



# Marketer's Blueprint to Mobile Websites: A Guide to Mobile Website Design and Development

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As a business owner or marketing professional, you are responsible for placing your brand wherever your audience is. These days, that place is on the mobile web. The purpose of this whitepaper is to help you decide if a mobile website is right for your business, and what steps you need to take to ensure your mobile website is done right.

## What's in this whitepaper

In this whitepaper you will find statistics on the importance of the mobile web, and reasons why your company's website should be a part of that growth. This paper will give you the information, tools, and resources you need to pinpoint the goals of your mobile website, as well as questions to ask and mistakes to avoid during your mobile website's development.

## The rise of the mobile web

Mobile technology has come a long way since the first mobile phone was made commercially available in 1983. Not only are the devices smaller and lighter, the insides have become much more powerful as well: over one billion of the world's estimated four billion mobile phones can access the Internet.

Mobile phone *users* have changed as well. We still use our phones to make calls, but we also use them to search, shop, get directions, watch videos, and play games.

As smartphones and other devices become ubiquitous, the number of people accessing the Internet (and your website) from mobile devices is going to increase — so much so that mobile Internet will likely overtake desktop usage by 2015.<sup>1</sup> Already 32% of smartphone users use mobile search more than search engines on their computers.<sup>2</sup>

The [2011 Mobile Search Insights Study](#) (conducted by Performics and ROI Research Inc.) revealed some compelling statistics as well:

- 84% use mobile search to look for information about local retailers (hours of operation, address, contact information)
- 66% of responders use mobile search while watching television
- 71% use mobile search to learn more about a product or service after seeing an advertisement

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<sup>1</sup><http://on.mash.to/igSelX>

<sup>2</sup><http://bit.ly/icgRMd>

These statistics are particularly relevant, for example, to businesses that spend most of their advertising budget on television or billboard ads. The ad may entice a viewer to search online for your business *right now*, but what happens if your website does not function on a smartphone? They will close their phone and return to the television, and you will have lost a potential customer.

Ignoring mobile website development is a luxury you will not be able to afford for much longer.

## Design with your audience in mind

Targeting your audience is crucial when designing for the mobile web. The average mobile user uses his or her phone to find a specific piece of information, and is usually in a hurry. It is important that no matter what information a user is looking for on your website, they are able to find it quickly and easily — and *which* information you present should depend on your target audience's goals.

Individual users generally fall into one of three categories (identified by Google web developers), each of which has different goals. Your mobile website's design and structure should cater to those goals, making it easy for users to find what they seek.

### The casual surfer

These users behave similarly to users who spend a few free minutes “surfing” the Internet on their desktop. Mobile surfers could be on the subway, waiting for someone, or traveling. A casual surfer may stumble upon your website by accident, so your goal is to provide them with quick, bite-sized content that keeps them coming back for more.

### The repeat visitor

Repeat visitors are those who come back routinely in search of specific data. If your audience comes to a mobile website looking for weather updates, breaking news, or sports scores, make it easy for them to access by putting it right at the front of the website — it can be difficult and frustrating for mobile users to click three or four times to get to the content they want.

Use your website's analytics program to see what content users access most often, and make that content a priority on your mobile website. You can also ask existing customers what content is most important, or set up a focus group.

If your website caters to repeat visitors, consider the value of user customization. Allowing users to customize their own version of the mobile website, and presenting those users with custom mobile URLs, allows them to instantly see what they want based on their own preferences.

### The “Urgent, now!” visitor

These are the visitors who come to your mobile site looking for something they need *now*

— such as a phone number to call if they are lost, or when they have an urgent customer service issue. Find out what information these users are searching for most often, and place it prominently on your mobile site.

## The development approach

Once you have identified who your visitors are and what they want, it is time to consider your mobile website's development. There are three main ways that a developer can create a mobile website; the goals you set for your website will affect which you choose.

### Simplify your main website

The quickest and easiest way to create a mobile website is to adapt your main website for display on mobile devices. Adjustments to text size can be made, the “look” of the website is preserved, and all of the content is available to mobile users.

Mobile download speeds are not usually at the same level as desktop broadband, so the website will have slower load times associated with having all of its content loading on a mobile device. Users will also have to scroll and zoom in order to read content and complete tasks, which can be frustrating on small devices.

This approach is direct and can save you time and money, however, and may be a good option if most of your mobile users are casual surfers who don't need to access content quickly.

### Create an adaptive layout

In this process, a developer creates a mobile website that can detect which mobile device it is being viewed on, and will adjust itself to fit on that device (pictures and text will re-size themselves, for example). Zooming and scrolling is not necessary.

Mobile websites with adaptive layouts can have slow load times—similar to the simplified websites discussed above—because all of the website's content is present; however, an adaptive layout will be more user-friendly than a simplified mobile website, and less costly than a dedicated mobile website.

### Develop a dedicated mobile website

This final approach is the most complex, and requires the greatest amount of mobile research and testing — but it's the best approach if your website is complex and deals with high user volume.

Working with a designer and keeping the goal of the website in mind, a developer creates a separate version of the regular site using streamlined navigation, fewer features, and stripped-down content. Both the design and the content you have available is dependent on the type of

visitors you have, and what those visitors want to do when they are there.

Despite a higher price tag and increased maintenance, a dedicated mobile site is worth the effort because it greatly improves the user experience. Site load times are shorter, zooming and scrolling is eliminated, and it's easier for users to find and do what they want.

## 5 mobile design traps to avoid

If you decide that a dedicated mobile website is the route you wish to take, here are five mistakes to avoid when designing and developing your mobile site.

### 1. Too many goals

While you want to make your website as accessible to as many people as possible, it is important to cater to your target audience; they are the ones who will spend the most time on your mobile website. If you spread yourself too thin by trying to please every visitor, you will end up with a mobile website that is overly complex and unwieldy. This will frustrate all your visitors, including your target audience. **Your mobile website should have one main goal: to be most valuable to your target audience.**

### 2. Not simplifying content

Because of mobile phones' smaller screens, it is crucial you **simplify your content.**

- Prioritize - Display only high-quality content that is useful to users
- Streamline - Remove buttons that are not necessary, and make your website's navigation intuitive
- Limit - Use only essential forms and input fields, make buttons easy to click, and remove unnecessary images

### 3. Excessive visual elements

Having eye-catching images on a traditional website is expected (some would say mandatory). Large screens and high-speed Internet connections make it easy for those images to load quickly and smoothly.

Smartphones, however, have slower processors and less RAM (Random-access Memory); they cannot always process large amounts of data quickly, and lots of images means lots of data and slower load times. If a mobile user is in a hurry, they are less likely to wait. **Minimize images on your mobile website to speed up load time.**

### 4. Trying to optimize for every mobile device

Testing is required to verify that your mobile site is looking good and working correctly on multiple devices; however, taking the time to test and tweak a design across every single mobile device is time-consuming, and is not worth the stress it will cause.

**Optimize your mobile website for the devices your mobile users use.** Use your website's analytics program to see which mobile devices are most used to access your site. Optimize for those and the most common devices (iPhone and Android are the bulk of the market), and leave it at that.

If your analytics program does not show mobile devices, add a program (like Google Analytics) that does, and gather some data before you start your project.

## 5. Not testing

There are many simulator tools you can use to test your mobile website on your computer, but simulations are not perfect; if you want to get a clear idea of what your mobile site looks like on a mobile device, you need to test on that device. It will show you exactly how things are rendering at different resolutions, as well as on differently-shaped screens.

Testing your mobile website involves more than making sure your website looks pretty — it needs to function well, too. This is where user testing comes in. Are the fonts you have chosen easy to read on small screens? Do you need to simplify content or streamline navigation further? Can someone who has never seen the mobile site use it to quickly accomplish a task or find a specific piece of content?

You may have to return to the drawing board several times before you get your mobile website looking and working the way you want. **Testing can be frustrating, but skipping it is a big mistake.**

## What to keep in mind when choosing a developer

### 1. A mobile website is more than just code

Your mobile site needs to function properly, but you cannot always depend on a developer to design an aesthetically pleasing site. **Make sure that your developer has some design experience, or hire a separate designer to work with you and the developer.**

### 2. Verify their experience

Has the developer created mobile websites before? **Visit those websites on multiple mobile devices and screen sizes.** If they do not look good and function correctly, choose a different developer.

Designing for the mobile web is a relatively new concept, so it may be difficult to find a

developer who specializes in mobile design and development. If you cannot find a specialist, hire a developer who is competent in traditional website design and development — these skills are more easily transferred to mobile.

### 3. It's not about their favorite platform

Some developers may have a “favorite” mobile platform (such as iPhone or Android), and may try to convince you to develop your mobile website specifically for that platform — to the exclusion of other platforms. Do not let a developer talk you into targeting a platform if it is not one your target audience uses. **Keep your focus on your audience and develop your mobile website for the platforms they use.**

### 4. Mobile website vs. Native app

A developer may ask if you want a “native app” or “app.”

- *Apps* are programs that users must download before they can access that content. They are platform-specific; an app developed for the iPhone will not work on an Android.
- A *mobile website* is instantly available when accessed through the Internet, no matter the platform.

An app may be appropriate for your business, but it is not the same as a mobile website. An app must be developed separately for each mobile device, while a mobile website only needs to be adapted across platforms. **Tell your developer you want a mobile website, not an app** (you can always create an app later).

## Tools and resources

Below is a list of resources you may find helpful as you develop your mobile website strategy.

1. [Free Website Analysis](#) - Digett's free website analysis is designed to give you insight into your mobile website strategy, as well as an overview of your regular website's strong and weak points.
2. [Mobile Awesomeness](#) - A showcase of some of the coolest mobile website designs from which to draw inspiration.
3. [Understanding the Mobile Audience](#) - A short but comprehensive guide to what mobile users (including your audience) want to do on a mobile website.
4. [Mammoth Mobile](#) - A good website to follow for the latest in mobile news.
5. [Make Your Site Mobile-Friendly](#) - Ways to create mobile-friendly content and your mobile design, and tips for writing CSS that works across multiple devices.
6. [Mobile Web Design](#) - This ebook covers mobile web fundamentals as well as XHTML and CSS (the coding languages used to create mobile websites).