

COLUMNS

## How to move from mobile-friendly to mobile-first

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There was a time not long ago when desktops dominated Web access and companies needed to create only one primary public-facing interface: their Web site.

If the handful of people who had access to a smartphone wanted to access the Web, they had to struggle through the process.

However, we have entered an age where people no longer have the patience to wait when it comes to online access – they want instant gratification.

Not PC on PC

As companies started to catch on, they would tend to follow the same path when it came to creating a basic mobile strategy: force as much content as possible onto a Web site and then only as an afterthought adapt it for mobile use by removing a few pieces.

In their eyes, cutting down the content to fit on a smaller screen was what made them mobile-friendly.

However, going down that avenue did not allow them to focus on what mobile users really want, and how to truly engage them.

These days, marketers need to move from being mobile-friendly to thinking in terms of mobile-first. Why? Because the game has changed.

According to Gartner, the combined sales of smartphones and tablets will be greater than PC sales by 44 percent in 2011.

Mobile devices are now more than just another customer channel – they signify the most important development in user interactions since the mouse.

How do you readjust your thinking to focus on mobile-first, before the desktop? Start by understanding the user and design an experience with their needs in mind.

Mobile users are focused, unlike laptop and desktop users who multitask between, casual research, work and play.

Smartphone users want on-the-spot answers and are usually transaction-oriented.

There are also the newest users on the playing field, those armed with tablets. They are focused on a broader experience.

Tablet remedy

Tablets are most often used as leisure surfing devices while people are lounging around their houses.

Tablet users are often more open to immersive experience, so you may miss the opportunity to engage if you present a tablet user with an interface designed for a mobile phone.

If a tablet user checks out an automobile Web site, he is open to more of an experience. He may want to see a video of the car zooming through a city or climbing hills in the countryside. Optimize his experience with colors, videos and more features to fulfill his need for speed.

Smartphone users do not want to be overloaded by content. They want what they want, when they want it, and then they move on.

If smartphone users punch up a restaurant site, for instance, chances are they want to make a reservation, look up directions or take a quick look at the menu.

This concept is also similar to a new idea called responsive Web design.

Responsive Web design is an approach that proposes that a Web site's design should respond to a user's environment and behavior, based on the platform, orientation and, most importantly, the screen size.

Whether Web sites are running on a smartphone, tablet or laptop, responsive Web design offers the ability to automatically shrink images, adapt font sizes, reduce the number of columns and eliminate all other content that will not display well.

How to think mobile-first

- For smartphones, stay away from excessive use of complex navigation paths, fixed-element layouts and Flash.

Although Flash-driven sites look amazing on traditional browsers that are equipped with a Flash plug-in, a mobile device will only display that annoying “You need Flash Player to view this site” advisory.

No one finds slow page loads appealing, so it is important to remember that a one second delay in page response can result in a 7 percent reduction in conversion.

- You need to prioritize the content on your mobile page. Organizations that throw too many links, images, videos and unrelated promos onto their site have mobile users running for the hills.

These extra features tend to answer the needs of internal stakeholders and ultimately do not benefit the Web site user.

- With tablets, always take the less-is-more approach. This allows tablet Web sites to have a cleaner look-and-feel, be less complex, touch friendly, Ajax-driven, have a good navigation structure, and present a strong call to action.

- Do not try to be all things to all people. Always focus on the user and measure task completions, not page views.

- Evolve from point+click to touch-and-swipe. Take full advantage of the new and simpler way that mobile users interact with content.

BEING MOBILE-FRIENDLY is a step in the journey of customer engagement, not the destination.

As mobile browsing eclipses desktop browsing, organizations need to ensure they are thinking with mobile in mind first and providing a consistent experience to their site users when and where they want to access it.

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