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Article Layout Tricks to Keep Readers Reading

A CHARTBEAT CHECKLIST

We've got bad news: **35% of desktop users will leave a web page before scrolling.**¹ In other words, more than 1/3 of your visitors are ditching before they even get a chance to truly interact with your content. So, how can you get more of your visitors to keep reading?

When it comes to engaging readers and turning them into a loyal audience, it certainly starts with quality content. But it doesn't end there. Not by a longshot. You also have to consider the space in which that content will live — the web page — and how you can use layout, links, structure, and graphic elements to more effectively capture and hold your readers' attention.

The good news? We've got answers. Using data aggregated from some of the top publishers in the game, we're giving you 5 insights into how readers typically interact with content — and how you can use that data to optimize your article structure for engagement.



1. Every Headline Needs a Home

Let's back up and understand how your readers are clicking into your content in the first place. We work with some of the best homepage editors in the business, and they all agree that headlines can make or break an article. Whether readers come from your homepage, search, or social media, the invitation to read always begins with a **killer headline** — one that's **enticing** enough to get readers in the door, and **truthful** enough to keep them there.

Okay, so you've got your world-class headlines lined up. Now where do you put them? As opposed to when they're reading an article, your readers won't make it as far down your homepage or section fronts:

Only 50% of readers will reach the 1000 pixels mark — just below the fold.²

So use that fold strategically: Place the headlines that will lead to the most subsequent engagement towards the top of the page, and flashier headlines further down. For even more homepage insights, the Chartbeat [Heads Up Display \(HUD\)](#) allows you to optimize for headline placement on the homepage by running continuous tests as headlines move around the page.

PRO TIP

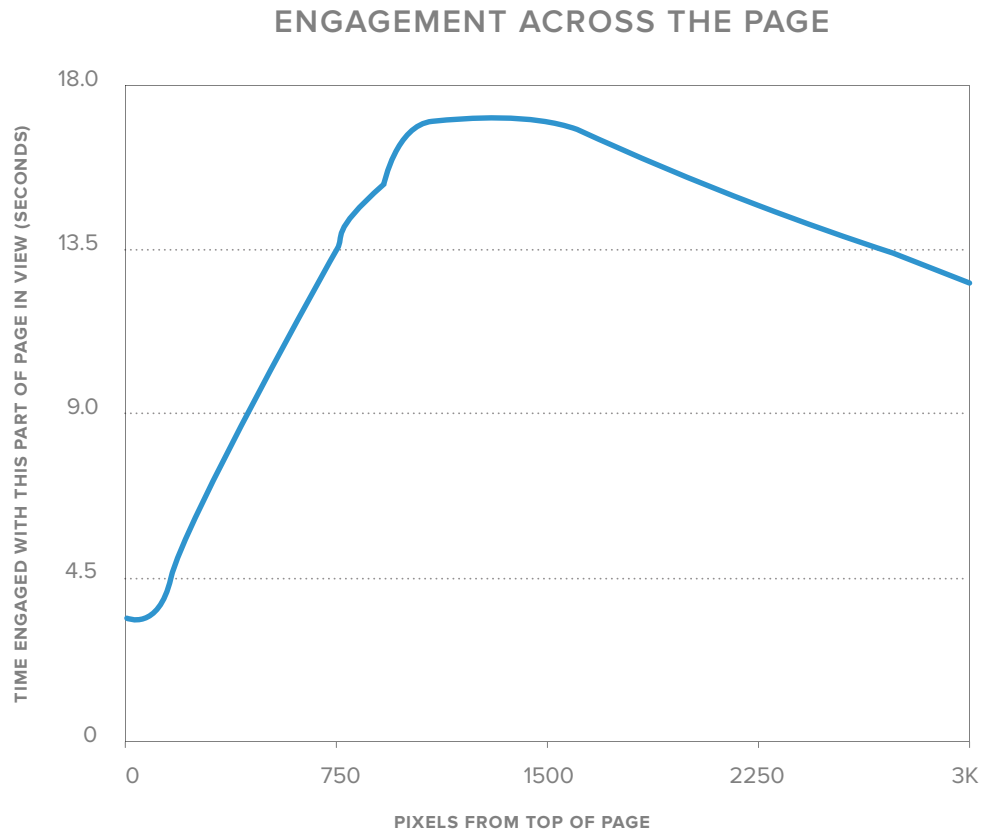
Ensure your headlines are sticky by optimizing both for the click and the behavior after the click with **Engaged Headline Testing**. With Engaged Headline Testing, the winning headlines are the ones that lead to actual engagement with your content, which lets you know how well the headlines and subsequent content appeal to, and match with, your audience. For more on headlines, [download our new Chartbeat Insider Guide: How to Use Headline Testing to Hook and Hold Readers](#).

2. Scrolling in the Deep

How readers are moving around on your pages — particularly, how far down the page they're scrolling — can tell you a lot about how to make your pages more engaging. Take a look at these remarkable statistics about page interactions:

- **The most viewed area of the page is just above the fold.** Viewership peaks (just over 80%) at about 550 pixels.
- **The portion of the page below the fold is viewed for nearly three times as long as the top of the page.** Pixels at the top of the page are in view for the shortest amount of time — about 4 seconds — and the amount of time in view steadily rises as we move down the page, peaking at around 1200 pixels.

- **Readers who do scroll down past the fold engage much more towards the bottom of the page than they do at the top.**³ We see this represented in the figure below, where we show the amount of time each area of the page was actively viewed by those who scrolled to view it at all.



DATA BY  Chartbeat

What does this mean? Don't just structure your content like every other article out there. Since there's a large drop-off of readers once you get past the fold, you should touch on your main point early on to speak to all of your readers. When finalizing layout, however, keep in mind how readers typically read and scroll through pages. By setting up your articles to suit these behaviors, you'll see much more engagement with your content.

PUT IT TO WORK

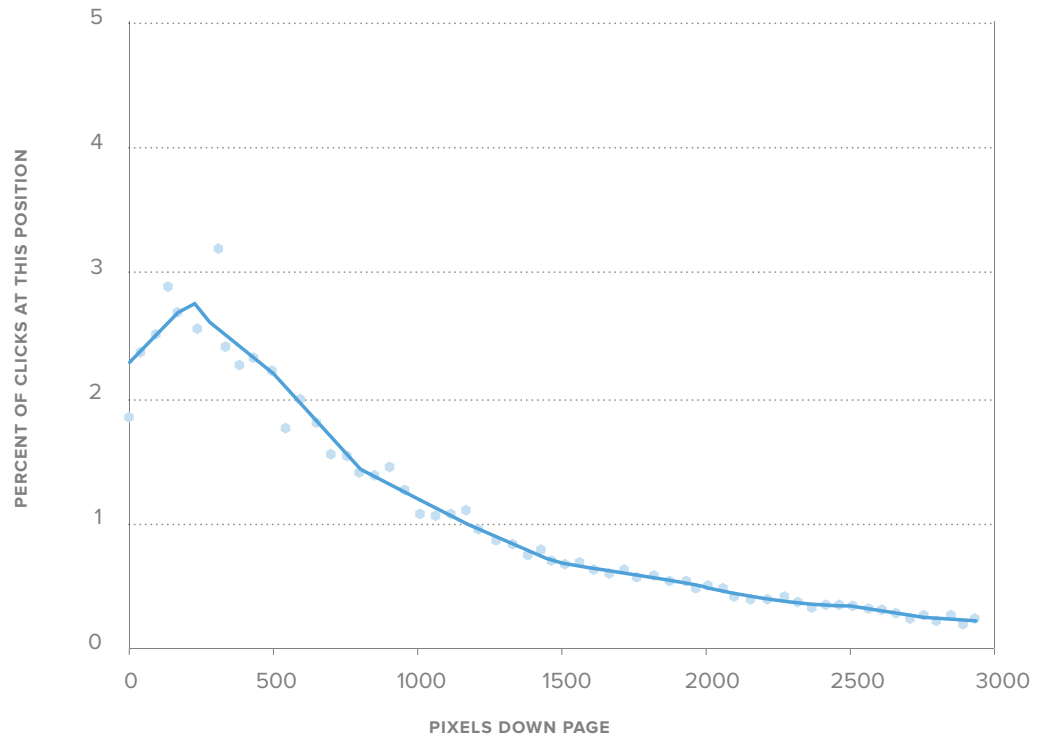
What portion of the page has the potential for the highest impact on your audience? That depends on your goals, of course. Two goals we hear frequently are maximizing reach and maximizing exposure time. **To maximize reach, it appears that placing the key theses, images, and display ads just above the fold is the best possible bet.** On the other hand, if you want to maximize the amount of time that viewers spend — a good goal for brand advertisements and site modules that take time to consume — **a placement around 1200px may be better.** And, if you want to maximize the tradeoff between the two, positions slightly below the fold between 600 and 1000 pixels typically have both high viewership and high engagement.⁴

3. Link Where it Counts

While data on scrolling behavior can indicate where readers will most likely view any links, actual clicking illuminates ways that page design can provoke and encourage clicks. With so much engagement on the lower portion of your page, you'll want to deepen and capitalize on that attention with links to related articles. In addition, integrating links throughout your content can increase **Recirculation**, or the percentage of your audience that moves from one article page to another within the same visit.

Data collected from 294 publishing sites produced some interesting, if not surprising, insights about how click behavior relates to page design:

WHERE DO VISITORS CLICK



DATA BY  Chartbeat

- The majority of clicks happen just above the fold at page depths of 400 to 600 pixels, where most main content links typically live (as seen in the graph above).
- Larger links (including linked headlines) correlate with higher click-through rates.
- Sites with links placed more closely together perform about 2.5x better than sites with more pixels between links.⁵

All in all, these statistics indicate that **a few large links interspersed with many smaller, closely spaced links** will result in the best recirculation.

So when you think about the design and formatting of your content, make sure you're considering three variables: link size, link density, and link relevance. That way, you're more likely to draw people deeper into your website and keep them coming back.

4. TL;DR: Break up Your Text

Remember that a visitor's default behavior when reaching a site is to leave. Consider this:

Around 53% of visitors to an article will leave before reaching 15 seconds of engagement on the page.⁶

Because of this, it is critical to hook them in right away — and work to keep them there. After using scroll depth to help you identify the places on the page where you're losing your readers' attention, start working on some quick design changes to help readers move along the page and keep reading.

Research has shown that reader experience and comprehension improve when the page design is clean and uncluttered by egregiously flashing ad modules or promos for unrelated content.⁷ Conversely, streamlining your own content can also determine whether a reader will stick around or bolt. You know the drill: bulletpoints, subheads, pull quotes. All of these are effective design

elements that catch your readers' eyes and sustain their attention. Just look below. Of course, the content you choose to highlight in these elements — key topic sentences, statistics, graphics (more on this below) — should make editorial sense and seamlessly draw readers into the rest of the article.



5. Sight, Sound, and Motion

Just like those structural elements we talked about above, graphics on the page — images, animations, video, graphs and charts, etc. — can significantly increase an article's engagement.

In fact, articles that feature images see 94% more total views.⁸

Deciding how best to illustrate a number story or which image to use, if any, starts in your editorial gut. But Engaged Time and scrolling metrics can help you decide where to put them, when to refresh them — or when to get rid of them if they aren't working.

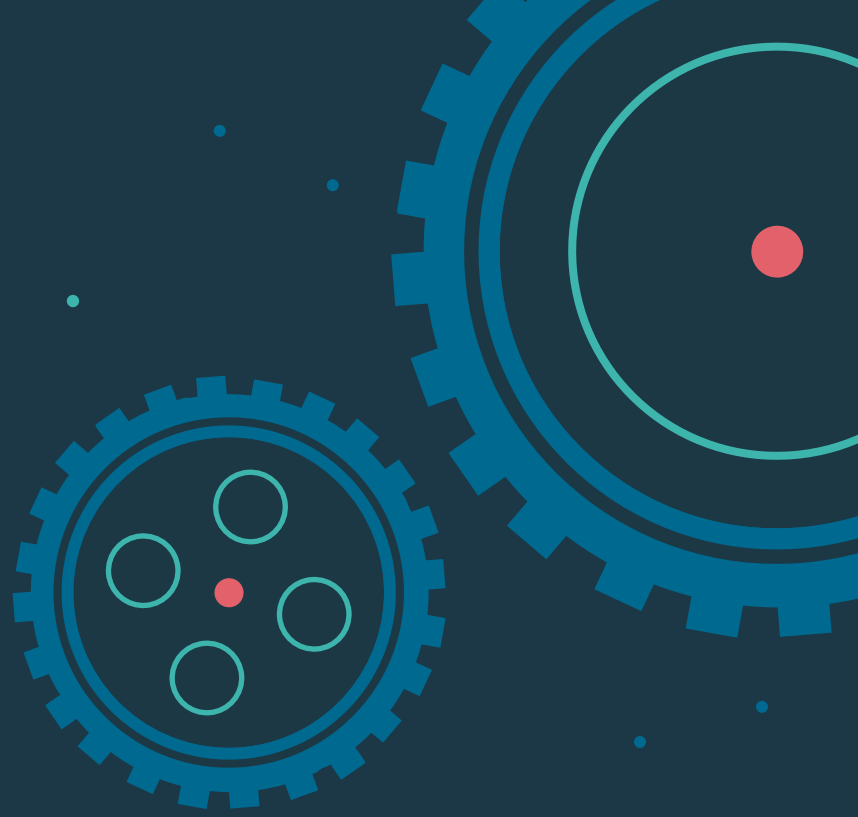
PRESS PLAY

When a visitor lands on a page with video content, there's only a 9% chance that they'll watch the entire video. That's right — fewer than 1 in 10 people will watch the average video to its conclusion. But that's not as bad as it sounds once you dig into the numbers. While there's only a 25% chance that visitors will manually press play on a video that doesn't start automatically, things improve once the video starts: the average viewer will watch 73% of a video under 10 minutes. **In short: Get your visitors to start watching.** Sure, very few people make it to the finish line (18%), but those who start will give you a decent chunk of their time.⁹

Want to learn more about our tools and how they can help you improve your layout strategies and grow your audience? Give us a ring at 646.218.9333 or shoot us a note at PRODUCTOUTREACH@CHARTBEAT.COM.

REFERENCES

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