Text Jarno Salovuori

Photos Katri Tamminen  
Translation Päivi Vuoriaro

Website is like a chameleon tai Responsive web design is here to stay

Evolving technology and the increasing pervasiveness of smart devices raise the bar higher than ever for website designers. A responsive website looks good on any device.

The internet is to an increasing extent browsed on mobile devices where the usability of traditional websites may turn into travesty, alienating users. The challenge of a smaller screen has been responded to by creating specific mobile sites and apps, but a better alternative is often available: a regular site is adaptable to a perfectly fine mobile version.

”The goal is to not need a specific mobile site. The user interface and layout are designed in a way that the site will structure and adjust itself according to the device. On a mobile phone, for example, a site is easy to use with single column while navigation can be hidden behind a menu,” says Fujitsu’s **Mathias Rönnlund**, systems architect for the NetCommunity content management system.

NetCommunity has supported responsive design for a year now. All new implementations come with a responsive layout, while many websites are being made responsive. This will not affect their content or functionality which allows upgrading the sites with just minor adjustments – as long as touch-based use is taken into consideration.

”Responsiveness is a straight-forward solution that brings websites to a level that works in mobile devices as well. The alternatives – a specific mobile site or a downloadable app – always require tailoring, which results in a higher price and heavy maintenance,” says systems architect **Markus Lehtinen** of Fujitsu.

”You must think carefully as to when to create a specific app for something. It takes a lot for users to actually download an app to their devices.”

It’s the browser that counts

Responsiveness is based on the HTML5 code and the CSS3 style properties. A site can be designed with fluid resizing, or it can offer a variety of views to the desktop, tablet computer and mobile phone. On end devices, the browser senses the width of the display and brings the site to the user as it was meant to.

The current browsers know how to adapt the websites with no problem. Outdated and problematic browser versions can still be found in old desktop computers where responsiveness is barely needed. On the other hand, even some newish mobile devices have surprising differences.

”Out of the smartphones, the browser in Lumia 800, for example, doesn’t support all features. However, the user doesn’t notice this as we are able to work around the problem using other means,” Rönnlund says.

Responsive websites call for new kinds of skills from the designers. Previously, the graphic designer designed a wireframe model and layout of the site in an image-processing program, and the html layout designer then converted it into code. The problem now is that there should be multiple models and images, for every device and every use.

What facilitates the designing of NetCommunity websites is a pre-defined user interface framework, Bootstrap, which was built to help Twitter solve its design needs. The widely used Bootstrap is a free and evolving library of tools for creating websites, which caters to different uses and deficiencies of devices. Yet we must accept the fact that not everything looks exactly the same in different browsers.

Online Net at the heart of the matter

The new and improved online version of Fujitsu’s Net magazine is an example of a responsive website and also the perks of the new kind of design. Updating the online version went exceptionally smoothly, because Fujitsu’s graphic designer Tom Nuorivaara designed the layout using html and Bootstrap which considerably accelerated the process.

”Nice looking images alone don’t cut it, but the designer must bring responsiveness to the site. Our graphic designer was given the guidelines in terms of the layout, and once he provided the finished design in html format, we were ready to get to the heart of the matter,” Rönnlund sums up.

Take a look at online Net at www.net.fujitsu.fi

CAPTION: "All the contents of NetCommunity websites can also be provided in a standardized, machine-readable form, which allows the use of third party mobile applications, for example," Markus Lehtinen and Mathias Rönnlund point out.

---

NetCommunity

NetCommunity is a database-driven content management system developed by Fujitsu Finland. It is fully browser-based and built on Microsoft technologies.

NetCommunity is used at approximately 25 customers primarily in the government sector. Websites implemented using NetCommunity include espoo.fi, turku.fi, helmet.fi and vero.fi, and the online services of several ministries and inter-municipal hospital districts.

NetCommunity is available as a turn-key version or fully customized to customer needs. In both versions, responsiveness is a built-in feature.

www.netcommunity.fi