

COLUMNS

## Why responsive design is the future of marketing

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By [Mark Montgomery French](#)

What does readability look like in the hands of your audience? Let us take a gander at the 2012 United States holiday purchasing season.

Cyber Monday set a one-day online sales record with \$1.4 billion dollars worth of products sold, of which 13 percent were sales transacted from mobile devices, equaling \$182 million dollars.

More tellingly, mobile sales were nearly split between phones and tablets 60 percent to 40 percent which meant that consumers are now using multiple screens to buy stuff.

Christmas Day also set a one-day record with 17 million new mobile devices activated, with tablet sales exceeding phones for the first time, 51 percent to 49 percent. This increase is more than 200 percent larger than last year's record, so the trend toward multiple device ownership is skyrocketing.

All of these new smartphones and tablet owners will be receiving your emails and visiting your sites.

If your marketing efforts fit nicely upon their screens, you have a strong opportunity to increase customer engagement. But if you send them something that only looks good on a laptop i.e. your laptop this may come as a shock.

Writing on the wall

In mobile, Readability = Engagement = Revenue.

Customers will not purchase what they cannot read.

Since their phone fits in the palm of their hand, do your marketing messages look like the bottom line of an eye chart?

Did you know the world already views more emails on mobile than browser-based emails?

If you want to reach your audience on mobile devices, you must design your services to function elegantly on those hand-held devices, or they will drop you like a bad habit and sully your brand on Facebook on their way out.

This means that all digital marketing should include mobile marketing considerations because that is where your customers are now, or soon will be.

Smartphones now outsell PCs, with a billion devices in use. Not only is mobile the dominant view of email, but one out of every five emails is viewed on the iPhone alone.

Most marketing emails are designed for larger screen browsers, relegating those messages to getting crushed on

iPhones, cropped on Android and mangled on other devices, diminishing their impact.

Seventy percent of consumers immediately delete emails that render poorly on mobile devices, while 61 percent abandon mobile-unfriendly sites.

Therefore, the question becomes, what are the proper target sizes to be mobile-friendly?

Screen ideals

Smartphone screens are roughly 4 square inches, whereas tablets have recently forked between 10 inches (the iPad) and 7 inches (Google's Nexus 7), all of which are smaller than the typical laptop screen.

With tablet shipments set to grow 300 percent over the next four years, do you want to maintain multiple versions of your sites, emails and preference centers? I suggest there an easier way: responsive design.

An initial concept published by Ethan Marcotte in his landmark piece "Responsive Web Design," responsive design uses a single HTML5 code base to enable maximum readability and functionality across a variety of screen sizes and devices.

Mr. Marcotte lays out a philosophy of communication that can be described as "if they can read it, they might engage with it."

Whether it is an email, a Web site or a preference center, responsively-designed messages remain readable and actionable.

Take [a look at the preference center we created for Michaels](#). It is a two-column design on phones, but reflows to three columns on tablets and reflows to four columns on laptops.

Email viewing is still a top consumer activity, so it is critical that your email offers are designed so they can be read clearly on multiple screen sizes and resolutions.

Responsively-coded emails allow words and pictures to resize for optimum readability on all screen sizes, and can even display products and headlines that are relevant to an individual users' device.

Responsive design is the closest tool available today for future-proofing your marketing communications. It is being adopted by companies large and small who plan to be in business tomorrow.

Do not confuse your company's technology with your customer's technology.

If you read your email on Lotus Notes or on a BlackBerry because it is your company standard, you represent less than 1 percent of your audience.

If your company still develops for and browses the Web with Internet Explorer 6, you also represent less than 1 percent of your audience.

If you surf the Web on a netbook, enjoy it while it lasts, because it will not. They were globally discontinued in January 2013, partially as a result of tablets' growing popularity.

YOUR CUSTOMERS are always on and always connected and they may make purchasing decisions on-the-go. They may own a laptop, but they are increasingly using mobile devices to engage with your brand as well as your competitors.

Yes, all laptop-sized sites with embedded Flash animations are now tombstones announcing the death of future profits.

But a mobile-first, responsively-coded design can keep customer engagement high, and can be a competitive advantage over those who did not read this article.

And Readability = Revenue.

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