How to Optimize Your Website for Mobile Users

by Dan Ahern

This report will outline the meaning and purpose of responsive web design, offer advice on how to optimize your website for mobile devices, and provide tools to build and test your optimized site.

What is Responsive Web Design?

- Responsive web design (RWD) is a web development approach that creates dynamic changes to the appearance of a website, depending on the screen size and orientation of the device being used to view it.[1]

Design with mobile in mind

- Mobile devices drove 61% of visits to U.S. websites in 2020, up from 57% in 2019, while desktops were responsible for only 35.7% of all visits in 2020.[2]
- Smartphones and other mobile devices are becoming increasingly more popular for web search. With that in mind, it's crucial for businesses to adapt and design UX and UI interfaces for both desktop and mobile use.
- You can choose to use two different URL domains for desktop and mobile, but this can be difficult to implement and maintain, which is why we recommend choosing a responsive design for your website.

Proven Tips and Tricks for Optimizing Content and Design

- **Consistent Content**
  - Too much information on a small screen can be frustrating and overwhelming for a user
  - Prioritize the content that users are looking for and need the most from your business
  - Keep your text short, sweet, and to the point

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[1] Schade, A. (2014, May 4). *Responsive Web Design (RWD) and User Experience*. Nielsen Norman Group. https://www.nngroup.com/articles/responsive-web-design-definition/.
[2] Enge, E. (2021, March 23). *Mobile vs. Desktop Usage in 2020*. Perficient, Inc. https://www.perficient.com/insights/research-hub/mobile-vs-desktop-usage#:~:text=Mobile%20devices%20drove%2061%25%20of,increase%20from%2063.3%25%20in%202019.

- ○ Keep important features and structure consistent across the entire site (menu options, back-to-home screen, etc.), but avoid non-mobile friendly features like sidebars that widen the screen.[3]
- **Compress Images and Graphics**
  - ○ If you're using a separate URL for mobile users, consider uploading smaller versions of images and graphics on the mobile site to improve loading speed and an aesthetically pleasing interface.
  - ○ If you use a responsive web design (WordPress option outlined later in the report), you can incorporate responsive images into your site, meaning images are optimized for desktop and mobile.
- **Simplify Forms:**
  - ○ Forms are often more difficult to fill out on mobile devices compared to desktop interfaces, which is why it's beneficial to limit the number of fields you require users to complete on your forms.
  - ○ Consider minimizing the number of fields that require text entry and use dropdowns and checkboxes to simplify the form-fill process on mobile devices.

Web Builder Tools for RWD

- Responsive WordPress Theme:
  - ○ If you're designing your website on WordPress, many of the options in the WordPress theme directory are responsive, which makes building a website much easier and updating for mobile use much more understandable. Before installing your website theme, check the theme's description to make sure the theme is responsive.
  - ○ If the theme is installed, you can see how your site will look on each device by navigating to *Appearance > Customize* in your dashboard. This is a great way to test the effectiveness of your website on mobile, but if you're not using WordPress, there are plenty of other ways to test which we'll dive into later.
- Squarespace Platform:
  - ○ While Squarespace is a paid web builder platform and does not come with responsive theme options, Squarespace has built-in responsive design to resize content and images for different screen sizes.
  - ○ Of all the top web builder platforms, Squarespace has the best reputation for built-in responsive design.

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[3] Patel, N. (2020, January 24). *Does Your Website Need a Mobile Makeover? 8 Mobile Optimization Tips To Improve Your Site's UX*. Neil Patel. https://neilpatel.com/blog/8-mobile-ux-tips/.

Testing Tools and Methods for Mobile Effectiveness

Once your website has been built or updated, it's important to understand whether features are compatible on mobile devices. These ideas can help:

- Google's Mobile-Friendly Testing Tool:
  - Simply type in the full URL of the web page that you want to test, and the test will typically take less than a minute to run.
  - Test results include a screenshot of how the page looks to Google on a mobile device, as well as a list of any mobile usability problems that it finds.
  - Mobile usability problems are issues that can affect a user that visits the page on a mobile device, including font sizes and use of Flash (which isn't supported by most mobile devices).
- Google PageSpeed:
  - Mobile connections are often slower than desktop search, and users want an instantaneous experience. Run your site through Google PageSpeed tool to get a checklist of everything needed to make it fast.
  - This can immediately impact things like search engine optimization (SEO) and bounce rates on your mobile site.[4]
- mobiReady
  - Described as "a free tool for developers, designers and marketers to test website performance on mobile devices."
  - While not necessarily as reputable as Google's options, this platform allows you to view web page compositions on desktop and mobile and provides a mobile readiness test for your website with areas of success and improvement.
- Customer feedback
  - If users are having issues with your mobile interface, you might not know unless you hear from them directly.
  - Collect customer feedback through a feedback button on your website, live chat, or encourage reviews on Google or Yelp.

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[4] Editors, F. T. C. (2019, February 25). *Council Post: 13 Ways To Optimize Your Company's Mobile Site*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2019/02/25/13-ways-to-optimize-your-companys-mobile-site/?sh=40d6484820ce.