

COLUMNS

Tips for local advertisers to develop mobile Web sites

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By **Annette Tonti**

There was a time when mobile-optimized Web sites were a nice-to-have for many businesses, but only a must-have for the few publishers that could monetize their mobile Web site or mobile application through commerce or advertising. Not anymore.

With smartphone sales quickly outpacing feature phones, people are doing more on their phones, especially when it comes to search.

Search for answers

According to Google, 40 percent of mobile searches have local intent, while Microsoft's Bing puts that number closer to 53 percent.

Studies show that mobile search rises on evenings and weekends and plays a larger role in our shopping and entertainment decision-making.

And while people are out and about conducting searches, they are more apt to take immediate action.

In fact, a recent study from Google and Ipsos OTX shows that 95 percent of smartphone users conduct mobile searches, with 88 percent of those taking an action as a result within a day.

Surprisingly, 79 percent of mobile advertisers still do not have a mobile-optimized Web site. This is clearly changing with a reported 50 percent of small to midsized businesses looking to implement a mobile Web site in 2011.

Many of these businesses are turning to their local interactive or marketing agency to build a mobile presence, but have an unclear idea what to expect.

"Many of our customers in travel and tourism have come to us in the last year wanting to build a mobile presence, but without a clear understanding of how to get there," said Darren Marinelli, founder and Design Einstein at Artinium Inc., a creative agency located in East Greenwich, RI.

"They just want to provide access to transportation, hotel and point-of-interest information for travelers on-the-go," he said.

Artinium has built mobile Web sites for a variety of local travel and tourism organizations including Newport Grand, City of Warwick, the South County Tourism Council and will soon be launching a site for The Block Island Ferry.

"Clients are often surprised at how cost-effectively they can create a mobile Web site, and how quickly it starts to show results," Mr. Marinelli said.

"For example, the Newport Grand mobile site was up less than a month and received over 2,800 hits," he claimed.

Guidelines

For local businesses looking to jump into mobile, there are a few guidelines to keep in mind:

1. Look for a partner that understands your business but also has experience building mobile Web sites.
2. Use a mobile content management system so that building the site is fast and making changes down the road is simple.
3. Let the information be the focus do not worry too much about fancy design and functionality at first, just maintain the same basic imagery, color scheme and branding as your desktop site.
4. Define what is most important for a mobile user. While on the desktop we tend to put contact information, address, hours and directions secondary, on mobile this is what needs to be front and center.
5. Make your navigation or call-to-action elements nice and big with plenty of buffer space. Remember, your visitors are using their thumbs.
6. Review your analytics to see where your traffic is coming from, on what devices, and what contact is the most popular.
7. Remember to redirect. Your desktop site should be set to automatically recognize mobile browsers and redirect that traffic to your mobile-optimized site at a separate URL.

WHILE MOBILE SEARCH is a big traffic driver, organizations also need to promote their mobile presence, especially where people are apt to seek local information, including out-of-home advertising, newspaper and signage.

For example, The City of Warwick is home to T.F. Green International Airport and operates the VisitWarwickRI.com travel Web site.

After rolling out its mobile site at m.warwickmobile.com, it launched an in-airport ad campaign to promote the site to visitors.

"We included QR codes in visitor brochures and in-airport signage to make it easy for visitors to access the mobile site to look up information on dining, accommodations, transportation and points of interest," Mr. Marinelli said.

With 68 percent of mobile searchers visiting a business and 53 percent making a purchase, the importance of mobile in the sales and marketing funnel is clear and growing.

If you do not already have a mobile Web site, the time to act is now, because your competitors probably do.

*Annette Tonti is CEO of **MoFuse**, Providence, RI. Reach her at atonti@mofuse.com.*