

COLUMNS

The urgency of mobile search engine optimization

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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The next real SEO challenge for brands is not duplicate content, schema or low-quality links. No, the next hurdle is the mobile experience of your site. And brands that simply serve up the desktop version of their site for mobile users could be in for a big surprise.

A mobile-friendly site is crucial for customer engagement now and the foreseeable future. Why? Already mobile drives an average of two-thirds of total site organic traffic.

SEO on the other side

Now, Google has announced that, starting April 21, “mobile-friendliness” will be an official ranking signal for mobile searches.

“Mobile-friendliness” simply means that a site renders an easy-to-navigate experience on mobile devices with responsive Web design or m-dot sites being examples of this. A less considered but important mobile ranking factor is site page speed on mobile devices.

For brands that already have a mobile-responsive or m-dot site, this future Google algorithm update should not have a negative effect. Indeed, it should have a positive one.

If you have “mobile-friendly” next to your mobile search listing, then Google has deemed your site as mobile compliant. If you do not, you can determine if your site is mobile-friendly using Google’s mobile tester.

While Google’s coming algorithm change has a lot of people concerned, this has been in the making for some time.

Google may say its current mobile algorithm does not differentiate desktop ranking signals. However, there are clear ranking differences between non-mobile friendly sites and responsive sites or m-dots.

We have tested #1 desktop and mobile rankings for client sites that are mobile compliant and those that are not and found that non-compliant sites had a 32 percent reduction in number rankings for mobile searches. Mobile-friendly sites had a fairly even amount of #1 rankings on desktop and mobile devices.

The trend of mobile driving the majority of client organic clicks will only continue to grow.

Will it click?

Brands that stick to running non-compliant mobile sites – non-responsive or missing m-dot – will not only continue to see a decline in mobile search rankings but the effect may be more severe after Google officially launches the new policy on April 21.

Consider this: A recent organic desktop vs. mobile CTR study published by SEO Clarity indicated that while the mobile #1 ranking on Google achieves an average click-through rate (CTR) of 27.7 percent, the number 2 position sees a drop to just 9 percent in CTR.

This is alarming because simply a drop of only one ranking can decrease potential clicks by 66 percent. And declines in mobile rankings can have a significant impact on overall site traffic.

Brands need to prepare. Those that currently have a responsive site or m-dot and the “mobile-friendly” label next to their mobile search listing should be fine, with no further immediate site modifications necessary.

Non-compliant sites need to start the process of transitioning to responsive design now.

Large enterprise brands may be challenged to move this quickly. Or they may need further data and resources to adapt.

Creating an m-dot site is a much faster solution, which can keep a brand in mobile compliance while working on a more long-term responsive solution.

Regarding mobile page speed, the two most common challenges with mobile page speed are large images on the server-side and content distribution network (CDN) as well as browser caching.

Compressing images to smaller file sizes can reduce the amount of time required to load in a mobile browser.

Take this one step further and serve images via a content distribution network that is equipped with exceptionally fast distribution.

Browser caching can reduce the image load requirement for repeat visitors within the cache timeframe. If you are uncertain of the proper time, mirror the caching period to the analytics attribution time, for example, 30 days.

BY CREATING a site that provides a compelling mobile experience that loads quickly for users, brands should expect to see continued mobile organic performance growth in April and beyond.

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