



## Shortcomings in Domain Name Landing-Page Design

Landing-page design and functionality have come a long way in the last few years. However, this is just the beginning of an evolving process.

The effectiveness of a parked domain's landing-page can be analyzed within an Information Retrieval (IR) context. Below, I outline some of the current shortcomings, with a focus on the significance of information imbedded in the item being searched. I don't consider issues of domain knowledge<sup>1</sup> or optimization of search strategy and tactics.<sup>2</sup>

From the perspective of a marketer, the content of the page should be designed to acquire and retain valuable customers. Thus, to be effective, the content has to be informative and persuasive.

For a domain name owner, traffic monetization service providers are complementors.<sup>3</sup> The value of a domain name

that is not associated with an active corporate website increases as its monetization revenue increases. Monetization services would not exist without the ability of domain names to generate advertising revenue.

### Information Classifications

There are a number of classification structures related to information. Based on the users' product information, economic models analyze the consequences on price, quantity, and quality of asymmetric information, whereby one side of a transaction has more information than the other. Another widely used classification is based on the revelation of information associated with the purchase of a good or service. Under this classification, three types of goods are identified: search goods, experience goods, and credence/faith goods.

A search good is one for which the consumer is lacking some information, be it price or some attribute of the good, which can be fully determined before purchasing it. Examples include books, cell phones, music CDs, and travel.

For experience goods a determination of all relevant characteristics may not be possible. Examples of such goods are auto insurance, cruises (How is a cruise different from travel in the previous category?), and durable goods. Nobody can tell you how long durable goods last, which can only be determined by consuming the good and seeing when it breaks. Thus, the consumer needs to purchase the good because only the purchase and consumption of the products and services will fully inform the consumer. This situation naturally leads to consumers trying a good that may not necessarily be the best match for them. Hence, advertising can be designed to make the consumer try the product, where, for example, free samples can be provided.

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<sup>1</sup> See Barbara Wildemuth, "The Effects of Domain Knowledge on Search Tactic Formulation," *Journal of The American Society For Information Science and Technology*, 55(3):426-258, 2004, and Charles Cole, et al., "Putting It Together Online: Information Need Identification for the Domain Novice User," *Journal of The American Society For Information Science and Technology*, 56(7):684-694, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See Nigel Miller, et al., "Web Search Strategies and Human Individual Differences: A Combined Analysis," *Journal of The American Society For Information Science and Technology*, 56(7):757-764, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> A player is your complementor if customers value your product more when they have the other player's product than when they have your product alone. See Adam M. Brandenburger and Barry J. Nalebuff. *Co-opetition*. Currency Doubleday (1996).

There are situations where the consumer might never find out if the product performs its function. This is the natural situation with cosmetic surgery, psychics, and therapy. Such goods are termed credence or faith goods. In such markets persuasion and credibility of providers become more important due to the asymmetric information between provider and consumer.

### Shortcomings of Landing Pages

1. **Not Serving Users' Needs.** Landing pages do not differentiate between search types: search goods, experience goods, and credence goods.
2. **Not Capturing Attention.** Users' attention is a scarce resource. Currently, informational content of a landing-page is being conveyed only through links to text-based content. However, some users prefer receiving information through other media: video, audio, PowerPoint presentation, etc.
3. **Sub-optimal Link Information.** A comparison of the content of landing-pages to search engines' result-pages indicates a limited overlap. We examined search result-pages from Yahoo's Overture.com - one of the leading pay-per-click (PPC) search engines - and meta-search engines. The latter group uses revenue optimization techniques to rank keyword results from multiple search engines. The findings suggest that potential revenue to domain name owners and quality of results on a landing page are sub-optimal. Yet, monetization service providers have every incentive to maximize the revenue from the links. Thus, one possible explanation of sub-optimality is that the ad agencies, such as Yahoo, are regarding landing pages as competitors, when, in fact, they should be regarded as complementors.
4. **Lack of Advanced Search Tools.** One difference between a domain-name based search-- whereby a user enters the domain name in the browser -- and a keyword search is that the latter provides advanced query options such as Boolean searches. Such advanced searches can be added to the search box that is typically included on a landing-page.
5. **Value of Search Box.** It is not clear whether the search box in its current capabilities adds value to the user or provides useful information to the monetization service provider. For the user, it has the potential of creating negative feelings about domain-name based searches. As for its revenue optimization role, the information that the monetization service derives out of it is too noisy to be effective in improving page-revenue optimization. Thus, its value remains a data mining and listening-to-customers issue that needs to be further addressed.
6. **Not Sticky!** Additional features should be added to the technology of a landing-page to make visitors sticky and willing to return to the page. There are a number of options that are currently being considered.

Addressing these issues can make domain-name based searches a viable complementor to search engines.

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