Mobile Website Design - 5 Things You Need To Know!

by Robert Fagnant

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Introduction

The world's gone mobile, and companies like Apple, Google and Amazon are betting that trend is much more than a passing fad!

Within this short report, I'll cover some of the most recent statistics, and reveal the "five things" you absolutely must know before creating a mobile website for your business.

To improving your mobile presence,

Robert Fagnant

Do I Really Need A Mobile Website?

The latest stats are truly staggering. According to CBS news, there are more than 5 Billion cell phones in use worldwide, and about one billion of these are capable of connecting to the internet.

In fact, there are more internet-connected mobile devices than there are desktop and laptops combined.

Because the use of mobile devices is steadily rising, it's important that every business consider building a mobile-friendly website. Those that don't, risk losing business to those that do… it's just that simple.

While all businesses could benefit by having a mobile-friendly website, some business types will benefit more than others. If your business offers any sort of mobile service, emergency services, or simply appeals to those "on-the-go," you fit that category.

It would be impossible for me to list the business types I think would benefit most, but I will give you some examples to help you determine whether your business might benefit.

Example #1 – Car Towing Service

This example should be easy to follow. A motorist breaks down and is in need of an emergency towing service. As they're not at home, it's likely they will use a mobile device to find the service they need.

This highlights both the need for a mobile-friendly website, and a website that is well-optimized for the search engines (aka "SEO" – Search Engine Optimization).

Example #2 – Restaurants

After church, a group of friends talks about where they might go to lunch. A search is conducted on someone's "smart phone," and a restaurant is selected.

Example #3 – Chiropractor (or many other medical-services businesses)

An out-of-town businessman starts experiencing back pain. As he's out of his usual area, he uses his mobile device to look for a chiropractor that takes "walk-in" appointments.

As you can see, there are a lot of reasons that someone might use a mobile device to look for a business. An added benefit is that most are looking to do business right away, not sometime in the future.

If your mobile website is easy to find, attractive, easy to navigate, and offers your essential business information, you stand a good chance to gain a new customer.

Which Coding Language Is Best?

Mobile websites can be "coded" in a variety of "markup languages," just like regular websites. You could choose to code your website with HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), XHTML (Extensible Hypertext Markup Language), or HTML5 (the newest version of the Hypertext Markup Language).

I realize that all of this is pretty technical, but it's important that you at least know your options before you begin your mobile website project.

I'd recommend you avoid using standard HTML, or even XHTML, as you won't be able to take advantage of certain "mobile features" like "Click-to-Call" links. These enable the user to click your phone number, and have the device immediately place the call.

Also, I'd avoid coding your mobile site in HTML5 for the time being, as the "standard" for this code is not yet complete, and some browsers do not fully support HTML5 features.

So, what do I recommend?

I recommend the use of XHTML MP (the "Mobile Profile" version of XHTML). It's fully supported by all browsers, and allows you to take advantage of a variety of "mobile features," including "Click-to-Call" links.

It's what I've used for my own mobile website, and what I recommend to my clients.

If you have a mobile device handy, you can click here to see my mobile website.

What Makes A Mobile Website Different From The One I Have Now?

Designing a mobile website can be a real challenge because there are so many inconsistencies between the devices used to access your website.

Some, like smartphones, have very small screens and others, like iPads have larger screens that can view sites in "landscape" format.

Some can view Flash-video content, and some, like the devices from Apple, cannot.

Some have relatively fast processors, and full-featured browsers, and some have neither.

Most do not have a full-sized keyboard, if they have a keyboard at all. Because of this, it's important your mobile site be optimized for "touch screens." This segment represents the fastest-growing segment of mobile devices, and nearly all of the new devices in production use touch-screen technology.

In general terms, here are the main things to consider when designing your mobile site:

- Your site should have a "flexible" layout... one that expands or contracts depending on the size of the mobile screen viewing it.

- The layout should not require the user to scroll left-to-right, nor should it require them to "zoom-in" or "zoom-out" if possible.

- Your site should be easy to navigate through the user's touch screen.

- Your contact information should be easily found, and all of your phone numbers should use the "Click-to-Call" feature.

- Each page of your mobile site should be optimized to yield a small file size. Many devices have slow processors and will "slow to a crawl" if your page sizes exceed 75kb.

- If your customers come to your business location, consider adding an interactive "Google map" or some other functionality that will make it easy for your mobile visitors to find you.

- Don't use "Flash" for any element on your mobile site. If you do, some users simply will not be able to see it. Instead, consider either removing the "dynamic" content altogether, or simulating the effect through Javascript.

  Most mobile devices are Javascript-enabled, and will properly display the content.

Do I Need To "SEO" My Mobile Site?

SEO, or Search Engine Optimization, is a set of techniques used to improve the "search engine ranking" of a web page, relative to a set of "keywords" or phrases.

So, if you're a chiropractor, you may want your website easily found when someone searches for "chiropractor," or "emergency chiropractic," or any number of keyword phrases.

The top search engines deliver different results to mobile visitors, so it is important that you optimize your mobile website just like you would your regular website.

The good news, however, is that the search engines like to rank mobile-friendly websites higher in the results. As a result, creating a mobile website will give you a better chance of getting search engine exposure.

It's not my intent to teach you Search Engine Optimization, it's far too complex a topic for this short report. However, I would recommend that you create unique content for your mobile website instead of using your existing content as-is.

In addition to seeing that your content is unique, it should also be succinct. Mobile visitors are typically in a hurry, and don't require the full content displayed on your regular website.

How Will People Find My Mobile Site?

After you've built your mobile site, you'll want to ensure that it can be found by your target market. Fortunately, some exposure can be achieved automatically.

Some website owners choose to put a "clickable link" on their regular site that reads something like, "Click Here for our Mobile Site." If the visitor clicks the link, the mobile-friendly website is displayed.

Personally, I don't like this approach. It forces the visitor to see the "non-mobile-friendly" website, and only displays the mobile version if they are fortunate enough to find the aforementioned link.

Instead, you can employ a "user agent redirect script" on your regular website. This way, your website will determine which "user agent" (just a fancy way of determining which browser is being used to access the website) is being used by the visitor. If it detects that a "mobile browser" is being used, it automatically displays the mobile-friendly version of the website.

This is far better as the visitor will see a pleasing layout right away… one that is optimized for a mobile device and one that can be easily navigated.

Still, I would suggest you provide your visitors a way of seeing your regular website if they really want to. Many "user agent redirect scripts" have a specific function that allows the script to be bypassed. If yours does, you can add a link to view your regular website.

In addition to using a "user agent redirect script," I do suggest you optimize your mobile site for the search engines (SEO), and do your best to ensure that your current customers know about your new mobile site.

Some ideas include…

- Sending out an email newsletter that "unveils" your new mobile site

- Alerting your "fans" (via Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) about your new mobile site

- Making a blog post about your new mobile website and asking for comments/feedback.

- Including a QR Code on the back of your business card that takes the user straight to your mobile site.

Of course, there are many other ways to market your mobile site, but these ideas will certainly help you jumpstart your marketing efforts.

Conclusion

Well, this short report is coming to a close, but I wanted to give you some visual examples that might help you better understand the importance of having a mobile-friendly website.

I'm going to give you three examples, starting from the most "mild," and moving towards the most "wild!"

Note: Each graphic will contain two images. The first is a screenshot taken from my laptop, the second a photo of what the website looks like when viewed on an iPod Touch (4th generation).

Example #1 – http://tvtowing.com

TVTowing.com is ranked on the first page of Google for the phrase, "towing los angeles ca." Their website doesn't display horribly on a mobile device, but it's far from optimal.

As you can see from the images on the next page, their site fits in the window of the iPod Touch, but the text is far too small to read. The visitor can zoom in, but that makes it necessary to begin scrolling left-to-right in order to read the content or navigate the site.

Example #2 – http://pepzpizza.com

PepzPizza.com is ranked on the first page of Google for the phrase, "pizza anaheim ca." This business isn't far from Disneyland, and is rated really well.

However, they really need a mobile website, as some of their content isn't visible to mobile devices that don't support Flash (i.e. Apple's iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch and a variety of devices from other manufacturers).

As you can see from the images on the next page, the graphic toward the top of the page does not display on the mobile device (because it was built with Flash) and the site's navigational menu disappears as well (and that's really bad!)
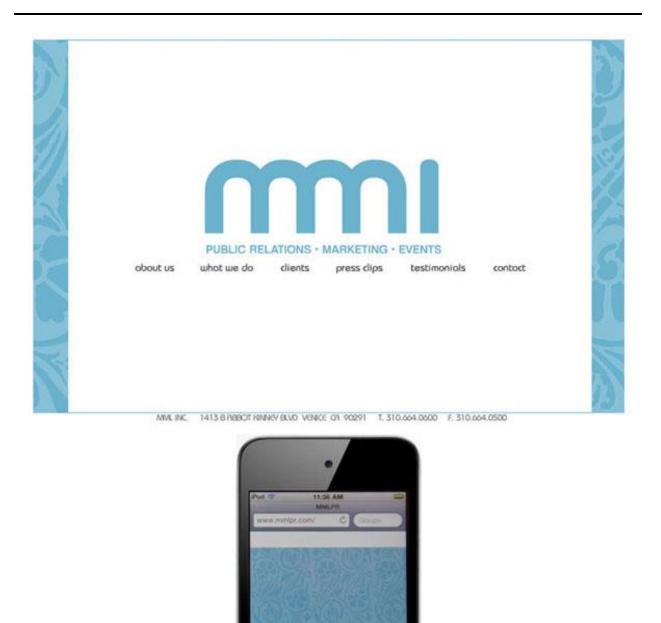
Example #3 – http://mmlpr.com

Mmlpr.com is the most extreme example of a "website gone wrong!" Ironically, this business is involved in marketing and public relations.

As their entire site is built in Flash (their graphics AND their content), it literally disappears when you try to view it on a mobile device that doesn't support Flash.

The top image shows you what you will see if you view their site on a desktop or laptop. The bottom image shows you that everything, except for a simple background image, disappears when trying to view the site on the Apple iPod Touch.

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I hope you found this information helpful, and I hope it helps you when designing your mobile website.

If you'd like professional help, we're here for you. We are experts in building quality mobile websites and would love the opportunity to build one for you!

If you'd like to see how we can help, give us a call at: (401) 453-5600 or visit: http://www.eprocs.net/contact-us.html and complete our online form to request more information.

We look forward to talking with you and will do our best to help you increase your web exposure, get new business and outperform your competitors!

About The Author

Robert Fagnant is the founder and managing partner of ePro Computer Solutions, Inc., which specializes in helping local businesses build a meaningful online presence.

Robert has been a developer and software engineer for over 40 years and his 23 contractors have extensive experience. We specialized in commercial software, marketing websites, mini-sites, Iphone and Android apps, Advertising board (RIProv.com or MyProvidenceApp.com), Landing Pages, and other complete Web Centric Applications for all mobile phones. Ranking these with SEO/SEM/Blogging for maximum exposure is where we excel.

When not marketing a local business, Robert enjoys hiking, relaxing, reading books, blogging, and social gatherings.