THE ANATOMY OF A HIGH-CONVERTING FORM

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How can we get more people to fill out our form?

As marketers, we spend countless hours fine-tuning our messaging. We craft beautiful landing pages and ads to persuade people to use our products and services.

But, after all of our hard work, we’re often plagued with less-than-ideal conversion rates. In my experience, forms tend to be one of the biggest roadblocks holding back a website’s conversion potential.

This was most evident for me in 2015 when my team and I calculated that one of our forms was costing us over $74,424 in lost business per year.

Since then, we’ve built and tested hundreds of forms, picking up insights along the way on what works and what doesn’t. We’ve filled this guide with some of the most practical learnings that you can apply to boost your leads.

I hope that the insights in this guide provide you with the inspiration and knowledge you need to upgrade the forms on your website. In doing so, you will not only capture more leads – but also improve the experience for all of the people that invest their time on your website every day.

All the best,

Marcus Taylor
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Why do people fill out forms?

When was the last time you filled out a form for fun?

Never, right? We all fill out forms to achieve outcomes that we either want or need. Whether we’re applying for insurance, a university degree, or a software demo, forms are the bridges that separate us from where we are, and where we’re trying to get to.

Yet, most organisations see forms as an after-thought, resulting in forms that are akin to the rickety bridges on Indiana Jones.

In this guide, I’ll walk you through how to build a modern form that not only results in more leads for your organisation, but also a better experience for your users.

It all starts with motivation.
Chapter 1

Motivation

People fill out forms to achieve an outcome. The motivation to achieve this outcome is one of the most important factors impacting your form’s conversion rate.

Imagine, for a moment, that your website’s contact form asked people to answer 50 questions, taking over an hour to complete.

Now imagine that you had the same form, but you offered everyone who completed it a red Ferrari F430, for free.

Despite no change in the form, your conversion rate will shoot through the roof when you start giving away free Ferraris. While extreme (and not recommended…), this scenario highlights the impact that motivation has on a form’s conversion rate.
The Anatomy of a High-Converting Form

The Form Optimisation Pyramid

After studying thousands of high-converting forms (those that convert above average in their industry), I’ve found that there are five contributing factors that determine how effectively a form will convert visitors into leads.

These are outlined in the Form Optimisation Pyramid:

When you climb a pyramid, you start at the bottom. As you can see here, motivation is the foundation of our pyramid.

Without motivation, it doesn’t matter how beautiful, easy to use, or engaging your form is. If people don’t want or need the outcome of your form, they won’t fill it out.

So, how do we motivate people to fill out our form?
Take vs. Give and take

Most forms just take, take, take.

Think back to the last time you enquired about a service. You may have had to fill out a long form, only to be told ‘Thanks! We’ll be in touch within 24 hours’.

But some forms give and take. They give you something valuable in return for your information – perhaps a free consultation, a free proposal, a whitepaper, or a free introductory session.

Case study: +743% leads using ‘Give and Take’ forms
VentureHarbour.com upgraded from a generic WordPress contact form that simply asked visitors to submit an enquiry, to a Leadformly form that offered visitors a free digital marketing proposal in return for their information.

Result: The form’s conversion rate increased from 0.91% to 8.1% (a 743% increase in leads)
Call to action value

For some strange reason, most companies leave forms up to the imagination of their IT or development teams.

In my opinion, anything that may result in up to 750% more leads (as we saw in the previous example), should absolutely be led and overseen by the marketing team.

One downfall of the IT-led approach to forms is using motivation-crushing call to actions like ‘submit’.

A useful technique for writing compelling call to actions is to finish the sentence ‘I want to…’ from the perspective of your users. For example, an agency might use the call to action ‘get my free proposal’, as it finishes the sentence ‘I want to… get my free proposal’.

This is sometimes referred to as a ‘call to value’ as it tells the user what value they’re going to get by submitting the form, as opposed to asking them to complete an action.
Chapter 2

Ability

Have you ever been stuck filling out a form because it had an unreadable captcha image that you had to type out? Or perhaps after filling out all of the questions, the submit button wasn’t working? In this section, we’ll explore how to ensure that your form doesn’t have any roadblocks preventing your visitors from using it.
Ditch the Captcha

A study by Stanford University found that captchas (those annoying boxes that ask you to prove that you’re a human) can reduce form submissions by up to 30%.

When Animoto removed captchas from their form, their conversion rate increased from 48% to 64%. While captchas may be bad for your conversion rate, how do you eliminate them without being bombarded by spam?

Honeypots.

A honeypot blocks spam by displaying an invisible field that only bots will ‘see’ and fill out, giving them away and blocking their submission.

We use this technique in Leadformly forms, as it prevents 99.99% of spam submissions for our clients without altering the user experience of the form for real people.
Are your forms accessible for the disabled?

According to the NSIP, approximately 1 in 5 Americans have a disability. The trouble is, few companies invest the time to make their forms usable for people who may be visually impaired, deaf, or have trouble using a keyboard.

The fonts in your form should be above 16px in size, to ensure that they’re readable by those with reading difficulties.

Your forms should be understandable without colour (to be colour-blind friendly).

You should also be able to complete your form using just a keyboard. Finally, it’s recommended that your form’s HTML is marked up using the correct input types, as many text-to-speech readers (used by the disabled) rely on this HTML markup in order for forms to be accessible.
Chapter 3

Peace of Mind

Friction and anxiety are created wherever there’s a disconnect between your users’ expectations and reality. For example, if your form asks for a person’s phone number, and they don’t want to be called, this will create friction – resulting in fewer conversions.

In this chapter, we’ll explore how to minimise friction in a form and instead create peace of mind for our users.
Should I trust this website?

Trust is often created at a subconscious level. We trust websites that look professional, use large amounts of social proof, and familiar signs indicating that we’re dealing with a real company (e.g. a phone number and address).

You wouldn’t hand over your sensitive personal information to someone you didn’t trust, and it’s the same online. As such, if you want high conversion rates, you need to ensure that your overall website experience evokes a sense of trustworthiness.

Case Study: Toptal.com

TopTal’s form is surrounded by client logos and guarantees like ‘risk-free trial’ to reduce friction and create a feeling that this is a trusted website. The form is also well-designed, which adds to the feeling that this a professional and trustworthy company.
The right way to ask for sensitive personal information

Some questions create more friction than others.

Dan Zarella from Hubspot analysed 40,000 landing pages, and identified that forms asking for a phone number or address resulted in fewer leads than those that did not.

Most people dislike being on the receiving end of an unsolicited sales call or direct mail campaign. As a result, many people will abandon a form that asks for these fields, unless it makes sense to them (e.g. you need an item to be shipped to your address, or you’re arranging a telephone consultation).

If you need to capture this information, do so in a way that does not create friction. If the user feels like it’s going to be used for unsolicited marketing, you’re going to be missing out on leads.
“Every field you ask them to fill increases friction. The best thing you can do to improve conversions is to get rid of as many fields as possible.”

Peep Laja
Founder, ConversionXL
Chapter 4

Ease

The easier your forms are to complete, the more leads you will capture. In this chapter we’ll explore how to make your forms easier to use by optimising the types of questions fields you use and the design of your form.
“Don’t make me think” – Steve Krug

When Microsoft changed their shutdown prompt from a clickable icon to a dropdown box they found that fewer people were shutting their computers down – just because of an additional two clicks.

This highlights the importance of choosing your question fields carefully. At Leadformly, we’ve found ‘image select’ questions like the Microsoft shutdown icon example to be a better alternative to dropdown fields.

Our brains process visual images significantly faster than text. Making it easier for people to quickly interpret and answer the question.
Reduce visual fixations with a one-column layout

I’m often asked why virtually all Leadformly forms have a one column layout.

According to research by Google’s UX team, a simple one-column layout reduces the number of visual fixations (eye movements) required to interpret the form. This is illustrated below – on the left, we have vertically-aligned field labels, which requires five visual fixations to interpret.

The form on the right asks the same questions, but requires twice as many visual fixations to interpret, because your eye has to zig-zag from left to right.

Fewer visual fixations result in faster form completion times.
Chapter 5

Engagement

People enjoy using tools and filling out quizzes, but they tend not to enjoy forms. But aren’t online tools and quizzes just a type of form? In this final chapter, we explore how to make your form more engaging and fun to use.
What separates a form from an interactive form?

Interactive forms and tools, like Hubspot’s Marketing Grader, convert exceptionally well – often in the 40-60% range.

Meanwhile, generic lead capture forms typically convert around 3-5%. Why such a large difference?

Quizzes and interactive forms are fun. They evoke curiosity, instant gratification, and a sense that you’re going to discover something new that’s personalised to you. Generic forms on the other hand are quite the opposite – we expect a long wait time to hear a response, and so there’s very little curiosity or excitement when filling out a form.

Consider adding an element of instant gratification to your form by giving people something valuable as soon as they complete your form. Rather than dull text fields, experiment with engaging and highly-visual question types, like image select questions.
Upgrading your forms today

Your forms impact the results of every online marketing campaign you run. Without forms, there are no leads.

So far, we have seen how upgrading forms can result in a 200-750% increase in leads. An increase that you’ll benefit from every month, for a one-off improvement.

On the next page, I’ve included a checklist that you can use to evaluate the forms on your website. You are welcome to use this checklist as a brief for your developers to work through, if you’d like to make these improvements yourself.

Alternatively, if you’d rather upgrade your lead capture forms sooner, I’d love to invite you to try Leadformly – a tool that we built to make it easy for marketers to build high-converting forms, without the hassle or cost of doing it yourself.

All of our form templates are ‘pre-optimised’ with all of the form design best practices mentioned in this guide, so you can start seeing an increase in leads quickly. We offer a conversion uplift guarantee, so you either get more leads or your money back.

To get started with a free trial visit leadformly.com

If you have any questions, feel free to email support@leadformly.com. Otherwise, I hope this guide and checklist serves as a useful resource for your organisation.

Marcus Taylor,
Founder & CEO, Leadformly
Form Optimisation Checklist

The following checklist includes many techniques that we’ve found to increase form conversions from studying and testing thousands of forms at Leadformly.

1. Motivation
   □ My form offers a tangible and compelling outcome
   □ My form provides value instantly / quickly (e.g. an instant download)
   □ My form’s call to action implies value (e.g.
   □ My form does ask for sensitive personal information on the first step
   □ My form asks questions over multiple steps
   □ There are no distractions or competing call to actions near my form.

2. Ability
   □ All fonts in my form are at least 16px (ideal for short-sighted users)
   □ My form can be completed on all major browsers
   □ My form can be completed on all major devices (phone, tablet etc.)
   □ My form can be understood without colour (colour-blind friendly)
   □ My form does not use too much validation
   □ My form can be completed with JavaScript disabled in the browser
   □ My form can be completed without a mouse (using the tab key)
   □ My form uses contract to ensure clear visibility under bright light
   □ My form uses a light background to ensure clear visibility in low-light
   □ My form has been translated in all relevant languages
   □ My form does not have flashing elements (that can trigger a seizure)
   □ My form uses correct HTML mobile input types
3. Peace of mind

- My form has testimonials & social proof in close proximity to it
- My form has contact information within view
- My form does not ask any non-essential questions
- My form clearly displays how many steps/questions there are
- My form clearly displays a progress bar (if it’s multi-step)
- The website my form is hosted on looks professional
- My form looks modern and well-designed.
- All likely concerns & objections to filling out my form are tackled in close proximity to the form (perhaps with an FAQ).

4. Ease

- My form uses question field 1 or 2 clicks to complete.
- My form uses smart defaults, such as using the user’s IP address to suggest his/her country.
- My form uses visual cues such as icons within question fields.
- My form can be filled out using browser auto-fill.
- My form uses a one-column layout.
- My form asks questions that are clear and do not use jargon
- My form displays help icons where jargon is unavoidable
- My form uses conditional logic where relevant
- My form has labels above each question (top-aligned labels are up to ten times easier for the brain to process than left-aligned labels)
- My form splits questions into clear sections or steps where relevant
- My form’s question fields are at least 48px in height (the Android recommended height for mobile tap targets)
5. Engagement

- My form gives users instant value when they complete the form
- My form is personalised to each user
- My form uses visual question types