Why Ad Campaigns Fail Early

Idea In Short

Before you redesign a landing page for a campaign that converts poorly, check who is arriving and why. Audience, ad message, placement and traffic source shape most of what happens after the click. Pick one outcome that matters, such as a sale, sign-up or lead, set a limited test budget and keep the page and offer constant. Then compare sources on cost per acquisition [CPA] and revenue per visitor instead of cost per click [CPC]. Give each test enough time to collect data, and scale a source slowly only when its visitors pay for themselves. Cheap traffic can still be useful when you measure it against business results, and a page rebuild makes sense only once the right people are already reaching it.

An ad can bring plenty of clicks and still generate almost no results. When that happens, the landing page usually gets blamed first. Marketers change the headline, call to action [CTA] or design. But the problem may start earlier, with the audience or the ad placement. A click doesn't always mean real interest. Someone may click out of curiosity and leave as soon as the page opens. Those visits are still considered traffic, but they won't lead to a lead or sale.

The landing page gets blamed too quickly

Marketers tend to focus on the landing page when there is a low conversion rate. They alter the headline of the blog, change out the call to action or start a new design. But sometimes there is nothing wrong with the page itself. The problem may be the traffic coming to it.1

The 1% conversion rate is not particularly significant when analyzed alone. You need to understand the source of traffic, why they click on the link and what they do after they land on the page.

Where campaigns lose users before the landing page

There are several points where a campaign can lose potential customers before they even

see the page.

- The audience may be wrong: Targeting a large group does not mean reaching the right audience. People can click an ad without having any real interest in the product. This happens often with broad targeting and campaigns built around cheap reach
- The ad may create the wrong expectation: A creative that promises a discount, feature, result or offer has to match what users find after the click. If the landing page doesn't match what the ad promised, people will leave pretty quickly.2 You may get the click, but that doesn't mean you've brought in someone actually interested in the offer
- The placement matters too: Traffic from different placements can behave very differently even when the cost looks similar. One source might bring visitors who read several pages. Another might deliver a large number of very short sessions
- The campaign may be optimized for clicks instead of results: A low cost per click [CPC] looks good on a report.3 It does not tell you whether those visitors become leads or customers

Cheap clicks can still be useful

Low-cost traffic is not automatically useless. It just needs to be measured properly. For example, popunder ad networks can provide a high volume of relatively inexpensive visits. Looking only at the initial cost can make the traffic seem attractive, but the useful numbers come later. Do visitors stay on the site? Do they visit another page? Do they sign up? Do they return a few days later? And, most importantly, does the traffic generate revenue?

The same applies to other less conventional sources. A traffic source may have a higher bounce rate than paid search and still make sense for a particular offer.4 Another source may look excellent because it delivers cheap clicks but produce almost no meaningful actions.

These are the metrics that depend on the campaign, but some good starting points are conversion rate, cost per acquisition [CPA], revenue per visitor and returning users. For some businesses, assisted or delayed conversions also matter.

A first visit is not always the whole story. Someone might see an offer, leave, and come

back later through another channel.

How to test an ad network without killing the campaign

Testing a new traffic source does not need to be complicated. Work through these steps in order:

1. Pick one conversion that really matters to the campaign: that could be a sale, sign-up, lead or app install. Don't use clicks as the main goal just because they are easy to track. Then set a limited test budget. There is no reason to scale a source before you know how its visitors behave
2. Keep the landing page and offer consistent while testing, where possible. Changing five things at once makes the results difficult to read
3. Give the campaign enough time to collect useful data, too. A small number of early conversions can make a source look much better or worse than it really is
4. Compare traffic sources using the numbers that matter to the business. If higher acquisition cost traffic pays for itself in longer retention time or higher spending, then it is a better choice. Consider real results, not the cheapest clicks. If the numbers make sense, start increasing traffic slowly

The question to ask before redesigning your landing page

A landing page still matters. But a redesign should not be the automatic response to weak campaign results.

Ask a simpler question first:

> are the right people reaching this page?

Look at the audience, ad message, placement and traffic source. Check what visitors actually do once they arrive. If the traffic has little interest in the offer, changing the button color probably will not solve much. The landing page is one part of the campaign. It gets the blame because it is easy to see. The problem may have started several steps earlier.

- 1Does traffic quality still matter?
- 2Information scent: how users decide where to go next
- 3Cost per action
- 4Engagement rate and bounce rate

Summary

Good landing pages cannot turn every visitor into a customer. Traffic quality has a direct effect on what happens after the click. So when a campaign underperforms, check the source before rebuilding the page. The problem may not be what users see when they arrive. It may be why they arrived at all. Start with the audience, the promise the ad makes and the placement it runs on. Then compare traffic sources by the results that matter to the business, such as cost per acquisition [CPA], revenue per visitor and returning users. A redesign belongs after that evidence, not before it.