

Wired is launching a Progressive Web App to boost page speed

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Tech publisher Wired is revamping its mobile site in an effort to improve page speed.

Today, Wired is introducing a so-called Progressive Web App, which is a Google-backed protocol that lets web developers build mobile sites that load quickly like an app. Wired plans to make it available to a small number of users for about a month before rolling it out to all of its users, said Zack Tollman, Wireds app architect. Unlike publisher apps for iOS or Android, PWAs are accessed through the open web like a regular website and dont have to be downloaded. Once Wireds PWA is rolled out to all users, Wired.com will function as a PWA for anyone who accesses the site through Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox browsers.

Wired believes a PWA will increase its page speed, which will get users to view more articles and result in more impressions per session. So, it deployed two web developers to work full time and four product managers to spend part of their time on the project for three months. The publisher is also looking at building products on top of the PWA, since PWAs allow for swiping interactivity, which opens the door to products like Snapchat-like mobile cards. Thats all down the road: The initial version rolling out is the same design and functionality as Wireds mobile site. About 70 percent of Wireds 11 million unique visitors last month came from mobile, according to comScore.

Even though Google announced PWAs in May 2016, Wired had to use its finite resources it usually has six engineers and web developers working on its site to finish other tech projects before it could create a PWA. For example, in the second half of 2016, Wired adopted HTTPS to make its site more secure and HTTP/2, which is supposed to improve page-load time by compressing data for ad servers.

Other publishers that have adopted PWAs are The Washington Post, the Guardian, The Weather Company, Forbes and Financial Times. Google did not reply to an interview request for this story. Wired is the first Cond Nast property to roll out a PWA.

I imagine [other Cond Nast titles] will do PWA; we are just ahead of the curve a bit, Tollman said. There is a general excitement around new technology that just works for our brand, so we like to be experimenting with these things as soon as possible.

PWAs are touted for their speed, but they have drawbacks. For one, they work on Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox browsers, but not on Apples Safari. Similar to how Apple restricted ad targeting in Safari, denying PWAs is a way for the device-selling company to play its card against ad giants like Amazon, Facebook and Google.

Making PWA-powered websites feel like an app also takes a lot of technical work, and monitoring another platform can be time-consuming, said Salah Zalatimo, head of product and tech at Forbes. Another publishing exec, requesting anonymity, expects PWAs to eventually become the standard mobile web experience for publishers in

four to five years. The delay in adoption is because most publishers back-end technology is too crappy to overhaul their sites in the near future, the source said.

Last year, Cond Nast integrated the underlying tech stacks of all its brands to operate under one platform, which should make it easier for other Cond Nast sites to adopt PWAs, Tollman said.

PWAs cache content, which speeds up the loading of ads and content. But users shouldnt notice any difference to the sites overall design, and salespeople shouldnt see any change to the inventory they sell, said Robbie Sauerberg, gm of advertising at Wired Media Group, noting that Wireds sales team hasnt had any concerns about its mobile site changing.

Another publishing source, however, had a different experience after launching a PWA. For this publisher, reworking its mobile site led to apprehension among some sales reps.

Going to PWA means refactoring your site, which generally gives sales teams anxiety and fear, said the source, under the condition of anonymity. The anxiety is understandable, as it is a drastic change.

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