



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 where your audience is. These days, that means establishing and maintaining an active presence on the mobile web. This whitepaper will help you decide if investing in a mobile website is right for your business. It also outlines the steps required to ensure your mobile website is done right.

What's in this whitepaper

Successful businesses like yours rely on data: this whitepaper provides statistics on the rapid growth the mobile web and demonstrates why it is imperative that your company be part of that growth. By the end of this document, you will be equipped with the information, tools, and resources you need to clearly articulate the goals of your mobile website. Further, you will know what questions to ask and what pitfalls to avoid *before* engaging the assistance necessary to develop your mobile website.

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, they are much more powerful as well: Today, over 1 billion of the world's estimated 4 billion mobile phones are capable of accessing 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.

It stands to reason that as smartphones and similar devices have become ubiquitous, the number of people accessing the Internet (and your website) from their mobile devices has increased. In fact, industry observers project that [mobile Internet access will be more prevalent than desktop usage by 2015](#). Already, one out of every three smartphone users utilizes mobile search more frequently than they access search engines on their computers.

The 2011 Mobile Search Insights Study, conducted among smartphone users by Performics and ROI Research Inc., revealed some equally compelling numbers:

- ❖ 84 percent use mobile search to look for information about local retailers (hours of operation, address, contact information, etc.).
- ❖ 66 percent use mobile search while watching television.



- ✦ 71 percent use mobile search to learn more about a product or service after seeing an advertisement.

These statistics are particularly relevant 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? Consumers will close their phone, return their attention to the television, and you will have lost a potential customer. In short, companies today that delay or ignore mobile website development put their competitive edge in peril.

Design with your audience in mind

Targeting your audience is crucial when designing for the mobile web. Remember that the typical mobile user is searching for a specific piece of information and is almost always in a hurry to find it. Those who access your mobile website need to be able to find what they are looking for quickly and easily. Your site needs to be designed to meet your target audience's needs.



Google web developers have identified three general categories of mobile website users: the casual surfer, the repeat visitor and the “urgent now!” visitor. Within each category there are different needs and goals. Your challenge is to design a mobile website that will cater to those varied needs and make it easy for the broad spectrum of users to readily find what they are seeking. Let’s examine each user category a little closer:

The casual surfer

These users behave similarly to users who spend a few free minutes “surfing” the Internet on their desktop; they are not necessarily in a hurry, but they still do not have much time — they might be on the subway, waiting for a meeting to start, or traveling. Casual surfers 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 that information right at the front of your website. Help them avoid the frustration of



having 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 attracts a significant number of repeat visitors, consider the value of user customization. Allowing users to customize their own version of the mobile website and assigning them custom mobile URLs gives users the ability to instantly see what they want based on their own preferences.

The “Urgent, now!” visitor

These visitors come to your mobile site looking for information they need now — such as a phone number to call if they are lost, or a response to an urgent customer service issue. Find out what information 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 are seeking on your website, it is time to focus on 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 help determine which approach will work best for you.

1. 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 are made, the “look” of the website is preserved, and most or all of the content is made available to mobile users.

Mobile download speeds typically are slower than desktop broadband, so the the mobile site will have slower load times associated with having all of its content loading on a mobile device. Users will have to scroll and zoom in order to read content and complete tasks, which can be frustrating on small devices.



While this approach is direct and can save time and expense, it may be a good option only if the majority of your mobile users are casual surfers who do not need quick access to content.

2. Create an adaptive layout

In this process, a developer creates a mobile website that is able to detect the type of mobile device being used. The site then adjusts itself for optimum fit on that specific device. Graphics and text re-size automatically, eliminating the need for zooming and scrolling.

Mobile websites with adaptive layouts can also suffer from slow load times because of the volume of content. But an adaptive layout is more user-friendly than a simplified mobile website and less costly than the third option, a dedicated mobile website.

3. Develop a dedicated mobile website

This approach is the most complex and requires the greatest amount of research and testing. However, it is the recommended approach if your website is complex and has high user volume.



Working with a designer and keeping the goals of the website in mind, a developer creates a separate version of the regular site using streamlined navigation, fewer features, and condensed content. Design and content are tailored to the most prevalent type of visitors to your site, taking into account their specific needs and usage patterns.

Despite the higher initial investment and likelihood of increased maintenance, a dedicated mobile site is worth the investment because it greatly enhances the user experience. Site load times are shorter, zooming and scrolling are eliminated, and it is easier for users to find and do what they want.

Mobile design traps to avoid

Regardless of which development approach you select, there are pitfalls to watch for in the design and development process. Some of the frequent traps listed below are easier to avoid in instances where you are implementing a dedicated mobile website. But in all situations, you should be alert to the following five common mistakes:



1. Losing focus

While you want your website to be as accessible to as many people as possible, it is important to cater to the needs of your target audience. They are the visitors who will spend the most time on your mobile website. In trying to be “all things to all people,” you run the risk of developing a mobile site 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 as valuable as possible to your target audience.

2. Making content complicated

Because of mobile phones' smaller screens, you must simplify your content. Keep the following points in mind:

- ❖ **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. Gorging on 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.

However, because of slower processors and less internal memory, smartphones cannot always process large amounts of data quickly. An excessive number of images means large amounts of data and slower load times. Mobile users in a hurry are less likely to wait for those slow-loading images and the risk of losing a user increases. Minimize images on your mobile website to speed up load time.

4. Trying to optimize for every mobile device type

For most companies developing or strengthening a mobile web presence, the sheer number of device types on the market will limit the ability to test and tweak site performance on each one. Let your analytics program guide you in identifying the types of devices most frequently used to access your site (iPhone and Android will likely be at or near the top of the list) and develop your design accordingly. Using Google Analytics or a similar



program at the start of your process can help you invest your time and resources effectively in this area.

5. Failing to test

For those platforms identified as popular among your visitors, there is no substitute for design and function testing on the actual device. Simulators that allow you to see your mobile site on a computer go only so far in providing you the assurance that optimal performance has been achieved. Factors like the various resolution options and screen sizes come into play, as do elements of functionality like navigation, font legibility, and ease-of-use by first-time visitors.

Committing to this level of testing can help you more readily identify necessary design changes and get your mobile site out to your clients and prospects as effectively and efficiently as possible.



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 your 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 try to convince you to develop your mobile website specifically for a platform they favor, perhaps 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 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

The resources listed below may provide additional guidance and insight as you develop your mobile website strategy.

- ❖ [Mobile Awesomeness](#) - A showcase of some of the coolest mobile website designs from which to draw inspiration.
- ❖ [Understanding the Mobile Audience](#) - A short but comprehensive guide to what mobile users (including your audience) want to do on a mobile website.
- ❖ [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.
- ❖ [Mobile Web Design](#) - This ebook covers mobile web fundamentals as well as XHTML and CSS (the coding languages used to create mobile websites).



Need help?

Mobile website development is a new and growing enterprise, one that should be closely tied to your overall marketing strategy. Getting your mobile site right the first time requires clear knowledge of your marketing goals, as well as of your audience.

If you are having trouble defining these goals, finding your target audience, or need assistance designing or developing your mobile website, Digett is here to help. We design clean, user-friendly mobile websites that improve mobile users' experience, and we'd love to design and build a site with you. [Visit the Digett blog](#) to learn more about mobile websites and online marketing, or [contact us online](#).

