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A MARKETING GEEK'S GUIDE TO:
WEBSITE SUCCESS

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Have you ever opened an email or visited a landing page on mobile, only to be surprised at how poorly it rendered on your screen? Have you ever wanted to get better at tracking the metrics of individual links and elements in your marketing campaigns? Have you thought about running tests to improve your brand's website but haven't been sure how to get started—or if you should?

If you can relate to any of these questions, then this is the e-book for you. It's chockful of information for modern marketers who want to leave buzzwords behind and start learning how to enhance the online experiences of their customers. Read on for advice from the experts at Relationship One on how you can transform your content strategy into a lean, mean, conversion-churnin' machine, with emails and landing pages that engage the right people in the right way.

CHAPTER 1:
BEING MOBILE-FRIENDLY: SCALABLE, FLUID, OR RESPONSIVE DESIGN?

'Responsive design' is a common term in marketing these days—but it's also commonly misunderstood. Responsive design evolved from fluid design, which itself came from scalable design. All three design methods are still in use today by marketers, and all three have the same purpose: to make it easy for organizations to deliver good-looking content seamlessly to customers across all devices. But each method, while related to the others, is also slightly different from them: in terms of skill needed to implement, resource intensity, and limitations.

Which method should your team turn to when it wants to beautify its emails and webpages? We'll use this section to spell out all the differences, so you can make an informed (and aesthetically pleasing) decision.

SCALABLE DESIGN

In scalable design, code is key—or, more accurately, the lack thereof is key. Jason Rodriguez at Litmus explains that scalable design (also known as mobile-friendly design) is "any design that works well across both desktop and mobile without using code to adjust table or image sizes, or to display or hide content between the two platforms." Content that is scalably designed can adjust from desktop to mobile automatically, with no special coding knowledge required of your marketing team to make it happen.

How is that possible? The layout does all the work. Criteria for non-coded scalable design typically include (1) a one-column presentation (2) with larger text (3) and easy-to-click buttons, (4) with no options or ability on the part of customers to shift or hide elements on the page. If these rules for the road sound like they add up to a simple page, remember: Less is often more in the world of marketing, and the simpler a page the easier it is for your marketing platform to automatically convert it from a desktop experience to a mobile one.

FLUID DESIGN

If you want a step up from super-simple design, fluid design—also called liquid design—is the way to go. It requires some knowledge of coding—which has advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is using code puts more direct control in the hands of your team. Don't like the way your page is being scaled up or down by default with your automation program? With code, you can tweak the presentation. However, the main drawback (of course) is the need for code itself, which most marketers are not trained in manipulating.

But let's get specific. What kind of code are we talking here? It's a numbers game. Fluid design is based on proportions; once your team figures out what it wants the page to look like, that vision must be converted into percentages that can then be fed into the layout. These percentages will always hold true, no matter the screen size—from a 4-inch wide smartphone to a 14-inch wide laptop.

For example, if you decide the navigation bar will always take up the top-most 10% of the page, and the main body will always occupy the middle 80%, and the footer will always use the last 10%, these proportions will survive as customers move between devices. Because text can wrap and flow more easily than images, this design works best with text-heavy layouts that, like scalable, live in one column. But in the end, brands that use this approach all but ensure the general look and feel of their layout is preserved. With minimal coding, you can customize and strengthen the layout by defining the percentage of space used by each major element.

RESPONSIVE DESIGN

Just as modern biologists propose that life becomes more complex over time, so too has responsive design "evolved" from fluid design to quote marketing experts. Responsive design necessitates heavy usage of custom code, so the marketing teams that use it need more niche knowledge. However, in exchange, these teams do gain the ability to manipulate email elements with unparalleled flexibility, so they can create designs that are both beautiful and adaptable to any screen size.

Why go through the hassle of implementing responsive design when it requires coding skill? Unlike scalable and fluid design, responsive can leverage multi-column layouts as opposed to only one. Also unlike scalable and fluid, responsive design can feature content that changes drastically from desktop to mobile—all while still being fully optimized for each viewing experience.

CHAPTER 2:
RESPONSIVE DESIGN: THE PROS, THE CONS & THE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Let's get the obvious out of the way: Responsive design is in and it's here to stay. The best marketers leverage their experiences as consumers, and as consumers of content we all know how frustrating it is to navigate to a non-responsive website from a mobile device. The zooming in on miniscule text, the endless side-scrolling, the need to carefully zero in on tiny buttons before pressing your finger on the screen and hoping it takes you to the link you wanted—these things do not a positive customer journey make.

But is responsive design right for your organizational needs? That is the million-pixel question. There is no right or wrong answer—the only thing a modern marketer can do is understand the pros and cons of implementing this approach and make a value judgment on its usefulness for their brand—and the return on investment possible for their team, who would be the ones building it.

RESPONSIVE ADVANTAGES

- The more responsive your page, the more screens and devices it looks great on—and therefore, the more people you can successfully engage.

- On a similar note, the nicer-looking your emails, the more likely they are to inspire multiple opens, full-reads, and click-throughs.

- The more code you utilize, the more customized you can make customers' digital journeys.

The bottom line: Millions of people are checking their emails from a phone or tablet right this moment. Are you reaching this as meaningfully as you could be? Responsive design helps you create experiences that are more reliably engaging across platforms, which can positively impact your marketing metrics and enhance the connection people have with your brand.

RESPONSIVE DRAWBACKS

- Of all major design approaches—scalable, fluid, and responsive—responsive design takes the most time to develop and test.

- To implement responsive design a marketing team must have knowledgeable designers and developers, both of which can be challenging to find.

- The more code you use to customize a page or an email, the more volatile the experience may behave. Different browsers, devise, and email clients—and even different versions of the same browser—can render design in different ways.

The bottom line: Responsive design mandates an investment of time and energy—and sometimes money, should your team need to consult outside professionals to build, code, and test the design. But all that labor doesn't even guarantee a perfect experience for all customers: A responsive design can render in myriad ways depending on environment.

3 QUESTIONS TO DETERMINE IF RESPONSIVE IS RIGHT FOR YOU

In a perfect digital world, marketers would have infinite resources and there would be no hand-wringing about whether or not they can spare the investment in responsive design. Heck, they just would! It would be our default: providing the most customers with the most likely experiences to render beautifully. But we live in the real world, and you have to know your investment will give a good return.

Here are three questions you should answer as you consider if responsive design is the right choice for your marketing team and your brand.

1. WHO IS YOUR AUDIENCE?

What percentage of customers visit your website from a mobile device? Same for emails—what percentage of people actually view them on a smaller mobile screen? If you're not sure, get the data: The numbers here surprise a lot of marketers. For perspective, the U.K.'s Office of Communications recently found that of nine major countries, eight on average used smartphones more than laptops, desktops, and tablets.

2. WHAT IS THE GOAL OF YOUR CONTENT?

Think about why you have created this specific content to begin with. If it is a landing page, do you want form fills? If it is an email, are you hoping to inspire click-throughs? Notice both these examples involve moving the customer toward a concrete action—a conversion you can quantify. If you have goals like this for your content, responsive design may be the answer. Why? Beautiful, seamless experiences encourage people to do all the things we marketers hope they do: reopen, revisit, click, form fill, and so on. Conversely, if your content is more focused on informing and educating, scalable or fluid design may be all you need.

3. WHAT KIND OF CAMPAIGNS DO YOU GENERALLY RUN?

What type of campaigns do you typically run: simple and one-off, or longer-term and evergreen? Does your segmentation cast a wide net or does it target a narrow group of customers? The more emails and pages involved in a campaign and the more people you engage, the more likely it is that responsive design will have an impact on your metrics. You maximize the investment when responsive design is used in longer-lasting campaigns that reach many different customer segments.

4 RULES FOR THOSE WHO CHOOSE RESPONSIVE

If you do decide to build responsive content, here are four rules of the road to help you get started.

1. PLAN YOUR CONTENT AND LAYOUT CAREFULLY.

Remember: Responsive design relies on percentages, so assign and finalize these with your designers before you crack open the code and start developing the content. Also remember the axioms of any good marketing content: Start simple if need be, and understand you must test whatever you build.

2. TRY A TEMPLATE.

Eloqua offers several templates for responsive content that can help you hit the ground running if you don't know where to start. You can use these templates to experiment with responsive's bells and whistles, so you can launch better-looking content without expert help from a developer or designer.

3. CONSULT A DEVELOPER.

As great as templates are, they are naturally restricting in ways that disappear when developers or code-knowing designers are available to help you. These expert resources aren't available to every marketing team or organization, but if you can swing it incorporate their feedback into this process. Even paired with an out-of-the-box template, they can provide your responsively designed content with greater flexibility and fine-tuning.

4. SET YOUR EXPECTATIONS AND PICK YOUR BATTLES.

Since responsive content can render quite differently across different platforms, browsers, and even versions of browsers, focus first on optimizing for your key platforms and your main segments.

CHAPTER 3:
QUERY STRING THEORY: HOW USING QUERY STRINGS CAN IMPROVE YOUR CAMPAIGNS

Ever seen a question mark in a URL and wondered what it is? That question mark signifies the start of a query string, which is the part of the URL that separates the base URL from other elements added to it via a web browser or other client application after the server receives a request to process information. Another symbol, often an ampersand, can be used to separate multiple parameters in the same query.

Here is an example of a query string (with multiple parameters), which technically begins after the question mark and does not include it: www.relationshipone. com?src=Eloqua&cmp=Welcome

The "?" identifies where the query string begins. The "src=" and "cmp=" represent two different query string parameters. The characters that come after the equal signs, in this case "Eloqua" and "Welcome" respectively, are the query string values. The "&" shows the break point between parameters.

Why are query strings important? When a query program is triggered on a dynamic website, the website can provide content based on the data recovered from the query— triggering tailored customer journeys. Query strings can also be used powerfully in conjunction with reporting tools like Google Analytics and Omniture, where you can set up standard or customized parameters that track specific data about website visits. Teams can use this data to learn how effective different campaigns are with different segments and on different platforms.

Here are four valuable ways query strings can be leveraged in Oracle Eloqua.

1. WEB REPORTING

Just as website analytics tools use query strings, you can use Eloqua to look for and report on tracked URLs that are visited with specific query strings. In the Setup area of Eloqua, there is a Query String option within the Website category. (If you do not see this option, please consult with your Eloqua administrator about increasing your privileges to be able to view, create, and edit query strings.) Here you can configure Eloqua to track specific query strings that are being used in your page URLs.

If you're using a web analytics tool (like Google Analytics, for example), then you may want to start by setting up the same query strings that are being tracked by that tool. For example, if you use Google Analytics's basic campaign query strings (utm_source, utm_medium, utm_term, utm_content, and utm_campaign), then it might provide the fastest return on investment for you track these query strings in Eloqua to learn more about their impact on your marketing.

You can also customize query strings to make them specific to your marketing needs. At Relationship One, for example, we set up custom query strings in order to test how efficient text links are versus image links in our emails, based on which type is clicked more often. How do we do this? Simple: Every time we add a hyperlink to an email, we append a query string parameter of "type=" and then add a value of "image" or "text."

Next, using the Query String Value Overview report in Eloqua's Insight, we monitor the number of times that a URL with a specified query string parameter was visited. This enables us to determine the click-through rate and total number of visitors per hyperlink and text link, which in turn informs future decisions we'll make around how we present our emails.

2. FORM POPULATION

Do you know which digital ads are driving the form submissions in the marketing campaign you just launched? You can use query strings to capture the source of each form submitter. And best of all, capturing this data is a fairly straightforward four-step process.

STEP 1

Add a hidden field to your form that will capture the source as it is generated (which happens in Step 2 with programming language).

STEP 2

Add custom JavaScript to the landing page that houses the form (be it an Eloqua landing page or an external one). The JavaScript will do several things: look at the URL that is generated whenever someone visits the landing page; identify if and what query strings are part of that URL; parse the query string by parameter and associated value; and submit that value to the specified hidden form field (from Step 1).

STEP 3

Generate your custom URLs. For example: http://user.relationshipone.com/UtahEUGRSVP?source=Ad1 and http://user.relationshipone.com/UtahEUGRSVP?source=Ad2

STEP 4

Test. Visit each URL, submit the form, and validate that the query string value was passed with the form submission data.

3. WEBSITE PERSONALIZATION

Another Eloqua strong use case is using query strings to perform a web data lookup. This lookup can prepopulate form fields with already-known values, so customers have reduced friction when bypassing gates en route to content, and can field-merge data into a landing page in order to personalize it for the visitor.

Sound cool? It is. One client at Relationship One used this functionality in a direct mail campaign, sending a compelling offer with a USB flash drive included in the package. When recipients plugged in this flash drive, they were directed to a landing page personalized just for them. How? Each person who was direct-mailed in the campaign had a contact record in Eloqua; so, the flash drive could send people to a page that was generated by query strings that pulled known values from the contact record. With data lookup, the landing page could then dynamically populate with specific content related to each recipient's company, industry, and location.

Imagine that: receiving a bespoke digital experience through snail mail!

CHAPTER 4:
3 SIGNS YOUR COMPANY IS READY FOR A WEBSITE TESTING TOOL

Marketers these days have a ton of options when it comes to new technologies. We're regularly approached by sales reps telling us just what we need to optimize our digital efforts and solve our key issues. But adopting a new technology can be a slow and painstaking process: You need executive buy-in, knowledge of how it might impact other teams, and a cultural or technical audit to ensure it can even be implemented.

Is your organization ready for a website testing tool? At Relationship One, our first bit of advice is: Don't get one just because you think your competitors use one. Our second bit: Don't get one just because you think you need one! Neither scenario necessarily leads to valuable data results. Instead, consider the questions you'd like to answer about your site, as well as the problems you'd like to solve. Would testing your website give you answers and solutions to your specific pain points?

If the answer is yes—great. Here are three scenarios that might signal it's time for your marketing and optimization teams to start using a website testing tool.

1. YOUR BOUNCE RATE IS INCREASING AND YOU DON'T KNOW WHY.

What if you've done everything right—minimized funnel length, followed design best practices, and so on—but your bounce rate is still going up? If you're wracking your brain to pinpoint the reason why visitors are leaving your site, despite the fact you've put time, thought, and care into its content, delivery, and layout, consider running an optimization test with a strong testing tool.

"But shouldn't I have been testing all along? What if the 'best practices' I implemented weren't as 'best' as possible, given they weren't informed by testing?" Don't get hung up on this. Yes, the ideal scenario is rather postmodern: to always have already been giving visitors an experience you built from

hard-earned test results. But it's never too late! (And don't fall prey to investment fallacy.) If you start testing now, you can stop guessing and start using clear data to justify changes to your site. These justifications will matter to the executives who fund your ideas and to the creators who build them.

For example, if visitors keep bouncing from your Shipping Details page, testing will help you identify the root cause. Are your rates too high? Does your layout make the rates look like 'hidden costs'? Is it too hard for people to update their address? Finding the source of the issue helps you fix it and give users a better customer journey.

2. YOU HAVE TOO FEW PEOPLE TO CARRY OUT ALL YOUR WEBSITE IDEAS.

We all fight tooth and nail for development resources: the designers, copywriters, coders, socializers, and more who are the lifeblood of every website. With so much business in the digital sphere, teams constantly pressure these builders to deliver project after project—with each team suggesting its particular initiative is the one that really matters. All marketers have lived this resource nightmare, and it's just not sustainable.

Help out your colleagues! Run tests to both free up creatives' time and help them feel the weight, goal, and importance of their work. With cold hard data, you can better direct resources in the future and also show teams the value of their work. If your business is agile enough to accommodate regular site changes, tests can also help you prioritize—choose the mandatory changes, the ones you'd prefer but don't need, the ones you can ignore for now, and the ones you can forget.

In this way testing can make collaboration easier: revealing the data-driven rationale behind marketing's requests, and eliminating the asks rooted in unproven ideas.

3. YOU HAVE ENOUGH WEBSITE TRAFFIC TO YIELD CLEAR, MEANINGFUL DATA.

So, you've got a too-high bounce rate and a too-low number of website builders. Testing is the magic salve, right? Well—half-right. The other half is your own website traffic. Without enough visitors to your website, your tests won't yield data you can trust—and untrustworthy data is unusable data. (And if you have Big Data goals, "veracity" is one of the 4Vs!)

What's the right number of people? There isn't a set ratio of visitors per time frame that automatically means you'd get trustworthy results and should therefore start testing. Instead, this threshold must be examined on a case by case basis. How much traffic you need depends on the complexity of the tests you plan on running and how long you plan to run them.

We can, however, give two big definitives. 1) Oracle Maxymiser clients are suggested to receive an average of 10,000 visitors per month in order to take full advantage of that powerful testing solution. 2) The more traffic you have, the faster you aggregate data, which means the faster patterns can emerge in customer behavior. And you can, of course, parlay these patterns into revenue-driving decisions.

But don't be deterred from testing should your site have low-trafficked pages! With the right tool you can figure out how to push more traffic to that page, enabling you to test it later. Experienced testing vendors can also help you tweak your testing strategy, so even in low-traffic areas you can learn something new about your site, its segments, and its potential.

GO WITH DATA

The old owl from Schoolhouse Rock was right: Knowledge is power! The more you test, the more you discover about visitors' wants and needs. From there, the more capable you are to make data-driven decisions that lower the bad rates (e.g., bounce), boost the good ones (e.g., conversion), and unite other teams under marketing's vision.

And testing is just one part of optimizing your customer journeys! Once you start testing, doors open to segmentation, targeting, and personalization, which can inspire you to build experiences that are even more engaging.

It's your company's website, and a great deal has been invested in it. Strategize beyond instinct alone: Go with data, and make everyone grateful—from creative to the C-suite—that you've got numbers in your corner.

WRAPPING THINGS UP

A MARKETING GEEK'S GUIDE

Hurry! Take what you've learned in this e-book and use it to maximize your content's value and potential.

Make your website and emails render beautifully across all devices and screen sizes with mobile-friendly design—scalable, fluid, or responsive, as best suits your needs, team skill set, and resources. Use query strings to better track your marketing metrics and to personalize the online journeys of your customers. And take a good hard look at your organization—does it show signs of being ready for a website testing tool? If so, leverage your website's traffic and start answering the questions that can provide you with more data, more conversions, and down the line more revenue.

Please visit Relationship One online to find more content like this e-book and to get help from the experts if you would like to implement any of our advice.