

The Eight-Fold Path to Conversion Nirvana

Once you've identified the pages you wish to optimize, it's time to figure out exactly what needs to be optimized. The following checklist will help you with this.

- **Single Conversion Goal**
 - Does every page in your sales funnel have a primary call-to-action?
 - Can the purpose of the page be understood by a typical visitor in less than five seconds?
 - Is the intended goal of the page clearly spelled out in a headline?
 - Is the purpose of the page clearly visible "above the fold"?
- **Eyeline**
 - Do the shapes and colors of the page clearly lead the eye to the desired call-to-action?
 - Are you using no more than two columns in your page layout?
- **Anxiety**
 - Are you asking for data the visitor may not want to give?
 - Are you offsetting the user's anxiety with a payoff?
 - Can you use testimonials?
 - Can you use third-party trust seals to improve credibility?
- **Length**
 - Is the page copy of the appropriate length?
 - Are there ten or fewer form fields on the page?
- **Friction**
 - Are there too many elements on the page?
 - Are there too many links or navigation elements?
 - Is there sufficient white space on the page?
 - Are you using a font appropriate for your visitors?
 - Are form fields aligned with one another?
 - Are links and buttons used appropriately?
 - Are you asking for unnecessary information?
 - Do the labels on form fields clearly convey what is required of the visitor?
 - Are you limiting the use of Flash or other third-party technologies?
 - Can you use AJAX to eliminate unnecessary page reloads?
- **Congruency**
 - Does the page look similar to the ones immediately before and after it?
 - Is the page hosted on a third-party domain?
- **Load Time**
 - Does the page load in under five seconds in both Internet Explorer and Firefox?
 - Is the page size under 150k?
- **Incentives**
 - Can you use incentives to boost response rates?
 - Is your incentive something that would be useful to your ideal customer?

Eyeline

Eyeline is the path that your visitors' gaze (and mouse clicks) naturally follow as they skim a page. It is guided by the use of color, contrast, and visual interest. Through careful use of these elements on your pages, you can subtly direct visitors to your desired action.

To see where the eyeline leads on a page, start at the top left of the page and follow the line of color. On most sites, the logo is found in the top left corner and after years of training, most of us begin reading there (of course, if your visitors read from right-to-left, you would start at the upper right.)

Here are three examples. These were all taken from the mortgage industry to illustrate how looking at competitive sites within a given category can help to uncover important principles (see Chapter 27 for more on using competitors' websites to help your own campaign.)

The eyeline on this page from Mortgage Marvel (Figure 1) starts at the top left. From there it proceeds downwards, into the photo. Photographs are often used for the purpose of directing eyeline due to the high visual interest, color, and contrast. From the bottom of the photo, it proceeds right into the "action area." This small colored box consists of three fields which the visitor fills out to receive their mortgage quotes.

The image shows a landing page for Mortgage Marvel. At the top left is the logo, which says "MORTGAGE Marvel". To the right of the logo is the tagline "The Only Way to Shop for Low Mortgage Rates!". Below the tagline is a three-step process: 1. Compare mortgage rates, 2. Choose the best rate, 3. Apply online, get immediate approval. Below the process is a form with three input fields: "Loan Amount:", "Property Value:", and "Property Zip Code:". To the left of the form is a "Start Here" button. To the right of the form is a "Get Quotes NOW!" button. Below the form is a "PRIVACY & SECURITY PROTECTED" badge. At the bottom of the page are logos for ARVEST BANK, Commerce Bank, MainSource Financial Group, citimortgage, Inc.500, FUTURE 50, BBB ACCREDITED BUSINESS, and VeriSign Secured. A testimonial quote is at the bottom left, and a "Privacy Policy | Terms of Use" link is at the bottom left. A copyright notice "© 2007 Mortgagebot LLC" is at the bottom left. A "ABOUT SSL CERTIFICATES" link is at the bottom right. Two large red arrows are overlaid on the page: one pointing from the logo down to the photo, and another pointing from the bottom of the photo right to the form.

Figure 1 The eyeline on this landing page leads from the logo, through the photo, and into the action area.

This next page from E-Loan (Figure 2) uses the same technique. The eyeline starts at the upper left, follows the dark blue bar to the right, and then jumps down into the "No Hidden Fees, Great Rates" headline. From there, the eyeline jumps to the yellow button below the action area.

E-LOAN RADICALLY SIMPLE™

Home Mortgage and Refinance

No Hidden Fees, Great Rates

Fed Cut Rates! Take Advantage Now

- Borrow up to 100% of your home's value
- Lock in a great fixed rate
- Approval in minutes
- Perfect credit not required
- Get cash back when you refinance

Get a Quote Now - No Obligation

Buy a Home

Loan Amount

Property Location

Go

Or call 1-888-375-1790

- 🏆 E-LOAN Rated #1 in Web Excellence for Mortgage
- 🏆 E-LOAN wins TRUSTe privacy award
- 🏆 E-LOAN is an "Upfront Mortgage Lender"

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Figure 2 E-Loan used a similar technique on this page.

Again, here's still another example (Figure 3) of how to put this technique in action in a slightly different manner. The photo anchors the gaze at the top left, while an orange arrow, dark blue navbar, and orange button serve to direct visitors where they need to go.

The advertisement features a dark blue background. At the top left, there is a photo of a smiling couple looking at a stack of money. To the right of the photo, the text reads: "Compare adjustable rate mortgages from reputable banks and lenders. Choose the lenders you trust." Below this is a three-step progress bar: "Step 1" (highlighted), "Step 2", and "Step 3: See Your Lenders!". A large orange arrow points from the top left towards the "Act now to refinance your home" text. Below the arrow is a form with three dropdown menus: "Loan Purpose" (set to "Refinance"), "Property Type" (set to "Single Family Home"), and "Desired Mortgage Type" (set to "Any"). An orange "Continue »" button is positioned below the form. To the left of the form, under the heading "The RMI Difference", are five bullet points: "Only direct lenders: no mortgage brokers", "No broker fees", "The right loan for your needs", "No obligation", and "It's free!". At the bottom, there are logos for "BANKMORTGAGESOLUTIONS, LLC.", "CHASE", "NORTH AMERICAN SAVINGS BANK", "Charter One", "Franklin Bank", and "Quicken Loans". A footer contains links for "About Us", "Privacy Policy", "Terms and Conditions", "Licensing", and "Send Us Your Comments", along with a copyright notice for 2008.

Figure 3 A third example of how to use eyeline to direct visitors to the action area.

Finally, this page from Xerox (Figure 4) was put together with little thought given to eyeline. Starting at the upper left, the visitor's eye is dropped at the navbar and abandoned, as neither the headline or "start saving" button have sufficient contrast or interest. Not only do these elements blend into the page, they are competing with the bright, interesting photo off to the right.

The page could be improved dramatically by moving the photo to the left of the copy area and increasing the contrast of the headline and button (Figure 5.) I'd expect to see a 20-30% increase in clickthrough rate from these changes.

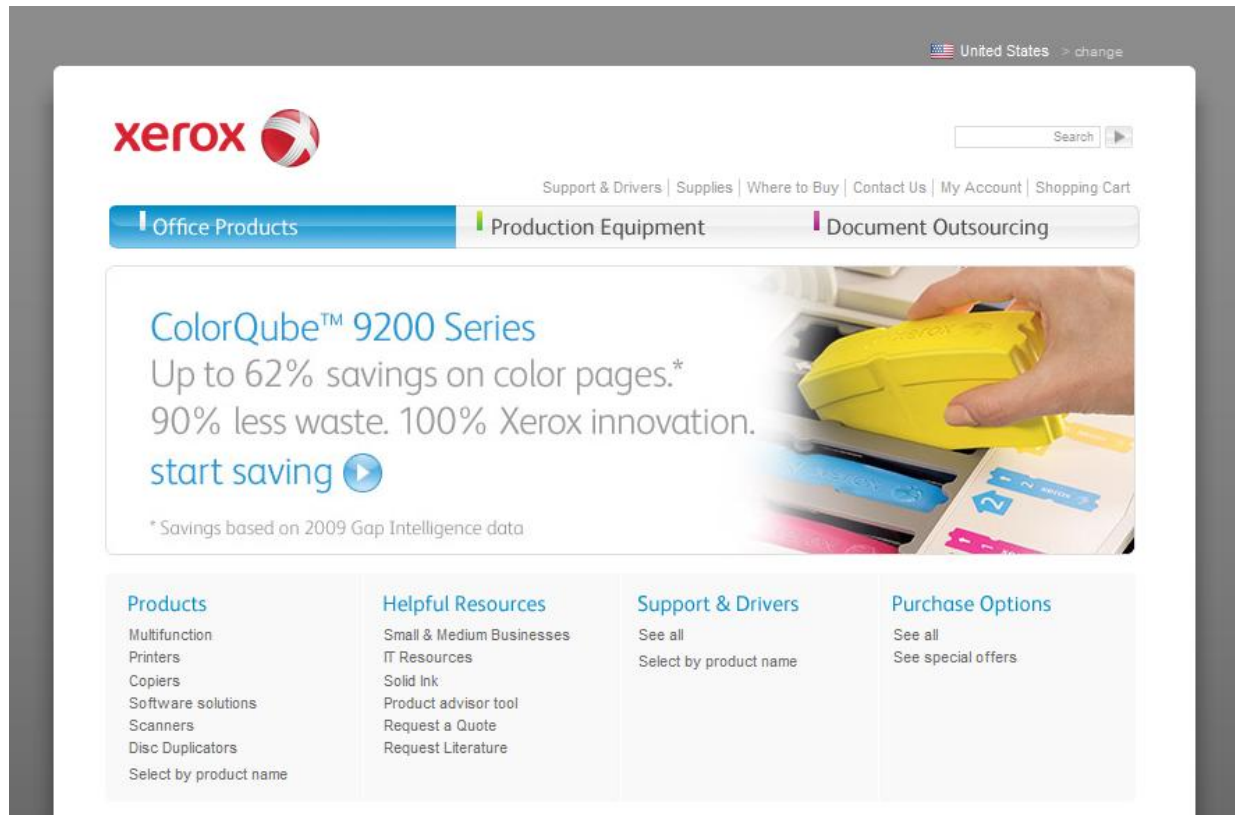


Figure 4 This landing page from Xerox does not use eyeline to good effect, but could be improved dramatically with just a few minor tweaks.

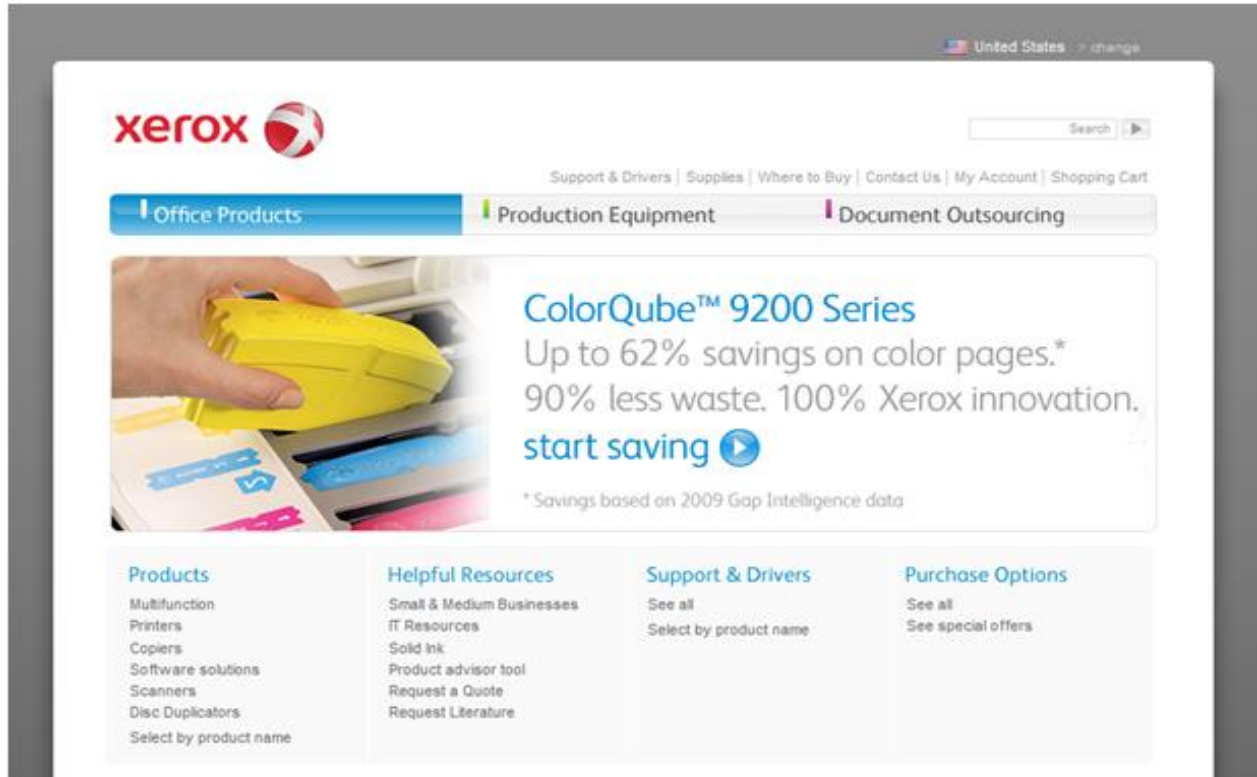


Figure 5 Here's the same page with a few minor changes. Notice how the "Start Saving" button is much more prominent now.

It takes a fair amount of practice to be able to correctly spot the path of least visual resistance through a page, so many companies opt to have their pages tested by usability labs. These labs produce heat maps, graphic visualizations of where their visitors are paying the most attention:

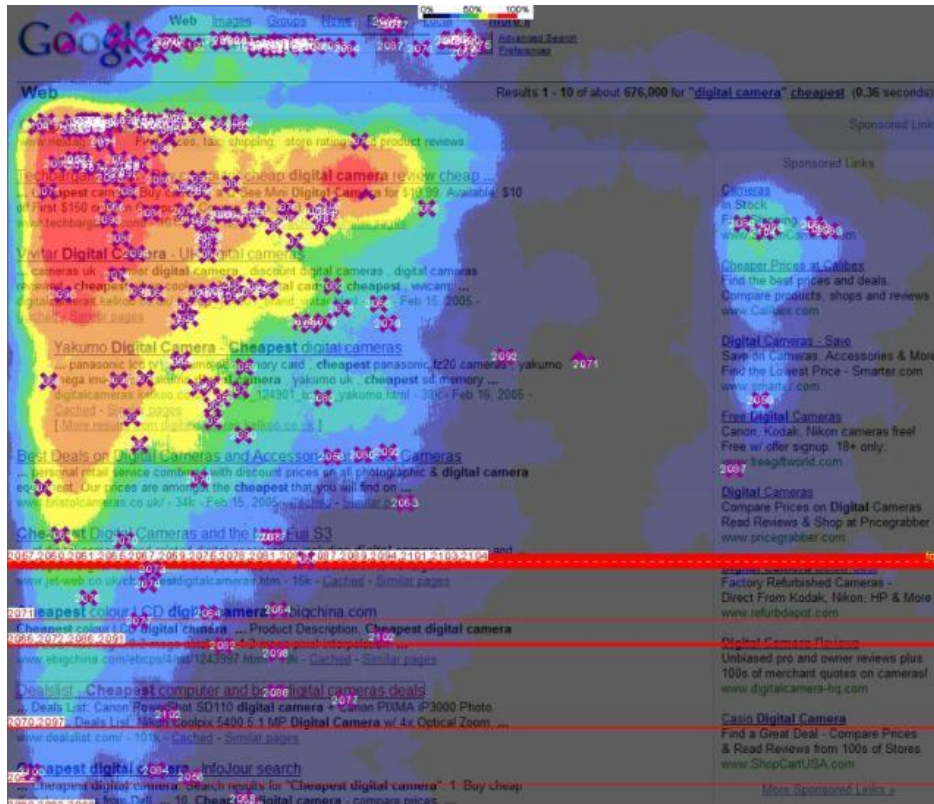


Figure 6 Heat maps are a useful tool to see where your visitors are looking (and clicking.)

This type of study is rather expensive, so years ago I created a software package that could track both mouse movements and clicks on my pages. While it couldn't track where users were actually *looking*, this information still proved incredibly valuable in my testing efforts.

Today, you can do the same thing on the cheap with a tool called *CrazyEgg* (www.crazyegg.com). This service starts at \$9/month, putting it within reach of virtually every website.



Figure 7 CrazyEgg is an inexpensive tool you can use to generate click maps, an inexpensive substitute for heat maps.