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Full v Mobile Website Design

With the proliferation of mobile devices there is a greater imperative for businesses and organizations to ensure content viability across these devices. To complicate matters, mobile users often have differing needs when visiting websites. Even the same user will visit a site with varying intents. For travel decisions, an “urgent now” user will likely utilize sites for booking flights or hotels before visiting a tourism site. Tourism sites are more likely to see traffic from casual surfers and repeat users (as travel planning often happens over an extended period). Taking this into consideration, the tourism websites for Auckland, Stockholm, and Norway are very extensive. Managing this quantity of information means decisions must be made about what keep standard between each type of site and what to vary, especially since visitors often have the same questions no matter the destination. Where is this location? What is there to do once I get there? What is the food like? Where would I be staying? Tourism sites want to make their destination stand out from the plethora of other options, so they might also address topics such as arts and culture, social identity, or historical significance. All three sites being evaluated touched on multiples of these subjects no matter what device type. To this end, none of the sites attempt to diminish the linked content of their site across devices, but they do vary their design on a mobile site versus the full webpage.

Norway sets itself apart by making some content more visible on the mobile site than the full site. In the “Green Travel” section, the desktop site displays a large image with a blurb and a link to show more information. On the mobile site there is a section labeled “Go Green” with a carousel of articles immediately available on this subject. In this way, designers have made content available in fewer clicks for their mobile users. This design strategy for Norway, however, leads to a difference in content organization across platforms. A user moving between devices might have a hard time relocating the same content. The “Typically Norwegian” and “Get Active” sections aren’t part of the home page on the desktop site. However, the imagery used to identify these sections remains the same, which reduces the friction of rediscovery across devices. One final thing that sets the site for Norway apart from the rest is that it does the least to change its navigation bar. By maintaining a hamburger menu on both sites, users can learn the same navigation strategies from this starting point regardless of platform.

Auckland has the distinction of having a desktop site that already looks very similar to a mobile site, which would make sense from a mobile-first design strategy and from a conservation of resources standpoint. While the navigation bar on the Norway page changes the least from full to mobile, the designers of the Auckland page not only use the exact same search icon (magnifying glass) across devices, but also do not apply additional styles to adjust the size. While a small indicator, it does give the impression the designers were looking for a design strategy of minimal interference. Another indication that the designers intended to focus on mobile devices is the use of a slideshow in the opening banner. In contrast to Stockholm which becomes a clickable video in low bandwidth scenarios (based on personal experience only) or Norway which sometimes fails to load anything at all, Auckland is better situated to keep a dynamic element viable in even low bandwidth scenarios. The website for Auckland does remove some elements from its captions on the mobile site such as the dates in its “Events” section and the category info in it’s “Auckland Insider” section. It also converts some of the card formatting on the full site to slide shows in mobile. This design change has an unexpected side effect. The images used are afforded more horizontal space in mobile, so mobile users get to see different variants of the images seen on the full site. Of the three sites, Auckland’s feels the most consistent across platforms but potentially to its detriment as it doesn’t utilize the capabilities and size of a desktop device to create a more powerful experience.

While it might seem that leaves Stockholm sitting somewhere in the middle, it works more as a triangulation. Norway and Auckland rely heavily on card-type layouts, lots of white space, and a tremendous amount of design element consistency throughout their site especially as you explore the different topic areas. The desktop site for Stockholm, however, uses multiple colors, background styles, varies their card style types and layouts, and uses a lot of mouse-over effects to set their desktop experience apart from their competitors. They do keep many of these design elements in play on their mobile site, however, it makes for a slightly cobbled together feeling as a mobile design. The Stockholm site also varies the dimensions on their images tremendously across sites to the point that it could be they use different versions of the same image. Examples of this include the images used in the section “11 Beautiful Parks” and “Discover the Stockholm Archipelago.” The desktop image in the parks section is more close-up than the one used on the mobile site, which shows a more expansive view of the same spot. In contrast, the image used in the desktop site in the archipelago section is truncated in height but appears to retain the same width. While this could be done with styling, it could also be done by using a separate file based on the site being viewed. The point where it becomes the most apparent that the Stockholm site might have been design for desktop first is in the word wrapping of some of their articles. In the article “A beginner’s course in Stockholmese” much of the text is truncated on the right margin and does not offer an overflow option. It only becomes visible when the mobile screen is rotated to landscape. An error like this would motivate a user to leave the site entirely not wanting to bother with running into issues like that elsewhere. Of the three sites, the Stockholm site feels and interacts the most uniquely even while still addressing most of what users look for in a tourism website despite its deficits in the mobile design.

Ultimately, a website is meant to inform and persuade a visitor. “Learn about our product. Visit our city. Donate to our organization.” Websites that fall into the same category must provide a user with all the pertinent information of said category to be relevant. For tourism sites, the repeat user might still be classified as a casual surfer in that their browsing habit are different from a repeat user on a shopping or news site. And tourism sites will rarely be the first stop for “urgent now” travelers, but that doesn’t mean a mobile user’s time isn’t valuable. In keeping content streamlined across multiple platforms, Auckland ensures users are just as familiar using their full site as they are using their mobile site. By providing greater visibility to content on the mobile site, Norway ensures that mobile users don’t have to click too deep to find the content that interests them. And finally, the website for Stockholm reminds us how important it is to remember the constraints of mobile devices but also to lean into the advantages only possible in a desktop site.

Sources:

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