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## What is a responsive website?

A responsive website refers to the capacity for the site to change its layout/format to optimize the visitor experience when using mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets.

Responsive web design (RWD) is an approach to web design which makes web pages render well on a variety of devices and window or screen sizes.

When viewed on a desktop computer, a traditional "fixed" website for instance, might show three columns. But when you view that same layout on a smaller tablet, it might force you to scroll horizontally, something users don't like. Or elements might be hidden from view or look distorted. The impact is also complicated by the fact that many tablets can be viewed either in portrait orientation, or turned sideways for landscape view.

On a tiny smartphone screen, websites can be even more challenging to see. Large images may "break" the layout. Sites can be slow to load on smartphones if they are graphics heavy.

However, if a site uses responsive design, the tablet version might **automatically adjust to display** just two columns. That way, **the content is readable and easy to navigate**. On a smartphone, the content might appear as a single column, perhaps stacked vertically. Or possibly the user would have the ability to swipe over to view other columns. **Images will resize instead of distorting the layout or getting cut off.**

## How Does Responsive Web Design Work?

Responsive sites use **fluid grids**. All page elements are sized by proportion, rather than pixels. So if you have three columns, you wouldn't say exactly how wide each should be, but rather how wide they should be in relation to the other columns.

Media such as images is also resized relatively. That way an image can stay within its column or relative design element.

Related Issues –

Mouse v. touch: Designing for mobile devices also brings up the issue of mouse versus touch. On desktop computers the user normally has a mouse to navigate and select items. On a smartphone or tablet, the user mostly is using fingers and touching the screen. What may seem easy to select with a mouse, may be hard to select with a finger on a tiny spot on a screen. The Web designer must take "touch" into consideration.

Graphics and download speed: Also, there's the issue of graphics, ads and **download speed**. On mobile devices, it may be wise to display fewer graphics than for desktop views so that a site doesn't take forever to load on a smartphone. Larger ad sizes may need to be exchanged for smaller ads.

Apps and "mobile versions": In the past, you might have thought about creating an app for your website — say an iPad app or an Android app. Or you would have a mobile version specifically for BlackBerry.

But with so many different devices today, it's getting harder to create apps and versions for every device and operating platform.

**There are two basic ways to make a website work on mobile devices:**

• Responsive website – Properly designed it will offer **ease of reading and navigation with a minimum of resizing, panning, and scrolling working across a wide range of devices – from desktop to mobile phones.**

• Mobile website – Building a distinct website using a unique URL separate from the main site that is developed specifically for a **fast user-friendly experience for the smaller screens of mobile devices.**

A mobile site and a responsive website will both optimize the site to work on smaller screens. Both will provide **simpler navigation and faster load times.**

**Advantages of Responsive Design**

A Single Domain

While a mobile site needs a different domain, responsive design allows you to have only **one domain,** the only thing that is different is the code on the back-end.

• Improved SEO (Search engine optimization) – When there is a separate mobile domain, users searching for your main domain on a mobile device will be redirected to the mobile site, automatically. This can hurt traffic to your main domain.

Responsive web design helps SEO efforts by having all your visitors directed to a single site, no matter what device they are using. Another improvement, managing one SEO campaign is easier than managing two.

• **Less Work** – Having two websites to maintain, a desktop and a mobile website, makes twice as much work. If there are updates or changes that need to be made, then webmasters have to make changes on the desktop version and the mobile site.

• One website **costs less** than two – Having one site that addresses the needs of all devices is less costly when compared to having two separate websites.