COLUMNS

Creating a good mobile experience

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By A LUXURY DAILY COLUMNIST

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Successful marketers know how important it is to be where their customers are. Considering that by 2013, Gartner predicts that more people will use their mobile phones than PCs to get online, the mobile user has become a key customer demographic.

After all, the mobile Web is growing eight times faster than the traditional Internet, according to Mashable, which means it will also grow in importance as part of any overall Web strategy.

Without a doubt, it is more important than ever to support your mobile users, but how?

You will need thoughtful planning and a laser-like focus on understanding these users and their goals to successfully integrate this objective into your Web strategy.

What do they want?
One of the mobile user's primary goals is to get information as quickly as possible while completing online tasks on the go.

You should be there to help these users. Give them a good mobile experience, because a bad mobile experience is going to cost you.

● Eighty percent of customers abandon a mobile site if they have a bad user experience.

– Limelight Networks Inc., 2011

● Forty percent have turned to a competitor's site after a bad mobile experience. – Compuware, "What Users Want from Mobile," 2011

● Twenty-three percent of adult users curse at their phones when a mobile site does not work. – Compuware, "What Users Want from Mobile," 2011

Remember that "mobile site" does not just mean that a desktop version of a Web site loads on a mobile device. You definitely cannot assume this will lead to a good mobile experience.

What makes a good mobile experience?
So what does make a good mobile experience? Here are a few things to aim for:

● Short load time. The mobile version should be lightning-quick. After all, your mobile audience is likely on the go

● Less clutter. Know what content your user is after and make it as easy as possible for them to find it. Get rid of fluffy content and bloated navigation

● Big user interface (UI) elements. Touch is the new click. Remember, you are no longer dealing with a mouse. Make buttons and other user interface elements large so they can be easily tapped with fat ol' thumbs.

Biting the bullet/Where to start
After reading this, you might be worried about customers cursing your name over poor mobile experiences. But do not worry.

Assuming that you already have a desktop version of your Web site, your first task in going mobile will be to reduce your current content and site map significantly.

Better yet, scrap it all together and start with a clean slate. Go slim. Get to the meat and only the meat.

If your mobile site ends up being only your logo, address and contact information, that may very well be the right solution for you. When it comes to mobile, less is more.

Once you have got a much slimmer site map, it is time to tweak the layout and interface.

Ideally, no design elements will need to be recreated. Most – if not all – of what needs to change can be done with CSS: tweaks to the layout, image sizes, the way that content flows, and possibly even UI elements.

For your own sake, try to implement your changes via CSS and only CSS.

Never touch the HTML files and their structure, if you can help it – this is when things can get hairy.

Trust me, you really do not want two different HTML code-bases, nor does your developer, unless, of course, you want more to manage. If that is the case, definitely have multiple code-bases.

Future thinking/Redesigning

When the time comes around again to overhaul your Web site entirely, try thinking mobile first.

Remember that by next year, the majority of Internet traffic will come from mobile phones. So why should your site's concept, structure, and design still be based on a desktop version?

Desktop users are slipping into second place. Thinking mobile first will get you focusing on what matters most to your audience, and it forces you to consider the amount of useless navigation, content fluff and general clutter that is present on the average site.

Here are some great examples of well-designed mobile experiences:

● southwest.com

● thebostonglobe.com

● authenticjobs.com

● nytimes.com

Bring it on home

So what did we learn? If you are creating a mobile presence from your current Web site, start with getting slim. Remember, less is more.

Likewise, if you are starting a new Web site altogether, try thinking mobile first. Soon enough, your mobile users will be the majority anyway.

In the end, regardless of the current state of your Web strategy, your mobile presence cannot be ignored and you cannot afford for it to be an afterthought.

Keep the needs of your users in mind and they will be thanking you for their seamless experience wherever they happen to be.

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