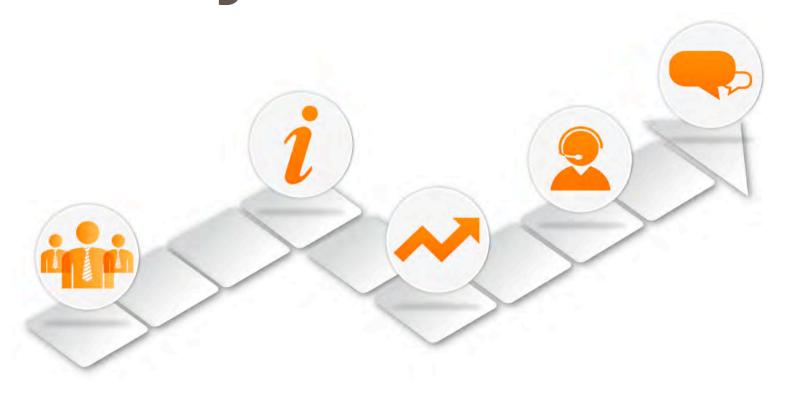# The 10-Point
Landing Page Software
Buyer's Guide

ion

Managing a landing page program

Across marketing departments, regardless of industry, landing pages are a vital part of the most successful online marketing programs. There are many ways to make and manage landing pages, including:

- ➡ Hand coding static pages
- ➡ Outsourcing to contractors & freelancers
- ➡ Having an agency 'handle' them
- ➡ Website content management systems
- ➡ Blogging platforms
- ➡ Modules of marketing automation & email platforms

Each of these methods will help you make pages, but you'll have a hard time creating and scaling a large or sophisticated landing page program with them. If you are trying to grow your program, get better results through testing, or create more advanced pages, then you've probably already felt the growing pains that come with having a subpar solution.

How do you know you need landing page management software?

Does it feel like you've hit a landing page wall? That there are never enough resources, time and developers to create and manage more campaign landing pages, let alone test them or even simply just make a quick content update? If you feel as if you're not getting as much done, or perhaps you're not launching campaigns as quickly as you had hoped, then you probably need landing page management software. Here are some tell-tale signs that your current landing page process is running out of runway:

- ➡ **Your pages are disorganized.** You have various pages living in different 'homes'—perhaps some in your website CMS, some with an agency, some living with other marketing teams in other regions. Your landing experiences (microsites, landing pages, etc.) lack unified processes and tools.

- ➡ **Your analytics are opaque.** A by-product of disorganization is often a lack of consistent visibility into basic analytics, conversions and test results. When landing experiences live in various places, the reporting and analysis can be challenging.

➡ **Your brand is inconsistent.** Another by-product of disorganization can be challenges with maintaining consistent brand standards and keeping things updated when the brand undergoes visual or messaging shifts.

➡ **Changes are inefficient.** It takes days to make a simple change and weeks to produce something new. The idea of launching an A/B or multivariate test seems daunting. Your landing page 'team' involves many resources from an agency to internal writers, designers, coders, and more—there are so many cooks in the kitchen that the process is grinding to a halt.

➡ **Some campaigns go un-tested.** When resources are spent trying to make and launch pages, there's little time, budget or energy left over to devote to a testing program. A sign of a landing page program in trouble is one where only a few tests are being run because of the time, technology and players involved to both make it happen and analyze the results.

If any of the above situations characterize your landing page program, it's likely time to evaluate your approach. These challenges can be solved by finding the right landing page platform for your organization.

Online marketing lives in real time and it needs to be relevant, specific and targeted to work. The best online marketers are those who can produce quickly, and react instantly. Landing page management software will empower your team with the ability to launch and optimize landing pages for multiple brands, products and regions – all without code or developers. Centralizing all of your campaign content within one specialized platform, managed by the marketing team and not by IT, will make it easier to manage hundreds of sophisticated pages, to run A/B and multivariate testing, and to increase your speed to market.

How to find the best platform for your business

A brief search for landing page software will help you find some options to consider, but a little more digging will uncover how different and varied they are. You'll find platforms that focus specifically on landing pages as well as other categories of platforms that include a landing page module (such as email or marketing automation platforms), but you'll also find that there is a quite a large range in the capabilities of these platforms.

While most platforms, at the very least, will help you create simple landing pages without

code or IT resources, there are solutions that go far beyond just publishing pages. For instance, most platforms handle the publishing of a single page, but few make the creation of microsites or multi-page experiences an elegant task. Testing capabilities will also vary widely—some offer A/B testing, others also include multivariate testing, and the ease of which tests can be launched should be considered. There are also differences in the level of customization and sophisticated logic that can be applied to the landing experiences, and in the total number of pages you can create, or the number of visitors the pages can receive.

In order to find the right platform for your company, it's important to first clearly define what matters most to you and what your organizational needs are. For instance, you can select a 'wide and shallow' choice by using a landing page module within another software platform, such as email or marketing automation software. These solutions are typically basic in nature. Another option is to select a specialized landing page platform that will be 'narrow and deep'.

What's most important is that you find the right platform for your specific organization's needs. The answer to this question actually doesn't start with a software solution, it starts with an introspective look at your own requirements, processes, team and objectives. Once you've clearly defined the exact challenges you need to solve and the ideal outcome, then you'll be able to pick the right solution.

10 Steps to find the right platform

At this point, you probably have a list of landing page options available to you, and you're ready to start narrowing it down. The following 10 steps will help you determine which landing page platform best fits your needs.

1. Gather your team

Including the right stakeholders in the decision process is important. While there's no set list of who exactly should be included, a good list starts with anyone who will be impacted by new a landing page process and platforms. For most companies, this likely includes a handful of marketers, some members of your tech staff, perhaps a graphic designer and your executive-level sponsor. Naturally, not everyone in this group will have equal decision-making power, but the opinions and attitudes from everyone in this group matter in choosing and successfully implementing a new platform.

When you're gathering the team, it's also important to think about who should be in charge of creating, managing and analyzing your pages and how much time should be dedicated to your program. A landing page is the first time that an interested visitor meets you and your brand, and it's the first time that they form an impression about you. It's important that landing pages get due process and resources.

2. Evaluate your 'status quo'

Now that you have your team gathered and have discussed your actual landing pages, it's time to start with an honest reflection about what is working and what isn't working with your current landing page creation and management process. This self-reflection audit is critical — and likely one of the hardest steps. Start with three questions:

➡ Where in the landing page creation process do you lose the most time?

➡ What aspects of the process do you feel could run better?

➡ What is holding you back from achieving your landing page goals? Is it something technical? Design? Test management? Available resources? Or something else?

More likely than not, the places in your process that slow you down are tedious and manual – such as hand coding pages – or "hand-offs" between marketing and whoever is developing your landing pages. The areas that you identify here will eventually help you prioritize your must-have features.

At this point, if your team has come to the realization that the ability to make and test landing pages needs to primarily rest in the hands of the marketing department, then landing page software is definitely the right choice for your business.

3. Set Goals

Now it's time to define what you'd like to accomplish with a landing page platform. How will your team measure success? Does success include faster page production, more marketing control, higher conversion rates, consistent branding across all pages, better online marketing ROI, lower cost per acquisition, or a something else? Make sure you that you outline your goals and benchmarks early, and set reasonable expectations.

While you'll certainly want to set performance-based goals, consider also setting goals that demonstrate that you've found a solution to one of the issues that you have identified in the previous step. For instance, if you've struggled with launching campaigns on time, then a goal can be for you to improve your speed-to-market. Or if an ad hoc approach to landing page creation has resulted in pages that look or work inconsistently and lack brand unity, then a goal should be to find a landing page solution that makes it easy to implement and keep brand standards. **Your goals are unique to your business, but the right solution should help you reach them.**

4. Understand your business realities

What does your company actually require from a platform? For instance, many industries have to follow strict regulatory requirements concerning data collection — what information can be collected, and how it can be transferred and stored. If your company has to meet regulatory requirements relating to the collection of sensitive data or has to follow certain encryption guidelines, these requirements should be at the top of your must-have features list. Data collection is just one example; for instance, many financial services companies have strict requirements on how emails can be sent and where they can be sent 'from'.

Most likely, the landing page solution you choose will be cloud-based (a hosted SaaS). Consider your comfort level with the various solutions and evaluate each vendor's approach to:

➡ Software security (features that protect access to the software, and those related to data collection and exports)

➡ Single-tenant or multi-tenant architecture

➡ Data protection

➡ Server reliability

➡ Network redundancy

➡ Datacenter redundancy and physical security

➡ Track record of uptime service

➡ Traffic scalability (how many unique visitors you can send, how the system will handle spikes in traffic, etc.)

Again, your landing pages are often on the front-line of your marketing, providing valuable first impressions to your web visitors. Uptime and system scalability should be part of your evaluation. It's good to address these points early in conversations with vendors — while some of the more advanced platforms can address all of these issues, many of the more basic tools can't.

5. Consider your budget

While there are low-cost landing page tools, if you're an enterprise looking for advanced, sophisticated features and the ability to make and manage an unlimited number of landing pages, then you are going to need to have a budget in place. Many landing page platforms do publish their pricing online, and while a quick search on pricing can help you gauge the market, it's important to also keep in mind how a new platform and a better landing page program will ultimately help increase your revenue. Walk through our free – and anonymous – ROI calculator to form a more concrete idea of how a better landing page program will help your ROI.

6. Plans for growth

Your plans for growth are very important to keep in mind while you're thinking about your budget and the different landing page platform options. Once you adopt a platform, it will be quicker and easier for you to launch specific, targeted landing pages, and as such, it's also very likely that you'll soon have double (or more) the number of pages that you have now. Even if your current program is relatively small, plans for a new brand, localized landing pages, or testing, all eventually require more and more landing pages. As you create a list of questions to ask vendors about your requirements, it's important to also ask if there are limits in page creation or in data storage that might become roadblocks in a few months or a year from now. Ask vendors how their platform will help you continually grow your program. Consider your organization's requirements for:

➡ **Seats at the table:** Is there a limit to the number of company user admin accounts you can have? Are there any additional costs associated with adding user accounts? Is there training for additional team members as your team grows? Are there access control options to give levels of access to different roles?

➡ **Traffic to your pages:** How much traffic can you send to your landing pages, and what are the upper bound limits of monthly traffic and traffic spikes?

➡ **Production limits:** Is there a limit — either implicit, or organizationally within the platform — to the number of landing experiences you can create, the number of page views you receive, and the number of tests you can run? Ideally, all of your production needs can be met by a system that allows for unlimited pages and tests.

7. Integration requirements

How will you need data to flow in and out of your landing page platform?

It's easiest to think first about where and how you'll need to send the information that you collect. You're creating landing page campaigns and collecting data for a reason, and – regardless of whether that information is going to a CRM, a marketing automation system, or a sales person – your business depends on it getting there. Find out how easily data exports are configured and if it's something that is codeless or if you'll need technical assistance either from your own tech team or from one of the software vendors. Also make sure to ask about which export formats are supported (such as post to web form, Salesforce.com, or vCard files just to name a few) and how customizable export schedules are.

Another integration requirement to think about is if you'd like to send information to your landing page platform. Using a landing page platform that can receive and use data from a third party can help you create incredibly personalized landing page experiences. For instance, you can pre-populate previously answered questions in a progressive profiling program or reference third-party platforms that help you better identify your page visitors. Often this is done by passing data into a platform via a query string or in an exchange of

data using a web service or API. When you think about integration, it's important to also think about how you'd like to use the data that you already have in order to make your visitors' landing experiences even better.

Another thing to consider when it comes to integration are analytics. Will you be able to add third-party tracking scripts to your landing pages, and if so, how? Can your landing page platform track and report on conversions that take place on external pages? Or if you're using another platform to track phone conversions from your landing page campaigns, can that data be reflected automatically in your landing page platform analytics. Ask yourself what type of data integration will you need in order to accurately measure your landing page program's success.

We've gone through a lot of integration options here, but we've really only scratched the surface. Make a list of every integration that's important to your team and make sure ask vendors about each one. Ask if they have customers who have done similar integrations and ask whether or not they offer any sort of set up support.

Some systems you may need to integrate include one or more of the following types of categories of marketing technology:

- ➡ Analytics
- ➡ Marketing automation
- ➡ Email
- ➡ CRM
- ➡ Third-party proprietary systems

8. Training & ongoing support requirements

Most businesses look to adopt landing page software in order to help their marketing team do more without using internal technical resources. Carefully consider the resources you want to assign to your landing pages, the amount of training and support they may need, and what additional outside help they want to use.

With any new software platform, there's a learning curve. While you can rest assured that landing page platforms are designed to make it easier to create and test landing pages, sometimes we all have a question or two, or a new advanced idea that we aren't sure how to implement. Make sure that the software vendor that you choose will be there to help you. Don't assume anything about what type of support services a software platform offers. While many platforms offer a range of support from initial training to set up help, many of the more basic platforms have limited support options, if any at all.

Next, think about your company's culture when it comes to adopting a new process or new technology. Would you consider yourselves to be as a group of independent self-learners that like to experiment to find your own best practices, or do you tend to want expert

training and guidance? What are your expectations for how you would like a software vendor to assist – or not – as you start to their platform?

9. Really dig into publishing & testing features

In the past several steps, we've been defining some specific requirements like support and integration capabilities, but we haven't gotten into those that affect landing page creation and optimization. **What do you want to be able to do with your landing pages?** For instance, perhaps you need a tool that gives you the ability to run code-free A/B and multivariate tests while tracking statistical significance and automatically optimizing for the highest conversions. Or maybe you want the ability to add social features like a Twitter feed or interactive content to your pages like content accordions and tabbed interfaces. If you receive a lot of mobile traffic, perhaps you want a tool that automatically creates mobile-optimized versions of your landing pages, in addition to giving you the ability to make your own mobile-optimized landing pages.

If you're having a hard time thinking of specific things, try to think on a project basis. For instance, if you plan to first create landing pages for PPC then perhaps dynamic content substitution and the ability to create custom lead generation forms are two very important features. Or maybe you'd like to be able to copy over entire campaigns so that you don't recreate the wheel for each new Ad Words group.

Don't worry about knowing what these "features" are called; just write down what you'd like to be able to do or what you'd like to improve. A good sales person will hear what you want to do and will then explain and show you how their particular platform can help you do it. Make sure that you take advantage of live demo opportunities and ask to see the particular features you're interested in – especially if something sounds too technical for your comfort level.

Now that you've listed out all of your requirements, separate the list into two: your must-haves and your nice-to-have features. Think back to the pain points you identified earlier, and make sure that those features are on your must-have list. Now, as you start talking to sales representatives and are start doing more research, you can eliminate those "features" that don't meet all of the criteria on your must-have list. If your list is still rather long, do this with the most important items of your nice-to-have list. As you start learning more and seeing different platforms, your lists will grow and change a little bit– but these lists will help you stay focused on finding a solution that addresses your main pain points.

10. Vendor check

Save this step for once you have narrowed your list down to two or three solutions. Since you know that everyone on this short list meets your must-have requirements, it's time to start evaluating the remaining options on your nice-to-have list and on their reputation. Ask for references, and make sure to ask specifically for references that are similar to you. If you're worried about specific things like support or the ease of integrations, ask them how their experiences went. The more specific your questions are, the more insight you'll gain into how happy and familiar a reference is with the platform.

The right fit

Following these ten steps will help you find the right landing page platform for your company. Of course, we're biased and hope that you end up choosing LiveBall, but it's important that your team takes the time to go through all of the steps outlined above. Once we've made it onto your short list, let us help you by explaining the LiveBall difference and why the best landing pages start with LiveBall.

Landing page platform checklist

When you are ready to kick off your buying process, here's a handy list of 10 things to evaluate:

1. **Overall features.** What landing page requirements do you need to meet for the short term, and what might pop up over the long term? How does this align with each vendor's feature set? Consider:

   ✓ **Integration options**. Is there a fixed list of available integrations, or does the vendor support custom integrations as well?

   ✓ **Multi-page experiences**. Will you be able to create multi-page experiences, like microsites, as easily as a simple landing page?

   ✓ **Code-free testing**. Will you be able to easily launch both A/B and multivariate tests on your landing pages, without requiring code and/or web developers?

   ✓ **Targeting and personalization.** Your landing page needs may be more specific than a standard, static page. Consider how the vendor and platform handles things like dynamic keyword substitution, automatic mobile versions of pages, personalization, geolocation and conditional logic.

2. **Templates**. Most landing page platforms come with 'off the shelf' templates, and the option to build your own templates as well. Consider how many templates are available, how flexible the templates are, and how new custom templates will be created.

3. **Training**. What sort of training is available, what are your training needs, and do those two things align well? Are there options for self-training as well as instructor-led training?

4. **Support**. How will any ongoing support be handled, and will it meet your needs? Options typically include an online support ticket system, phone and/or email support. Determine what is right for you & your team and how that aligns with the vendor offerings.

5. **Platform pricing**. How is the landing page platform priced? What are the various pricing tiers available and how are they different? What is included in the pricing, and more importantly, what is excluded from the pricing? Consider traffic volume allowances, user seats, live training and ongoing support.

6. **Additional services**. If you end up needing professional services, such as strategic guidance, test planning or even just page production, will there be options either from the vendor themselves or from a network of service providers and agencies? How easy will it be for you to engage professional assistance when you need it?

7. **Traffic allowances**. How will the platform scale and handle higher traffic volumes or traffic spikes as your landing page program grows? Find a vendor that meets your scale both in the short term and long term.

8. **Reliability**. The landing page solution you select will likely be a cloud-based SaaS. The quality, reliability and scale of SaaS solution varies. Consider the platform architecture (multi-tenant or single-tenant?), hosting partner, and system infrastructure.

9. **People**. If you are buying a simple online tool that you can sign up and try today, then you likely won't be interacting with the vendor's people too much. But if you are buying a mid-market or enterprise-class platform, you will likely be interacting with their sales and account management team. Consider how knowledgeable the team members are, and choose people you like and feel confident in.

10. **Customer success.** Most importantly, review customer case studies, and ask for references. What kinds of success have the vendor's customer base had and how can you apply that to your organization?

The Best Landing Pages Start with You. And LiveBall.

LiveBall is ion's web-based platform that empowers marketers to launch and test advanced landing pages without code or IT. If you're looking to grow your landing page program, check out these resources and find out how LiveBall can help.

Next steps for your landing pages:

If you want to stay up to-date on the latest online marketing trends and best practices, subscribe to the **ion landing page blog**.

Learn more about how you can improve your online marketing ROI by checking the free **webinars**, **white papers** and **presentations** in our library.

Join us for a **Live Demo** and see just how easy it is to use LiveBall to create conversion-focused landing pages.

Ready for more effective landing pages? **Let's talk LiveBall!**

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