubSpot customer, the [Call-to-Action Module](#) makes it very easy to [A/B test different call-to-action buttons](#) to determine which generates the most clicks and conversions.

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how to conduct

A CALL-TO-ACTION TEST:

So how does call-to-action split testing work? You create a few variations of your CTA, place them on the same page, and when you send traffic to that URL, visitors will be randomly sent to one of your variations. Standard A/B testing tools remember which page the reader landed on and will keep showing that page to the user. For statistical validity split tests need to set a cookie on each visitor to ensure the visitor sees the same variation each time they go to the tested page. This is how [HubSpot's advanced landing pages](#) and [Google's Website Optimizer](#) work.

While in most cases the goal of CTA split testing is to determine which call-to-action attracts the most clicks, it is important to look for results further down in the sales funnel: submissions. Conversions are, naturally, influenced by the landing page and how well it is aligned with the call-to-action. In the example below we used [HubSpot's Call-to-Action module](#) to test the alignment between the same call-to-action and two different landing pages:

Call-to-Action A/B Test Group	Views	Views to Clicks	Clicks	Clicks to Submissions	Submissions	Views to Submissions
This group viewed on 12 pages.  <i>Links to: hubspot.com/lead-generation-using-inbound-marketing-kit/</i>	4462	4.93%	220	29.55%	65	1.46%
 <i>Links to: hubspot.com/lead-generation-quick-start-series/</i>	4375	4.50%	197	31.98%	63	1.44%



HubSpot's call-to-action module (screenshot showed on the previous page) enables you to quickly build A/B tests and drill down to the data that matters the most to your organization. For instance, you might look at the views-to-click rate in an effort to optimize the call-to-action, but...

“ if your click-to-submission rate is surprisingly low, then the problem might lie with the landing page. ”

That is why, ultimately, you want to be keeping an eye on your view-to-submission rate and try to optimize that.

Remember that you should be running only one A/B test at a time, so don't try to optimize both the call-to-action and the landing page simultaneously. Make changes to one variable at a time so that you understand which element triggered the results you are seeing.



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an example of

A CALL-TO-ACTION TEST:

The screenshot below is of a call-to-action A/B test that sought to compare two offer types. The image actually illustrates what HubSpot's homepage used to look like in 2010!

Originally, HubSpot's homepage offered our community a seven-day free trial. However, we were curious to see if offering a longer trial period would entice more visitors to sign up. Would it have a significant enough effect? In this case our control was a variation that offered the seven-day free trial and the treatment offered a 30-day free trial.



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Results from the test showed that the 30-day free trial enticed more visitors and had a significant effect on conversion rates. The 30-Day free trial won with a 99.9% confidence rate and created a 110% increase in HubSpot free trials. The control had a 0.326% visitor-to-free-trial conversion rate, while the treatment had a 0.709% visitor-to-trial conversion rate.

TREATMENT

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The takeaway emerging from this A/B test is that type of offer can exercise a tremendous influence over lead generation efforts. If you want to optimize your calls-to-action (and for that matter email and landing pages), comparing different offers is a great place to start. Such experiments will provide you with a better understanding of what prompts your visitors to convert into leads.

“Type of offer can exercise a tremendous influence over lead generation efforts.”

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CONCLUSION & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



“Always ask yourself and your team,
‘What is the call-to-action here?’”

.....

Calls-to-action are one of the fundamental elements of lead generation, linking website visitors to the next step that will engage them further with your company. You have the power to strengthen that connection by optimizing your CTAs. And now you know how!

After reading this ebook, you should be in a great shape to improve the design and copy of your calls-to-action. We have shared some best practices here, but remember that you’ll need to do some specific A/B testing in order to truly identify the elements that matter the most to your audience.





And remember, always ask yourself and your team, “What is the call-to-action here?” Let this question guide your marketing efforts!

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For additional information on calls-to-action, check out the resources below:

-  [INTRODUCTION TO EFFECTIVE CALLS-TO-ACTION](#)
-  [HUBSPOT'S LEAD GENERATION TOOLS](#)
-  [AN INTRODUCTION TO A/B TESTING](#)
-  [HUBSPOT PRODUCT OVERVIEW](#)

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