

Hyde & Co.

— FREE RESOURCE · NO. V

The conversion *playbook*

Turning the visitors you already have into customers —
without buying more traffic.

Every claim graded by the evidence behind it: randomised experiment, observational study, benchmark count, or expert opinion. You will finish knowing what is **proven**, what is merely plausible, and which famous numbers are worthless.

FREE TO USE AND SHARE
COMPANION TO THE WEBSITE PLAYBOOK

AN AGENCY FOR BUSINESS OWNERS
ORLANDO, FLORIDA



Why this is the cheapest growth you have

Most businesses respond to "we need more customers" by buying more traffic. That is the most expensive option available, and it is usually the wrong one. Conversion work costs less, compounds, and makes every future dollar of traffic worth more.

The arithmetic

	TODAY	DOUBLE THE TRAFFIC	DOUBLE THE CONVERSION
Monthly visitors	1,000	2,000	1,000
Conversion rate	2%	2%	4%
Leads	20	40	40
What it costs	—	Double your ad spend, every month, forever	A few days of work, once

Same outcome, wildly different cost. And the second column keeps costing you money while the third keeps paying you. This is why conversion work should come before any increase in spend — not after.

Before you start: know your numbers

- How many people visit each month
- How many contact you — forms and calls, counted, not estimated
- What one customer is worth to you, roughly

Without those three you cannot tell whether anything you do next worked. Most of the disappointment in this field comes from businesses that changed things and had no way to measure the result.

A warning about the numbers you are about to read elsewhere. This industry runs on statistics with no traceable origin, most of them published by companies selling the solution the statistic recommends. The next page explains how to tell them apart. It is the most useful page in this playbook.

How to judge any Conversion claim

Four kinds of evidence get quoted as though they were the same thing. They are not. Learning to tell them apart takes ten minutes and will save you from most bad advice for the rest of your career.

TYPE OF EVIDENCE	WHAT IT CAN TELL YOU	TRUST
Randomised experiment A/B test, users split at random	That the change <i>caused</i> the difference. The only design that can establish this. Rare in published marketing content.	High
Observational study Regression on data that already existed	That two things move together. Cannot separate cause from effect. Fast sites and engaged buyers may share a cause rather than one producing the other.	Medium
Benchmark count "Average checkout has 11.3 fields"	What is typical. Says nothing about what performs better.	Medium
Opinion survey "Experts rank this factor #3"	What informed people believe. Useful. Not a measurement of anything.	Low

Three questions that filter almost everything

1. **Who paid for it?** A speed statistic published by a company selling speed tools deserves more scrutiny than one published by a university.
2. **What is the sample and the date?** "A study found" with no number and no year is not a study.
3. **Was anything randomised?** If not, you are looking at a correlation being sold as a cause.

QUICK TIP

When someone quotes a conversion statistic at you, ask one question: "Where does that number come from?" In our experience roughly four out of five cannot answer it. That single question will tell you more about who you are dealing with than any portfolio.

Before anyone can be persuaded, they have to understand what you are offering and believe they are in the right place. Most sites lose people here, before any of the clever work matters.

The five-second test

Show your homepage to someone unfamiliar, on a phone, for five seconds. Hide it. Ask them: what does this business do, who is it for, and where is it? If they hesitate, nothing further down the page will save you.

Where attention actually goes

Nielsen Norman Group's eye-tracking research — 120 participants and over 130,000 eye fixations — found **57% of viewing time above the fold and 81% within the first three screenfuls**. That is a meaningful change from their 2010 study, which found 80% above the fold. People scroll now. But attention is still heavily front-loaded.

The practical conclusion is not "put everything above the fold". It is: **the top of the page has to earn the scroll**. If the first screen does not confirm they are in the right place, the other 43% never happens.

A headline that works

The reliable structure is the least clever one: *what you do + who for + where*, in plain words. "Emergency plumbing repairs for homes across Winter Garden, seven days a week" outperforms "Excellence you can trust" every time, because the second one could belong to any business on earth.

Message match, when traffic comes from ads

Google's own advertising documentation instructs advertisers to choose a landing page that "closely matches your ad and keywords" and to "mirror the call-to-action in your ad text" — and this affects what you pay per click, not just how you convert. Separately, one large field test of 239,607 people found that matching the ad's image to the landing page's image produced a 47.6% relative lift. That is one test at one organisation, so do not bank the number — but the change is free.

A visitor who understands you and wants to act still needs to be told exactly what to do. This is where the most common piece of conversion advice is also the most misunderstood.

"Above the fold" is not the rule you think it is

The evidence does not support "your call to action must be above the fold" as a law. It supports something more useful: attention is front-loaded, people scroll when the top gives them a reason, and **a call to action placed before the visitor understands the offer can actively cost you the lead.**

In one Nielsen Norman Group usability study, six of eight participants clicked a "Get Started" button without realising they could scroll for information — and were dropped into a signup funnel before they understood what was being offered. One left for a competitor. Small sample, but a pattern worth recognising: a premature call to action does not accelerate the decision, it interrupts it.

What to do instead

- **One primary action per page.** Competing calls to action produce fewer of all of them.
- **Repeat it at decision points** — after the proof, after the pricing, at the end. Not every 200 pixels.
- **Say what happens, specifically.** "Get a free quote" beats "Learn more". "Check availability in your area" beats "Contact us".
- **Reduce the perceived cost of clicking.** "Takes two minutes, no obligation" removes the fear that a form is a commitment.
- **Give a lower-commitment option too** — a phone number for people not ready to fill in anything.

On button colour

The famous "red converts 21% better than green" finding is a single test on a single page from 2011 that was never replicated. Later work attributes any effect to *contrast* against the surrounding design, not to the colour itself. The rule worth following: your primary action should be the most visually distinct element on the page. Which colour achieves that depends entirely on your design.

This is the single best-evidenced area in conversion, and the one most businesses get wrong through simple over-asking.

The strongest finding in this entire playbook

A controlled experiment published at CHI 2014 — 65 participants, randomised, with eye-tracking, testing real registration forms — found that applying established form-usability guidelines **roughly doubled first-attempt success rates**. Across the three forms tested: 31% → 73%, 28% → 73%, and 69% → 88%. Completion time fell 18–33%.

This is a genuine randomised experiment, which almost nothing else in this field is. The guidelines it tested are unglamorous: clear labels, sensible grouping, helpful error messages, no unnecessary fields.

How many fields?

Baymard Institute's benchmarking found the average e-commerce checkout contains **11.3 form fields** (down from 12.7 in 2019), while their assessment is that most sites need around **8**. Note what that is and is not: a count of what sites do, plus expert judgement. It is not a measured conversion result — and no credible study exists giving an optimal field count for a lead form specifically.

So the honest rule is a principle rather than a number: **every field must earn its place by being something you genuinely cannot proceed without**. Ask for the rest on the call. "How did you hear about us?" costs you leads and can be answered by your analytics.

The rest of the form rules

- **Mark every required field explicitly.** Do not rely on a note at the top — people do not read form instructions. Marking the optional ones helps too.
- **Labels above the field** on mobile and short forms. Never use placeholder text as the only label — it disappears the moment someone types, and people forget what the field was.
- **Single column.** Multi-column forms cause skipped fields.
- **Radio buttons for two or three options**, not a dropdown.
- **Validate helpfully.** Say what is wrong and how to fix it, next to the field, not at the top in red.

HONEST GAP

Multi-step versus single-step forms is genuinely unresolved. We could find no credible research either way — every "multi-step converts 300% better" claim traces to a company selling multi-step form builders. This is a real candidate for testing on your own site rather than taking anyone's word.

The mobile reality

Between roughly half and two thirds of your visitors are on a phone, depending on your sector. Across 93 million form sessions analysed by Zuko, about half of everyone who starts a form never finishes it — and mobile completion runs consistently below desktop. Contentsquare's 2026 benchmark found desktop conversion 74% higher than mobile across its client base.

Some of that gap is intent rather than friction — people browse on phones and buy on laptops. But a meaningful part of it is your form being genuinely harder to complete with a thumb.

What actually goes wrong on a phone

- **The keyboard eats the screen.** A touch keyboard occupies roughly half the screen in portrait and up to four fifths in landscape. Your visitor loses all sense of where they are in the form and starts treating each field as an isolated task.
- **The wrong keyboard appears.** A phone number field that opens a letter keyboard produces errors and bad data. Baymard found 60% of the top 50 mobile-optimised e-commerce sites failed at least two of five basic keyboard optimisations.
- **Tap targets are too small or too close.** Fat-finger errors that a mouse never produces.
- **Autofill is broken** because the fields are not labelled in the way browsers expect.

The fixes, in order of value

1. Set the correct input type on every field so the right keyboard appears.
2. Use standard autocomplete attributes so browsers can fill the form — your developer will know these.
3. Make the phone number in your header tappable on every page. Some people will never fill in a form and should not have to.
4. Test it yourself on your own phone, outdoors, one-handed, in a hurry. That is the actual usage condition.

One caveat on autofill. Google's own documentation gives clear implementation guidance but contains *no* quantitative claim about autofill improving completion rates. If you see a blog citing "Google says autofill increases completion by X%", that figure is not in Google's documentation. Do it because it removes obvious friction, not because of a number.

Reviews: the best-evidenced trust signal

Two sources worth knowing, with very different strengths:

- **Peer-reviewed:** Chevalier & Mayzlin in the *Journal of Marketing Research* (2006) used differences between two retailers to isolate the effect, and found improved reviews raised relative sales — with **negative reviews carrying more weight than positive ones**. This is the strongest causal evidence in the area.
- **Large but observational:** Northwestern University's Spiegel Research Center (2017) found most of the lift comes from the **first handful of reviews**, and that purchase likelihood **peaks between 4.0 and 4.7 stars and declines toward a perfect 5.0**. Products that get reviews are products people already bought, so treat the size of the effect with caution — but the shape of it is consistent and useful.

Two practical conclusions: your first ten reviews matter more than your next hundred, and a flawless rating is not the goal. A handful of imperfect reviews with good replies reads as real.

Where to put proof

On the pages where people decide — the service page, next to the price, beside the form. Not on a separate "Testimonials" page, which almost nobody visits. Nielsen Norman Group's usability testing also found people are **more sceptical of testimonials hosted on your own site** than the same praise found elsewhere, so link out to the platform. Being checkable beats being polished.

Trust badges: an awkward finding

Baymard's research on payment security found that visually encapsulating card fields raises perceived security, and — uncomfortably — that **homemade and invented seals performed comparably to genuine SSL certificate seals**. Padlock icons, which are essentially decorative symbols, also increase perceived security. The honest reading: badges signal *care*, not verified safety. Baymard states plainly that their seal research did not measure conversion impact at all.

Photos of real people

Nielsen Norman Group's eye-tracking observed users scrutinising photos of real, identifiable people while ignoring decorative stock imagery entirely. This is illustrative rather than measured — no sample size was published — but it aligns with everything else here: specifics are believable, generic polish is not.

Speed is the most over-claimed topic in conversion. It genuinely matters. It does not matter in the way the popular statistics say it does, and knowing the difference protects you from being sold an expensive fix for a problem you may not have.

The best evidence that exists

Vodafone Italy ran a genuine randomised test: two versions of the same site, identical in look and function, differing only in performance work, with traffic split 50/50 across roughly 34,000 visits a day. **A 31% improvement in load time produced 8% more sales**, plus double-digit improvements in lead and cart rates. This is a real experiment, which makes it worth more than every correlational statistic in circulation combined. Caveat: it was published by Google, on Google's own developer site, and covers one company in one market.

The finding nobody quotes

The largest multi-brand study — commissioned by Google, run by Deloitte Digital across 37 brands and roughly 30 million sessions — found a 0.1-second improvement associated with 8.4% more retail conversions and 10.1% more travel conversions. For **lead generation, the same study found -1.9%**: no benefit at all.

That is the sector closest to most small business websites, and it is systematically omitted from the marketing that cites this report. The study is also explicitly correlational — it says so itself.

What to actually do

- **Fix genuinely slow.** If your pages take eight seconds on a phone, that is a real problem worth real money.
- **Stop chasing the score.** Going from a good result to a perfect result is engineering effort with little evidence behind it, and it is often sold hard.
- **Measure real visits, not lab tests.** Field data from actual users beats a synthetic score.
- **Compress your images first.** On most small business sites, unoptimised images are the entire problem, and fixing them costs nothing.

QUICK TIP

Google's own guidance on connecting speed to business results recommends server-side A/B testing and explicitly lists the possibility that "site speed really doesn't influence your business metrics" in some cases. When Google is more cautious than the agency quoting Google at you, that tells you something.

Someone who has used you for ten years and someone who saw an ad forty seconds ago need completely different pages. Sending both to the same one guarantees you underserve one of them.

WHERE THEY CAME FROM	WHAT THEY NEED FIRST	RIGHT PAGE TYPE
Searching your name	Contact details, fast	Homepage
Searching your service	Confirmation you do exactly this, proof, price sense	Service page
Searching a problem	The answer to their question, then a path	Problem/how-to page
Clicked an ad	The exact promise from the ad, restated	Matched landing page
Never heard of you	To understand the problem before the offer	Educational pre-sell page

Pre-sell pages: useful convention, weak evidence

The idea that cold traffic should meet an educational page — a guide, a "reasons people choose us" listicle — before a sales page is standard practice among direct-response marketers. We looked for credible research supporting it and found none: every source is a landing-page-builder blog or an affiliate marketer.

So here is the honest version: it is a widely-used convention with a sound logic behind it, not a proven technique. It costs a page to try, it is easy to measure, and you should treat any specific percentage attached to it as invented.

The structure that most pre-sell pages use

1. A headline promising specific value — "7 things to check before hiring a roofer"
2. A short introduction naming the reader's actual situation
3. Numbered points, each with a clear heading and a short explanation
4. Honest handling of the cost of doing nothing
5. One clear call to action at the end

Write the headings so that someone who reads only those still understands your value. Most people will.

Businesses spend months optimising the form and nothing at all on the ninety seconds after it is submitted — which is where a startling proportion of leads are actually lost.

The confirmation page

A grey "thanks" message that fades after three seconds leaves the visitor genuinely unsure whether anything happened. A real confirmation page should:

- Confirm plainly that it worked
- Say what happens next and **when** — "we call back within one business day"
- Give them something to do meanwhile: your phone number, a relevant guide, what to have ready for the call
- Exist as a real page with its own address, so you can actually count conversions

Response time

No change you make to the page will outperform replying quickly. The business that responds first usually wins, because the person who submitted your form almost certainly submitted two others. Decide who responds, how fast, and what they say — then measure it. An automatic acknowledgement that sets expectations buys you real time.

Test your own form monthly

Silently broken forms are the most expensive failure in this playbook and the easiest to catch. Submit your own form from your phone, with a real email address, and confirm it arrives — inbox, spam folder, and CRM. Put it in the calendar. Two minutes a month.

Count what matters. If you cannot say how many leads the website produced last month without using the word "probably", nothing else in this playbook can be evaluated. Form submissions and phone calls both need to be counted as conversions, not estimated from memory.

How to test without fooling yourself

Most small businesses do not have the traffic for statistically valid A/B testing, and that is fine — but it means being honest about what you are doing.

If you have low traffic

Do not run A/B tests. You will get noise and mistake it for a result. Instead: make one substantial change at a time, leave it in place for a full month, and compare against the same month-length period before. Write down what you changed and when. This is weaker evidence, and it is the honest version of what is available to you.

If you have the traffic

- **Decide the sample size before you start**, and do not look until you reach it. Stopping when the numbers look good is the most common way to generate a false result.
- **Change one thing**. Redesigning the whole page tells you the new page won, not why.
- **Run an A/A test first** — the same page against itself. If it reports a winner, your testing setup is broken and every result you have ever had from it is suspect.
- **Run for whole weeks**. Tuesday behaves differently from Saturday.
- **Expect most tests to show nothing**. That is normal and is not a failure.

Changes worth trying, roughly in order

1. The headline — largest effect, lowest cost
2. Removing form fields
3. Moving proof next to the decision
4. Making the call to action specific about what happens
5. Matching ad wording to page wording
6. Adding a lower-commitment option alongside the main one

QUICK TIP

Keep a simple log: what you changed, the date, and what happened. In a year it will be worth more than any industry benchmark, because it is about your customers rather than someone else's.

Numbers to stop repeating

Each of these is quoted constantly. Each one falls apart when traced to source. Knowing them makes you very hard to sell to.

"A one-second delay costs 7% of conversions."

A 2008 Aberdeen Group report based on a **survey of about 160 organisations' opinions** — not a measurement of behaviour. Sponsored by two web-performance vendors selling the fix. Eighteen years old, and the original press release contains a typo that makes the claim ambiguous.

"100ms of latency cost Amazon 1% in sales."

A conference slide from 2006 by a former Amazon employee. No paper, no dataset, never published by Amazon, never replicated. Same story for "Google found a 500ms delay dropped traffic 20%".

"Video on a landing page increases conversions 80%."

Every trail leads to a video advertising vendor. No study, no methodology, no sample.

"Personalised calls to action perform 202% better."

An internal analysis by a company that sells the personalisation feature being validated. No controlled test, no disclosed baseline, no statement of what was held constant.

"Reducing form fields from 11 to 4 increased conversions 120%."

Untraceable to any original study with a methodology or sample. Circulates purely as a blog anecdote. Use the CHI 2014 experiment instead — it is real, and it says something more useful.

"Companies with 30+ landing pages get 7× more leads."

Correlational marketing benchmark data. Larger, better-resourced marketing teams have both more landing pages and more leads. Publishing 30 pages will not produce the outcome.

"People have an 8-second attention span, shorter than a goldfish."

No original research exists. The goldfish claim has no scientific basis at all.

— IF YOU WOULD RATHER NOT TEST IT YOURSELF

We can find the leak, then *close* it.

Most of this playbook is work you can do without us, and the cheapest items on the list — testing your own forms, rewriting a headline — cost nothing at all.

When the fix needs building rather than editing, that is our part. **Hyde & Co. is an agency for business owners** — we build the asset and keep it working.

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- i.* We measure what your site actually converts today, honestly.
 - ii.* We identify the single largest leak, with the reasoning shown.
 - iii.* You decide whether to close it yourself, or have us do it.
-

No obligation. And we will not quote you a conversion lift, because nobody can honestly promise one.

[Book a consultation](#)

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WE BUILD ASSETS, NOT JUST WEBSITES

Sources, graded

Every substantive claim in this playbook, with what kind of evidence sits behind it. Where the evidence is weak, we have said so in the text rather than hiding it here.

USED IN	SOURCE	EVIDENCE
Part 3 Form usability	Seckler, Heinz, Bargas-Avila, Opwis & Tuch, <i>Designing Usable Web Forms</i> , CHI 2014. n=65, randomised, eye-tracking. First-attempt success roughly doubled.	Randomised experiment
Part 5 Speed	web.dev Vodafone case study — 50/50 randomised split, ~34,000 visits/day; 31% LCP improvement, +8% sales. Published by Google.	Randomised experiment
Part 4 Reviews	Chevalier & Mayzlin, <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> 43(3), 2006 — negative reviews outweigh positive.	Peer-reviewed
Parts 1, 2 Attention	Nielsen Norman Group, <i>Scrolling and Attention</i> (2018) — 120 participants, 130,000+ fixations; 57% above fold, 81% in first three screenfuls.	Observational (eye-tracking)
Part 4 Review effect shape	Spiegel Research Center, Northwestern (2017) — first reviews drive most lift; 4.0–4.7 sweet spot. Run with a reviews vendor.	Observational
Part 5 Speed at scale	Deloitte Digital & Fifty-Five, <i>Milliseconds Make Millions</i> (2020), Google-commissioned; 37 brands, ~30M sessions. Retail +8.4%, travel +10.1%, lead generation –1.9% .	Observational (vendor-funded)
Parts 3, 4, and mobile	Baymard Institute — checkout field benchmarks (11.3 average, 8 recommended), mobile keyboard failures, perceived security and seal research.	Benchmark + usability testing
Mobile page	Zuko form benchmarking (93M form sessions) and Contentsquare Digital Experience Benchmark 2026. Vendor data, self-selected samples.	Benchmark
Part 2 Premature CTAs	Nielsen Norman Group, <i>"Get Started" Stops Users</i> (2017) — 6 of 8 participants. Small qualitative sample.	Qualitative
Part 1 Message match	Google Ads Help, <i>Optimize your ads and landing pages</i> ; NextAfter field test (2016), n=239,607, +47.6% relative lift.	Guidance + single field test
Part 4 Design credibility	Fogg et al., Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab (2002) — n=2,684; design cited in 46.1% of credibility comments. Self-reported, and 24 years old.	Survey (dated)

NEXT IN THE SERIES

The Website Audit Scorecard will tell you which of these areas is costing you most. *The Copy Kit* gives you the actual words for the headlines and calls to action described in Parts 1 and 2.

This playbook is free to use and share.
The only goal is better websites and better results.