



Building Mobile Friendly Websites

By Erich - 8:26 AM 4/9/2015

Updating your site, or creating a new website opens up a lot of options. An important consideration is to be mobile compliant. This leaves you with the choice: to use a responsive web design or should you include a separate website for mobile visitors.

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Responsive vs Mobile Version

An unbiased look at choosing to use either a mobile version sub-site or a responsive design.

Consideration	Responsive	Mobile Version Sub-Site
What is it?	A design style that responds and conforms for all devices. Known as "RWD".	A top level website with a mobile version inside a folder. Sometimes called "Adaptive Web Design".
Mobile compliance	Responsive design, if coded correctly, will check as mobile compliant.	Mobile version will also be fully mobile complaint and responsive.
Responsiveness	Top level site will be fully responsive for desktop, tablet and smartphones.	Mobile version website will be fully responsive for desktop, tablet and smartphones.
SEO	<p>Good for mobile ranking. Passes the Google Mobile-Friendly Test. The top level homepage will be mobile for better SEO.</p> <p>Because it is less specifically tailored to mobile it may rank slightly lower than a mobile version sub-site.</p>	<p>Good for mobile ranking. Passes the Google Mobile-Friendly Test. Because the mobile site includes extra pages and content, this can be beneficial for SEO if you have unique or different page copy on the mobile site.</p> <p>At this time the general consensus among SEO experts is that this is better for mobile ranking because Google sees it as a better user experience.</p>
Ease of use	<p>Responsive design is more restricting and difficult to work with. The design and load speed is more easily compromised by adding 3rd party applications and widgets, too many Google Fonts or images that are too large and/or do not include responsive widths. In most cases the webpages will include double the normal site code.</p> <p>Big corporations can keep people on staff to create high-end user applications that flex for smartphones. For the more casual webmaster keeping the responsive site properly responding can be a time consuming task.</p>	<p>The major drawback with a separate mobile version is that you'll need to maintain two websites. This can make for extra work when updating. Redirection of some kind, user interactive or automatic using a PHP or jQuery script, can be added.</p> <p>Because the mobile site is separate, the code is not lumped into a single site so how the css and html work is usually more easily understood.</p>
Design	This type of design should be simple and include less design elements. As the site becomes more complicated it can be difficult to change any design elements. Because a responsive design must respond to many different devices, you will have to make many compromises if you plan to do a lot of layout changes.	Allows for total creative freedom on the full website. The sub-site should be treated as a responsive design.

<p>User experience</p>	<p>It is more difficult to integrate elements and apps specifically for mobile, or specifically for desktop into a responsive design thus limiting what the website can offer.</p> <p>Generally will be slower and less mobile friendly due to design considerations built-in for desktop display.</p>	<p>The mobile site is specifically designed for smartphones and will display better and load more quickly.</p>
<p>Mobile and desktop</p>	<p>Will need to be a more basic design with a limited number of images and applications. All webpages must always work on all devices.</p>	<p>Because the site has one area specifically for desktop, and one for mobile, this allows for more creative freedom and tailoring of your website for different devices.</p>
<p>Speed</p>	<p>Will be a slower website due to including the css Media Queries code for responding. Additionally, there are usually many more webpage elements and above-the-fold content included to allow mobile flexibility.</p> <p>Speed matters for SEO. See Google PageSpeed Insights.</p>	<p>The mobile site, if coded correctly will be "stripped" of many elements that slow down mobile devices. With PHP auto-redirection smartphones are automatically re-directed and never load the full website. Speed matters for SEO. See Google PageSpeed Insights.</p>
<p>Updating an older site</p>	<p>If you are planning to update your current website to responsive, you will want to add some css Media Queries. In most cases a site can pass the Google SEO tests if fonts and linked images are made larger, elements are hidden for mobile and the layout is made to flex. This however requires learning about the Media Queries and quite a lot of design changes and testing.</p>	<p>If a site is very large, it may be better to add a mobile sub-site. This allows you to ease into mobile in a more seamless way. As you update the mobile site you can more easily see how the responsive design works. At any time, once you have the mobile site setup how you like, you can always make this site your top level website, replacing your older site with a responsive design.</p>
<p>Building a new site</p>	<p>This is considered by many to be the more forward thinking way to build a site. Best if you plan no layout changes.</p>	<p>This allows the webmaster to cater to the mobile experience employing different objectives than they would for desktop users.</p>
<p>Our brilliant analogy</p>	<p>Imagine if you had a kitchen device that was both a toaster and a blender. Maintenance would be more difficult and you may be limited as to what the device can do, plus if you do not remain vigilant you might have wet toast.</p>	<p>Imagine if you had two cars and two custom fit garages. It may be more work to get to the car you want to drive that day, and you will have to clean two garages.</p>
<p>Domain</p>	<p>Uses the top level domain. Using a single shared site preserves a canonical URL, avoiding redirects. Simplifies the sharing of the web addresses.</p>	<p>Uses the top level domain but inside a "mobile" folder. The mobile site does not need its own domain name.</p> <p>Being inside a folder does not have any adverse affect on SEO, however, you may want to setup canonical code or the "Vary HTTP header" for the mobile site in the robots.txt or .htaccess or using PHP. Use great care when editing these files!! This is also called Dynamic Serving by Google. Read more...</p> <p>Pretty complicated huh? Hopefully Google will simply add the function to Google Tools soon and you can skip all this nonsense. It already includes "Set your preferred domain" so why not add "Set your preferred mobile domain".</p> <p>If you use a separate domain name for mobile then the above canonical settings are not needed.</p>
<p>Future considerations</p>	<p>If you plan no major design or layout changes this type of website should be compliant for many years.</p>	<p>As a website is updated over many months and years, typically the site will include many more pages and more design elements on both the full site and sub-site. At any time the responsive mobile sub-site can be moved into the top level hosting folder and become the main website.</p>

Our findings	<p>In a test website we were able to simply make some fonts and tap targets larger on an older website (using Media Queries with a breakpoint) and it passed the Google mobile friendly test.</p> <p>Just because a website is responsive does not mean it will rate highly at Pagespeed Insights. Loading speed can be a factor.</p>	<p>Google Pagespeed Insights rates a webpage low for even medium size images, but may still rate the site highly for user experience.</p> <p>Our test used a site with 11 small images (50 x 50 pixels) and 1 medium image (700 x 234). It rated a 59/100 for speed and 99/100 for user experience.</p>
Best choice if...	<p>Best for websites that do not include a lot of page text, many products, or require large tables of information.</p>	<p>Best when you want to target desktop computers and mobile devices separately.</p>
SEO special considerations	<p>Although good for SEO, this type of design does not allow for as much page text unless you plan to hide areas for mobile. Long pages of text are unreadable on mobile.</p> <p>Keep in mind that most people "scan" webpages looking for specific information.</p>	<p>Google has made it clear that relevant content on a website is good for SEO. With this option you can include more text on each desktop page, and optionally, you can use more condensed page copy on the sub-website. This allows for much more content to be added to the website.</p>
Conclusion	<p>While many think that responsive is the best solution, there are a number of drawbacks, most specifically the difficulty of updating and adding new elements. If you like the design you purchase and do not plan to change the site layout, then this is the best choice. This also is a good choice for experienced webmasters and new users that want to learn about this style of design.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Good for small simple sites. ✓ Less webpages to maintain. ✓ Simplifies the web addresses. ✗ Code is complicated. More prone to errors. ✗ Slower to load. 	<p>If you like to add new elements to your website and change the design layout, or you want to target mobile and desktop separately, a full website with a mobile sub-site version allows for much more freedom of design. You will be maintaining extra webpages with this option.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Best for larger and complicated sites. ✓ Targets specific devices. ✓ Better user experience so better for SEO, ✗ Extra webpages to maintain. ✗ Redirection scripts required.

Consideration	Responsive	Mobile Version Sub-Site
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