

ABCs *of* CTAs

Supercharge your conversion rate
by crafting the perfect
Call-To-Action

thousand+

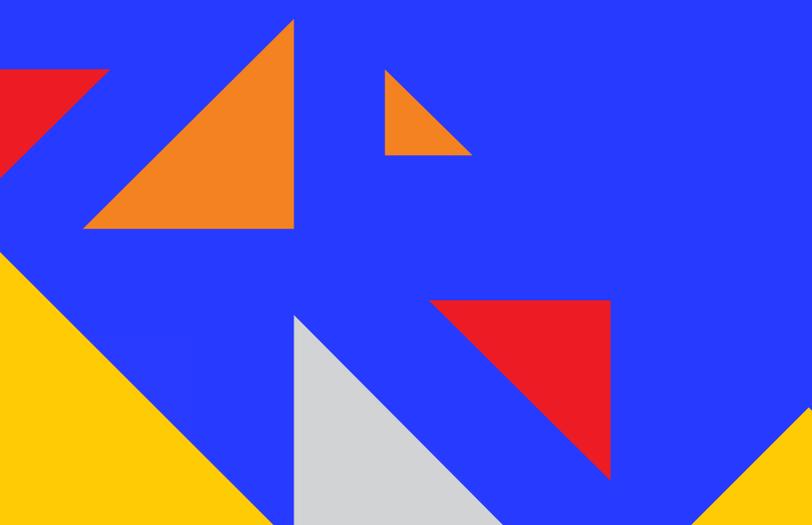


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How much power does a mere button hold?

You probably have a hard time remembering a moment where you clicked a button because of its colour or text. The button, carefully engineered with shadows to signify depth, didn't mean anything to you as your mind busily fixated on the end product.

Knowing this, you'd be quite justified in doubting the impact of these subtle changes. "What's the point of having a perfectly optimized call-to-action?" you might be thinking. "People won't click on it anyway if they aren't interested, and if they are, they'll still click if it were the ugliest CTA in the world."

And you have a point. CTAs don't exist in a vacuum; far from it. But even if you aren't aware of it, they *do* influence your behaviour.

When you naturally gravitate towards clicking something, it's a sign that the CTA is working. You aren't distracted by surrounding clutter, unsure about where it'll lead you, or struggling to find it in the first place. But when you're the user, that frictionless decision is usually undetectable. Only when a roadblock appears—mental or otherwise—do you break out of the spell.

In the marketing world, designing your call-to-action to be as effortless as possible can go a long way. In this guide, we'll discuss how to write, design, and place your CTA so you can convert as many people as you can.

What is a Call-to-Action (CTA)?

More than just a button, **a call-to-action is anything that tries to get you to do something.** That commercial that invites you to visit their website, for instance, or that persistent telemarketer urging you to buy their discounted cable services (limited time only!). Online, you'll see phrases like "Click here!" or "Download Now!" vying for your attention. To say the least, CTAs are everywhere.

In this guide, we'll be looking at the CTAs that inhabit the digital sph Specifically,

- In a blog post:
- In an email:
- Lead generation on your website: e.g. collecting emails, get a quoteere.
- E-commerce: add-to-cart, checkout
- Sharing something to social media

- Sign up/Log in

Finding a formula that applies to all these contexts is no easy feat, as each medium has its own unique characteristics. What we aimed to uncover is a general principle that underlies every CTA. Though useful, it's important to remember that this approach sacrifices some detail that may only apply to your specific situation.

Anatomy of an Irresistible Call-to-Action

A CTA has three elementary components:

1. **The text:** The text, also known as copy, tells the reader what they should do next. The message could be as short as a word ("Download") or as long as a sentence ("By the way, if you enjoyed reading my article, please like and comment down below!").
2. **The design:** Design can make the CTA stand out, signify that it's a link or button, and give it a unique edge. For the aforementioned blog CTA, you don't even need a design!
3. **The integration:** Integration is stepping back and looking at the relationship between the CTA and its surroundings.

In the following section, we'll go over each one in detail.

The Text

How do you write something that gets people to click? It's a question that seems to have no answer, yet it has a direct impact on your company's survival. While there's no right or wrong answer, let's explore some things that are proven to work.

Here, we'll cover some strategies for crafting an unambiguous, benefits-focused message, as well as some approaches to framing the message in an inviting way.

Leave Out the Ambiguity

Yes, even a seemingly trivial feature such as the text on a button can influence the success of your CTAs. You wouldn't click on a button if you didn't know where it led, would you?

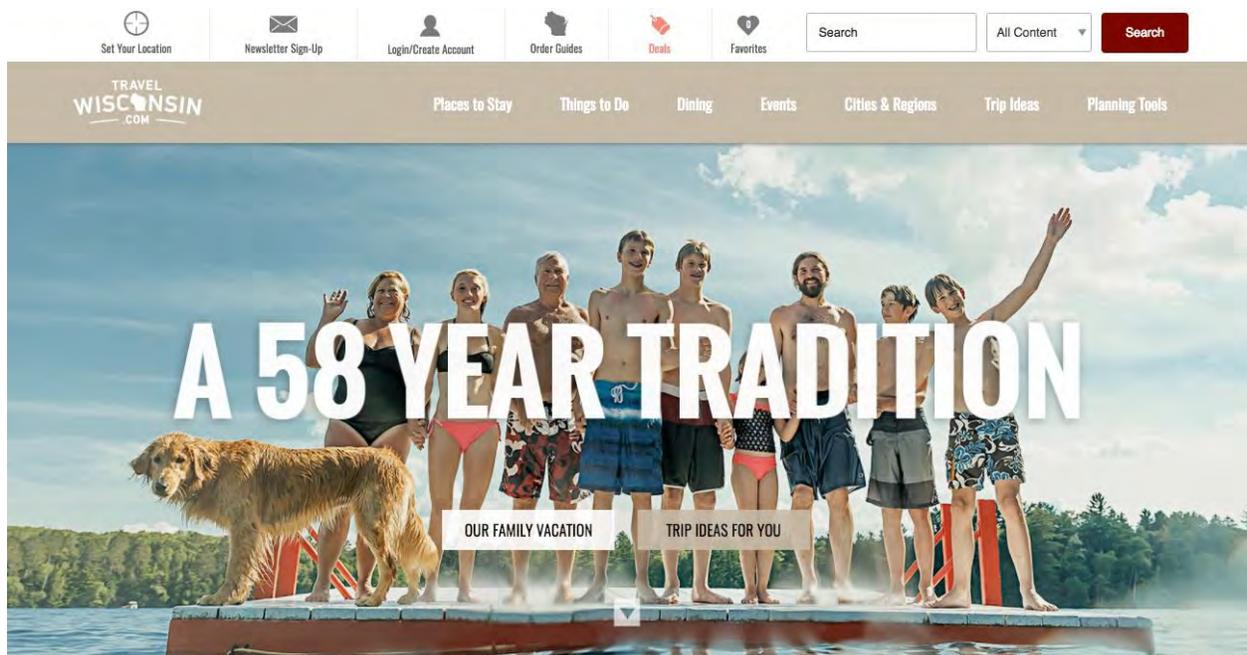
As a minimum requirement, it should be crystal clear what people should expect when following through on a CTA. This means using simple language and being straightforward about the button's purpose.

Be action-focused

Secondly, make sure your CTAs revolve around something actionable. This can be something the user does (Sign Up, Learn More, etc.), or a benefit they receive (Get Your Free Guide).

Notice how all of these examples include a verb in them.

To illustrate my point, let's look at Travel Wisconsin's two main calls-to-actions: "Our Family Vacation" and "Trip Ideas For You". Neither one is actionable or contains a verb.



Let's start with the first one. As the user, I don't really know what "Our family vacation" means for me. It's like if someone came to you and said "My biggest fear" or "Yesterday's spaghetti dinner". Because they're just describing something irrelevant, you regard it with passivity or confusion and don't think much of it.

Now let's make it more action-oriented, replacing "Our family vacation" with, say, "Read our story". Now that guy that taps on your shoulder to say a vague phrase is instead inviting you to do something. How much more meaningful is that?

It isn't hard to see how this minor shift in wording transforms the way you view the button, but the benefit is more subtle in the second CTA, "Trip ideas for you". That's because you have a clearer idea of what it's about.

But although there's no ambiguity here, it's not really inviting me to click. Rather, it just states the fact that they have some trip ideas for me. I'll put it another way: of the two statements below, which one makes you want to do something?

1. Come eat this delicious cake I made for you
2. I made some delicious cake for you

If you're like me, you expected to eat cake in the first statement, while in the second one, responding might've been at the forefront of your mind, or something else. Maybe you rightfully assumed that your friend wanted you to eat the cake, but it takes some additional effort on your end. For the marketer, you don't want to take that chance.

Let's now turn the statement "Trip Ideas For You" into an actionable invitation: "Discover Your Next Trip" or maybe "Explore Trip Ideas". Now, you're not just being told the availability of these trip ideas, but you're being encouraged to go check them out.

So how do you turn your stale statements into something more actionable? Here are some sample verbs to help you get started:

- Shop
- Discover
- Learn
- Explore
- Get Started
- Create
- Join

Take a User-Centric Approach

For this next section, it's important to remember that every user who visits your website doesn't *have* to be there. If they get disinterested at any time, they're one click away from switching to another tab.

That's why it's incredibly important to tailor your CTAs to your dear viewer. There are a number of ways to do this, such as making the conversion process effortless, but in the context of the text on a button, we've highlighted two: Changing second-person words to first-person, and phrasing your language to stress the benefits the user will receive.

A [study by Unbounce](#) found that by changing CTAs from second person (you, your, yourself) to first person (my, mine, myself), they were able to consistently produce higher click-through rates. In fact, in one test where they changed "Start your free 30 day trial" to "Start my free 30 day trail", they saw an astronomical improvement of 90%!



Now I've said before that calls-to-action are more effective when they contain a verb, but not all verbs are created equal. Words like "Submit", "Contact" or "Book" make people lethargic just thinking about the barriers they have to face before getting what they want. [Copyhackers](#) call these **friction words**, defining them like so:

"Friction words are words that describe things people have to do—not things people want to do."

CTA buttons that reduce friction highlight the rewards people get rather than the work they have to put in. For example, by replacing "Submit" with "Get started", or "Book your next flight" with "Find your next destination", you're steering their attention away from filling in a form or booking a flight and emphasizing what they'll be getting in return.

To elaborate, here are some examples of words that entail high, medium, and low friction:

Friction Level	High	Medium	Low
CTA Treatment	Avoid	Use selectively	Target these
Message Conveyed to Visitor	Will need to expend energy/time/money	Benefit, but potential work involved	Benefit; minimal work involved, if any
Sample Words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Buy ● Complete ● Submit ● Book ● Schedule ● Contact ● Request 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Find ● Join ● Learn ● Share ● Start ● Switch ● Visit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Check Out (not to be confused with "Checkout") ● Discover ● Earn ● Get ● Reveal

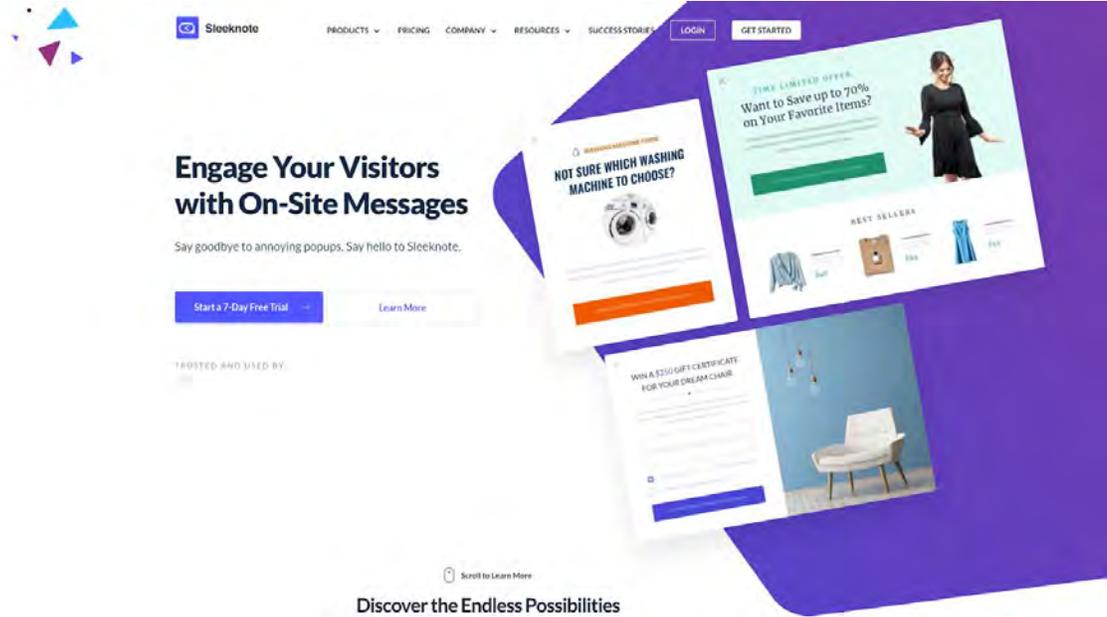
Design

Now we move onto the design aspect, a more complicated component of your CTA. Not only do you have to optimize your chances for conversion, but you also need to establish your brand image, think about what implicit and explicit messages you want to communicate, and keep it pretty in the process.

But though there’s a lot to talk about—colour, size, typography, layout, etc—we’re only going to touch on the things that directly impact your conversion rate. This includes choosing the best colours and positioning your CTAs.

Positioning: Where to Put the CTA?

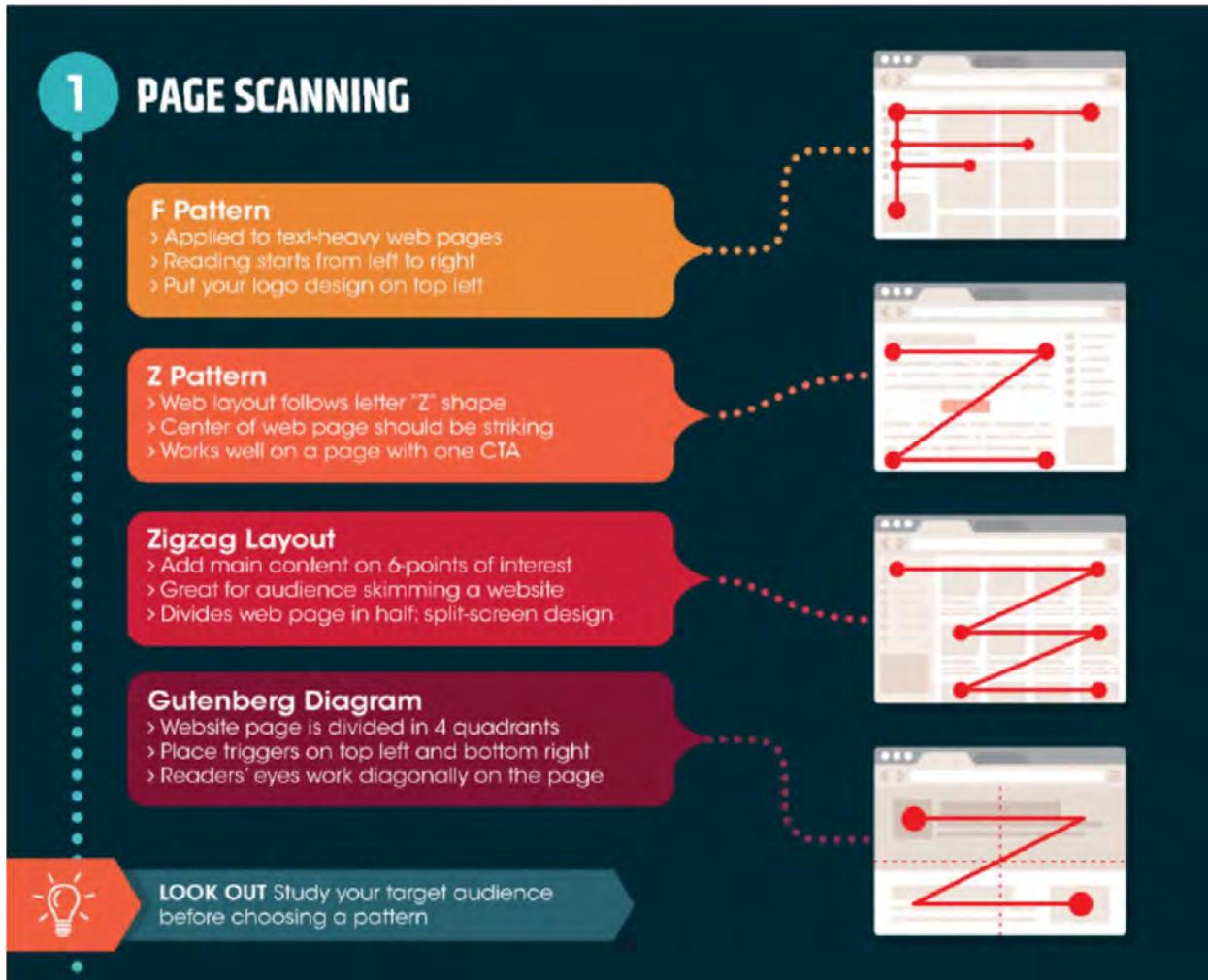
Did you know that website visitors spend nearly [80% of their time](#) above the fold? This is the area of the screen you see without having to scroll down, like in the picture below:



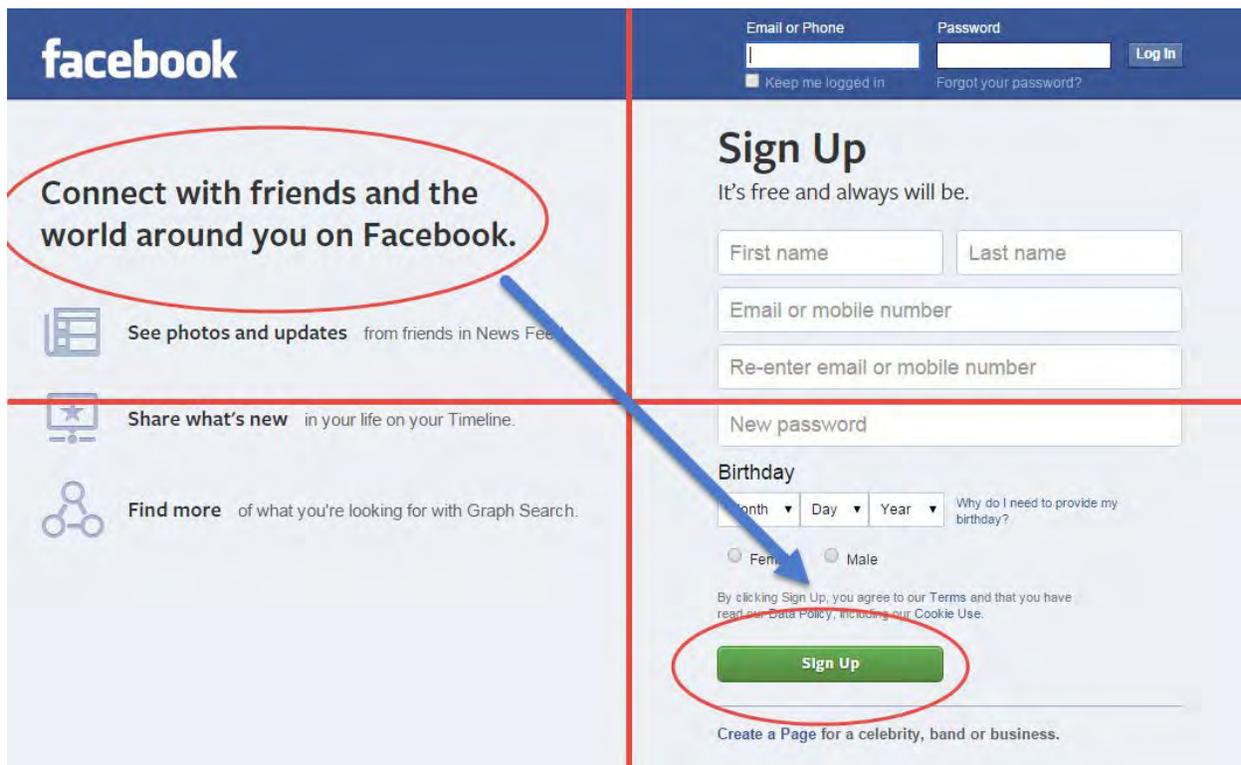
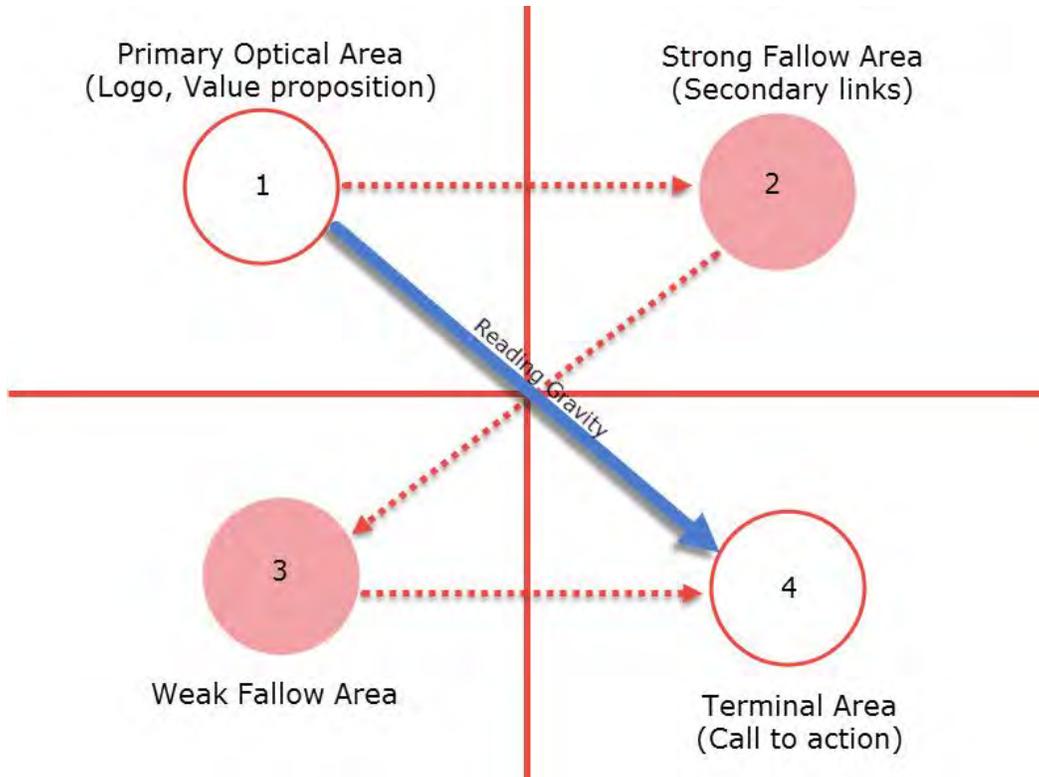
What this implies you've probably already guessed. Place your primary call-to-action above the fold! If people have to scroll to find it, they're probably not going to bother.

But here follows another question: *where* above the fold should I put my button? In an eye-tracking study, researchers set out to answer this question by measuring how long it took for someone's gaze to fixate on an "Add to Cart" button and how long it took to click. Keep in mind, however, that their goal was to optimize the shopping process on e-commerce stores, not to find a general formula to apply to every situation.

Before we get into it, let's first take a step back and see where people tend to look when browsing web pages. When users look at anything from a text-heavy site to a checkout page, they typically follow one of four scan paths. Below is part of an [infographic by ZillionDesigns](#) briefly going over them:



We're going to focus on one of the scan patterns, the Gutenberg Diagram, specifically because it has a special place for the call-to-action button. The diagram divides the web page up to four quadrants, shown below.



What the researchers found was that for websites that supported the Gutenberg pattern and had their “Add-to-Cart” button on either the strong fallow area or the terminal area, people found

and clicked on the button earlier. When placed elsewhere, users found their attention drawn to other things.

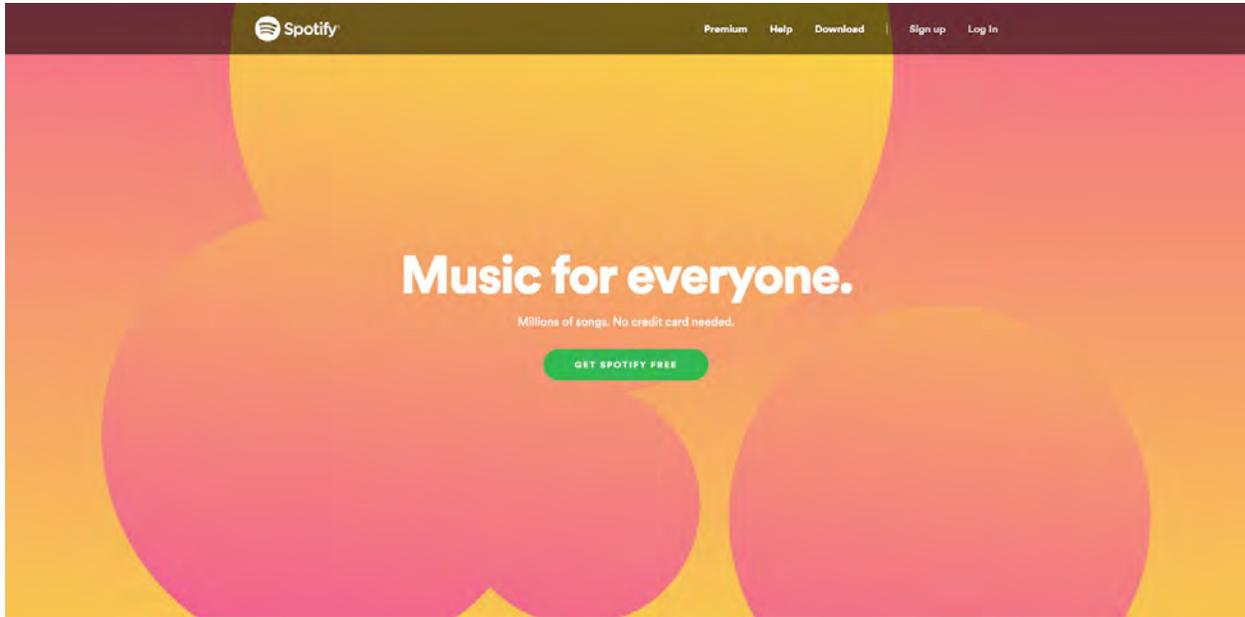
Colour Theory

While a seemingly trivial characteristic, colour is among the most impactful design elements on a website. It's the [main reason](#) why 85% of people buy a product (yes, really!), and it increases brand recognition by 80%.

Below is a colour wheel showing primary hues (red, yellow and blue) in the center triangle, and secondary colours (green, orange, and purple) along its perimeter. The colours that are diametrically opposed are called **complements**, meaning the two colours are opposites. These include red/green, blue/orange, and purple/yellow.

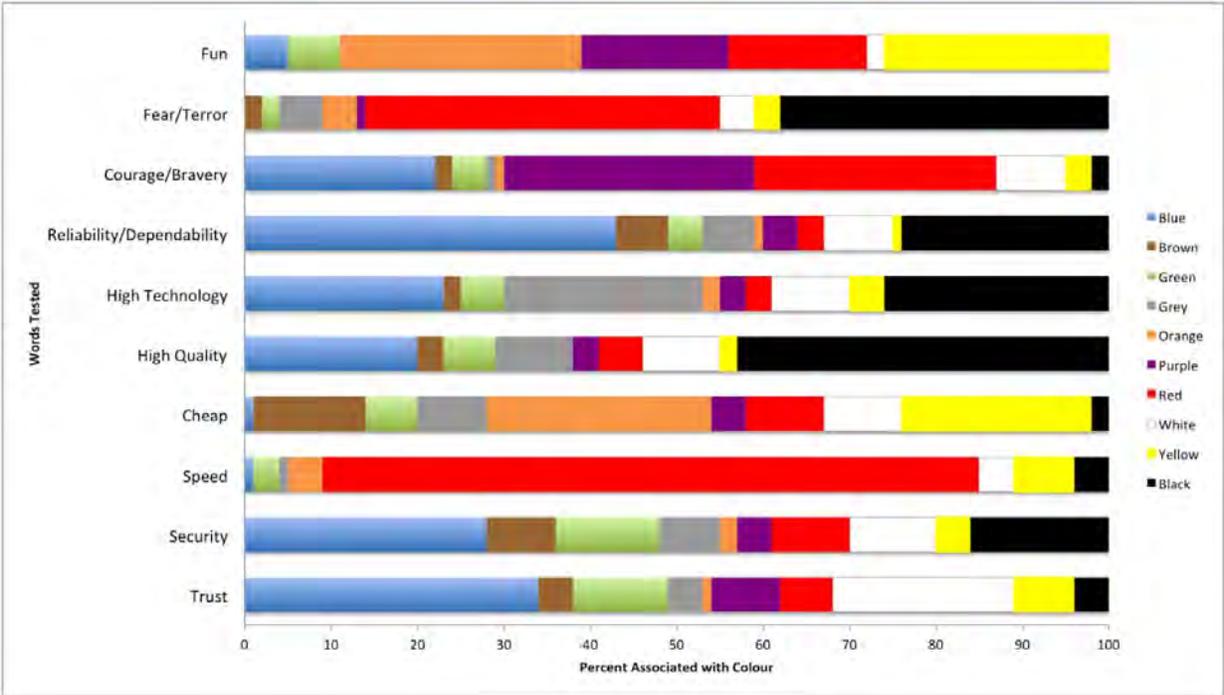


Why is this significant? Well, when two complementary colours are put together, they contrast each other. You can use this to your advantage if you want to make something—say a button—stand out. You have to be careful with using red and green, however, as most colour blind people have red-green deficiency, making them indistinguishable (also, it might accidentally trigger some holiday spirit!). Some websites like Spotify fixes that problem by making the red softer and adding yellow into the mix:

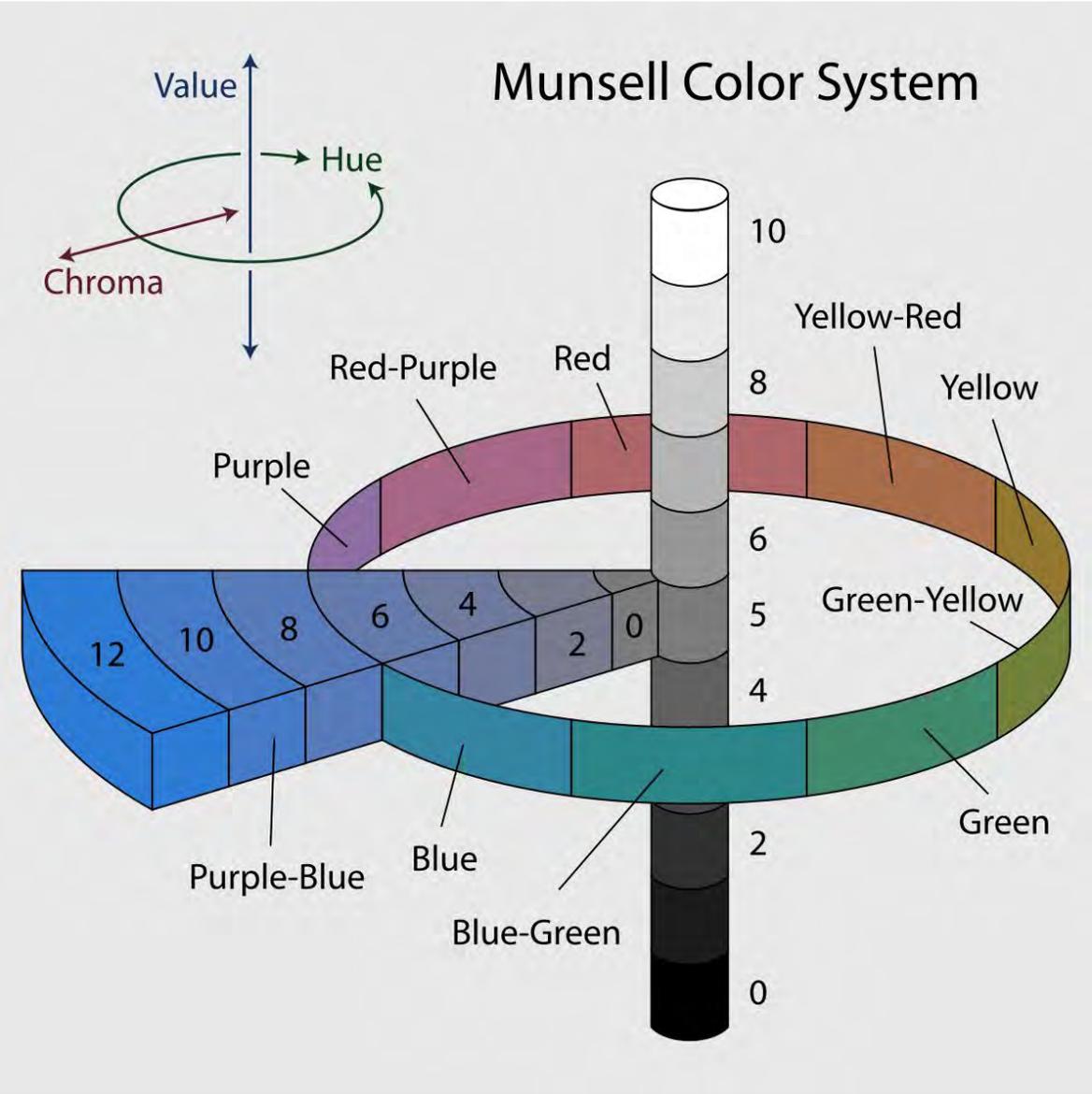


Now that you know basic colour theory, let's ask ourselves a very subjective question: what is the best colour to use? Whether there is a universally right answer is debated. Studies by Dmix and Hubspot found that between a green button and a red one, red tended to perform better. But many skeptics assert that an isolated colour has little to no impact. More important is how they fit into the visual hierarchy and the surrounding colours.

But the closest thing we can offer is a general guideline that can point you in the right direction. Here's a survey that asked people what colour they associated with certain words.

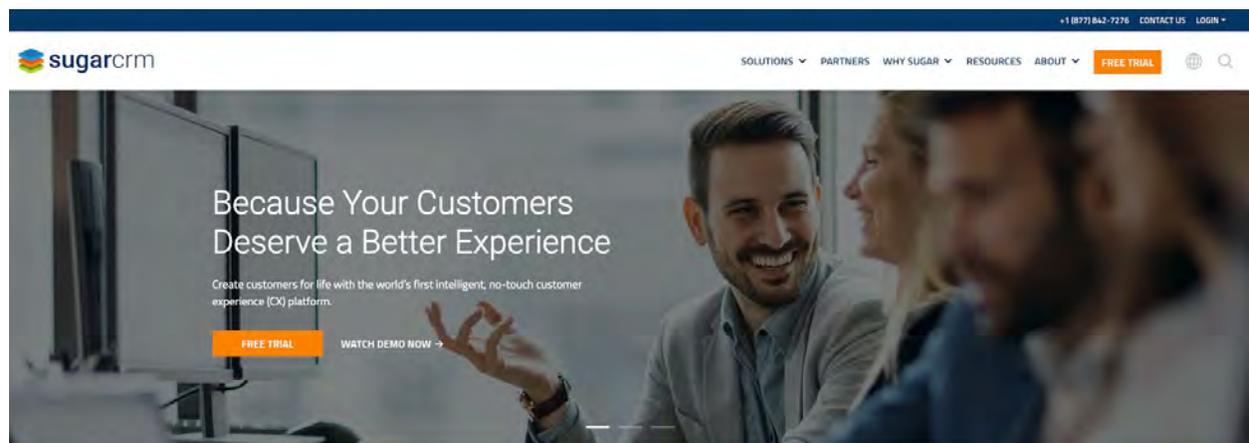


Going beyond the common six colours, we can create something more complex by adding white, black, or anything in between into the mix. This changes its **value**. The amount of value that is added to the colour is determined by its **chroma**. Put together, hue, value, and chroma are the properties that make up the Munsell colour system. It's kind of like the colour wheel in three dimensions:

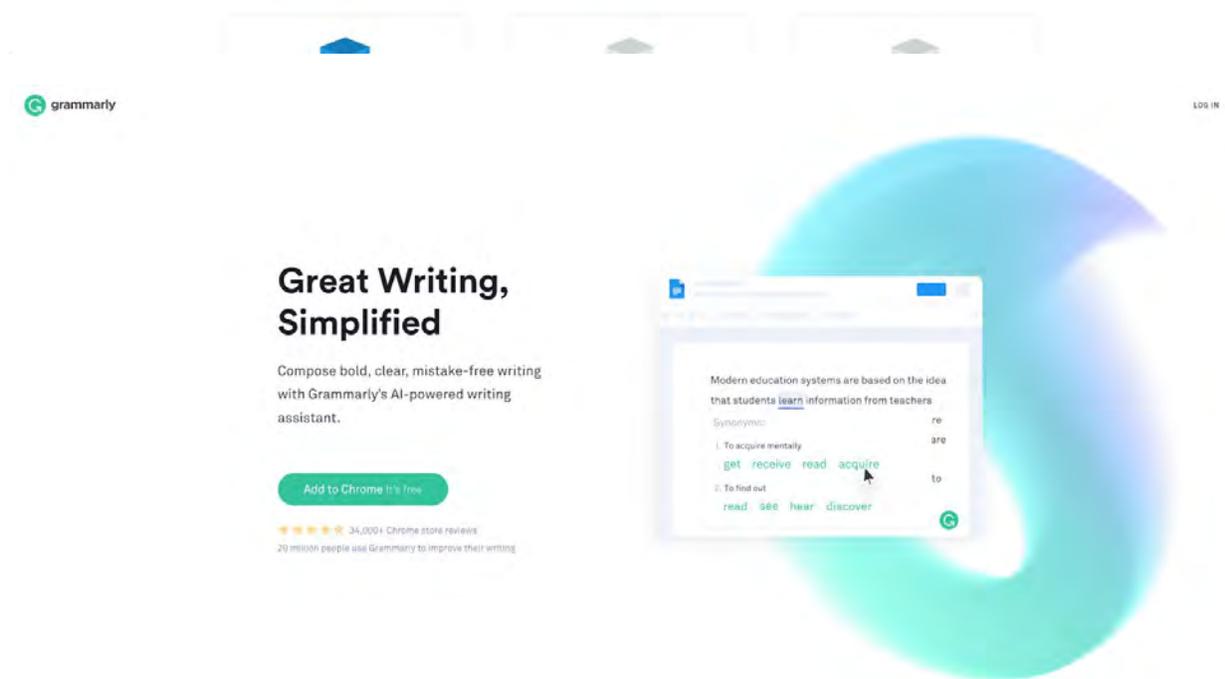


With a more developed colour wheel, we can create, for instance, a warm, muted tone that conveys a professionalism that can't be achieved with brighter hues. Keep in mind that although it's easy to obsess over the perfect hue, value and chroma also have a substantial and possibly more influence on a person's emotions and decision-making.

Now, we can make that CTA stand out even more by placing a bright, colourful button against a white or neutral background, as many websites do:



SugarCRM empowers your marketing, sales and services teams to collaborate across the entire customer lifecycle for more meaningful, memorable experiences.

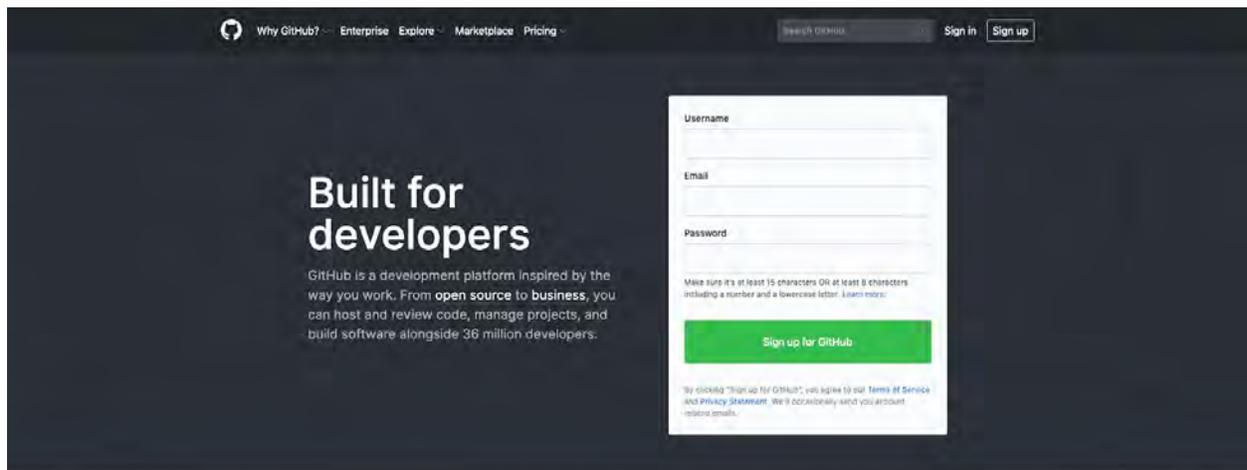


It's important for the colour palette on your website to be balanced. Using a pure colour for a background would be blinding, but using too many neutral colours would be boring. Instead, you want to have a sort of balance, with the right amount of bright and soft colours. To wrap up, I'll list some tips you can do now to create a visually balanced website.

Backgrounds are coloured best with unassuming colours such as white or beige, and it's best to limit the number of fully-saturated colours to 2-3. CTAs work best when they pop out colourfully, as mentioned earlier. It's also important to include lots of white space. Too many colours or things can make your website feel cluttered and overwhelming.

Good Examples of CTAs

Github



- Follows the Gutenberg diagram
- Green “Sign up for GitHub” button is bright green, making it stand out against its neutral background
- Three used in total not including white
- A simple no-nonsense value proposition (Built for developers), which suggests that it's a reputable service
- Secondary CTA lower on the page (Contact Sales) is clearly secondary based on its placement and size

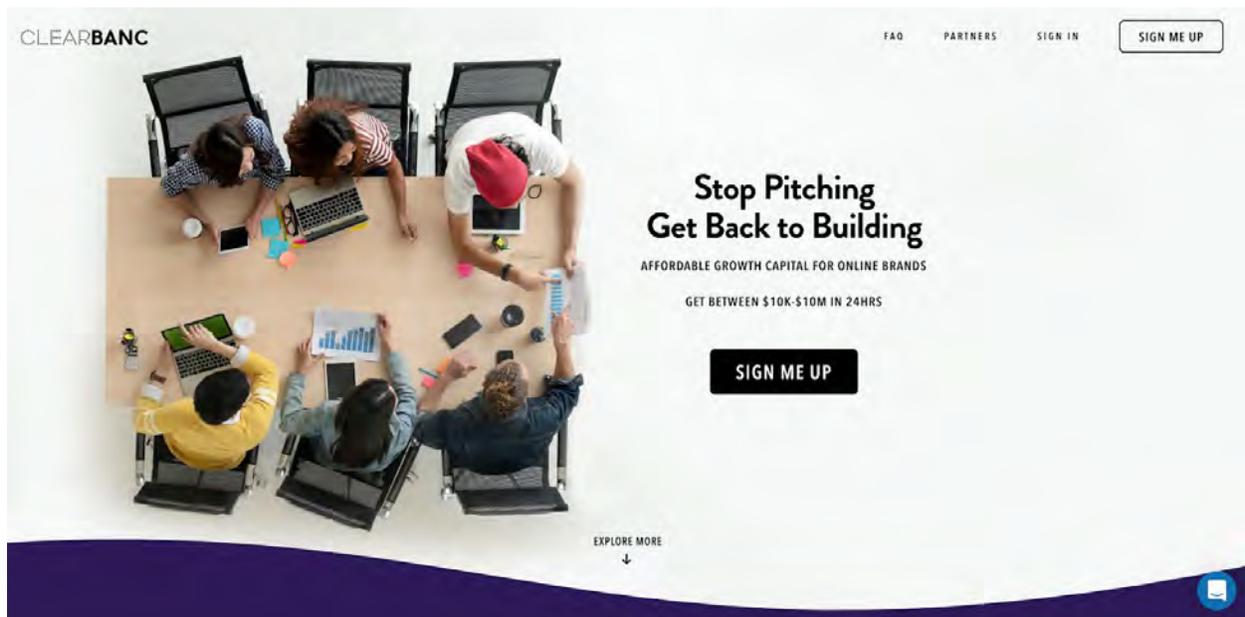
Chanty



- Green CTA pops out against white background
- Tons of white space to make the interface feel simple and uncluttered
- Making “free” bold may catch more attention to viewer
- Copy is incredibly simple: with 5 words in the headline and 13 words in the subheadline
- The sign-up process is made easier; instead of clicking the button which leads to a form, you can sign up directly on the homepage

Clearbanc

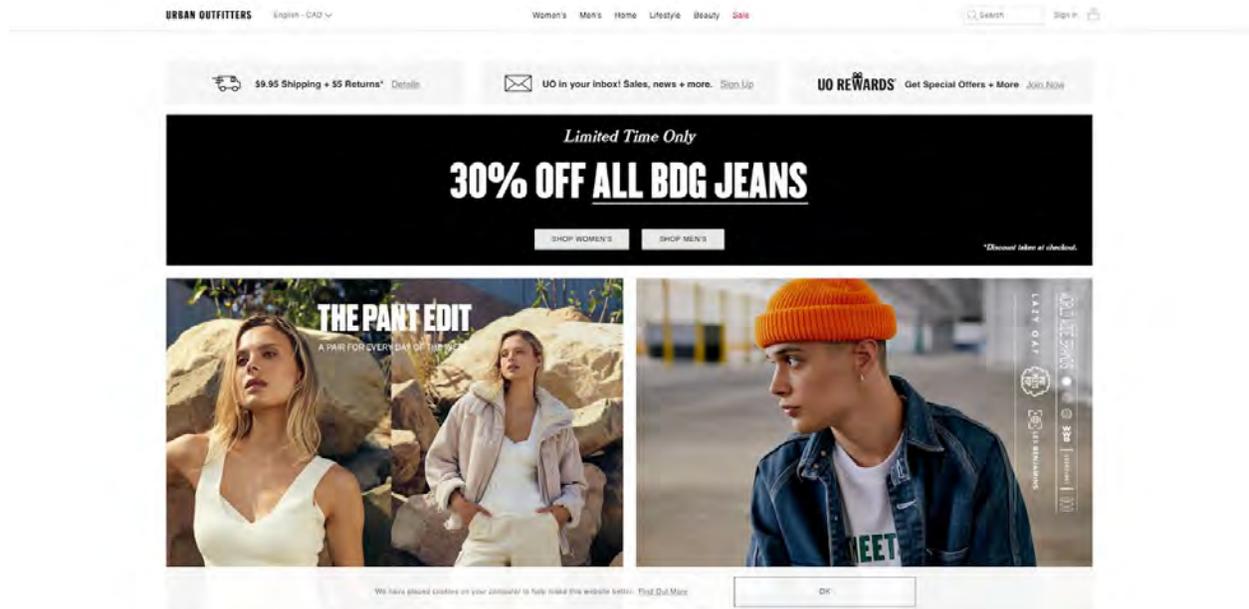
Clearbanc is a Toronto-based startup which lends other new startups capital for growth initiatives (like marketing) without having to give up equity in their company.



- Instead of saying “Sign up”, they modify it to “Sign me up”, which adds a personal touch
- “Sign me up” CTA appears twice—on the upper right hand corner and near the center of the page
- Lots of white space, without many elements on the page
- Subheadline is short
- Navigation bar is also minimalistic, with just four pages
- Secondary CTA (Explore More) is smaller and less prominent than the primary

Urban Outfitters

As a strictly business-to-consumer (B2C) website, this design will be a bit different from the other ones on this list, which are primarily software products. Software generally doesn't distinguish between different people too much - a user is a user. But in the case, Urban Outfitters sell different clothing for both men and women, which makes it necessary to have multiple CTAs for each of their audiences and product lines.



- The entire page is created with a card style.
- At the very top of the page below the menu bar, there are CTAs for their shipping, email list, and rewards program. They aren't very prominent.
- Just below that, there is a banner displaying their latest sale, with their main CTAs for women's and men's products. With the black background, they stand out.

Bad Examples

USPS



■ Marketing - White Paper | 17-min. read

STILL RELEVANT: A LOOK AT HOW MILLENNIALS RESPOND TO DIRECT MAIL

If you want to reach Millennials, don't rely solely on digital. In this guide, we'll show you how mail can help cut through the digital clutter and make connections.

TO READ, FILL OUT THIS FORM.

First Name	Last Name
Company	Job Function 
Address Line 1	Address Line 2
City	State  ZIP Code™
Phone Number	Email

How much do you spend annually on Marketing/Advertising?

Select One 

On average, how many packages or envelopes do you ship daily?

Select One 

How much of your current shipping business are you doing with USPS?

Select One 

How often does your company send advertising mail?

Select One 

Would you like a USPS direct marketing consultant to contact you about growing your business?

Yes, please contact me

No, do not contact me

All fields required for submission.
Privacy Notice: For information regarding our privacy policies visit www.usps.com/privacypolicy

Submit

In our earlier copy section, we explained why using “Submit” is ineffective and potentially even harmful. For an extreme example of this, let’s look at this white paper landing page from USPS.

As you’ll notice in the fine print, the first line says, “All fields required for submission.” There are 15 fields that all need to be filled out to access this white paper!

For the CTA itself, we’ve spoken at length about shortcomings of “Submit”. This case is the perfect example—one would almost surely feel like *submitting* after going through this form! As such, “Submit” serves as an unpleasant reminder to the visitors of all the work they have to do. “Get My White Paper” would do a much better job of conveying the benefit and convincing them that it’s worth the effort (and all the information they’ve given up).

And although this is a CTA guide, we would be remiss if we did not mention the astronomical ask requiring all 15 fields. [Graceful Resources](#) recommends that “your email opt-in form is an entry point for a relationship with a future customer.” Using this approach as a baseline, the only thing you really need is their email. You could also ask for their first name so that you could give the emails a personalized touch. However, the added field does create additional friction. So you can imagine how many added layers of friction 15 fields would create!

Macy's

As a department store giant, it makes sense that Macy's would want to market as many departments as possible. With that said, the context is crucial, which is something they failed to consider with this following email:



HURRY! ORDER BY 11:59PM ET TONIGHT FOR FREE GUARANTEED FATHER'S DAY DELIVERY Free Shipping with \$99 purchase. Continental U.S. only. [exclusions & details](#)

FREE SHIPPING & NEW! FREE RETURNS
Free Shipping with \$99 purchase. Free Returns by mail or in-store. excludes furniture & mattresses. U.S. only; other exclusions apply.

EXTRA 20% OFF
EXTRA 15% OFF [home & select depts.](#) [exclusions & details](#) promo code: **SAVE**

FATHER'S DAY SALE

celebrate dad with big savings on his top faves!

- [WOMEN](#)
- [MEN](#)
- [SHOES](#)
- [PLUS SIZES](#)
- [JUNIORS](#)
- [KIDS](#)
- [FOR THE HOME](#)
- [BED & BATH](#)
- [KITCHEN](#)
- [DINING](#)
- [HANDBAGS](#)
- [WATCHES](#)

 **FATHER'S DAY GIFT GUIDE**
[SHOP NOW](#)

 **LET HIM PICK THE PERFECT GIFT!**
[SEND AN E-GIFT CARD](#)

ENJOY EXTRA SAVINGS IN STORES!

-  [get savings pass >](#)
-  [shop the catalog >](#)
-  [find a store >](#)

The subheadline says, "celebrate dad with big savings on top faves!" However, if you look at the litany of links they include, you'll see a dramatic disconnect between the message and the offer. For instance, it's doubtful that a dad's faves would include Women's Clothes or Handbags. The same could be said for the Juniors and Kids' collections.

The primary CTAs are actually quite good, so they should've focused on those instead. They could have replaced all those links in the middle with the "Father's Day Gift Guide" CTA and paired it some popular products. Then, they could have placed the "Send an e-Gift Card" CTA under that as an alternative option.

Multitouch



Multitouch has successfully executed most of the design elements for a CTA. Brightly coloured button, "free" included in the copy, and plenty of white space on the website. Unfortunately, none of that white space is around the CTA itself. Half of the CTA is on top of the background image, which makes it blend in due to them having the same colour scheme. Also, the copy is a bit vague, reading "Get Free Edition." A free edition of what exactly?

Loup



This one is not necessarily that bad. The copy could use a bit of work (“Contact Us Now” instead of just “Contact Us” perhaps?), but the button size, colour/contrast, and copy are quite good. The main issue with this CTA is its positioning. It’s placed in the upper left corner, which is not ideal considering your eyes are immediately drawn to the images and text in the centre of the page. Also, there’s an identical but uncoloured button on the same menu bar. If they were going to put the CTA up there regardless, why not just have one? Or move the other one near the centre?

Money4YourMotors



There's a lot to think about for this one. This is more of an overall landing page disaster, with a whole spectrum of colours across the entire page, competing elements strewn everywhere, and multiple unique fonts used. Plus, not to mention the giant, seemingly unrelated ad featuring citrus fruits right in the centre of the page. Maybe in 2003 this would have been passable, but definitely not today.

Ignoring everything else though, let's look at the CTA itself. The main one is a bright green button which reads "Get Valuation". This is a decent starting place, but there are some changes that would make it much more effective.

For example, the shade of green they used is a different one from the green in their logo, yet also different from the other green "Step 3" further down the page. Unifying these colours would tie the site together much better. Also, the copy is not black, but actually just a darker green than the button, which makes it more difficult to read.

The other problem is the Vehicle Registration field, which for some reason is styled to look like a button, and implies that it would take you to another page. But when you click on it, it's a simple text field. The copy is also in all caps, which makes it draw more attention than the actual CTA, right beside it. Finally, the field is a shade of yellow, which again for some reason is not the same yellow as the one used in their logo, nor the same yellow as the "Step 2" element lower on the page.

Conclusion

So now we've come to the end of our journey. If I'm successful, I've armed you with the tools you need to construct a seductive call-to-action that sucks people in like moths to a lamp.

Although I provide a loose blueprint, you're free to shape and bend it however you see fit. Break the rules if you want! The important thing is, you've enjoyed this guide enough to read this far into it. And that's a win for both of us.

But you've arrived here at the end and you realize this is a project bigger than a one-man project, we want to help you! (We're a web agency after all.) **If you've got any questions or if you want us to help redesign your website, come hit us up at hello@thousand.plus.**

Good luck!

—Thousand Plus