How to write a call to action

Why "contact us" asks for more than the reader has agreed to

Gates. Relevance: secondary. Credibility: no. Proof: no. Safety: secondary. **Access: primary.**

The ask has to be proportional to what the reader has already agreed to. One article read is close to nothing agreed, and a scheduled conversation with a partner sits several gates ahead of that.

Questions this guide answers

- What can we ask a reader to do before they are ready for a sales call?
- How should the next step differ for early readers and people ready to talk?
- How can we tell whether our small ask is disguising a bigger commitment?

The symptom

Every button on the site says the same thing.

Contact us. Schedule a consultation. Get in touch. The identical ask sits under an article a first-time visitor found through a search, and under the page a nine-month prospect reads the week before signing.

Nobody planned it that way. It arrived one page at a time, each new page inheriting the button from the last one, until the whole site had a single ask with no idea who it was talking to.

Traffic looks fine. Form fills don't. So somebody rewrites the button. Somebody tests a color. Somebody floats the theory that the headline above it is doing the damage. The conversation never leaves the button, because the button is the only part of the arrangement anyone thinks of as copy.

Why it keeps happening

One ask is easier to approve. It's easier to track. And it matches how the firm thinks about the goal, which is a meeting.

Those are real reasons, which is why the practice survives every review it's ever put through. The problem shows up in the direction of the design. It begins with what the firm wants at the end and works back to the button. The reader's position never enters the calculation.

We've put schedule a consultation under a top-of-funnel article and read the conversion rate as a copy problem for a year. The copy was fine. The ask was several gates ahead of the person reading it, and no verb was going to close that distance.

The pattern turns up in almost every site audit we've run in this work, and it survives because the firm's own logic never contradicts it. If the goal is meetings, ask for meetings. Ask on every page. Ask more clearly. Ask in a stronger color.

What the buyer is doing at the Access gate

Working out what the next proportional step is. Proportional is the whole word.

A reader who has consumed one article has agreed to almost nothing. They haven't settled whether you're relevant to their problem, they haven't tested anything you've claimed, and they're nowhere near deciding a choice like this is safe to make. Asking them for a scheduled conversation with a partner asks for a commitment several gates in front of where they're standing.

Nothing about their response reads as refusal. They close the tab. The firm records it as a traffic problem and buys more traffic.

The far end of the range breaks in the same place. A buyer who has cleared four gates will take one step, and most firms answer by offering the largest thing they sell, which is how a good sequence dies in the last ten yards.

Access is the gate a sorting model has no opinion about.

The correction

Give the site three asks instead of one, each matched to how much the reader has agreed to so far.

For a first-time reader, something they can take without identifying themselves. An explanation, an insight, a piece of the problem worked through in public. The ask works when the next step is almost insultingly small. Reach out your hand. For that reader, it might be the checklist itself, with no form and no meeting attached.

For a returning reader, something that costs an email address and returns real utility. This tier lives or dies on the exchange rate. Every additional field on a gated asset can reduce who claims it, and the friction has to be earned by how much you've already established. Three fields on the strength of two articles is a firm charging for a relationship it hasn't built.

For a reader deep in the material, the conversation. Offer it plainly, once, on the pages where it belongs.

Then the copy rule that makes the whole arrangement work: every CTA names the specific problem or topic it belongs to. A generic request asks the reader to switch modes, from reading about their problem to being sold to. Naming the topic tells them the step is proportional to what they were already thinking about, and it does that before they've consciously evaluated anything.

You'll know you've got the tiering right when the asks stop being interchangeable. If you can lift the button off one page and drop it on another without noticing, you have one ask in three fonts.

Before and after

Before. *Contact us to schedule a consultation.*

After. *We wrote up how selection committees screen advisors in the first ten minutes, including the two things that get a firm removed before anybody opens the credentials. Six pages. No form.*

What backfires

Putting all three asks on every page. Three equally weighted asks make the reader do work the page should have done. Choose a primary next step for the page, and keep a plain contact route available for the person who arrived ready to talk.

Worse is the small ask that turns out to be a large one. A free assessment is a meeting wearing a smaller word, and the reader finds that out on the form. You spend the trust you were trying to build.

Run this on your own material

List every CTA on the site. Every button, every end-of-article line, every sidebar, every email signature.

Beside each one, write what the reader had to have done to earn being asked that. Write what the page they're standing on could reasonably have produced in someone who landed there cold, and be strict about it.

Two things fall out of that list. The same sentence appears under pages that are four gates apart. And there's no ask at all on the pages where somebody deep in the material would go looking for one.

An afternoon. No new copy required to find the problem.

Signals you've cleared it

Advance when the small asks get taken by people who never fill out anything, when the list grows from readers who came in through a named topic, and when requests for a conversation arrive from people who already have most of your material. That last one means the sequence carried them instead of the button.

Hold when traffic is climbing and form fills are flat and the proposed fix is a rewrite of the button. Hold when the only ask on the site is the largest thing you sell. And hold when the entry-level asset is behind a form long enough to function as a qualification exercise, which tells the reader you'd rather have their phone number than their attention.

Where this connects

Story from the Field · *The Four Words That Defined a Good Mother*, on an ask small enough to be almost insulting.

Research Library · Entry 07, small commitments and the ladder of yeses.

Next move · Go to *How to know when to make the ask*.