Maximize Your Marketing Dollars by Capturing Your Mobile Audience

Why Mobile Optimization Matters and How to Implement it Effectively

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Stop Leaving Money on the Table

Would you knowingly walk away from 10 percent of your prospective clients this year? What if I told you that without a mobile-friendly website or smartphone application, that's exactly what you've been doing for the last two years.

Desktop computer use has declined by around 10 percent each year for the last three years, while mobile device use over the last 1-2 years has increased dramatically, actually surpassing desktop computer use[1] for the first time in January 2014. This includes the use of mobile-friendly websites and apps.

With the affordability and availability of smartphones and tablets, it's easier than ever to surf the internet, consume news or buy a product or service from just about anywhere. Your prospect in 2015 is more likely to be perusing your site from their couch or commuting to work than sitting at their desk.

Global Usage

—— Desktop
—— Mobile

2007   2014

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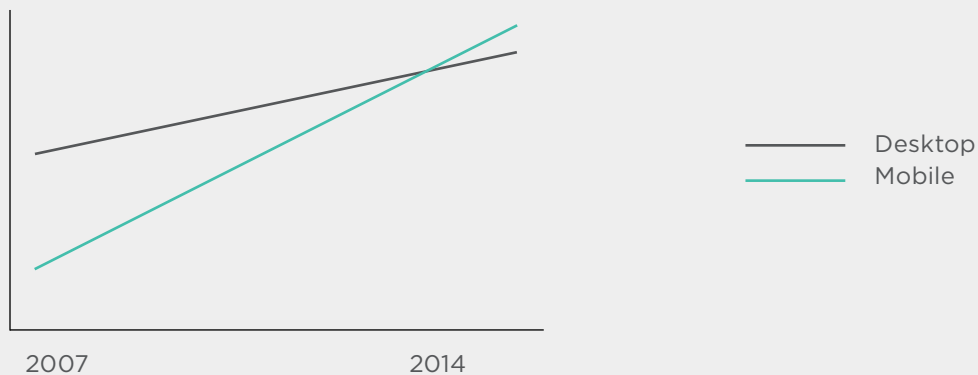
[1] Bosomworth, D. | Mobile Marketing Statistics 2015 | Smart Insights | Jan. 15, 2015   http://www.smartinsights.com/mobile-marketing/mobile-marketing-analytics/mobile-marketing-statistics/

Making the Case for Mobile Optimization

Beyond basic accessibility, a mobile-optimized site is important for your brand and professional identity. A poor mobile experience negatively shapes a consumer's opinion of your brand. In fact, as reported by a 2012 Latitude study[2], 61 percent of people reported that they have a better opinion of a brand when they have a good mobile experience. Any brands that identify as modern or cutting edge (e.g., fashion, technology) must demonstrate this with the first impression they provide their mobile user.

If you are a service professional you need to establish trust and authority quickly, within a few seconds in many instances. This is true whether you're a lawyer, contractor or dog trainer. Clients subconsciously attribute their frustration over a poor user experience on your website to your services before they even meet you! You can't afford to make that bad first impression, especially if your competitors aren't.

The good news for companies looking to compete on mobile is that for both large and small businesses, close to half of the competition isn't thinking about that space.

According to research conducted in February 2014[3] only six percent of small businesses have a mobile site and a whopping 45 percent didn't have a website at all.

6% | 45%
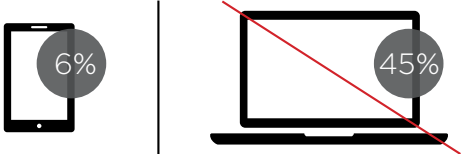
A 2013 Pure Oxygen Labs report[4] indicated that of the top 100 Fortune 500 companies, a full 44 percent had no "mobile signals" at all. Of the 56 percent of businesses that had mobile websites (either a dedicated mobile site or a responsive site), only six percent complied with Google's mobile requirements. Unsurprisingly, one of those six was Google itself, so there was really only five percent compliance.

Smartphones Deliver Prospects Better Than other Channels & Devices

Let's evaluate where we came from, dig a little deeper into how people are leveraging their smartphones today, and then see if we can make some predictions for the future. In 2012, Google published statistics[5] indicating that smartphone use was primarily motivated by communication (54 percent) and entertainment (33 percent). Most of us would probably agree that three years ago, our phones were primarily used to check the news, weather, email and engage on social media.

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2 Gosselin, K. (2012) | Next Gen Retail: Mobile and Beyond | Retrieved March 13, 2015 from Latitude: http://files.latd.com/Latitude-Next-Gen-Retail-Study.pdf

3 Sterling, G. | Survey: Only 6% of SMBs Have Mobile Sites, 45 Percent Don't Have Any Site At All | Marketing Land   Feb. 12, 2015 | http://marketingland.com/survey-online-6-percent-smbs-mobile-sites-45-percent-dont-site-73937

4 Research: Two-Thirds of the Fortune 100 are not Mobile-Optimized for Google | Pure Oxygen Labs June 25, 2013 | http://pureoxygenlabs.com/research-two-thirds-of-the-fortune-100-are-not-mobile-optimized-for-google/

5 Google, Sterling Brands, Ipsos (2012) | The New Multi-screen World - Understanding Cross-platform Consumer Behavior | http://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/multiscreenworld_final.pdf

That landscape is changing as apps evolve and mobile-friendly websites become the norm. Smartphones are being leveraged in complex purchasing decisions, primarily at the start of the sales funnel. This process often spans multiple devices and results in a purchase. The multi-device engagement looks something like this:

- A user is watching TV and a commercial comes on that causes them to recognize a need they may have. They use their phone (most likely within arm's reach), to do some initial information gathering on solutions to their problem by researching different options, companies and products. Twenty-two percent of mobile searches were prompted by a TV commercial or program (Google, 2012).

- The next day at work, they fire up their desktop machine and use Google to locate the company, service or product they previously viewed on their smartphone. They evaluate different offerings or compare similar products to come to a purchase decision.

When engaging in a multi-device experience, users rely heavily on search, particularly when using their smartphones (Google, 2012). Ensuring a site displays in mobile search results is imperative in order to not disrupt the user's journey towards a purchase.

| How Shopping Related Content is Accessed	Smartphone	PC/Laptop
Typed website in browser	36%	50%
Already bookmarked	27%	36%
Through email	28%	29%
Search Engine	30%	24%
Social networking site	25%	16%

- At that point, the user may make their purchase online from their personal computer, or may use their phone to look up the address of a local company that provides the service or product.

The following table shows the connection between devices when a user starts their shopping engagement on one device and ends it on another. Note that shopping engagements were most often initiated on smartphones and completed on personal computers.

Start Shopping	Purchase
Smartphone: 65%	Laptop/PC: 61%
PC/Laptop: 25%	Smartphone: 19%
Tablet: 11%	Laptop/PC: 10%

The above sequence should sound familiar because if you own a smartphone, you've probably performed these steps or something very similar in the last week.
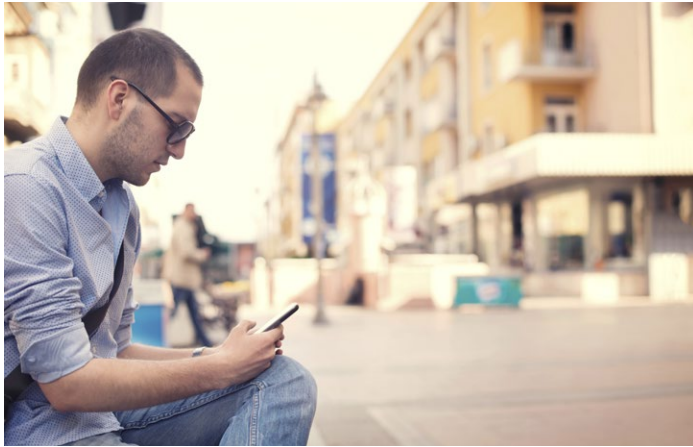
Smartphones have become a critical tool for individuals to assess their needs and make decisions. We automatically reach for them to look up answers to questions and solutions to problems. The popularity and convenience of smartphones has caused it to land at the top of the sales funnel, making it easy for a company to get in front of an engaged audience.

By all indications, the majority of businesses haven't recognized this trend and have yet to truly leverage their mobile presence to capture these users.

Optimize for Mobile to Optimize for Local

If part of your marketing strategy involves local search optimization but you don't have a mobile website, your local strategy has a fatal flaw. For local businesses, smartphones not only represent the beginning of the sales funnel - but the end - as many users return to their phones after they've made a purchase decision in order to locate information on local businesses on how to obtain the product or service. Thanks to modern smartphones (and browsers) that know our location, it's easier than ever to locate things to buy near us.

Eighty-eight percent of consumers conducted a local search on their smartphone in 2014, according to Google's 2014 Local Search Behavior Study[6]. That same study revealed some other key insights related to a business's "bottom line," including that 50 percent of smartphone local searches resulted in a visit to the store within a day of their search, and 18 percent led to a purchase within a day.

Google's 2015 Mobile Friendly Announcement

Perhaps the biggest factor in pushing businesses towards mobile-friendly websites is Google's recent announcement that "Starting April 21 [2015], we will be expanding our use of mobile-friendliness as a ranking signal. This change will affect mobile searches in all languages worldwide and will have a significant impact in our search results."

Some details of the announcement include:

- Responsive design does not have a ranking benefit. This means the use of responsive as a mobile design approach, even though it's Google's preferred method, won't impact rankings. Your m.domain won't be negatively impacted.

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6 Google, Purchased, Ipsos MediaCT (2014) | Understanding Consumers' Local Search Behavior | https://think.storage.googleapis.com/docs/how-advertisers-can-extend-their-relevance-with-search_research-studies.pdf

- Googlebot must be allowed to crawl CSS & JavaScript to pass the "mobile-friendly" test.

- Mobile friendliness is determined at the page level – not sitewide. Specific mobile-friendly pages on your site can still rank in Google's mobile search results even if your entire site isn't optimized.

- Tablets will not be affected by this update. Tablets will continue to display the standard desktop search results.

- Google is currently working on a dedicated mobile index

Google has made the decision about going mobile pretty straightforward. If you want a presence in search results on smartphones after April 20, 2015, you need to have a mobile-friendly website (or at least some mobile-friendly pages).

For more information about Google's "mobile friendly" tag, please see Appendix B.

Three Ways to Implement Mobile Optimization: Mobile URL, Responsive Design & Dynamic Serving

There can be a lot of confusion around "responsive" websites. The terms "responsive" and "mobile" are often used interchangeably when referring to mobile optimization needs. The two terms actually refer to two different content rendering strategies. To confuse things a little more, there's a third approach called "dynamic serving."

The primary difference among these three approaches is how website content and style is transmitted and rendered on your mobile device.

NOTE: When Google refers to "mobile devices," it's specifically referring to phones. Tablets more closely resemble desktop machines and are not officially classified as "mobile" devices.

MOBILE WEBSITES (MOBILE URLS)

There are actually two different URLs serving up two unique sets of code depending on the user's device. Each desktop URL has a mobile-URL subdomain that displays a mobile optimized version of the page. Two examples of websites that currently do this are Macy's (desktop: macys.com, mobile: m.macys.com) and Wikipedia (desktop: wikipedia.com, mobile: en.m.wikipedia.com).

DYNAMIC SERVING

There is a single URL, however the server responds with different HTML (and CSS) depending on the user agent making the request.

When you call up a web page on your phone, your mobile browser identifies itself to the server hosting the website you're attempting to view by sending its "user-agent" string.

The user agent string includes information about the browser, version number, and operating system you're using to try to view the web page. The website's server then uses this information to serve the appropriate content to you based on what device and browser you're using.

RESPONSIVE DESIGN

The same URL and HTML are used regardless of a user's device. There is no user agent component as with dynamic serving. The display of the content is rendered based on programmed breakpoints that correspond with screen sizes and pixel density, and CSS is used to re-order and re-size content and design elements on the screen.

Configuration	Same URL?	Same HTML?	Same CSS?	Rendering is Determined By
Separate URL	No	No	No	User agent
Dynamic	Yes	No	No	User agent
Responsive	Yes	Yes	No	Breakpoints (screen sizes)

Which Type of Mobile Optimization is Best?

Google claims that it doesn't favor any one optimization technique over others. This may be true as it pertains to its algorithm, but in reviewing Google's Mobile Guide for Developers[7], Google appears to favor responsive design. The "Responsive Web Design" topic is the only one that includes a section titled "Why [you should do] responsive design" followed by a bulleted list of the reasons Google recommends responsive web design.

As Google cites, there are advantages to responsive design over dynamic and mobile site design. These advantages generally make it a more reliable option from a development, maintenance, SEO and user experience standpoint.

- On a responsive site, you're only updating one website in order to update for your desktop, tablet and mobile device. On mobile (m.sites) you're maintaining two unique sites and on dynamic sites you're still maintaining a second SEO campaign due to the second set of HTML.

- Dynamic sites require constant vigilance and updating of the user-agent strings[8] as new devices are released.

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7 Responsive Web Design https://developers.google.com/webmasters/mobile-sites/mobile-seo/configurations/responsive-design

8 The user-agent string is sent from a user's browser to the server hosting the site they're visiting. The string indicates which browser and version number, operating system and version is being used to access the web page.

- A single site makes your SEO strategy a lot simpler - you don't need to worry about unintended duplicate content problems or diluting your web pages' SEO juice.

- User-agent detection (performed for both mobile sites and dynamic rendering) makes assumptions based on the device. According to Google, "...user-agent based redirection is error-prone and can degrade your site's user experience." That means it's possible to serve up the wrong version of your site. Responsive programming based on screen size (and designated breakpoints) eliminates the user-agent variable.

- Responsive design increases crawler efficiency which increases the number of pages on your site that can be indexed (which improves your website's overall SEO). Having content on one domain that's crawled by one version of the user agent means they can get to more of your pages. When multiple user-agents have to be deployed to index a single page because of multiple versions of HTML or mobile page versions, it means the spider can't get to as many pages and less of your site is indexed.

- Because it serves up the same content, a responsive site naturally preserves a more consistent, cohesive user experience from desktop to mobile and back again. If your audience views your website on desktop and mobile, this may be an important consideration.

- Google advocates responsive design. This alone is a very worthwhile consideration since Google is the largest search engine and so much of SEO is focused on Google's algorithm and preferences. If you want your site to rank well in organic search, figure out what Google likes and do that.

All that said, responsive design has to be executed properly in order to provide the best user experience for your prospective customers.

Are There Times Not to do Responsive Design?

Responsive design done well is a near-perfect solution in 99 percent of the cases where a mobile-friendly website is needed. The execution of responsive design can be difficult, as it's a consideration that needs to be made throughout the design and development process. Finding an experienced designer, developer or agency is a great way to mitigate the risk of a dysfunctional responsive site.

FEATURE PHONE OPTIMIZATION

One drawback of responsive design is that it does not make accommodations for "feature phones", meaning non-smartphone cell phones that have web browsing capabilities. These phones are not able to follow CSS media queries, which is what is solely responsible for the mobile optimization of "responsive" sites.

Some questions to consider:

- What mobile devices are people using to access my site? That answer can be found in your Google Analytics in the Mobile > Devices report. If you're finding a lot of visitors accessing your site from feature phones instead of smartphones, you should consider a non-responsive mobile optimization option.

- Is the trend towards smartphone use continuing?

For that second question, we can look at the Pew Research Center's 2011 and 2013 statistics[9] on mobile device ownership (or any smartphone manufacturer's profit margin increases over the last few years). The Pew results for adult cell phone ownership are as follows:

Year	Non-Smartphone	Smartphone	No Cell Phone
2011	48%	35%	17%
2013	35%	56%	9%
2015	??	??	??

More adults own cell phones in general in 2013, and a larger percentage of the overall cell phone owning public owns a smartphone. When broken down by the demographics that apply to your specific industry (gender, age, ethnicity, income, education, urbanity) it's possible to get an even more accurate view of the outlook for a specific target audience.

Assuming we're not unplugging from our smartphones and the established trend continues, responsive web design shouldn't pose a problem for the growing majority of mobile device users.

COST PROHIBITIVE TO REDESIGN THE WEBSITE

Regardless of your demographics, a responsive site may not be the best option for very large, content-rich sites such as the New York Times, and large retail sites like JCPenney and Macy's because it necessitates a complete redesign of your existing site.

A mobile-URL site is a separate website and could be developed at a lower cost and probably faster than overhauling an existing website to accommodate responsive. In these instances, a smartphone application may be a good supplement to a .mobile or dynamic serving site to help facilitate purchases and information consumption on a smartphone.

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[9] Smith, A. | Smartphone Ownership 2013 | Pew Research Center | June 5, 2013   http://www.pewinternet.org/2013/06/05/smartphone-ownership-2013/

Mobile is the Future – Adapt or … You Know

A lot of businesses are in for a rude awakening on April 22, 2015, when their web pages drop off of mobile search results completely. Having your brand, products or services accessible on mobile devices (smart phones and feature phones) via a mobile, responsive or dynamic website is imperative for any business.

The only thing that remains constant is change. Consumers have embraced new technology and incorporated it into the buying decision-making process. For each passing week that businesses don't recognize this and do not prioritize mobile optimization in their marketing or business plan, they leave piles of money on the table.

APPENDIX A: HOW TO KNOW IF GOOGLE CONSIDERS YOUR WEBSITE "MOBILE FRIENDLY"

If you're not sure whether or not your website is "mobile friendly," there are several ways to figure out what Google thinks of you.

Test a page from your website with Google's "Mobile Friendly" test by visiting this website: https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/

Visit your Webmaster Tools account and check out the "Mobile usability report" under the "Search Traffic" menu.
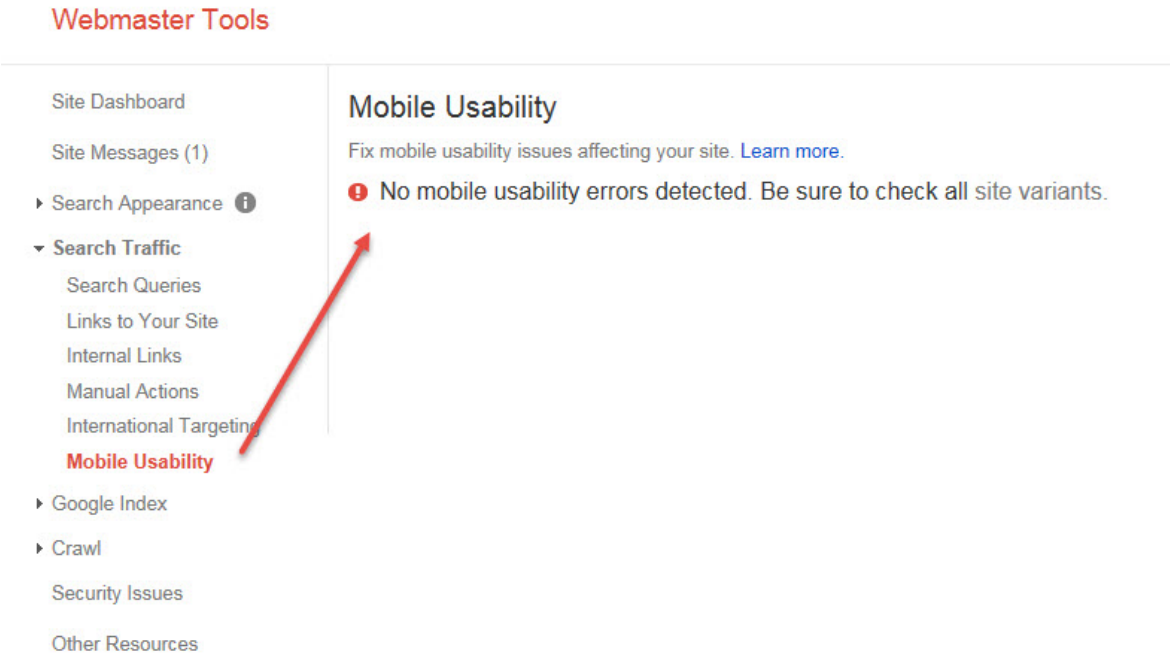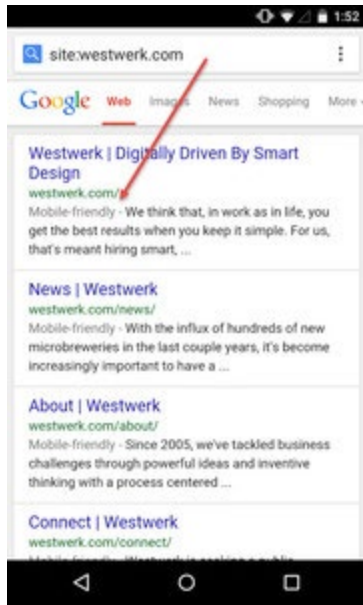
Go to Mobile Chrome on your smartphone and run a site search query on your website by inputting "site:" followed by your website's url (as shown in the image). This will pull indexed pages for your website.

Look for the "mobile friendly" tag in front of the meta description on each listing.

APPENDIX B: GOOGLE'S MOBILE FRIENDLY TAG

Google rolled out the "mobile friendly" tag in November 2014 as a precursor to the algorithm change. Google checks for mobile optimization of a web page and if it passes the test, the page earns the "mobile friendly" label in mobile search results.

Google then gives priority in mobile search results to websites that are optimized. Here are the "mobile friendly" criteria straight from Google:

- Avoids the use of software that is not common on mobile devices, like Flash
- Uses text that is readable without zooming
- Sizes content to the screen so users don't have to scroll horizontally or zoom
- Places links far enough apart so that the correct one can be easily tapped

We can look at this list as a starting point and expect it to grow as mobile-friendly best practices are defined in the coming years. We may even see a day when Google promotes one mobile optimization technique above the others.

REFERENCES

Citations have been included throughout the whitepaper as footnotes.

Westwerk is a Minneapolis-based agency that specializes in digital solutions through inspired design and expert development. Design is our passion, WordPress development is our expertise, and these qualities combined with sound strategy and branding services are what set us apart within the industry.

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