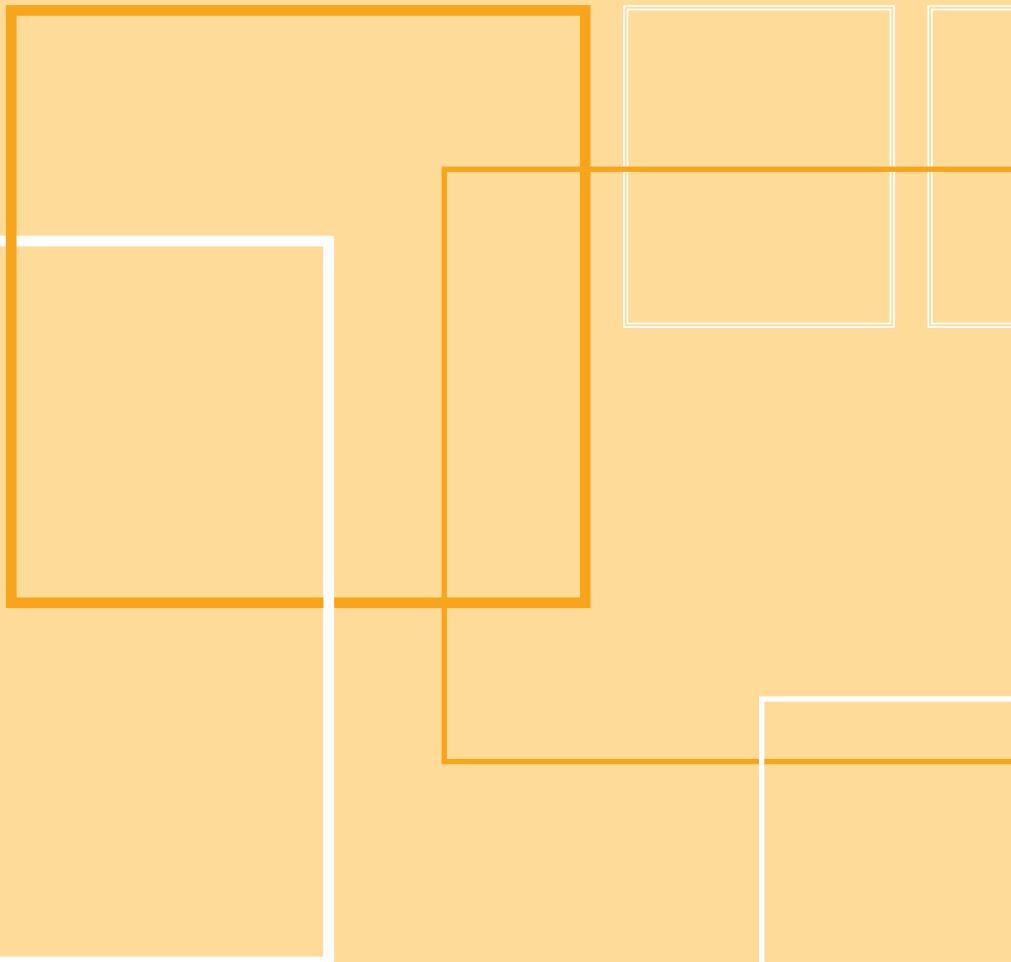

WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR

RESPONSIVE DESIGN

How to weave content into an adaptive framework.



WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR RESPONSIVE DESIGN

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OUT AND ABOUT

— Today's average smartphone has more processing power than the desktop computers we were buying three years ago, allowing website owners to create feature-filled portals their audience can access anywhere.

That said, it's wrong to presume that someone accessing your website via a phone is always going to be on the move. They're just as likely to be lounging on the sofa or sat at their desk as they are walking through the Lake District.

SMARTPHONE OWNERSHIP IS SHOWING NO SIGNS OF SLOWING AND TABLET SALES ARE WELL ON COURSE TO OUTNUMBER NOTEBOOKS

Smartphone ownership is showing no signs of slowing and tablet sales are well on course to outnumber notebooks as they become more affordable.

There's little doubt that the balance will continue to tip in the favour of handheld devices and you may be inclined to focus on a mobile-friendly site as your primary portal, but on that day there will still be a significant number of users accessing through alternative means.

Responsive design isn't about rewarding or punishing your visitors with added or diminished elements based on how they've arrived on your site. It's about adapting what you present in a way that retains the emphasis of the messages you're trying to get across.

Forget desktop or mobile first - think information first.



GET ON THE GRID

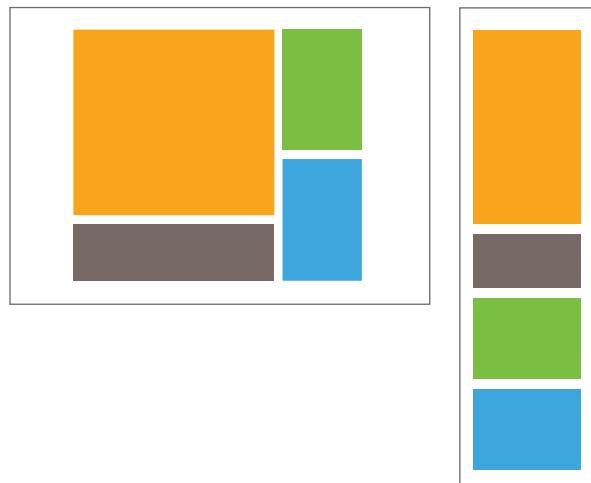
The grid system concept that sits behind responsive design applies just as much to the front-end as it does to back-end development. Putting logical structure behind your content helps marry what you produce to the containers within which it will be published.

“
PUT THE IMPORTANT STUFF FIRST, BUT DON’T GET RID OF THE REST OF IT
CONTENT STRATEGY FOR RESPONSIVE WEBSITES,
WEB CONTENT MAVENS,
CLARISSA PETERSON
”

When putting together a responsive site, it would be lovely if you could leave each block to flow down the page on a smaller screen. However, what happens to the social plugins that sit alongside your title, or the call to action in the right hand column, or the comments and related articles that sit at the bottom?

When viewed on a large monitor, navigational elements often sit inside columns that provide a prominent place to display these essential elements. When the pixel width reduces, if the same flow is retained you risk losing the elements you want users to focus on.

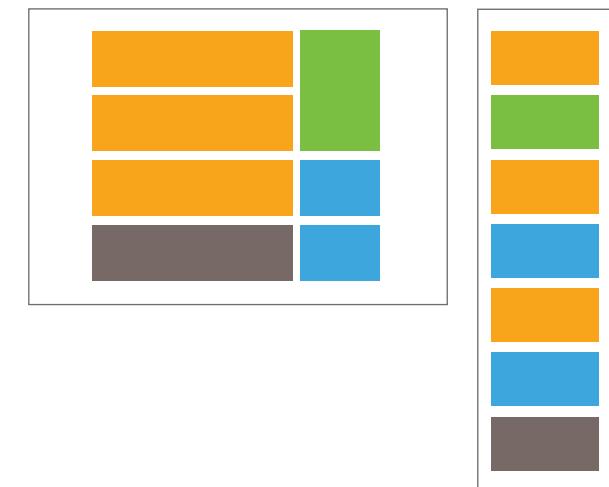
Regular content on a responsive grid



The best way to maintain the right information flow is by assigning proportional importance. By deconstructing each section of content item into chunks, you free the elements to act in an optimised and responsive fashion. You may choose to place a call to action just after your intro paragraph on a mobile, or accompany a bullet point list with a visual slideshow on a tablet, or change the design of your social buttons by device.

Anything is possible, if the structure is there to empower your ideas.

Deconstructed content on a responsive grid



ONLINE ORIGAMI

As the number of web enabled devices continues to increase, the concept of 'the fold' is an outdated notion. Content creators once worked with designers and UX specialists to ensure that essential copy, links and buttons were arranged in a way that would allow visitors to immediately take action, without the need for the dreaded scroll.



“
THE ANSWER IS TO DESIGN FROM THE BOTTOM UP, WHICH MEANS FROM THE CONTENT OUT RESPONSIVE DESIGN WORKFLOW, MOBILISM,
STEPHEN HAY
”

Now, when a site reacts and adjusts according to device and screen size, the precious pixel-perfect positioning is lost.

The fold still exists, but it now appears in an inconceivable number of places. Scrolling may not even be such a bugbear for users. After all, when you're on a flimsy 3G signal, would you prefer to have added clicks or swipe your finger to move down the screen?

Early mobile experiences were often filled with 'next' buttons or pagination that tried to keep content per page to a minimum and as much as possible high up on the screen. Modern responsive sites do away with this, allowing users to freely move around, with site elements arranged to provide the user with everything they need, in a way that's simple to absorb.

BROKEN INTO BITS

Absorbability means different things to different people. The role of developers is to create media query code that assesses how best to display the web page based on the user's device; the focus of designers is to identify where and when the elements of the site should be rearranged so it sits in a sensible structure; the role of the content professional is to ensure they help to meet the goal of the user and the business.

All the cogs in the digital machine need to work together to understand the message you're trying to get across and make sure it's emphasised throughout the whole customer journey.

Content teams aren't in the business of creating web pages, they're focused on creating what goes into them and a development project that fails to place importance on this could potentially overlook some critical aspects.

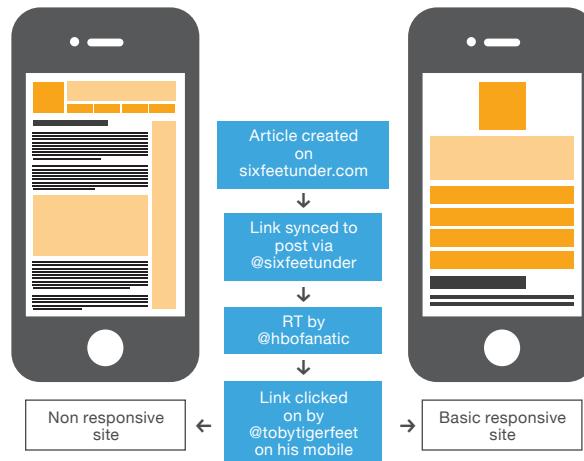
Narrowing the area where copy and images sit so they fit within a smaller screen size is a simple enough procedure, however making sure it retains its original purpose is a much harder task.

A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Getting people to move around your website and persuading them to take the actions you want is a major goal for every site owner.

On a large desktop monitor you can comfortably set aside a higher percentage share of the header to let people know what's available on the rest of your site; visitors expect to see it there and it provides a useful reference point should they get lost at any stage along their journey.

On smaller devices such as tablets and mobile, taking up half the screen with big buttons screaming 'PRODUCTS AND SERVICES' and 'ABOUT US' is going to be an instant turn-off, especially if your visitor has arrived on a page deep within your site from one of their social streams and just wants to get on with what they came there to see or do.



DON'T PAT YOURSELF ON THE BACK JUST BECAUSE YOU'VE MOBILE-IZED SOME KEY FEATURES—THERE'S MORE WORK TO DO WITH YOUR CONTENT
CONTENT STRATEGY FOR MOBILE, A LIST APART, KAREN MCGRANE

So while a basic responsive site displays the content in a format that's readable without pinching and zooming, the main purpose of visiting the page, such as to read the article, can sometimes be forgotten.

Responsive sites generally tackle this by presenting users with a button that expands to reveal the main navigation options. Granted, you may say that this is primarily a UX decision to make, deciding on the navigational elements to include based on the most likely steps the user will want to make when they get to the page, but there are some important editorial decisions to make too.



Depending on the type of content they have arrived at and the link they've used to get there, are they likely to want to consume more of the same? Would they be likely to subscribe to a newsletter or feed? Is it something that might instigate some form of social interaction? Is this a common first step that often leads a visitor into the purchasing funnel?

The message is different in each case, and therefore the actions need to adapt to trigger the desired activity from your user, whether that's a click, subscription, share or purchase.

BE IN THE MOMENT

We'd love to be in a position to say that if you create great content on your site you're going to get more visitors who are all going to fall in love with your brand, bookmark your homepage and return daily to see what great things you can sell them.

On a large desktop monitor you can comfortably set aside a higher percentage share of the header to let people know what's available on the rest of your site; visitors expect to see it there and it provides a useful reference point should they get lost at any stage along their journey.

The reality is that web 'browsers' are called that for a very good reason - the primary activity online is skating around the surface of numerous sites, pausing momentarily to survey what's on offer before taking their attention elsewhere. Research has indicated that the average page visit lasts less than a minute.

RESEARCH HAS INDICATED THAT THE AVERAGE PAGE VISIT LASTS LESS THAN A MINUTE. THIS MINUTE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY IS YOUR CHANCE TO HELP YOUR VISITOR



This minute window of opportunity is your chance to help your visitor and make them aware of what lies within various areas of your site. Not everything necessarily has to drive people into a transactional funnel; that may be what you want, but it's not always going to be the main focus of your users.

MAKE IT EASIER FOR USERS TO ACCESS RELEVANT PAGES AND INCREASE THE CHANCES THAT THEY'LL TAKE MORE THAN A CURSORY GLANCE AT WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER

Your site map, despite not generally being for public consumption, is one of the most vital assets you have. It can be used to determine in a responsive manner the most suitable elements based on the most likely user activity. Your analytics team will be able to tell you what areas resonate with your audience, both from a browsing and deeper interaction perspective.

For example, when viewed on a mobile device, visitors to your 'Advice' area may be most likely to read another article from within the same section. Therefore, when they get to the end of a piece of content, don't offer them a sales pitch, offer sub-navigation that relates to what they've just read, heard or watched.

Work with your development team to create templates that align with your digital strategy and factor all the behaviour you have observed via analytics. Make it easier for users to access relevant pages and increase the chances that they'll take more than a cursory glance at what you have to offer.

BEYOND SITE BOUNDARIES

The internet is a big colony; a connected community that has blurred international boundaries and made the world a smaller place. The presumption that you can get people to stay within the confines of your website is a misguided one.

A RELATIONSHIP WITH DEVELOPMENT TEAMS IS VITAL TO ENSURE MESSAGES ARE TRANSMITTED IN A WAY THAT TRANSLATES WELL FOR THE END USER

It's common for your audience to go on the hunt for other sources of interest or information, especially if you're in the business of selling goods that would gather lots of useful consumer reviews. However, this doesn't mean you need to put up big flashing exit signs.

Third-party partnerships and mutually beneficial relationships with other organisations allow you to expand your reach and satisfy more of your users' needs without the need for humongous budgets.

Syndicating in relevant content that satisfies your users' goals and meets your business objectives helps you to keep your audience close. With a responsive website this should make for a seamless integration, as long as your suppliers are thinking responsively too.

Whether you're featuring headlines or taking full feeds, you shouldn't (in theory) need to do much more than ensure the right style classes have been assigned so your branding remains consistent.

When other, more complex, syndication methods come into play, your tech teams may need to work a bit harder to ensure a seamless experience; it would be a shame to see your beautifully configured website ruined because affiliate content doesn't know how to behave beyond the desktop monitor.

A relationship with development teams is vital to ensure messages are transmitted in a way that translates well for the end user. Where you have existing relationships with partners, discuss what their plans are to cope with multi-device channels and see what you can do to help make what they produce work better for your users.

When you're on the lookout for new partners, make cross-device compatibility an integral part of your selection criteria.

DIRECTING USERS TO BADLY OPTIMISED CONTENT REFLECTS BADLY ON YOU

Some things are often better left said by someone else with more knowledge, so you may often find yourself linking out elsewhere on the web.

Directing users to badly optimised content reflects badly on you. Even if you have disclaimers covering your back, in a connected web, user experience is only as good as the next link you click on.

Don't assume that the user journey stops as your website ends. If you've put a link within your page, you're making the assumption that a certain percentage of people will click on it (if you're not, why are you linking it in the first place?), so always test the pages you send people to on various devices. If you come across anything that might be seen as a barrier - an unresponsive layout, a splash page asking you to download an app or a dreaded paywall - consider whether you should be linking to it at all.



POWER TO YOUR PEERS

This doesn't necessarily need to halt you in your tracks; services such as Instapaper, Pocket and Readability take the clutter away, leaving users with a comfortable reading experience. A clever use of their APIs can allow you to direct people towards pages of interest elsewhere on the web, without submitting them to the horrors of an ugly or poorly constructed website.

Provide users with a good external experience in a new tab or window, and they'll return to yours with a newfound respect.

MAKE THINGS BEAUTIFUL

Big, high-res imagery is seen as a standard design feature on the modern web, allowing visitors to see the product they're about to buy, the meal they're about to cook or the place they're about to visit.

Photos scaled to 100% may look stunning on a large widescreen monitor, but what about when the dimensions are reduced? If you have an image that contains essential information that will aid your visitor (such as a flow chart or process diagram), it needs to be treated with as much importance as the rest of the content.

Making your users strain their eyes or making images large enough to see at the expense of your copy aren't viable solutions that aid the customer journey.

There's a case to say that if an image gets in the way, then it shouldn't be there at all, however there are many technical workarounds to ensure your site retains its sense of style.

For example, on a responsive site you may want an image with an aspect ratio of 5:3 to revert to 8:2 on a smaller screen so it doesn't push copy too far down the screen. This doesn't mean your users will be presented with an elongated version. Defined cropping can take place to retain the original dimensions whilst slotting seamlessly into the new placeholder.

Original 5:3 image



Cropped well to 8:2



Cropped badly to 8:2



Producers need to work closely with the design and development team to decide exactly how this should occur so imagery retains its appearance and purpose. To save yourself from copious amounts of code, you should ideally make a style decision that can be replicated across all your images, such as always having the main element of focus in the lower third.

Sensible scaling is even more important when it comes to technical diagrams and infographics, which have spread like wildfire across the web in recent years. The data that sits within these is often difficult to make out on large screens, let alone when they appear just a few inches wide.

There are two possible solutions:

- Create a replacement image that only contains key information
- Construct your graphic on a grid system that can adjust according to screen size.

This means a fundamental change in how graphics are constructed, with considerations required early on in the conception. Is it possible to leave out certain information or is everything required? If we are to allow blocks of the graphic to shift, will the overall message flow remain intact?

This may actually offer additional opportunities for interactivity that you hadn't considered previously. For example, if a certain section of your diagram links to a feature or product on your site, you might decide to make that block clickable, linking to more detailed information.

Pinching and zooming is always an option that you can offer to users, but why make it unnecessarily difficult for them to absorb your content?

CAPTAIN CAPTION

Even though pictures speak a thousand words, a short piece of associated text can go a long way to helping users understand context. You'll often see text overlaying photos on the web, ideally not text within the image itself but text that's readable by a search engine spider. When transported to a smaller screen, if your font retains some of its size and readability you may find your background image obscured completely.

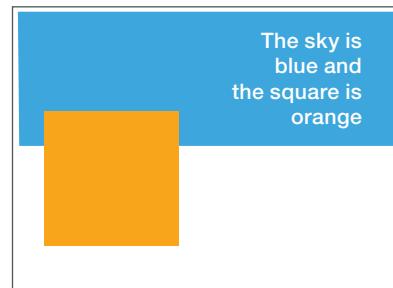
Worse still, if you've placed white text over some blue sky, what happens when it moves and overlaps another element of the image that isn't a contrasting colour.

MOVE THE COPY TO A CAPTION BELOW THE IMAGE SO IT CAN TAKE PRIDE OF PLACE WITHOUT GETTING IN THE WAY OF THE IMAGE

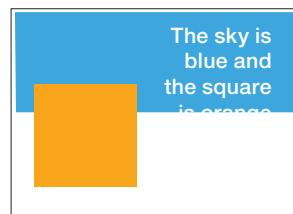
Content producers shouldn't be in the business of dictating to designers how best to present information; however we need to be able to get across the importance of each individual element.

It may be the case that the text stands up for itself without the need for the image, however if your picture is the primary focus, consider switching text to a neutral colour, or even better, move the copy to a caption below the image so it can take pride of place without getting in the way of the image or being obscured.

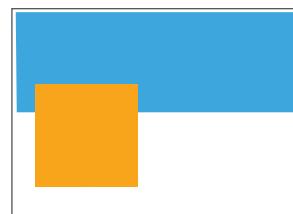
Annotation over original image



Annotation on a smaller screen



Annotation as a caption



The sky is blue and the square is orange

SHOW AND TELL

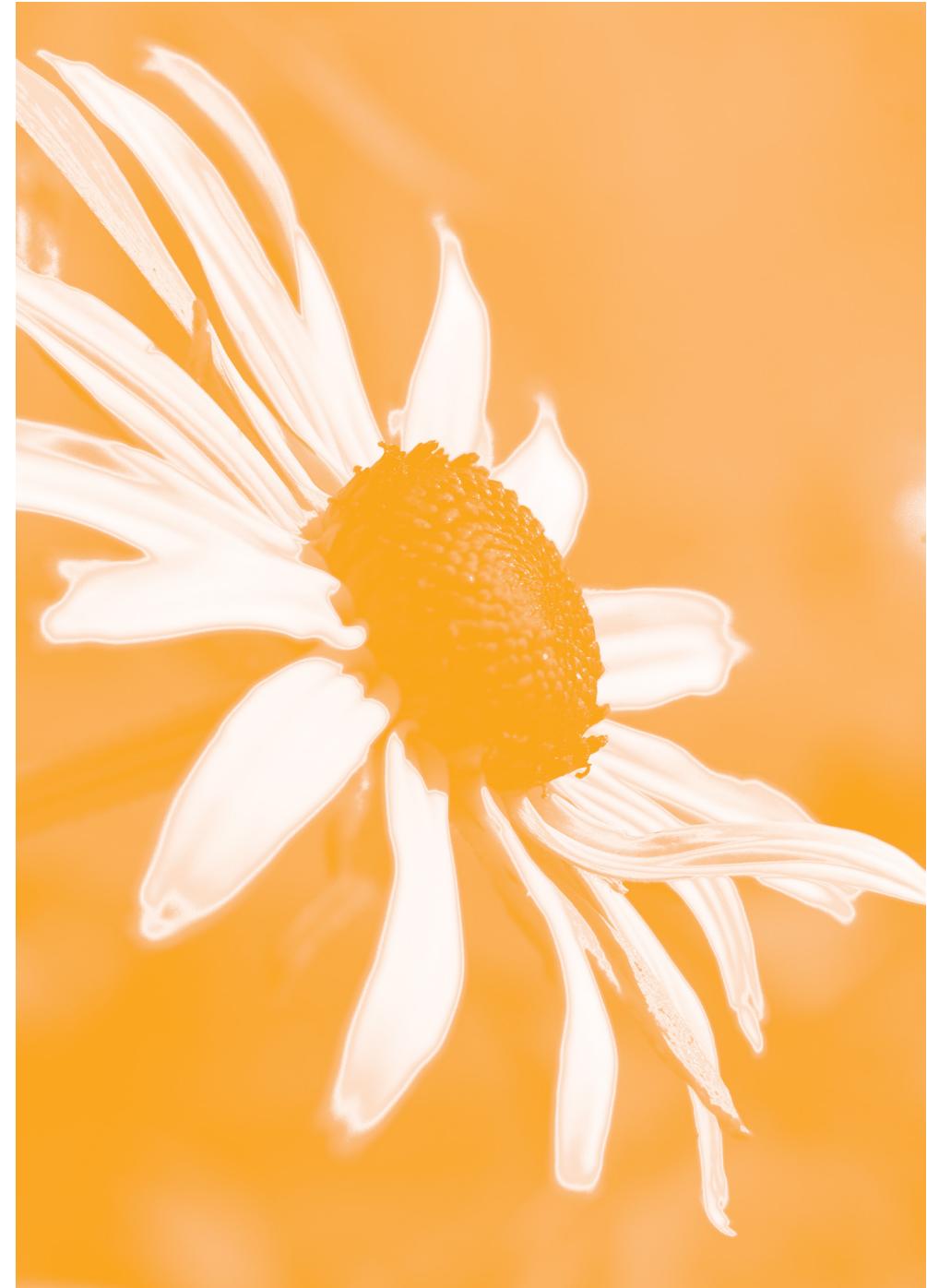
— Content producers often suffer from feelings of constraint. When the printed page was their canvas, editors dictated strict word and character lengths to allow copy to sit nicely within the allocated columns and around eye-catching visuals.

“
FLUID GRIDS,
FLEXIBLE IMAGES,
AND MEDIA
QUERIES ARE THE
THREE TECHNICAL
INGREDIENTS FOR
RESPONSIVE WEB
DESIGN, BUT IT
ALSO REQUIRES A
DIFFERENT WAY OF
THINKING
RESPONSIVE
WEB DESIGN,
A LIST APART,
ETHAN MARCOTTE
”

Along came the web, and text began to reclaim its place at the top table. No more changing words in order to align text correctly with the contours of a soon-to-be-forgotten pop star's soon-to-be-unfashionable haircut. But hold on, what's this? A CMS seems to be telling me how many characters I'm allowed to put in my headline?

Then came responsive design, and perhaps an opportunity for writers to turn around and say “this time, I'm going to write what needs to be written”.

You still need to ensure you consider SEO best practice to create search-friendly page titles, but font styles and sizes are controllable by individual users and trying to devise pixel-perfect headlines is one process that can be resigned to the history books.



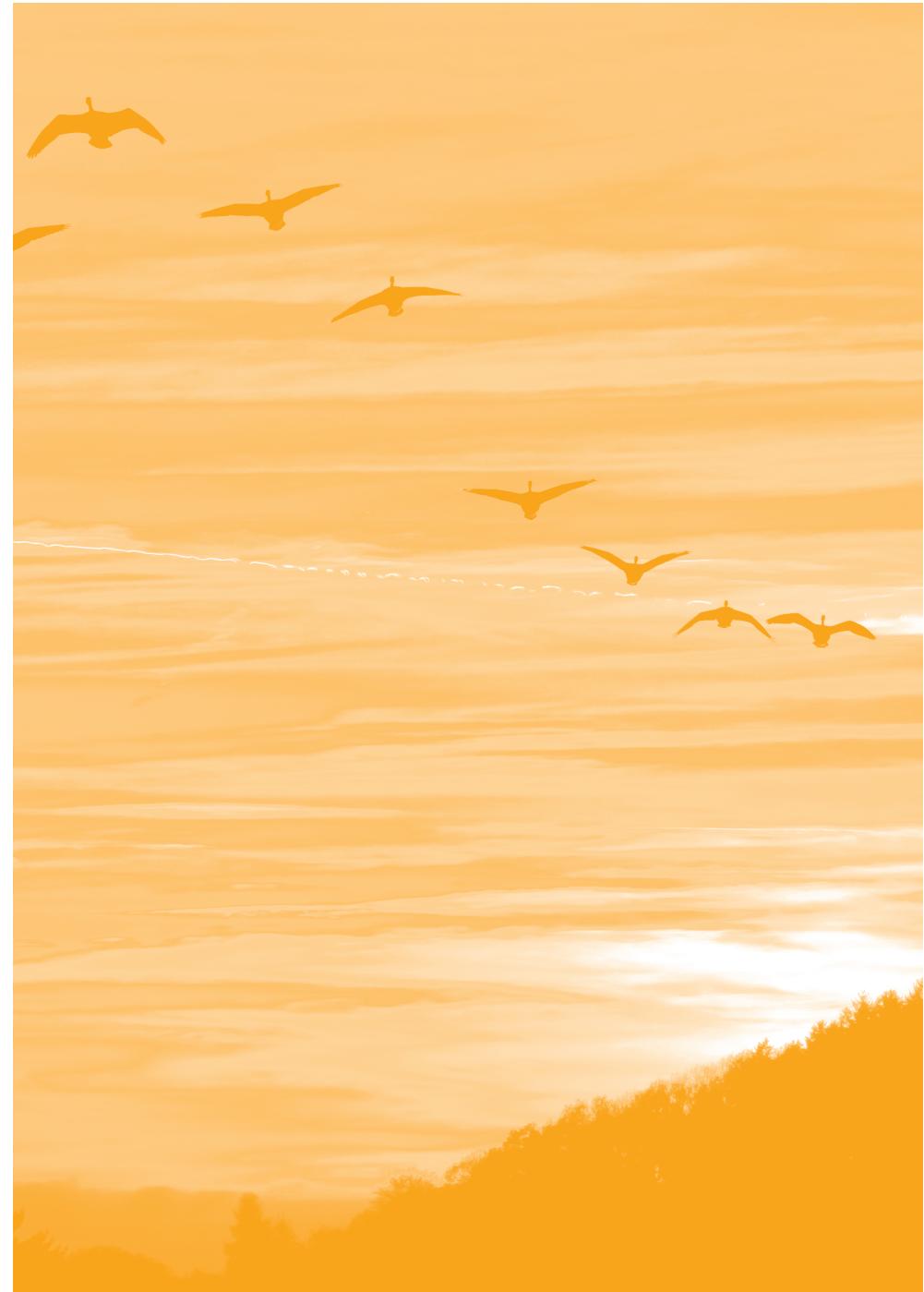
WRAP BATTLES

When text wraps onto the next line of a web page your design team may cringe, but in a responsive world, they have to accommodate this occurrence. Anyone dealing with content on a global scale has come across this issue before; it's not particularly simple to slot the word 'schwangerschaftsverhütungsmittel' into a limited character title field.

**schwan-
gersch-
aftsve-
rhütun-
gsmitt-
el**

Knowing how text moves from device to device is also important when determining your writing style. On a fixed structure you're free to reference 'the image below' or encourage your visitors to 'click on the pink albatross to the right'. When your site rearranges itself, chances are your bird will have flown elsewhere.

Again, deconstruction is crucial. The code behind this enlists media queries to adapt what is shown and how it's displayed to each individual user. It's all about talking to your development team to determine what features and functionality you may need in order to allow what you write to make logical sense whenever and however it's viewed.



MAKING MORE OF MEDIA

— Most websites today make use of multiple media formats. Whether you're using audio, video, quizzes, slideshows, polls or calculators to accentuate your message and provide value to your users, there are responsive techniques and tools you can use to make the most of what you have to offer.

Each content type means a new responsive requirement and consideration - you can't treat them all the same way and expect them to react in the most appropriate fashion. The aim is to ensure they retain relevance and relationships within an adaptive structure.

Over four billion hours of video are watched each month on YouTube with 72 hours of video being uploaded to the site every minute . Epic blockbuster movies and pixelated webcam cover songs all have their own loyal audiences and almost every website features video in some way, shape or form.

Whether you choose to host your videos through YouTube, Vimeo, or on your own servers with a branded skin and playback control, make sure these are considered within your responsive design. The full screen option is a particularly important component here, increasingly so as display devices get smaller.

FOR USERS WITH YOUTUBE INSTALLED ON THEIR DEVICE, CLICKING A VIDEO WITHIN A WEB PAGE CAN PROMPT THEM TO REVERT TO AN OPTIMISED PLAYBACK TOOL

Ideally pressing 'play' would trigger an automatic response that makes the most of every inch of the available width, with users able to rotate to a landscape view should they wish. If you leave it up to users to try and press a minuscule 'expand' option, they may either not notice it, or clumsily miss the button and press something else altogether. Once in fullscreen mode, there needs to be easy controls to allow users to revert back to the main view so they can carry on with what they were doing.

The use of native web apps can provide some major benefits here. For users with YouTube installed on their device, clicking a video within a web page can prompt them to revert to an optimised playback tool. There are a few pros and cons with this.

- + On the plus side, these apps are constantly being tweaked and updated to ensure they comply with the latest web standards on a plethora of operating systems. You also get access to the in-built social interaction tools which increase the number of people who will comment on and share your content, helping it to spread far and wide.
- However, you need to be aware that YouTube is an addictive beast. View one video and you're shown a menu of others that may tickle your fancy; your users could lose themselves in LOLs and fails, forgetting what they were doing on your site in the first place. Whilst YouTube's servers are likely to be a lot more robust than your own, you also need to be aware that reliability is out of your hands when the connection drops.

If you do decide that making use of proprietary apps is the right option, you can gain access to functionality far beyond the scope of your core site and servers.



THE RIGHT TOOL FOR THE JOB

Maps potentially provide the most seamless roaming experience, and most smartphone users would list this as one of their most commonly used apps. Store locators, office directions and anything else on your site that is based around a physical location can be improved by tying content in with native technology.

This can be even more effective if you're able to make use of the GPS signal that your visitor is giving out - displaying where a visitor's nearest branch is without them even making a click is about as smooth as it gets.

On a large display this may involve an embedded map that spans the width of the page, but on a smaller screen it may be better to convert this feature into a button that launches their preferred map tool with directions from their current location. A button that allows mobile users to make an instant call rather than copying and pasting your phone number into their dialler might increase your enquiry rate too.

If you have audio on your site, SoundCloud and Spotify provide excellent embedding functionality that allows visitors to comment, download, add tracks to personal playlists or subscribe to updates. However, wherever these features are used, you need to be aware of the experience the average user will receive, not just the users who have all the apps already installed and the necessary logins already active.

Whatever type of content you're producing - live betting odds, image galleries, shopping vouchers, etc - consider whether there's an app out there that will make it more usable, then tailor the assets in a way that makes the most out of the tools and APIs that are available to you.

WHERE APPS FIT IN

— “Apps are dead” is something you may have heard, read, and even believed and said yourself. The truth is apps aren’t anywhere near to hearing Chopin’s Marche Funèbre.



Organisations are realising that download popularity and longevity depend on them meeting a specific user need. Replicating your site onto a mobile app doth not a mobile strategy make. People only have a certain amount of room on their homescreen which is mainly taken up by Facebook, Twitter, a weather app, live football scores, BBC News and a game or three.

This isn’t the time or the place to discuss whether you should be creating an app for your business, but it is worth mentioning that a responsive site can often provide the experience your users need until offline access or bespoke functionality is required.

“**WHAT IS IMPORTANT WHEN IT COMES TO DECIDING BETWEEN RESPONSIVE DESIGN AND A STANDALONE SITE IS TO PROPERLY UNDERSTAND YOUR CUSTOMER AND THEIR NEEDS AND PUT THEM AT THE HEART OF YOUR MOBILE STRATEGY**
RESPONSIVE DESIGN OR STANDALONE SITE?
ICROSSING, JACK JOSEPHY

Responsive design can help by featuring prompts to download apps at the most appropriate times when users reach a point within your site where the benefits are crystal clear.

FLASH, AAA-AHH!

Flash has always been a thorny issue for developers and thankfully modern coding methods have all but extinguished it, along with other non-standard and non-conformist formats like Microsoft Silverlight.

Creating a game that’s suitable for your brand is a sure-fire way of increasing the amount of time people spend on your site and helping to satisfy their need for entertainment. ‘Suitable’ for your brand doesn’t necessarily mean closely related to your products and services - nobody would spend much time playing an insurance-themed RPG - but non-contextual content can still retain the same ethos that your style guide portrays.

Remember the Barclaycard advert with a waterslide providing a handy commute home? The completely-unconnected-to-banking Waterslide Extreme game that accompanied it has been downloaded over 20m times from iTunes.

Designed in the right way, a game can be ubiquitous across all devices, allowing those with a mouse as much enjoyment playing it as those who are flexing their thumbs.

CASH CONVERTING

— We mentioned earlier that not everything within your site necessarily has to drive people into a transactional funnel. You will however ultimately need to meet your business objectives and at some point you'll probably want to direct users towards the shopping basket or contact form.



Through multivariate testing you can get your calls to action and conversion optimisation perfected to the nth degree so your site strikes the right chord and directs people towards the buttons you want them to click on. On a desktop that may well be the start of the transaction funnel, whereas on a mobile your analysis might tell you that an alternative CTA, such as a 'save for later' button, has higher resonance with the audience.

**“
LEARN FROM
OTHERS MISTAKES
AND SUCCESSES
AND MAP IT TO HOW
YOUR VISITORS
ARE CURRENTLY
INTERACTING
WITH YOUR WEB
PROPERTIES
WEBTRENDS,
BENJAMIN DIGGLES
”**

So you've got everything placed exactly as it should be, with the headline tailored, the right font sizes used and the correct contrasting colours on your calls to action, until a user heads to the responsive site on a mobile device and the elements start taking on a life of their own.

You need to check that the content and styling decisions you make and the assumptions they're based on maintain the best user experience regardless of device - think of it as multi-multivariate testing. You may find that the copy that surrounds the 'buy' button works brilliantly on a monitor, but is too long on a smaller screen, causing a fraction in the process.

'Click to expand' content blocks are usually the answer, but where do you put the break? Is the same preview length right for each content chunk?

MARCHING IN FORMATION

Filling in forms and completing shopping carts can be an arduous task on a small screen device, and again there's an adaptive response that can be applied. Do you really need users to fill in all those fields? Really?

Could you provide Google Wallet as a swift payment option for people accessing via Android? Do what you can to make the process more streamlined and therefore increase purchases. If you don't need a field on a mobile, you won't need it in the desktop view either.

The web goes with your users everywhere and second guessing when they might decide to use your site is like predicting the weather during an English summer; chances are you're not going to be suitably dressed.

The responsive site gives you an adaptable wardrobe, ensuring that the most appropriate message is displayed at the appropriate times. When a commercial transaction is the likely next step, a sensibly designed website can encourage consumers and ease them through the process.



**PRESENTING
CONTENT IN
CONTEXT AND
MAKING THINGS
AVAILABLE FOR
REAL WORLD USE
IS PART OF THE
ROLE OF A
RESPONSIVE SITE**

Take a cinema website, for example. The user sat at home on their laptop is likely to have more time to flick through films that are on later that day, might have the option of two same-brand cinemas within driving distance, is likely to be about to email a friend for suggestions or organise a gathering on Facebook.

Once their decision has been made, the booking process should be followed with a confirmation that works as a ticket, either printed (for those who have facilities at home) or sent to a mobile phone, or even better, single tickets sent to multiple mobile phones if you're buying on behalf of people arriving at different times.

A few hours later while sat in a cafe a few hundred meters from the cinema, this same user heads back to the cinema website, this time on their mobile phone. Knowing that they're nearby, the website no longer displays start time by film, it shows the next five movies due to start (helping confirm to the customer how quickly they need to drink their coffee). After reading a review of their chosen movie, a 20% discount voucher for popcorn is displayed, prompting them to not get the slice of cake they were about to order.

Presenting content in context and making things available for real world use is part of the role of a responsive site; designed cleverly, you can tap into the mind of your visitors to influence them at exactly the right time.

GET YOURSELF CONNECTED

The web has been a social place since the day it was conceived, with bearded boffins discussing code, Star Trek and other such geekery over networked mainframes. Now we have Palo Alto mega-offices housing countless companies with neon logos and missing vowels in their brand names, encouraging the masses to “share, share, share”.



IF YOU REQUIRE PEOPLE TO LOG IN TO MAKE A COMMENT, THEY'RE UNLIKELY TO GO TO THE TROUBLE OF SETTING UP AN ACCOUNT USING A FIDDLY MOBILE KEYBOARD

There's no denying that getting your users to share your message with their peers helps to get it in front of a wider audience. What many websites fail to recognise is the 'share situation' their users are likely to be in when they reach their website.

Whatever device your user is on, aim to already understand what they know using readily available social plugins. If you're aware of the purpose and audience for each piece of content, you can segment and create more tailored templates that go beyond Facebook and Twitter, considering whether Songkick, Meetup or Foodie buttons might encourage a more meaningful interaction..

This is less about responsive design and more about contextual link placement, but where and when these buttons are presented is pivotal as your site adapts by device - the floating Facebook and Twitter counters pegged to the side of your screen may get into all sorts of trouble when the site is scaled down.

You may even wish to adapt what buttons are shown by device. If research shows your mobile users are more likely to push recipes to Evernote while tablet users are more prone to adding them to Pinterest, change how buttons are featured accordingly.

WORTHY OF COMMENT

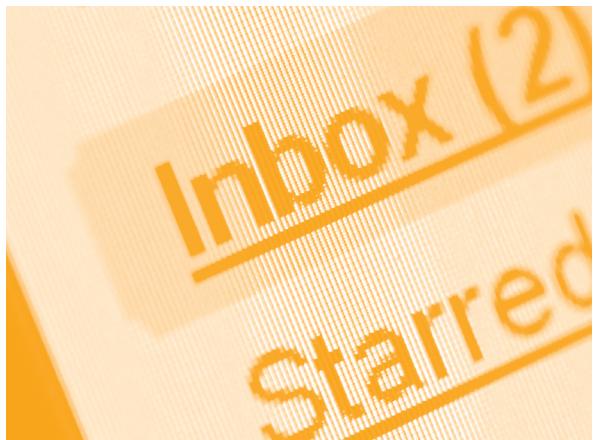
If your site encourages user interaction via forums and on-page commenting, this is another area that needs consideration within your responsive grid.

If your articles generate a lot of comments, you may end up with a bottomless scrolling pit that's undecipherable to the casual visitor. Threaded conversations can help keep things neat and readable, whilst top comments (selected either by humans or an automated method) will direct them to the best of the bunch.

Also, what you can do to remove the barriers - if you require people to log in to make a comment, they're unlikely to go to the trouble of setting up an account using a fiddly mobile keyboard. You probably don't want to open it up to all and sundry otherwise the spammers will take over, but you can make it easy and give people the option of using [OpenID](#) to confirm who they are.

ALL HAIL THE INBOX

Email isn't generally considered alongside the giants of the social media world, but it has all the hallmarks of a social network. In fact, with all the daily personal interaction that's taking place, it's probably the biggest social network there is.



The average web user will be on many email databases; buy something online, make an enquiry, create a profile and BAM! you're added to an email list until you unsubscribe. This barrage of newsletters and updates goes to your inbox, which you may access at home, at work or on the move.

IT'S BEST THAT YOU DESIGN A SIMPLE MOBILE-FRIENDLY TEMPLATE USING FONT SIZES AND WIDTHS THAT WORK WELL ON A MOBILE INTERFACE

The problem is that the majority of email templates aren't set up with the small screen in mind.

Pick up your phone, open your email client and flick through the latest batch of marketing bumph - how many are designed in a way that displays the information in the appropriate format without you having to pinch, zoom or sideways scroll?

Due to the inability of some email clients to cope with the media queries that are necessary for responsive design, responsive email templates have taken a while to develop, but some options are starting to emerge, and [MailChimp](#) has also gotten in on the act.

If you're finding that responsive templates are struggling to bypass the spam filters, it's best that you design a simple mobile-friendly template using font sizes and widths that work well on a mobile interface. Your desktop users will still get the content and you're not alienating users on smaller devices.

If your site is responsive and all the links that sit within your newsletter go to pages that are suitable for the device they're being viewed upon, your users will get a better overall experience and the click-throughs will increase over time.

STARTING FROM THE BACK

— It's time to talk about the humble CMS; a content creator's best friend, and often their worst enemy. Whether you use a simple out-of-the-box package or a bespoke system designed specifically for your organisation's needs, it's the middleman between what you concoct and how it's presented to the public.

In this world of instant media consumption, the ability to publish on the move isn't just a nice-to-have. Finely tuned pieces of content that take weeks or months to craft are all well and good, but there's no guarantee that they will be a more lucrative traffic driver than a well-timed post you put together reacting to something you've just seen, heard or done.

If your site is responsive, so should be the method by which you publish to it.

Many of the popular blogging platforms provide app or web based editing tools that pander to those wishing to publish from a smaller device. Fully loaded with rich-text editors and simple media embedding tools, the experience is often equal to, if not better than, what you'll get on a desktop.

But apps are apps, and there's no reason to build one for your CMS if the publishing tool is designed in a responsive way. Future-proofing the ongoing creation process is important, as is legacy-proofing; giving yourself the ability to edit existing pages as and when you need to. When working with enterprise-scale websites, teams must work closely with developers to understand the capabilities and limitations of the CMS, and collaborate to create effective solutions that work for everybody.

A daunting list of fields, tags and checkboxes face the average user when they head to their CMS. Most have become blind to those they deem unnecessary, focusing on the places they can put their title, tagline, etc and then hit the big red publish button.

This is relatively simple on a big screen where you can scan your eyes to a particular part of a page, but on a smaller device an endless stream of unnecessary input fields is bound to put your writer in a bad mood - and they won't write well when they're angry.

DIVISIVE DEVICES

There are a lot of end user considerations to make when publishing from various devices.

Firstly, training. Depending on the number of people permitted to add content to your site, you may have spent many months ensuring they fill everything in correctly and that they don't run off and crash your database.

An unfamiliar interface - even a new and improved one - will confuse the average user. A round of teaching and process documentation may be necessary which should be considered in an overall project budget.

Secondly, there's formatting. Authors should be given the ability to have their creation appear in the way they intend, with the necessary bolds, italics and bullets in the right places. Buttons get in the way and HTML isn't a native tongue for many, so the ideal solution is to create a series of straightforward, simple to understand markup tags which publishers can use covering the full assortment of text styles and media call outs.

This allows the back-end developers and designers to keep control of how the page is displayed and tailor each element to a responsive grid, while allowing front-end producers to forget about the code and get on with creating cool stuff for people to look at.

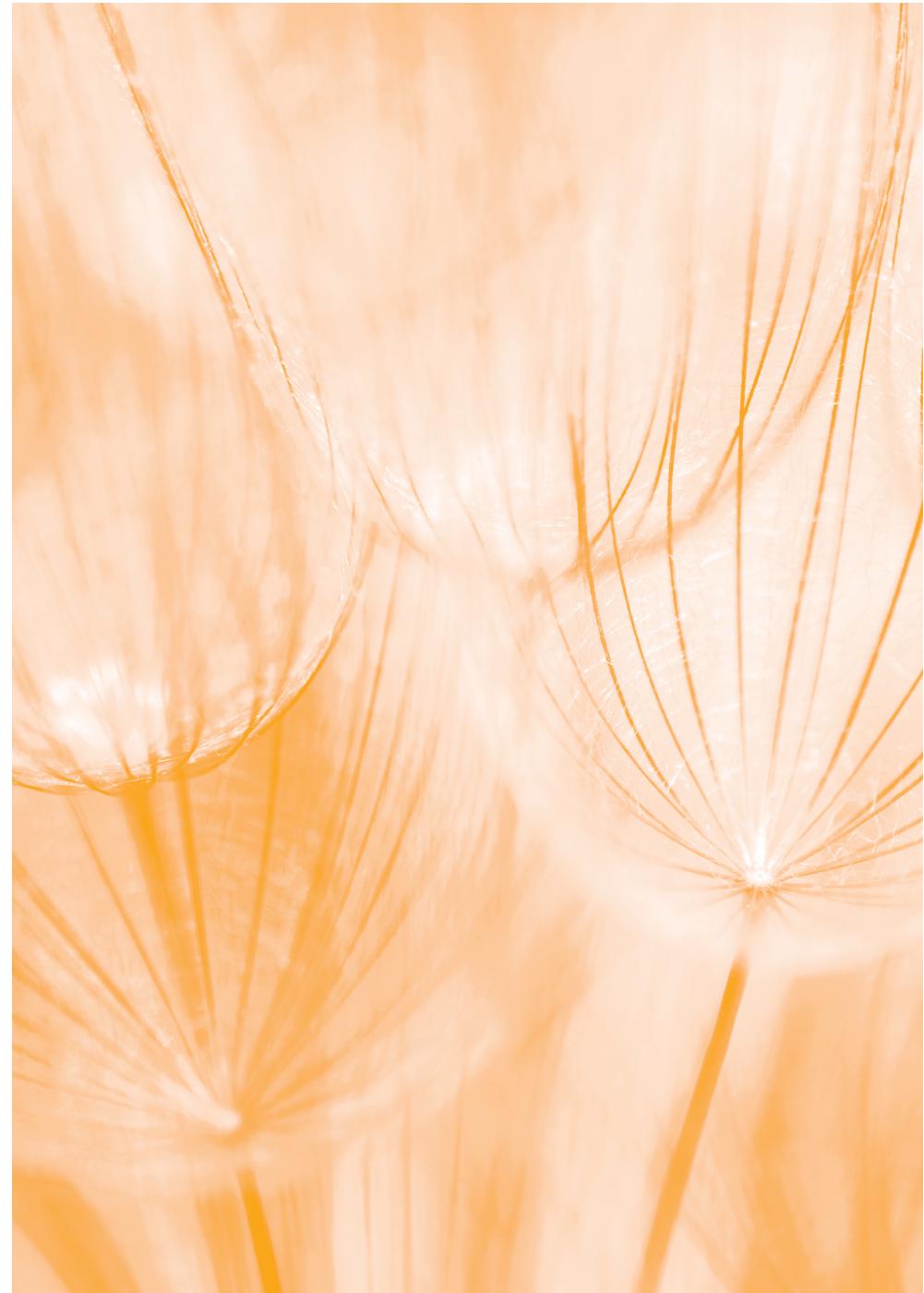
“WE'RE JUST BEGINNING TO SOLVE A LOT OF THE PROBLEMS WITH LIVING IN A MULTI-DEVICE WORLD. THAT BEING SAID THERE IS STILL PLENTY OF ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT WHEN IT COMES TO RESPONSIVE DESIGN BUILD FOR FOUR CORNERS, NO MATTER THE SIZE, ZURB, JONATHAN SMILEY”

Finally, previews. People generally like to know how things are going to look and test any buttons or links before they go live, and so they should.

Being able to see how something is going to be displayed on various devices is an essential step before it goes out to the wider world. Simple enough when publishing from a large device as preview buttons can resize the browser to the scale of your average smartphone or tablet.

Coming at it from the other angle - how do you preview a desktop version of a page when publishing from a phone when you're unable to make the browser any bigger than it is? The simplest answer is that you don't necessarily need to.

If everything works on a mobile preview, it'll work exactly the same on a larger screen size and you can leave the rest up to your template; that's the joy of responsive design!



10 TAKEAWAYS

— Want to know how to get the most out of your responsive design? Here's ten quick tips to consider to make your website shine:

1. Deconstruct your content

Break it up into digestible chunks and prioritise each element to act in an optimised fashion within a responsive framework.

2. Make friends with developers

Discuss what features and functionality you may need in order to allow what you create to make logical sense whenever and however it is viewed.

3. Test with accessibility tools

Ensure your content flows as it should by running it through text-to-speech software and listening to how your message comes across.

4. Put experience on the map

Use your site map to segment your content types and responsively determine the most suitable menu elements and page templates based on the most likely user activity.

5. Review your partners

Audit any feeds and embedded content from third party partners and affiliates to see if they sit seamlessly within your responsive design.

6. Make the next click count

The links that you include in your site are there to be clicked on so make sure that you are sending your users to pages that are suitable for the device that they are on.

7. Put things in the picture

Work closely with your dev and design teams to create a uniform format that dictates how images, graphics and diagrams display. Think about sensible scaling and text overlaying images.

8. Use what's already out there

Whatever type of content you're producing, there's probably an API already out there that will make it more usable within your responsive structure.

9. Streamline your forms

Mobile users aren't the only ones who are put off when faced with a lengthy form to fill in. Take away any unnecessary fields, and don't add them back in for larger displays.

10. Know the sharing situation

The default Twitter and Facebook buttons might not always be the right option, so analyse by device how your users share, and replace the icons they see to offer them a single click solution.

APPENDIX

We hope that this brief collection of thoughts and suggestions about developing your responsive content strategy will prove useful.

A few useful links for those that want to know more...

ARTICLES

The article by Ethan Marcotte that coined the term:
<http://alistapart.com/article/responsive-web-design>

Guidelines for RWD from Smashing Magazine:
<http://coding.smashingmagazine.com/2011/01/12/guidelines-for-responsive-web-design/>

TUTORIALS & TOOLS

A Net Magazine tutorial to teach you some adaptive layout basics:
<http://www.netmagazine.com/tutorials/adaptive-layouts-media-queries>

Handy sketch sheets to help you plan how your content may look:
<http://jeremypalford.com/arch-journal/responsive-web-design-sketch-sheets>

Test your site and content on various devices using Screenfly:
<https://quirktools.com/screenfly/>

OTHER RESOURCES

A SlideShare deck covering content workflow for responsive sites:
<http://www.slideshare.net/stephenhay/mobilism2012>

See an ever-growing list of responsive site examples:
<http://mediaqueri.es/>

A huge list of useful responsive resources that will keep you going for hours:
<http://bradfrost.github.io/this-is-responsive/resources.html>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



DANNY CHADBURN

Danny joined iCrossing as a Content Strategist in early 2012, bringing with him over 10 years' experience from the realms of public, private and charity sectors.

The bulk of this time was spent with online recruitment behemoths Totaljobs and Monster, and millions continue to benefit from the expert career advice content he developed in text, audio, video and interactive formats. Danny classes himself as a content connoisseur and is on a one man mission to make the web a better place.

He has various side projects sitting on danny.chadburn.co.uk

ABOUT ICROSSING UK

iCrossing UK is a digital marketing agency specialising in data driven strategies to build connected brands.

The company blends best-in-class digital marketing services — including paid media, search engine optimisation, creative, Web development, social media, UX, research and analytics — to create integrated digital marketing programmes that engage consumers and drive ROI.

iCrossing UK's client base includes such recognized brands as The Coca-Cola Company, LG Electronics, The LEGO Group, Heathrow and M&S Bank.

iCrossing UK is part of iCrossing, one of the world's largest digital marketing agencies, which employs over 900 staff in 18 offices around the globe, including 150 staff based at UK offices in London, Manchester and Brighton.

iCrossing is a unit of Hearst Corporation, one of the world's largest diversified media companies.

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iCrossing /:::/

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