

▶ Optimizing Your Website for On-the-Go Users

BY KIM LONGETEIG, FRBMA

hundreds, if not thousands, of people are visiting your website on mobile phones, tablets, and e-readers. More than likely, they are pinching and zooming their way through pages of content, drop-down menus, and features designed for a mouse to navigate rather than the touch or swipe of a finger.

A quick glance around a public scene will tell you that mobile usage is increasing at staggering rates yet many businesses do not have websites that are mobile-friendly. Recent data from Smart Insights¹ indicates:

- More than 20 percent of Google searches are now being performed on some sort of mobile device.
- In 2012, over half of all local searches were done on a mobile device.
- 25 percent of Internet users in the United States only access the Internet via a mobile device.
- 26 percent of all emails are opened on mobile phones, with another 10 percent being opened on tablets.
- In 2014, mobile Internet usage is expected to overtake desktop usage.

Catering to your mobile users comes with two distinct options: the first is called Responsive Design and the second is to create a mobile-optimized site. Here's how to tell the difference and some guidance on choosing the best option for your website.

Option #1

Responsive Design is quickly becoming the most popular and widely used method for designing a website. A responsive website is a single website with a single source of content that adapts to the user's device. Visitors on a mobile phone, tablet, e-reader, or desktop will see your website in a format that is uniquely displayed for their screen size. From a management perspective, a responsive website is easier to update and make changes to because everything is contained in one place—which also typically costs less than building and maintaining a stand-alone mobile site in the long run.

Aaron Brown, developer and SEO expert at Malama Online Marketing, states, "Another upside is that everyone uses the same URLs to get to the same content on your site. This has huge potential for search engine rankings. If everyone is sharing the same link, it makes it easy for search engines to give credit where credit is due."

Challenges that you might face when choosing Responsive Design include finding a vendor that understands 1) how to do it well—particularly because it is relatively new—specifically in radiology, and 2) the possibility that it could slow down load times if unnecessary scripts are being sent to the mobile device. However, Brown states, "There are tools being used now by both developers and devices that are making this less of an issue every day."

The easiest way to determine if a website is responsive is by, from your desktop, grabbing the lower right corner of your browser window to reduce the size and see if the website "responds" to the smaller window size. Here are a couple of websites that do responsive well if you want to give it a try: <http://www.childrenscolorado.org/> and <http://fortcollins-co-1565.theupsstore-local.com/>.

Option #2

Building a mobile-optimized website is your second option for catering to mobile users. This option requires you to have a mobile-only website, which is a second website that is uniquely designed for smartphones. A mobile-optimized website generally only uses content that is deemed to be a priority for mobile users—often times it is a subset of the content found on your full site. The main strength here is that you can craft a more specific experience for mobile devices than with responsive. "This is especially true for improving page load times by serving up fewer/smaller images, fewer scripts, and eliminating unnecessary elements," says Brown.


Challenges you may face when choosing a mobile-optimized website include having to manage your desktop website and a completely separate set of mobile sites, which can be complex and expensive. Mobile-only websites look great on the small screens

of smartphones, but they can look awkward on the larger screens of tablets and e-readers, and sharing links that point to mobile versions can confuse search engines and people. When it comes to Search Engine Optimization (SEO), there can be some negative impact if mobile sites are not built correctly. Credit for inbound links will be split between your two or more websites, and duplicating content on more than one website can create less-than-optimal search engine rankings.

Here are a couple of well done mobile-only websites if you want to check them out (hint: open them with your smartphone): <http://klondikebar.com> and <http://www.hudsonhealthplan.org/m>. Notice the different URL in the Hudson Health example with the /m at the end to identify it as a mobile site.

Takeaway

It's important to recognize that right now, your customers are coming to your website from a variety of mobile devices. They are looking for quick access to information they need to make decisions while they are on the go. There's also a good chance that your competition does not have a mobile-optimized or responsive

website, which means they are also missing out on capturing those customers. Regardless of which mobile option you choose, make sure your website delivers the type of experience your visitors expect from your organization. 

REFERENCE

1. Smart Insights: Mobile Marketing Statistics. <http://www.smartinsights.com/mobile-marketing/mobile-marketing-analytics/mobile-marketing-statistics/>



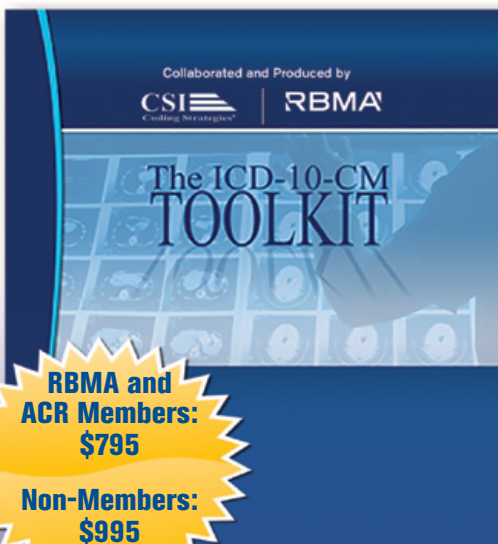
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