



LANDING PAGE OPTIMIZATION: IT'S ABOUT PSYCHOLOGY NOT TECHNOLOGY

[Chapter 7 – Digital Minds v2]

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Introduction

"Advertising is the art of getting people to buy things they don't need with money they don't have." This statement predates the Internet by decades, yet still rings true today. While it might be a bit cynical, let's not forget that in the digital world people rarely stumble across a website without actively searching for something. If you have what people are looking for, it's your job to help them find it.

The problem is most websites and landing pages are so ill conceived and poorly constructed that they're little more than monuments to their owners.

Let's make something transparently clear: people do not read on the Internet, they scan. They see headlines, images and bullet points. Depending on the personality type of your visitor, you have between two and eight seconds to convince them to stay on your website. Searchers click in, take a quick peek, and click out. Those are the conditions in which business is conducted on the Internet.

And when it comes to the landing pages you're using to drive conversions for your online campaigns, you have to be even more strategic with how the page is laid out and reads to a visitor. So let's take a look at the elements that make for good landing page optimization.

Write Good Headlines

Since we all have a tendency to scan before we read, one of the few things that are guaranteed to be seen and actually read is the headline. A successful landing page is a combination of many elements, but if your headline fails, your entire landing page will fail. You need to spend more time on your headline than on any other element of your landing page.

"You HAVE to crap out 25 headlines for every piece of content"
-David Ogilvy

Your headline should be either clever, shocking or interesting. It should be focused, relevant and address your target audience's pain. The truth is any headline you come up with is some variation of one that has been used successfully multiple times over. Think of it as a formula:

- **The Secret:** The 5 Secrets of [Retail Success]
- **Be Done:** Be Done with [Procrastination] Once and For All
- **Need to Know:** What You Need to Know About [Training Your Cat]
- **Play on Words:** Urine Good Hands with PowerPlus! (about a generator that runs on urine)
- **You Can Have It All:** Now You Can Have [Financial Freedom...And Keep Your Job]
- **The Hush-Hush:** 5 Little Known Ways to Dominate [Your Office Cubicle]

You get the idea; there are scores of formula-driven examples out there. If you're having trouble coming up with something completely original, take a look at some of the headlines that got your attention, and play around with substituting your offer.

Headline Best Practices

Keep Your Headline to One or Two Lines: Remember, people aren't reading your headline, they're scanning it. It isn't body copy, it's an attention grabber at a glance.

Center Your Headline: This gives it the special emphasis it deserves. It stands out as important. DO NOT ever center body copy. Anything longer than two lines that is centered is harder to read.

Make Them Big: No BIGGER! Your Headline should be disproportionately larger than any other text on the page, not just the next font size up.

Make Them Bold? Maybe, maybe not. Depends on the overall size differential between the headline and the body copy and the font selection.

Use a Different Font: Reserve separate fonts for the headline and the body copy. You might try mixing serif and sans serif fonts.

Use Title Case: Make the first letter of each word capitalized. You can keep spacer words like "to" and "the" lower case to put more emphasis on the important words.

Quotation Marks: In some cases you might consider putting quotation marks around your headline to further make it stand out.

Use a Sub-Headline: Make it the same size as the body copy (or much smaller than the primary headline) and perhaps make it bold.

Ready to start scribbling down some headlines? Not just yet... Exactly who are you writing that headline for? Certainly not for yourself. You're writing it to appeal to your next best customer, and that customer should be a very specific person.

How Your Buyer Personas Play into Your Landing Page Strategy

We've already talked about the importance of establishing your buyer personas in our Content Marketing whitepaper. But your buyer personas come into play at every point of your digital marketing strategy, which means they are a critical component to the success of your landing pages as well.

If you're like most business owners, marketing managers or sales reps, you probably have your ideal customer pegged...at least in your head. But ask yourself this: is the image of your ideal customer an amalgamation of all your buyers rolled into one? If so, you are doing yourself a disservice and probably losing out on a lot of leads.

Sure, I bet your product or service is perfect for all sorts of consumers, but how do they know that? Unless you're able to appeal to them on their own terms, it's likely your message will go unnoticed.

How can you create a landing page that converts visitors into leads unless you know who you are trying to convert? To appeal to your customer, you need to first know their goals and challenges and address those specifically with your landing page copy and your offer.

Identifying personas means identifying who you want to reach. And where they hang out online. Once you know that, you can fine-tune your landing page(s) for your ideal customer(s). You may have more than one buyer persona, so you will want to prioritize. That might mean having different landing pages for each persona.

Here is an actual example of a buyer persona from one of our clients. As you read through "Suzie Shopkeeper" pay close attention to finer details of the persona. It doesn't have to be perfect, but the more detailed and specific your buyer personas are, the easier it will be to create highly targeted marketing (and landing pages) that will appeal to them.



Buyer Persona for: Suzie Shopkeeper

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Gender: Female

Age: Early – mid 40s

Income: \$4,000 - \$5,000 per month

Education: College degree

Location: Mid-USA

Roles: Business owner, wife and mother to three adolescent children.

Goals: Being a successful business owner and entrepreneur. She wants to find ways to help her become more efficient so she can spend more time with her family.

Challenges: She own and runs her own business. When she started her business she had to dedicate a lot of time to getting it off the ground but now she wants to strike a better work/life balance so she can enjoy watching her kids grow up. She's tentative to take a step back or change her standard business routine as she wants to still increase her overall sales.

Suzie's Story: After completing college she entered the workforce like everyone else and started a career in a typical nine-to-five job. Feeling like she had hit a plateau early on in her corporate

job she decided to take a risk and start up her own business and follow her passion to be an entrepreneur.

Driven by success, Suzie dove head first into getting her business off the ground. As her business developed, so did her family, as she started to have children. Suzie enjoys being her own boss and doing something that she loves but is still working the long hours she did at the start to keep the business growing. While that was fine when she was younger, now that she has a family she doesn't want to miss out on watching her kids grow up.

Suzie likes to maintain control in her life and is afraid that if she takes a step back in the business or changes how she does things (so she can spend more time with her family) that it may negatively impact the growth of her business. She needs to find a way to find balance between work and life, without feeling like she is losing control. While she has decent computer skills, she has just enough to get by and knows that there is much more she could be doing to help streamline her business overall, she's just not sure where to start.

Again, be sure to consult our April Whitepaper for more information on developing your buyer personas or you can download our guide, *How to Create Buyer Personas* at this link: www.wsiworld.com/buyer-personas.

Landing Page Campaigns

Sometimes a well thought-out marketing campaign requires multiple landing pages to move a buyer down the sales funnel. These campaigns typically start with a top of the funnel offer for people who aren't customers yet. They are in the awareness stage and can be nurtured through a marketing automation step-by-step process until they eventually become customers.

Example: Suzie Shopkeeper

We know from our buyer persona example above that Suzie Shopkeeper owns her own business and is looking for an edge to make her more successful and free up some time. For demonstrations sake, say we are business that sells point-of-sale (POS) software. We can help Suzie. She just doesn't know it yet.

The Primary Offer

On our landing page, we offer Suzie a free eBook called "Five Principles to Streamlining Your Business Operations." Since we wrote the eBook, naturally our services are baked into each of the 5 Principles and subtly branded throughout. On our landing page there is no navigation to other pages or any other distractions. The landing page is focused entirely on one low-risk offer that would be of interest to the Suzie Shopkeeper persona.

Suzie fills out the form (a very basic unintimidating form) and immediately three things happen:

1. Suzie gets the link to download the eBook in her inbox.
2. Suzie goes directly to the thank you page (the secondary offer)
3. Suzie is now in our database

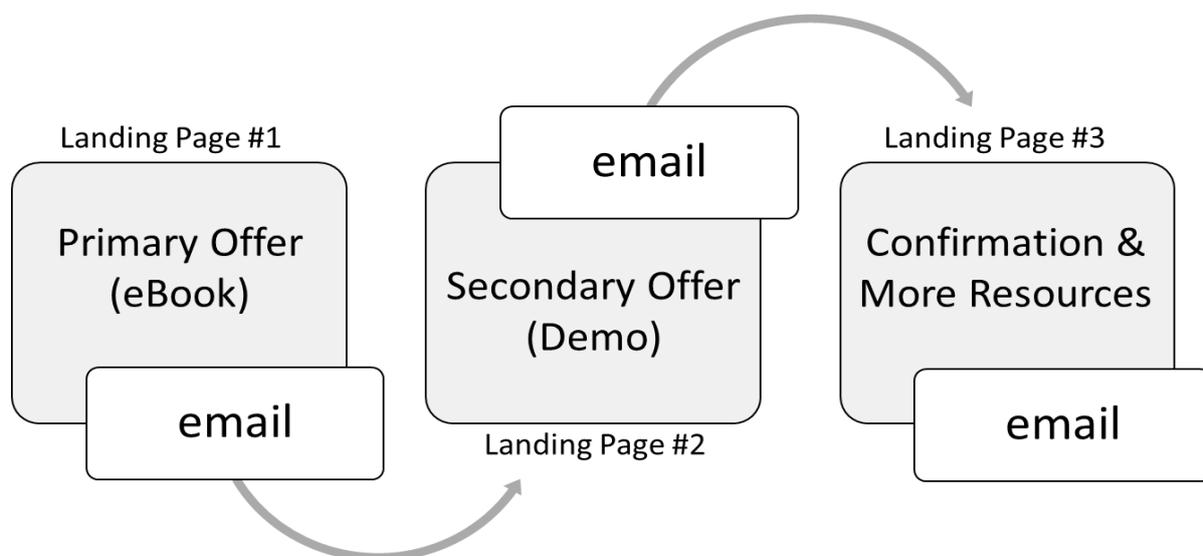
The Secondary Offer

The email not only has the link to the eBook Suzie requested, but it also suggests that she request a free demo of our software.

The "Thank You" page is more than good manners, the real purpose is to move Suzie farther down the sales funnel by making a strong case for requesting a demo of our product.

There is another form on the thank you page for her to request the demo. We decided to use a smart form so Suzie won't have to fill out any form fields that she already completed. The navigation has returned to the landing page in case she isn't ready to request a demo but wants to browse through our site.

If she does request the demo (our real goal) she will get the obligatory email acknowledgment and another thank you page with further instructions, along with other resources that she might be interested in such as blog articles or other eBooks we may be offering. We want Suzie to view us as an authority long before we do the actual demo.



If Suzie is content with her eBook and not quite ready for the demo, we're not worried... Suzie is in our database and will be hearing from us with the offer of the free demo again once she's had enough time to go through the eBook.

By the way, if we collected Suzie's phone number, why not give her a call to see how she enjoyed the eBook and see if we could be of any additional service?

Giving away free eBooks is great branding, but it's a top-of-the-funnel activity. The demo however is farther down the sales funnel because Suzie is requesting something of us, and it requires interaction with her. Spoiler alert...the secondary offer is the real objective.

Tips for Effective Landing Page Design

So what does an effective landing page look like? The simple answer is it can look however you want, as long as it contains some important and necessary elements. Here's a list of tips to creating an effective landing page while making it your own.

Define Success

In order to accomplish your goals, you have to know what they are. Is this an eCommerce website focused on transactions? Is the purpose to generate leads, or is it about branding, relationship building, or increasing your database through membership registration? A good marketer will often start at the bottom of the sales funnel and work their way up to the point where the visitor first enters the funnel.



Define Your Customer

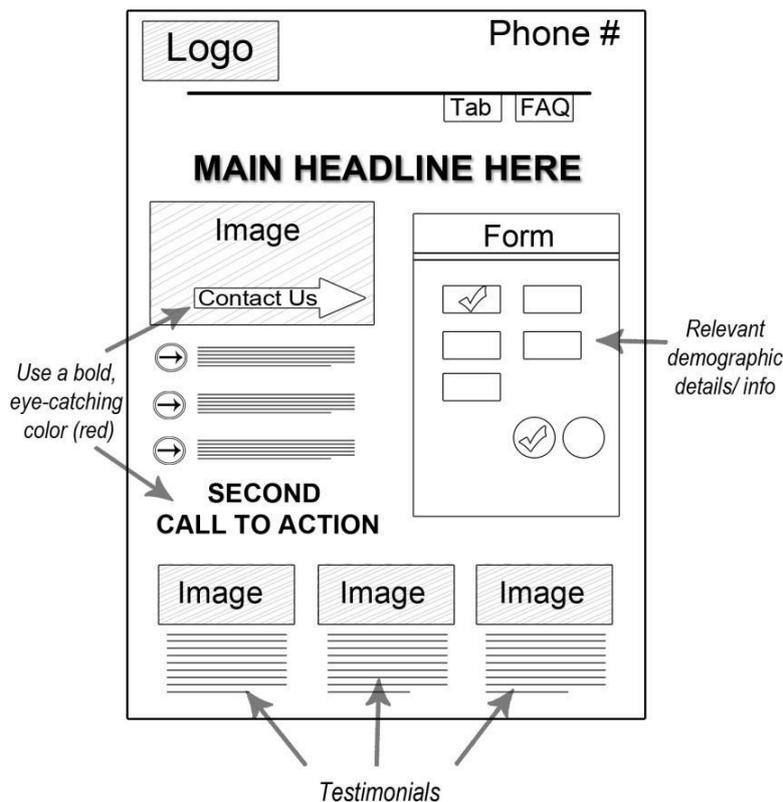
It's not about you. Many businesses feel compelled to tell their story to who they perceive is a captive audience. But there's no captive audience on the Internet. Check your ego at the door: it's just too easy for a visitor to leave and find what they really want. This is where you want to start designing your buyer personas.

Separate Domain Names?

Most businesses consider their homepage to be their landing page. That may be acceptable in some instances, but in most cases it's not always the best choice. Your landing page may be part of a microsite or single page with its own domain name. You might consider one or more vanity names targeting a specific product or service. That's particularly effective when the domain will be visible on items like printed material or PPC ads.

Wireframing

A wireframe is a sketch of a page layout. Start by listing all of the elements that go on the page and lay them out on a piece of paper. You should do this before you write the copy because the space available will dictate the amount of copy you have to work with. Make sure that you place the most important elements above the fold (the spot on the page where most visitors will have to scroll down to see more).



Copywriting

As we mentioned before, people don't read on the Internet, they scan. They see headlines, bullet points and graphics. It's important your headline refers back to what the visitor was looking at before they landed on your page. Only about 20% of your visitors will actually read the body copy (which should still be well-written).

Don't forget the call to action! You might test matching the call to action with the headline since that's almost certainly the one element on the page that you can be sure people will read.

Testing and Tweaking

This isn't an activity for your spare time. It's something that should be scheduled at regular intervals. Examine your metrics, make incremental changes and re-examine the effect. Don't make too many changes at once or you won't know what you did to affect the changes. Your testing and adjustments should match your original goals (transactions, lead generation, branding and education, relationship building, registrations, viral marketing).

Best Practices and Trends

Just search “*landing page best practices*” in Google, and a whole page worth of blog posts and articles will come up. So what do you focus on? We'll here's a list of the landing page best practices I feel are the most important ones to consider in today's consumer landscape.

Mobile

It's the first one on my list for a reason. Entire websites are now being designed for mobile devices first, and desktops as a consideration. The odds are very high that your landing page will be viewed on an array of different sized mobile devices as much or more than their desktop counterparts. Did you ever try filling out a tiny form with little buttons on a smart phone? Enough said.

Two-Step Opt-In Process

There is a growing trend towards removing the form from the primary landing page and persuading the visitor to click-through to proceed to the next step. The psychology behind this is to avoid the initial impression an opt-in form creates: that you are asking instead of giving. Clicking on the offer button triggers the form to appear, and by now users have decided they want your offer.

Targeting Specific Verticals

Creating a landing page for a specific industry allows you to use industry jargon and position your product or service to the way it would be used in that specific vertical market.

Targeting Decision Makers

This comes back to a well thought out buyer persona. In most cases your persona will be a decision maker. Don't count on an employee to bring your message to the attention of the person you are really trying to reach.

Retargeting

Just because the customer left your landing page doesn't mean they're out of reach. Many brands are using retargeting technology to start showing their banner ads to consumers who have previously visited their landing page. Why not? They've already shown interest in your product or they wouldn't have been there in the first place.

Testimonials

An oldie but goodie. Especially effective if you can drop the name of a recognizable brand.

The Halo Effect

You're only as good as the company you keep, and name dropping brand names that you service psychologically extends some of that prestige to you.

Flat Design

A trend that has been around for a few years, but a trend none the less. No shadows, gradients, beveled edges, reflections or textures. A very clean and simple two-dimensional design concept.

Descriptive Buttons

Sure, you can get lazy and use the good ol' "Sign Up" or "Click Here" or the reliable "Submit" to label your buttons. Your buttons should be viewed as an extension of our call-to-action and the trend (and best practice) is to use button copy that actually aligns with what the buyer wants: "Try it for Free" or "Start Your Trial Now!"

Contextual Imagery

Much like product placement on TV, there is a growing trend towards featuring products being used in real life situations instead of the product alone.

Video

No secret here. Video is creeping into every aspect of our lives from social media to, you guessed it - landing pages. Best practice is, and hopefully will always be, setting the video to be user-activated. Users want the illusion of being in control, and taking that away from them by force-feeding your media on them is just not going to help you get your message across.

Trends happen for a reason; either they have always been best practices in other media and are just catching up to digital marketing, or changes in technology (mobile and retargeting, for example) are redefining design and strategies.

Elements of a Landing Page

So how many elements need to be on a landing page? The correct answer is as many as necessary, no more and no less.

These are just some of the items that may go on a landing page. It's not meant to be a checklist of items that should be on every landing page:

- Logo
- Conversion Button
- Offer Explanation
- Headline
- Links to More Information
- Deadlines
- Descriptive Tagline
- Testimonials
- Technical Specifications
- Guarantees
- Dynamic Media

Copy Tips

- Use half the copy that you would use in printed material
- Landing page headlines should match the headlines that got the visitor to click
- Nothing more than needed, nothing less than needed
- Don't waste valuable real estate with a welcome message
- "You" and "your" trumps "we" and "our"
- People only read the first few words of bullets and paragraphs
- People read the beginning and end of lists, not the middle
- Keep your first few paragraphs short and inviting
- Alternate long and short paragraphs
- Paragraphs shouldn't be longer than four or five lines
- Numerals have more impact than written numbers

Campaign Killers

There are a number of common landing page mistakes that can ruin the hard work put into every other component of a digital marketing strategy. These campaign killers might seem like simple mistakes, but they have a negative impact on conversion rates (which means your bottom line suffers too!).

Here are the landing page campaign killers you need to avoid:

Too Much Text

As mentioned multiple times, people don't read, they scan. They see images, headlines and bullet points. You have two to eight seconds before potential customers decide to leave your page or spend some time on it. How much is the right amount of text? No more or less than you need to make your case.

Error Pages, Broken Links and Anything That Does Not Work:

Nothing diminishes confidence like a website that doesn't work. Even worse for landing pages because, unlike a website with multiple paths, a landing page has a very specific path down the sales funnel. Anything broken on the path becomes a dead-end.

Mandatory Form Fields

Consumers don't like giving up their personal info for fear of finding themselves on yet another list. Unless you're using required information to pre-screen submissions (where the cost of screening exceeds the value of capturing contact information) you're more likely to get a submission if you try to gather only the most essential information. There will be plenty of time to request their personal information and telephone numbers once you have their basic information and have established a relationship with them. As a general rule, the less you ask for, the more you'll get.

Reset Buttons

Have you ever intentionally used a reset button? Have you ever gotten so lost in filling out a simple form that you just give up and reset the entire form? No, of course not. At best a reset button is useless. At worst, a consumer may inadvertently click on it instead of the submit button and delete everything they just filled in. It's hard enough to get them to fill it in the first time, what are the chances they'll fill it in a second time?

No Email Privacy Information Next to the Email Field

Few people actually read a lengthy privacy policy, but most consumers are comforted when you do have one. The mistake is burying it deep on the page when you should be linking to it right at the point where they make the decision whether to submit your form.

Lack of Communication Choices

Everyone has their favorite communication method. Some people like to talk with a human being on the phone, and other people like live chat because of the spontaneity and anonymity. Others like the convenience of just filling out a form and shifting the initiative to follow-up to the merchant. There is statistical evidence that having a phone number as an option actually increases form submission simply because of the additional confidence that the merchant is accessible if necessary.

Inadequate Shipping and Pricing Information

No one likes surprises when it comes to money. Not making the consumer's price clear (including shipping and taxes) is a recipe for abandonment.

Too Many Links Leading to Too Many Destinations

Every parent learns that you don't ask a child what they want for breakfast. You ask them if they want Cheerios or oatmeal. You manage their choices. If you give them too many distractions they wander off the path. Keep it simple and focused.

Landing Page Development

In-House vs. Outsource

The biggest obstacle to in-house landing page optimization is a lack of resources. In mid-sized companies the marketing department is typically overloaded. In smaller companies, the owner or the staff, even if they have the right credentials, are too busy minding the core business.

Here are some of the considerations you need to evaluate to help you decide if you have the in-house capability to execute on your landing page strategy or if it may make more business sense to outsource to a professional.

Resources

It's tempting to try and do things yourself or assign it to existing staff. Take into consideration the true cost of doing it in-house. Are you diverting staff members from other necessary duties? Are you paying them to learn on the job when an agency or consultant may already have the know-how? You may indeed have the talent under your own roof, but be mindful of the true costs.

Aptitude

Most individuals are either left-brained or right-brained. That is to say technically or creatively inclined. Since a landing page campaign is a combination of creative and analytical, a technically oriented team or individual isn't likely to come up with the compelling creative, and the creative team may not be able to interpret the data. That applies to agencies as well as you and your staff.

Experience

Agencies may have strengths in both creative and analytics, however they may not have the full array of skill sets necessary to do it any better than you can in-house. Consider the traffic to your landing page. If your current levels of web traffic are insufficient, make sure you work with a consultant that can deliver traffic as well as conversions, either in full or in conjunction with your in-house team.

Conclusion

Landing pages are unique in that they are tied directly to a greater marketing campaign that undoubtedly represents a significant investment for your company. This is not the place to drop the ball and hand the assignment over to whoever has time to deal with it.

Landing page design is a marketing assignment that employs a great deal of psychology. A common mistake companies make is to assign the design of a landing page to their IT department or even their graphics department as a side job when it should be a focal point of their current marketing campaign.

This whitepaper is not intended to be a step-by-step handbook, but rather as a reality check for CEOs and business owners who are about to make an investment in their companies growth and profit.

25-Point Landing Page Checklist

- Does your headline say what the page is about and relate to your PPC ad?
- Does your sub-headline further refine your message?
- Is your landing page focused on a single purpose and persona?
- Could someone understand the message in 5-10 seconds?
- Does the visitor understand what they will get in exchange for contacting you?
- Does the copy focus on benefits rather than features?
- Are you using a unique image that tells the story? (no generic stock photos)
- Do you have an obvious call-to-action?
- Does your landing page look professional?
- Is your opt-in form visible without having to scroll down the page?
- Did you eliminate extraneous navigation from the page?
- Are you asking for the minimum amount of contact details?
- Is there continuity between your landing page and your advertising messages?
- Do you have a privacy policy link or statement near the submit button?
- Is your submit button more interesting than just "submit"?
- Is your landing page as focused as your elevator speech?
- Did you articulate the value of your giveaway item (whitepaper, discount, etc.)?
- Did you use trust icons and testimonials where appropriate?
- Did you offer multiple contact options (phone, email form, live chat, etc.)?
- Did you use light boxes (pop-outs) to offer additional information without the visitor having to leave the page?
- Are you using your thank you page to present a secondary offer to the visitor?
- Is your offer time-sensitive enough to create urgency?
- Are you creating separate landing pages to segment your leads? (PPC, display advertising, email, print, etc.)
- Have you designed your page as a template so that you can repurpose the page in the future?
- If you have a multi-step process, have you been clear about how long it will take to complete?
Example: take our two-question survey.

About the Author



Chuck Bankoff is an International speaker, author and trainer to Internet Consultants in over 8 countries.

With degrees in graphic design, digital electronics and an MBA from Keller Graduate School of Management, his areas of expertise are search engine marketing, social media management, website design, landing page design and conversion technologies.

Chuck holds a variety of digital certifications including Google Adwords, SEMPO, Hubspot and eCommerce from USC Marshal School of Business.

Chuck is based in Orange County, California, USA where he has been practicing digital marketing since 1999.

About WSI

WSI is a digital marketing company with a strong international presence. Our Digital Marketing Consultants use their knowledge and expertise to make a difference for businesses all around the world. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, we also have offices in over 80 countries. We're a powerful network of marketers who strive to discover, analyze, build and implement digital solutions that win digital marketing awards and help businesses succeed online.

Over the last 20 years, WSI has won multiple digital marketing awards for our solutions by adapting to the constantly shifting landscape of the Internet. We take pride in helping businesses make the most of the dollars they spend on digital marketing.

Ready to move ahead and discuss a project with a local Digital Marketing Consultant? Get in touch with one of our experts now by visiting www.wsiworld.com/get-in-touch-with-an-expert