

COLUMNS

No mobile commerce site? Your Google search rank is in jeopardy

February 23, 2015



Wilson Kerr

By **Wilson Kerr**

Been putting a mobile commerce site off? Getting to it later this year? OK, but be careful, because there is more at stake than just your mobile conversion rate.

Google's bots are constantly crawling the Web and reporting their findings back to the Google mother ship. Specifically, these days, they are checking to see if your site is mobile optimized. Mobile usability, or the lack thereof, is now a key determinant of the quality rating that Google is assigning to your site.

Master Web

Google has been issuing warnings and cautionary hints about this for years, but it seems to finally be following-through on threats to penalize sites algorithmically that are not mobile-optimized by ranking them below sites that are in mobile search results.

Google's rank is important for any Web site, but for online retailers and especially mid-market online pure-plays, this ranking can be the difference between success and failure. Most retailers know this, and work hard to hold their spot once achieved.

Google explains how search rankings can be maintained by saying, "webmasters can improve the rank of their sites by creating high-quality sites that users will want to use and share." Obviously, delivering a non-optimized site to someone on their mobile phone is the antithesis of something "users will want to use and share."

Google is sending personalized "To: Webmaster" emails to this effect, and the message could not be clearer. Get mobile optimized or Google will demote you in their search rank.

Why does Google care so much? Its mission is to deliver stellar mobile search results, so it can deliver the right ads to people conducting these mobile searches. If they steer users who "Google" something on their phone to a poor mobile experience, it suffers, too.

In 2014, eMarketer reported that that desktop search ad spending dropped \$1.4 billion in 2014, a decrease of 9.4 percent from 2013, while mobile search increased 82.3 percent year over year.

As Google's revenue shifts toward mobile advertising, it must keep the quality of the mobile search experiences it serves up to snuff and retailers without mobile sites are a fly in that ointment.

In 2013 Marketing Land reported the first cases of demotion based on this. General Motors was dis-associated with mobile searches for the car models it makes for throwing a 404 error at mobile users and Disney was dinged for having a mobile site with Flash. Now the net being cast is far wider.

having a mobile site that loads fast, and not being easily hacked.

Capitalize tool

In 2014, Google launched a free tool that tests for mobile optimization. It also introduced "Mobile Friendly" tags in its search results. These tags tell mobile users that the site they are about to visit is prepared to receive them.

In the blog post that announced the tool and the tags, Google said, "We see these labels as a first step in helping mobile users to have a better mobile Web experience. We are also experimenting with using the mobile-friendly criteria as a ranking signal."

Note the last part. It seems that the experiments are over and Google has altered the algorithms. The result could push online retailers right off the search results page displayed to consumers looking for the products they sell.

So, if you are a retailer without a mobile commerce site, watch your inbox and expect your position in Google search results to mirror the poor experience you are providing to your mobile customers.

The solution? Design, build and deploy a quality, dedicated mobile commerce experience for your mobile site visitors. And, if you value your Google search rank, you better hurry.

Wilson Kerr is vice president of business development and sales at [Unbound Commerce](#), Boston. Reach him at wilson@unboundcommerce.com.

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

American Marketer is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.