

Funnel Vision: Practical Research and Planning

Online marketing is changing faster than Lady Gaga's wigs... but one thing that never changes is the importance of sales funnel creation to your marketing success.

Knowing what your sales funnel is going to look like is as important as coffee beans to coffee. Without a sales funnel, you won't be able to build a list or create a steady, consistent income flow. You'll leave "gaps" in your online presence and hurt your reputation by appearing to be inconsistent and unprofessional.

A sales funnel is what separates the amateurs from the pros... and having a sales funnel also takes the guesswork out of your business, helping you run it smoothly and with confidence.

In this series of four lessons, we're going to show you how to build strong, solid sales funnels from scratch. Once you've grasped the principles, you can apply this structure to all your online ventures. (You should have a separate sales funnel for every campaign.)

Step One: Putting Your Customer First

No, there's no shortcut. Yes, it always starts here: Knowing your customer, fan or subscriber base as well as you know your best friend or spouse.

That doesn't mean you have to know every single detail, but it does mean developing an instinct for what's going to thrill them, and what will leave them cold. The trick is to discover their strongest need; the piece missing in their collective jigsaw puzzles -- and supply it. Even if that feels like you're setting them free from needing you in the process.

(Don't worry: If you've done your job properly, they'll be back... looking to see **what you've got to offer next.**)

And that's where your **sales funnel** comes in. When they return, you'll have the next component they need already lined up and perfectly positioned -- **timing, price point** and **ease of purchase.**

In fact, for your customer, it should feel harder to refuse each offer than to buy. You want them to be eager to see what you're going to supply next: The old "always leave them wanting more" trick is a good principle to remember.

But to create a perfect sales funnel, you first need to understand how a sales funnel operates, and what it looks like.

The best way to explain is visually...



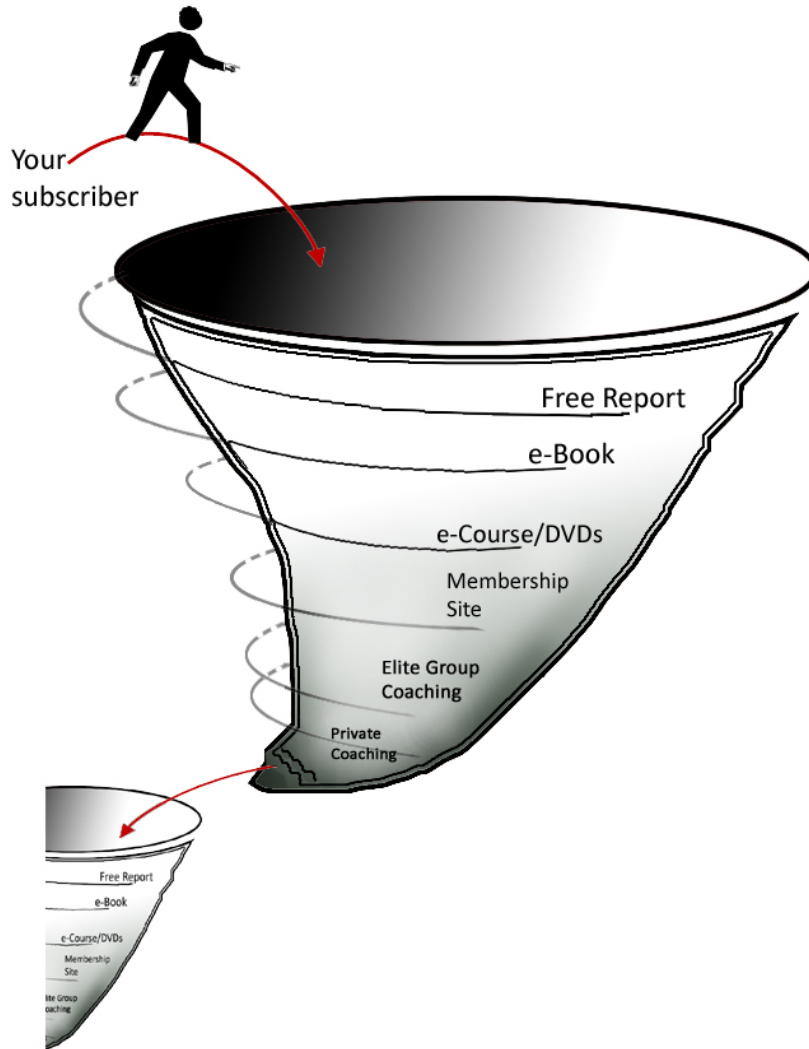
The idea is to entice your ideal target customer to voluntarily jump into the mouth of your sales funnel via your **sign-up incentive** -- a free report, free webinar, \$1 DVD or first month's free membership -- there is no one "best" incentive. Simply choose whatever offering you think will work best as a lure for your unique subscriber.

Once they've taken that leap of faith, it should be like traveling down a water slide: Your new subscriber should be swept along on a smooth, enjoyable ride, picking up increasingly more expensive **paid products** or services from you on the way.

There should be no bumps, sticky spots or holes to divert him off-course -- each "turn" in your spiral should feel natural -- and exciting. He should be eager to see what happens next -- what you've got waiting for him on his journey.

The one point many people miss? It will be a learning curve for both of you: Always keep his needs foremost, and your own journey should flow equally smoothly.

At the end of the "ride", you can choose whether or not your subscriber ought to be diverted to a **new sales funnel** for a related product or service or "graduate" -- in which case, you want to have an **attractive affiliate program** set up and waiting, so he can eagerly direct others to your wonderful offerings.



Remember... today's customer or pupil may be tomorrow's best **joint venture partner**!

But whether he "graduates" from that campaign or hops into your new one (via a new sales funnel), that first great sales funnel should have achieved one objective...

...To turn that customer into a **loyal, lifetime buyer**, eager to open his wallet for you.

Step Two: Planning Your Sales Funnel

Yes, there are tricks to ensuring your sales funnel flows smoothly. Priority number one is to **plan** that funnel from the start. Build it into your own business plan from day one.

Many people are intimidated by this step. "How do I know what product my customers will want till I really get to know them?" is a common question. And the only way to answer it lies in conducting thorough **research**.

But thorough research or not, there's one thing to remember about business plans: *They're supposed to be flexible.* Your plan should be like an architect's blueprint. If you've ever had house renovations or a new house designed, you'll know there are always "tweaks" along the way -- the finished building is never exactly, brick for brick, what the initial concept looked like. You realize, as you start the process, that it would be better if the laundry room was a foot wider, or you take out some details to cut costs -- or add details in to increase the value of your new building. Or adjust for a hidden beam you didn't know existed, *et cetera, et cetera*.

But "tweaks" can sometimes be expensive. The way to ensure you don't end up way off target is to do your homework. Get to know your target customer and what he needs as thoroughly and wisely as you can -- in advance. The more accurate an idea you have of the services or products he needs, the more accurately and cost-effectively you can plan to supply these... at the perfect time in *his* unique, particular journey.

The ideal sales funnel is one you don't have to modify too greatly -- you've accurately pinpointed every step of your subscriber's journey, supplying what he needs (even if what he needs most is to exit your funnel, halfway through. And if you've planned your sales funnel properly, you will even make money and have him sincerely thanking you on his way out the door -- while eagerly directing new, better subscribers to you via your affiliate program, which he will probably want to sign up for.)

Step Three: Doing Your Homework

Your goal with any sales funnel? To create **lifetime customers** or clients -- the sort who automatically think of you first (often with happy anticipation), whenever they want or need something in the niche you both share.

Here's how you find out not just what your customers or clients need -- but what they can't live without!

1. Run a poll -- You can do this by using poll apps supplied by the forums you belong to... or via Facebook. What is the difference between a poll and a survey? There's not always a clear differentiation, but basically:

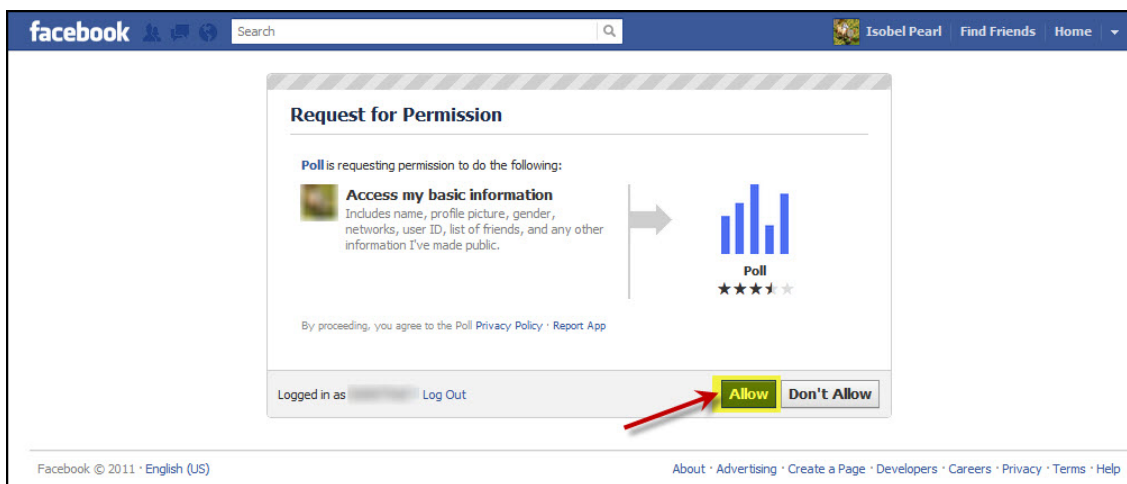
- **A poll** is useful for taking a quick "vote" -- you're getting numbers, not opinions

- A **survey** is useful for obtaining in-depth information, often allowing the survey taker to voice opinions or give specific feedback.

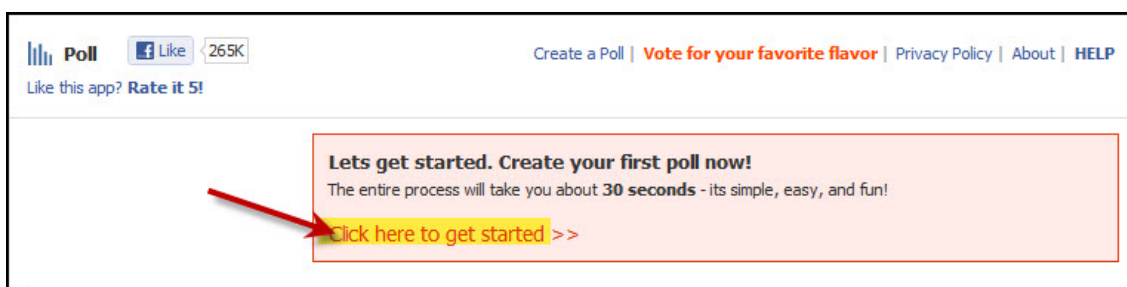
To run a poll on Facebook, go to [Facebook.com/OpinionPolls](https://www.facebook.com/OpinionPolls) and select the "Go to App" button:



The poll app will ask for permission to access your data. Select the "Allow" button...



It will then guide you through creating your first poll with an easy-to-follow wizard. It really does take only about 30 seconds to create your first poll -- it's a one-step process:



You'll be quickly asked to select :

- **Which page** you want the poll to appear on
- **Your question** -- one inviting a "yes or no" answer is best
- **Answer options** -- "Yes" and "No" are the defaults, but you can add other highly-customized options
- **"Post poll on the page's wall"** -- always a good idea
- **"Show voters' faces to friends"** -- Don't do this, unless you really know it would be an advantage (I.E. your "friends" and followers would see it as a bonus)

The poll is free, but if you're willing to pay, you can add premium features such as purchase votes, remain on tab, hide ads "and more" (\$99 annual fee.)

If your Facebook fan page doesn't show up in the above wizard, don't worry. You'll get a chance to add the fan page with the next step -- the "Viral Dashboard"; the real reason this is the best poll app to use and a great kick-start to get your poll going. And if you're willing to pay, you can solicit votes from Facebook members who are not your friends but who might represent your target market by selecting "Purchase Public Votes".

Viral Dashboard

Promote this poll

| | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Invite | Invite your friends to vote. You can invite up to 8 friends. This will send classic Facebook invite to your poll. | Invite |
| Publish on Personal Profile | Publish your poll on your Wall and friend's News Feeds and ask them to vote. This will be visible for all your friends coming to Facebook | Publish on Wall |
| Publish on Fan Pages | Publish your poll on Fan Pages you like | Publish on Page |
| Direct link | http://apps.facebook.com/opinionpolls/poll.php?pid= | |
| Purchase Public Votes | Thanks to the public votes, we will make sure you will get the required amount of votes on your poll from users from a selected country. | Purchase |

When you're done with the Viral Dashboard, simply select: "Back to my poll":

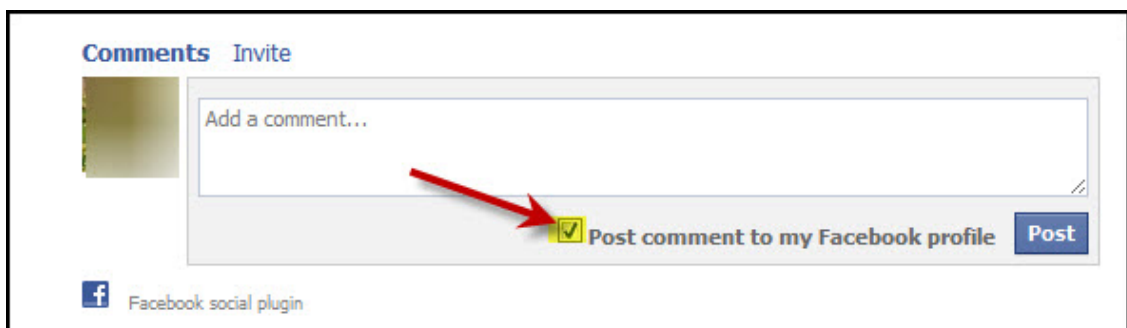
| | | |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Purchase Public Votes | Thanks to the public votes, we will make sure you will get the required amount of votes on your poll from users from a selected country. | Purchase |
|------------------------------|--|--------------------------|

[Back to My Poll](#)

You'll be able to view exactly what your poll will look like. If you're pleased with it, simply select "Publish"...



But oops! Wait! We neglected one crucial step. Make sure you have "Post comment to my Facebook profile" enabled!



Whenever you go to "My Polls", you'll be able to select your poll and perform the following functions:

- View Poll
- Delete
- Edit
- Promote Poll
- Download Vote List

And this app is really the most "difficult" of all poll apps you're likely to come across. Those provided by the forums you belong to will most likely be even simpler to set up (and your highly-targeted capture group will be already there and waiting, in that they've all subscribed to your specific niche topic by joining the group).

2. Survey your potential customers -- This is the second most effective way to get down to business and identify needs -- but not all customers or subscribers respond well to surveys.

Here are some tips to help up your chances of getting the responses you need:

1. **Focus on your customer.** Make sure you let him know the survey will benefit him -- not you. (The old "I need your help" routine only works if you've already established loyal, back-end customers.)
2. **Keep it short** -- no more than ten questions
3. Allow at least one Textarea box for open feedback, where your survey participant can vent or have their say
4. **Make it easy.** Remember that radio buttons and multiple choice questions are your friends!
5. **Keep it clear.** Your questions shouldn't be vague or ambiguous -- your customer should never be in the position of having to ponder: "What did she mean?"
6. **Make it fun.** Surveys should be enjoyable to take
7. **Include a call to action!** The end of the survey is the perfect place to invite your customer to be put on a mailing list. And if you don't yet have subscribers, it's essential.

Things to always ask yourself, when creating any survey

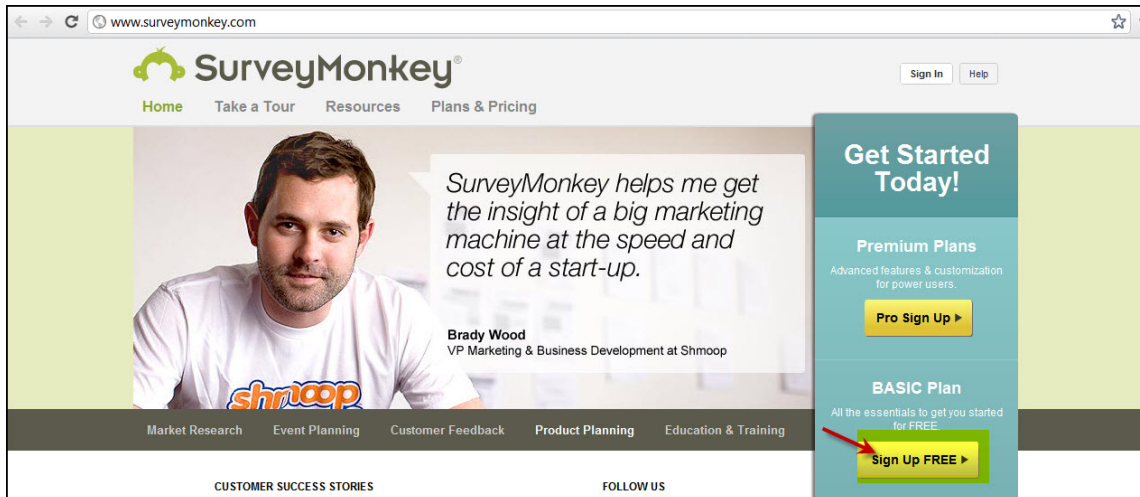
1. What do my potential customers want to talk about **right now**?
2. What will they be happy to **pay for**, further down the funnel?
3. Is this a group that **spends money** on information or products?

Remember you can run polls or surveys *at any time* through your research and preparation stage, just to check in with your potential market that you're still on the right track.

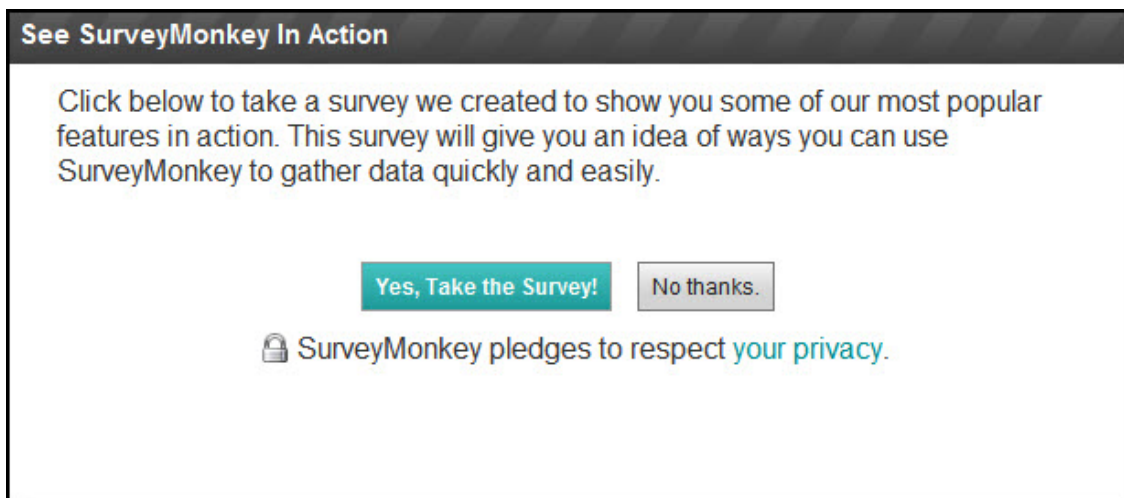
There are lots of free and paid survey companies you can use. If you belong to a forum that allows you to create surveys as well as polls, that's where you should start.

If you're eager to get started and want a quick recommendation, [Survey Monkey](#) company provides free survey creation and is exceptionally easy to use.

Simply visit their [home page](#) and select the "Sign Up Free" button:



Almost immediately, you'll be asked to "Take a survey" to see their features in action. If you're not familiar with survey apps, don't miss this step -- Select "Yes, Take the Survey" and you'll instantly see what's available for your own use, which will help you in planning your own survey:









(HINT: Notice that their "Yes" button provides a strong call to action. Make sure your own survey buttons do the same thing.)

Signing up is so simple, there's no need for a walk-through -- you provide your email address, choose a password and confirm it.

Survey Monkey allows you to select:

- **The type of survey** you want to conduct (which includes "Market Research")
- **A basic template** that best suits your needs
- **Types of responses** that best suit your questions (radio buttons, multiple choice, etc.)
- **A basic color scheme** that best suit your business

Whenever you sign in, you'll instantly see a list of your past and present surveys. You'll be able to select one and edit it or check the responses.

| Current Folder: -- View All Surveys -- <div>Manage Folders</div> | | | | Title Search: <input type="text"/> <div>Search</div> | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|---|---|--|--|
| Survey Title <div>Sort</div> | Created <div>Sort</div> | Modified <div>Sort</div> | Design | Collect | Analyze <div>Sort</div> | Actions | |
| Flower Power Survey | March 16, 2010 2:36 PM | 1 year ago |  |  |  0 | <div>Clear</div> <div>Transfer</div> <div>Delete</div> | |
| Website Design Services Survey | December 7, 2010 3:41 PM | 1 year ago |  |  |  1 | <div>Clear</div> <div>Transfer</div> <div>Delete</div> | |
| | | | | | | | |

More options are available with their paid service, including:

- The ability to pose more than ten questions
- Exporting survey data as Excel, PDF or CSV files
- Printing and downloading your results
- Access to premium features (advanced logic, customization, randomization of questions, including your logo, etc.)

Survey Monkey offers plans ranging from \$19-\$69 CAD per month (they're a Canadian company).

There are other ways to find out what your customers or clients really need -- and want:

1. Read niche or industry authority blogs and online magazines
2. Check YouTube -- to see what's already been covered (and what these videos have missed)
3. Check blogs and Facebook pages in your niche to see what people are saying in the comments
4. Look for complaints in comments and forums -- that's where you'll most easily be able to identify gaps. (Put your keyword plus "complaints" in Google's search bar, too.)
5. Look at your competition. What are they doing? Can you improve on it?

6. Pay attention to your niche or industry "buzz". What is everyone talking about on Social networks? YouTube? Television? (What are sitcoms, talk shows, science shows, etc., currently joking about?)
7. Study magazines -- both "general" ones (to see what's being buzzed about or what is trending) and those specific to your niche. The headlines and sub-heads on the cover should tip you off almost instantly to what's currently popular.
8. Be specific: Don't survey your niche members and say "What do need the most?" Offer them specific options and alternatives, after doing your homework -- like this:

Q: As a web designer, would you like my next product to be:

- A simple form builder?
- A set of Blog Theme templates?
- A set of headers in .PSD format?

Other

And finally... *just ask*.

The answer may give you your next, amazing sales funnel idea.

ASSIGNMENT:

1. **Prepare a profile** of your specific niche customer. Include every detail you can think of that seems to be common to your potential customers as a group.

Include:

- Age
- Marital status
- Religion
- Number of children/no children
- pets
- education
- income
- formal or informal
- laid back or focused to the point of ADHD
- any other relevant, specific details your group shares in common

If you are not able to identify your customer this strongly, go back and do more research.

2. Visit [Alexa.com](https://www.Alexa.com) and look up the websites and forums your potential customer hangs out the most in. Study the demographics of site users and compare them to what you thought you knew about your potential customer.
3. Read their comments on social networks and blogs (make notes of useful facts.
4. Check out what magazines they read. (Ask on social networks, forums. Create a poll!)
5. Sign up for [Survey Monkey](https://www.SurveyMonkey.com) and survey niche members you already know or have on a list

Brainstorm the best incentive sign up offer possible for this customer. Don't just stop with your first idea: Play devil's advocate with your self and look at every possibility, considering how you can tailor the more improbable ones until they fit.

(Ask yourself "What can't they live without that I could provide? What do they wish someone would create for them.)

At the end of this exercise, you should have **a more accurate customer profile**, plus at least **five strong ideas for sign up incentives**.