

COLUMNS

Native mobile sites versus proxy mobile sites

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By [Jason Goldberg](#)

There are many significant advantages to a native mobile site leveraging an existing commerce platform versus a third-party proxy mobile site.

Proxy sites, also often called "shadow sites," "scrapped sites" or "transcoded sites," have often been the fastest way to get a mobile-optimized site up and running.

Many of our clients initially deployed proxy mobile sites with third-party vendors. However, virtually every one of these clients now has an initiative to replace that proxy with a native mobile site served from their core ecommerce platform of choice.

Desktop versus mobile

The problem with a proxy site is that it must mirror your desktop site. This can create user experience issues, because there is often very good reason for wanting your mobile and desktop experiences to be different.

On a desktop site, for instance, it may make sense to offer 12 discrete categories from a fly-out super navigation menu. But that is far too many categories for a small format screen such as the smartphone.

It makes more sense to aggregate those 12 categories into four or five more general categories. This is easily achievable on a native mobile site, but can be very expensive and inflexible to do on a proxy site.

Further, every time you change your desktop site, you will be breaking your proxy mobile site and will have to pay to update it.

Multiple toolsets

When you want any unique content on your mobile proxy site, your business users are forced to learn multiple toolsets.

For instance, Management Center is used to change the desktop version of IBM WebSphere Commerce sites, while Usablenet tooling would be required to make the same change to a proxy mobile version.

When you upgrade your technology stack with new features such as edge caching, alternative payment methods, affinity programs or image optimization, those new features are not leveraged by your existing proxy mobile site, so you either do not get the feature on your mobile site or you have to pay to implement the feature twice.

Maximum scalability and speed

An increasing amount of your traffic is coming from mobile browsers. It is critical to give those visitors the most

stable, fastest page loads possible. It makes sense to invest in one hosting infrastructure that can be leveraged for all your traffic.

Remember, too, consistency of experience is key for customers.

It makes no sense to spend \$1 million-plus hosting a site for your desktop users and then investing in a smaller scale third-party hosting service for your mobile users.

Most proxy mobile sites use an alternative subdomain such as m.mysite.com versus mysite.com. This approach fragments your search engine optimization value and traffic between two domain names.

If the mysite.com/redwidget does very well for SEO, it will never show up in search results from mobile devices because the mobile content is at m.mysite.com/redwidget.

Native mobile sites leverage user agent detection and screen resolution identification to optimize the page for each viewer at the same URL, so organic traffic is maximized.

Time to go native

Native mobile sites are more cost-effective to own and operate than outsourcing a third-party mobile proxy site.

Native sites provide a far greater range of flexibility and control to site operators to respond to new requirements and user needs far more than an outsourced proxy site.

In the long run, outsourcing your mobile site to a proxy when you natively host your desktop site simply gives you less flexibility at a greater cost.

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