

COLUMNS

Responsive design and the continued rise of the mobile Web

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By AN AMERICAN MARKETER COLUMNIST

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The market for mobile, Web-accessible devices of all shapes and sizes has exploded over the past few years, while desktop PC sales are declining. Cascading releases of smartphones, tablets and whatever comes next in the progression of Internet devices have created a diverse set of channels to reach users.

For marketers, retailers and all content providers, ignoring or providing a subpar user experience on any platform translates into lost opportunity and brand sacrifice. As a result, finding efficient methods of delivering device-agnostic content has an incredible amount of value for these organizations.

Responsive Web design is a powerful and flexible approach that is being used by organizations of all shapes and sizes to address this critical need.

Pressing refresh on mobile strategy

The rise of mobile devices is transforming site design.

Before smartphones and tablets became somewhat ubiquitous, many organizations established device-specific distribution channels for Android devices, iPhones, iPads, and on and on.

Not only is this a headache in terms of maintenance incurring costs for each platform when it comes time for updates but it is potentially confusing for users as well.

In many cases, some content would be available to desktop users but not to mobile users which is arguably a mild form of discrimination. Responsive design is a promising solution to this dilemma.

Responsive design has helped produce a consolidated content strategy that addresses the problem caused by the plethora of devices used to browse the Web.

Instead of having multiple sites for mobile and desktop, or between mobile devices themselves a responsive design allows the same content to be massaged and optimized for use on multiple mediums.

A responsive Web site recognizes the resolution constraints associated with the device that is accessing it and makes adjustments to presentation layers to best fit that device.

The key objective of a Web presence for many organizations is to increase brand awareness. Responsive design is an asset in that endeavor.

The users of a mobile application a popular mobile approach have already engaged with a brand. But Web browsers can bring anyone and everyone to a site, which is critical when acquiring new users or customers.

While a mobile site designed for smartphones will yield a poor user experience on a tablet, a solid responsive design insures that an organization's Web site is accessible and optimal on any device.

New devices will continue to release into the market. It is no wonder that innovators across the country are pouncing on a more cost-effective and efficient process to optimize content on multiple platforms to avoid lost opportunities.

Responsive design has several benefits beyond increasing a Web site's visibility by making it accessible on all platforms. It essentially future-proofs an organization's mobile strategy.

Regardless of what devices become popular for Internet use, a responsive design can address them. It also ensures a cohesive message is conveyed across the entire spectrum of devices because the same content is presented for each device.

The responsive design strategy is also a cost-saver in the long run.

When it comes time for updates, a responsive site only requires maintenance once.

A divided Web strategy incurs maintenance costs for each site aimed at a specified platform, which adds up when a new device is released seemingly every quarter.

No innovation without speed-bumps

All innovation experiences hiccups along the way and responsive design is no exception.

As a developing technology, there is not a quick-and-easy way to do responsive design properly.

A lukewarm commitment to the techniquescaling down design to mediocrely present content on several devices is not a viable mobile approach.

The goal of responsive design is to have a sound presentation of content on multiple platforms.

To excel at that, resources must be invested in development upfront to create an optimal user experience on a set of devices deemed to be most valuable.

Another area that responsive design is still in its infancy is advertising.

Incorporating advertising into mobile Web strategies has been a much discussed issue.

Mobile Internet use continually increases at a rapid clip, yet from small organizations to household names like Facebook, the difficulty surrounding advertising for mobile devices rings out loudly.

Advertisers need to update their specs to catch up with design on this one in terms of ad sizes and monetization strategies.

Opening up solutions

If an organization chooses to adopt a responsive philosophy to its projects, there are people already crafting and implementing responsive Web designs successfully.

Open-source content management systems (CMS) such as Drupal are able to keep pace with these types of technological advancements and are actively being used for responsive design implementations, such as Georgia.gov.

These CMS platforms allow content producers to create well-structured content that can be distributed across a number of channels aside from browser-based experiences to power native iOS apps and populate newsletters.

A centralized approach to content management across all possible channels can be efficient, powerful and valuable.

RESPONSIVE WEB DESIGN allows organizations to continue creating great content in the face of a fundamental behavioral shift in terms of when, where and how users demand and consume content.

Indeed, it is a powerful tool that should be considered in the context of an organization's brand, content strategy, target audience and available resources.

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