



The Honest Conversion

A practical guide to creating useful actions, earning trust, and learning from every campaign

Make the next step worth taking.

SHAD EDDIE MONGRUE

Free preview · Introduction and Chapter 1

shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com

SHELF 23 OF 32 · COST PER ACTION (CPA) MARKETING · CORE
BOOK

The Honest Conversion

*A practical guide to creating useful actions, earning trust,
and learning from every campaign*

SHAD EDDIE MONGRUE

ShadEddieMongrueBooks Gallery · shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com

The Honest Conversion. Free preview edition: Introduction and Chapter 1. © 2026 Shad Eddie Mongrue. All rights reserved. Published by the Shad Eddie Mongrue Books Gallery, shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com.

This book is for education and general information. It is not personal financial, legal, tax, medical, mental-health, nursing, investment or other professional advice. Talk with a qualified professional about your situation.

Every statistic, study finding and documented example is numbered and listed in the Sources, with a link to the page it came from. Each was checked word for word against its source in October 2026. Stories marked "composite example" are illustrations drawn from common situations; their names and details are not real people. Stories marked "documented example" come from the cited sources.

Research credits: see "Research Credits" at the back of the book. Cover and design: Shad Eddie Mongrue Books Gallery.

Contents

INTRO	An Invitation
CH. 1	The Joy of a Useful Yes
CH. 2	Follow the Value
CH. 3	Trust Is Part of the Offer
CH. 4	Design a Clear Next Step
CH. 5	Know What the Numbers Mean
CH. 6	Make Small Tests Teach You
CH. 7	Consent Is a Working Skill
CH. 8	Spot the Failure Before It Spreads
CH. 9	Run a Responsible First Pilot
CH. 10	Keep Learning, Keep Your Word
RESEARCH	What the Evidence Says
PRACTICE	Your 30-Day Practice Plan
REFERENCE	Glossary
LETTER	Keep Going
BACK	Sources and Research Credits
BACK	About the Author

An Invitation

A conversion is a small word for a very human moment. Someone sees an offer, decides whether it fits, and takes an action. Maybe they request information, sign up, or choose to learn more. Behind the number is a person with a reason for being there—and a right to understand what comes next. That is where cost-per-action marketing gets interesting. It can help you connect a real need with a useful next step, while giving you a way to learn whether your message and offer made sense.

It is also a subject worth approaching with care. An action recorded in a dashboard is not proof that someone benefited, or that an ad caused the action. In field experiments at eBay, researchers found that conventional, non-experimental estimates overstated paid-search returns relative to their experimental findings; they also reported no measurable short-term benefit from brand-keyword ads.¹ Those findings concern paid search, not every CPA campaign. Still, they offer a useful reminder: numbers can look persuasive before you ask what they really show.

The best part of this work is not getting a person to click at any cost. It is making a choice understandable. A clear message lets someone see what is being offered, what they will need to do, and what may happen after they act. The Federal Trade Commission says advertisers must substantiate the express and implied claims an ad conveys to reasonable consumers before disseminating it.² That principle is practical, not just formal: it asks you to make sure your words can carry the weight you put on them.

Trust matters especially when an action involves someone's information. In one lead-generation case, the FTC required defendants to verify the identity of businesses receiving consumers' sensitive information and obtain consumers' express, informed consent for those disclosures.³ That was a requirement in that particular order, not a universal description of every rule. But it makes a valuable point for anyone building a campaign: the path from a person's choice to the use of their information deserves attention, not a shrug and a checkbox.

This book is an invitation to enjoy the craft without confusing activity for achievement. You will look at offers, messages, consent, tracking, and

results as parts of one exchange. You will practice asking who benefits, who carries the cost, what your evidence can support, and what you still do not know. Sometimes the thoughtful decision will be to improve an offer. Sometimes it will be to pause it. Either way, learning honestly is progress.

You do not need to arrive with a marketing background or a taste for dashboards. Bring curiosity, a willingness to test your assumptions, and respect for the person on the other side of the screen. We will work in small steps, with realistic expectations and room for results to vary. The goal is not to make every visitor say yes. It is to make each yes better informed—and each campaign a little wiser than the last.

Reasons to fall in love with this subject

- **A useful yes has a person behind it** CPA marketing gives you a chance to connect a person's need with an action that may help them move forward. That possibility is meaningful, but it is not automatic: an action alone cannot tell you whether the offer was useful or the experience was fair. You will learn to look beyond the conversion and ask what the person understood, what they received, and whether the exchange made sense from their point of view.
- **It turns curiosity into a working habit** A campaign gives you questions you can investigate: Is the offer clear? Does the landing page match the ad? Are people taking the action you expected? Careful measurement can help you find answers, while honest limits keep you from claiming more than the evidence supports. That combination—asking, observing, and revising—is satisfying because it makes marketing a practice of learning, not a contest to sound certain.
- **Clarity is a skill you can build** A good call to action does not need to be mysterious, breathless, or hidden in tiny print. It can plainly explain what a person is choosing and what follows. The FTC notes that when an ad has more than one reasonable interpretation and one is misleading, the seller can be liable for that misleading interpretation.² Learning to spot ambiguity is therefore useful both for consumer understanding and for making your own work more responsible.
- **The details can protect the relationship** Consent, disclosures, and follow-up choices may seem like small parts of a campaign, but they shape how people experience it. Getting those details right is not a

promise that every person will trust you; it is a way to treat their attention and information with care. You can make transparency part of the offer itself, so people can make a choice with a clearer picture rather than discover important context afterward.

- **A modest test can teach a useful lesson** You do not have to declare a campaign a triumph or a failure after one result. A well-framed test can help you examine one assumption, notice what changed, and decide what deserves another look. The discipline is to keep the conclusion proportional to the evidence. A promising signal is a reason to investigate further, not a guarantee of future results—and a disappointing result can still help you avoid repeating a weak approach.
- **Responsible work has room to change** Offers, platforms, consumer expectations, and rules can change, so a sound practice needs regular review. You can decide to revise a message, improve how a partner is monitored, or retire an offer that no longer seems right. The FTC advises advertisers to have reasonable programs to train and monitor network members, with the scope depending on the risk of consumer harm.⁴ That kind of attention makes responsibility an ongoing craft, not a one-time box to check.

BY THE END OF THIS BOOK, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO

- Judge whether an offer appears relevant, understandable, and worth presenting.
- Trace the exchange from a person's need to an action and its possible outcomes.
- Write claims and calls to action that are clear and supportable.
- Make the relationship between an ad, landing page, and requested action easier to understand.
- Interpret actions and tracking cautiously, without mistaking correlation for proof of cause.
- Plan small tests around a specific question and draw appropriately modest conclusions.
- Recognize warning signs in lead quality, partner methods, consent, and campaign results.

How to use this book

Read the chapters in order if you are new to CPA marketing. Each one builds on the last: first the purpose of an action, then the offer and message, then measurement, testing, and a bounded pilot. If you already work in the field, you can also use the chapter titles as a review list. Notice which areas feel solid and which ones deserve a closer look.

As you read, keep a simple campaign notebook. For each idea, write down the assumption you would test, what a person would need to understand before acting, and what evidence would count as a useful result. Keep observations separate from interpretations. If the numbers are thin or mixed, write that down too. A careful “not enough to tell yet” is often more useful than a confident guess.

Use the exercises as practice, not as a formula for guaranteed performance. Start with a small, bounded pilot and define in advance what would make you pause, revise, or continue learning. Check the current requirements that apply to your particular channels, offer, audience, and data practices before launch. A book can help you ask better questions; it cannot inspect your campaign or determine every obligation for you.

HOW THIS BOOK HANDLES EVIDENCE

This book distinguishes documented examples, which are limited to the cited facts, from composite examples, which are fictional illustrations and not reports of real people or events. Numbered citations identify the source behind factual claims; they are not proof that every point applies to every campaign. The guidance is educational, not legal, financial, or other personal professional advice. Rules and circumstances can vary and change, so check current, authoritative requirements for your situation. Results vary, and no method here guarantees a particular outcome.

The Joy of a Useful Yes

A COMPOSITE EXAMPLE · NAMES AND DETAILS ARE ILLUSTRATIVE

Maya opens a page on her phone while waiting for the kettle. She is looking for help comparing a service she may need, not for a surprise adventure through twelve tabs and a maze of tiny print. One ad catches her eye because it says plainly what the service does. She taps through. The next page explains what information it asks for, what will happen after she submits it, and how to stop if she changes her mind. Maya pauses, reads, and chooses to continue.

That small yes is the heart of a good action campaign. It is not a trick, and it is not a trophy the marketer gets to keep. It is a decision made by a person who understands the next step well enough to decide whether it suits them. The marketer gets something useful, too: a recorded action that can be examined and compared with the campaign's purpose. But a recorded action is only a beginning. It does not, by itself, prove that Maya got what she needed or that the ad caused a valuable outcome.

Cost per action marketing is worth loving for that combination: a real next step for someone, and a measurable question for you. The work is to make both sides of that exchange honest.

A conversion is a person making a choice

In performance marketing, an action is a response you have decided to count. It might be a request for information, a signup, a completed application, or another defined step. The exact action matters because it tells you what the campaign is asking a person to do. If you cannot explain it in one clear sentence, pause before you buy traffic or build a funnel. A fuzzy goal tends to produce fuzzy decisions—and occasionally very confident reports about what the numbers supposedly mean.

Start by asking what problem the offer is meant to help with. Then describe the next step from the visitor's point of view. What will they learn, request, or

receive? What information will they have to provide? What might happen after they act? You may not know every later outcome, but you can avoid implying more certainty than you have. A request for information is not the same thing as a completed service, a favorable decision, or a solution to someone's problem.

This distinction changes the way you judge success. If you count only submissions, you may be tempted to make the request as irresistible as possible, even when the offer is poorly matched to the people who respond. Instead, make relevance part of the goal. Ask whether the people who take the action appear to understand what they requested and whether the next step is consistent with the promise that brought them there. A useful yes is more than a tap; it is a choice made with a fair picture of what comes next.

There is satisfaction in making that choice easier. You can remove vague language, put important information where people can see it, and make the call to action say what it actually does. Clarity does not guarantee that everyone will say yes. That is not a flaw. The aim is not to collect every possible response; it is to help suitable people recognize an offer and decide freely.

Follow the value on both sides

Before presenting an offer, map the exchange. On one side is the person's need. On the other is the business or service they may reach by taking action. Between them are your message, the page, the requested information, and the handoff. At each point, ask who benefits, who bears a cost, and what is known versus assumed. A campaign can look efficient in a dashboard while asking people for information that does not lead to the help they expected.

Imagine an offer that invites someone to request a comparison. A plain explanation might say what kind of comparison they will receive, what details are needed to make the request, and what contact may follow. A hazy version might promise a broad benefit, tuck the actual request out of sight, or leave the visitor guessing about who receives their details. The first version gives a person a basis for choosing. The second may generate actions, but the action count cannot repair a misunderstanding.

The words around an offer also matter because people can take away more than one meaning. Before an ad goes out, advertisers should substantiate

the express and implied claims it conveys to reasonable consumers.² So read your draft as a visitor might, not only as its author. If a headline could reasonably sound like a guarantee, a special relationship, or a result you cannot support, revise it. The question is not merely, “Can I defend the literal wording?” It is also, “What impression might this create in context?”

A practical value check can be simple. Write down the benefit you intend to offer, the exact action you are counting, and the next event the person should reasonably expect. Then look for gaps. If the benefit is a useful connection but the action only records interest, say so. If you do not know what happens after a handoff, do not decorate the unknown with reassuring promises. You can investigate the gap, narrow the claim, or decide the offer is not ready.

This way of thinking may reduce some responses. Someone who wanted something different may decide not to continue. That is not necessarily wasted attention. It can save a person from an unsuitable next step and save you from mistaking mismatched activity for meaningful performance. A smaller number of well-understood actions can teach you more than a pile of responses you cannot explain.

Let measurement ask a careful question

CPA gives you a convenient unit to watch: the cost associated with a defined action. Convenient is not the same as complete. A tracked action tells you that your system recorded a response under a particular rule. It does not automatically tell you why the person acted, whether the ad changed their decision, or whether the resulting experience was valuable. Keep those questions separate in your notes and in your conversations with partners.

Attribution is one reason to stay modest. A person might see an ad and act later through another route; a tracking system might credit the last recorded touch; or someone might have acted without the ad. The exact limits depend on what is being tracked and how. You do not need to solve every measurement problem before you learn anything, but you should name the assumption you are using. “This system recorded the action after this campaign” is a narrower, more defensible statement than “This campaign caused the action.”

Think of a campaign report as a map of observed events, not a verdict about human motivation. If the count changes, ask what else changed: the

audience, the offer, the wording, the page, or the tracking definition. When several things change together, it becomes harder to learn which one mattered. A useful test isolates a question where possible, and a useful review records the result even when it disappoints you.

The same care applies to the word “value.” An action can have a price and still be a poor exchange. If people misunderstand the request, if the downstream service is a mismatch, or if the action cannot be verified, the apparent efficiency may be misleading. Ask what evidence would show that the action is useful beyond being counted. You may not have access to every later outcome, so be candid about what you can and cannot evaluate.

That honesty is not an obstacle to growth; it is the condition for learning. A campaign that disappoints can still teach you that the message was unclear, that the offer was not relevant, or that your measurement answered the wrong question. The win is not making every test look successful. The win is making the next decision better informed—and keeping the person on the other side of the report in view.

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

Research spotlight

A large-scale field experiment at eBay was designed to measure the causal effectiveness of paid search ads.¹ The researchers found that conventional, non-experimental estimates overstated paid-search returns compared with their experimental results.¹ They also found that non-brand ads positively influenced new and infrequent users, while more frequent users accounted for most ad spending without having their purchasing behavior influenced by the ads; average returns were negative.¹ Their experimental estimate of paid-search ROI was -63% , with a 95% confidence interval of $[-124\%, -3\%]$.⁵ This is a useful reminder, not a universal forecast for your campaign. The work tested a particular advertiser, channel, and setting; it does not establish that every paid-search campaign loses money. It does show why observed clicks and actions are not enough to prove that advertising caused the outcome. A measured test can challenge a comfortable assumption. It cannot promise that the same result will appear in a different offer, audience, or market.

A life example

A DOCUMENTED EXAMPLE

A lead is not automatically a useful connection

A 2017 Federal Trade Commission lead-generation matter offers a concrete reason to look beyond the count of applications collected. The FTC said the judgment against the lead-generation firm exceeded \$104 million, representing revenue obtained by selling consumers' loan applications as leads. The judgment was suspended based on the defendants' inability to pay.³ The stipulated order also required the defendants to investigate and verify the identity of businesses receiving consumers' sensitive information and to obtain consumers' express, informed consent for those disclosures.³

Those facts do not tell us that every lead-generation arrangement works the same way, or that every collected application is mishandled. They do make a basic point hard to miss: a person's application is not just a convenient unit in a marketer's report. Its path and use matter. If your campaign gathers information, ask what the person has been told, who may receive it, and whether you can explain the handoff accurately. If you cannot answer, that is a question to resolve before you celebrate a low cost per action. A responsible campaign measures the response and pays attention to what the response sets in motion.

TRY THIS

Write the useful-yes brief

Before you build or review a campaign, take a few minutes to describe the choice from the visitor's side.

1. Name the person's need in ordinary language, without turning it into a promise that everyone has that need.
2. Write one sentence describing the offer and one sentence describing the action you will count.
3. List what a person should expect after taking that action, including what you do not yet know.
4. Read the ad and landing-page language as a reasonable visitor might; mark any phrase that could suggest more than you can

support.

5. Decide what evidence would help you judge whether the action was relevant, not merely recorded.
6. Write down one reason you would pause the campaign, revise it, or investigate a partner's process.

Myths and honest truths

- **Myth:** A low cost per action proves that the campaign is working. **Truth:** It shows that actions were recorded at a particular cost under your measurement rules. It does not, by itself, establish that the ad caused them or that the people received useful outcomes.
- **Myth:** More conversions are always better. **Truth:** A higher count can still reflect confusion or poor fit. A useful action is one a person understands and that leads toward the next step the offer actually describes.
- **Myth:** If the wording is technically true, the message is clear. **Truth:** People may reasonably take away an implication you did not intend. Review the whole impression, and support the express and implied claims your ad conveys.²

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A counted action is a person's choice, not just a number in a report.
- Make the offer, requested action, and expected next step understandable before asking for a yes.
- A recorded response does not alone prove causation, fit, or lasting value.
- A modest test can be useful even when its result argues against your first idea.
- The best conversion is one a person can choose with a fair understanding of what comes next.

REFLECT

- 1. What would a person reasonably believe they are agreeing to when they take your campaign's action?*
- 2. What does your current measurement show, and what important question does it leave unanswered?*
- 3. What would make you pause an offer even if its reported conversion cost looked attractive?*

Nine more chapters are waiting

You've read the Introduction and Chapter 1. The full 92-page book continues with:

- CH. 2 Follow the Value
- CH. 3 Trust Is Part of the Offer
- CH. 4 Design a Clear Next Step
- CH. 5 Know What the Numbers Mean
- CH. 6 Make Small Tests Teach You
- CH. 7 Consent Is a Working Skill
- CH. 8 Spot the Failure Before It Spreads
- CH. 9 Run a Responsible First Pilot
- CH. 10 Keep Learning, Keep Your Word

Plus the research analysis "What the Evidence Says", a 30-day practice plan, a glossary, and every source with full research credits.

JOIN FREE OR GO INSIDER

Join the free Reader's Circle at shadeddiemongruebooksgallery.com to read the full book online, listen with AI reading mode in a man's or a woman's voice, and download the PDF. Want every shelf? Reserve an Insider membership.

Sources for these chapters

Numbers in the text (like ³) point to these sources. Every statistic, finding and documented example was copied from its source page, checked word for word against that page in October 2026, and is restated here in plain English. Figures can change as sources update. This book is for education and is not personal financial, legal, medical, mental-health, nursing, investment or other professional advice.

- 1 **National Bureau of Economic Research.** Tom Blake, Chris Nosko, and Steven Tadelis. *Consumer Heterogeneity and Paid Search Effectiveness: A Large Scale Field Experiment*. May 2014. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w20171>
- 2 **Federal Trade Commission.** *Advertising Substantiation Principles*. <https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/attachments/training-materials/substantiation.pdf>
- 3 **Federal Trade Commission.** *FTC Halts Operation That Unlawfully Shared and Sold Consumers' Sensitive Data*. July 5, 2017. <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2017/07/ftc-halts-operation-unlawfully-shared-sold-consumers-sensitive-data>
- 4 **Federal Trade Commission.** *FTC's Endorsement Guides: What People Are Asking*. <https://www.ftc.gov/business-guidance/resources/ftcs-endorsement-guides-what-people-are-asking>
- 5 **National Bureau of Economic Research.** Tom Blake, Chris Nosko, and Steven Tadelis. *Consumer Heterogeneity and Paid Search Effectiveness: A Large Scale Field Experiment*. May 2014. https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w20171/w20171.pdf