

Social Studies with Wendy Lewis: The ABCs of CTAs

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Calls-to-action (CTAs) are key lead-generation elements in both traditional and digital marketing. Best practice dictates that all or most of your marketing tactics—social media updates, press releases, blog posts, eblasts, newsletters, seminar invitations, etc—should include some CTAs.

A CTA should appeal to your target audience so that they do what you want them to do, such as click, call, schedule, buy, etc. A CTA is not just limited to e-commerce or hotel booking sites that are trying to get visitors to make a purchase. Your practice website should also have a CTA. This may range from filling in a contact form, signing up for a newsletter, or scheduling a consultation.

Aspire to Inspire

A CTA should clearly tell users what you want them to do. Use action verbs such as:

- Call
- Buy
- Shop
- Register
- Sign up
- RSVP
- Subscribe
- Donate
- Click
- View
- Enter to win

- Schedule
- Share

All of these phrases encourage users to take a definitive action.

To take your CTA one step further, create a sense of urgency. Add phrases to encourage the user to act immediately, such as:

- Offer expires April 30
- For a short time only...
- Order now and receive a free gift
- The first 10 people who respond...
- Valid for 30 days
- Space is limited

Another way to create a sense of urgency is to offer discounts to those who sign up early, or refer friends and family.

Positioning Your CTA

The position of your CTA on your website page, eblast, or ad is equally important. Ideally, it should be placed high on the page and in the central column. The more space around a CTA, the more attention it will receive. If your CTA is positioned where there is a lot of other content or features, it may get lost in the clutter. Color is another effective way to help your CTA stand out, especially if the rest of the page is relatively neutral. The position, color, and white space surrounding your CTA are all keys to success. The bigger your call to action, the more chance it will be noticed.

Every page of your site should have some form of CTA. It does not need to be the same for each page. Instead, you can use smaller actions that lead the user toward your ultimate goal.

CTAs As Seen On TV

Infomercials and home shopping networks are the masters of the CTA. They identify a problem and present a product as a deft solution. Then there is a high degree of urgency that is created to get viewers to respond, “while supplies last.” When the counter comes up and inventory is going fast, it prompts the viewer to pick up the phone and grab one before it’s too late.

Infomercials are expensive to produce and to air, so they need to sell as many widgets as they can in a single view to turn a good profit. That means they pull out every classic sales conversion technique in their toolbox to hit their numbers. “As seen on TV” products tend to have fairly liberal return policies and the ubiquitous “money-back guarantees.”

Clearly, these are not the marketing tactics a reputable medical practice should adopt. However, there are lessons to be learned. The key to using effective persuasion techniques is to make sure they are in line with your overall marketing communications. The tone and messaging for your brand need to be consistent across all channels.

What these hard-sales models do so well is drive their CTA to the user. Before a user is willing to take heed, they have to recognize the benefits of responding. Think about what the user will get out of completing your CTA and how you are going to communicate that benefit. You need to clearly explain what the user will gain

by taking the desired action. In some cases, you may add incentives to encourage users to complete a CTA. These may include discounts, entry into a competition, or a free gift.

Keeping it simple helps. For example, if you have too many CTAs, the user may become overwhelmed and opt out. A customer who is presented with too many options is less likely to pursue any. By limiting the number of choices, you can avoid confusing the user and make it simpler to comply with the offer.

A CTA can generate measurable return on investment. Finally, consider what happens when a user responds to your CTA. The rest of the process needs to be just as carefully thought through so the back end is seamless and the promised benefits are provided in a timely fashion.



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All New!

"Social Studies with Wendy Lewis" is *Plastic Surgery Practice's* newest column. It features CTAs from Lewis, whose latest book, "Aesthetic Clinic Marketing in the Digital Age," is slated to be published in June 2015.

Facebook's New CTA

Facebook has integrated a CTA as a new tool right on pages that is free, at least for now. CTAs help drive your Facebook friends and fans to take actions that are important to your business (for example, booking appointments or selling products/services). To add a CTA button to your Page: Go to your Page's Cover Photo (the main image that runs across the top of your page) and click on "Create Call-to-Action." There are five CTA buttons to select from:

1. Use "Shop Now" to promote a new product, or a product that is a special offer or limited edition;
2. Use "Learn More" to showcase a new or popular blog post, or direct visitors to your website or microsite;
3. Use "Sign Up" for a newsletter, event, or webinar registration;
4. Use "Book Now" to book an appointment or schedule a visit; or
5. Use "Download" to promote e-books and white papers, brochures, or special offers.

Choose your CTA and the Destination URL that you want to link to, such as your website home page or a specific landing page. Facebook automatically chooses the best destination based on your specified web address, but you can edit these suggested destinations. Then click "Create," and you're done. Facebook also allows you to track your clicks to the CTA you have chosen to see how it is working.