

Why You Need Mobile Ready Websites



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We've all heard the phrase: "Leaving money on the table". It means neglecting opportunities to make as much profit as possible with products or services you already sell. But how does this apply to mobile websites?

Just think about your mobile phone: It's good for more than just sending Tweets while you're out and about.

How often do you check websites on your phone? You may be thinking "not very much", but it's still probably more times than you realize. You might use it to:

- Get directions
- Find stores or restaurants
- Play games during involuntary waits
- Connect with social media

That's just for starters. Now that it is not necessary to be physically connected to a plug-in source of electricity, wireless technology has changed internet usage forever, in a big way.

People are relying on mobile devices more than ever – and less on their PC's. You may not be one of them. That makes it even more important that you realize, these devices are changing and evolving all the time. Those who take notice and position themselves at the leading edge of this unstoppable trend – by creating and servicing mobile websites – will benefit with the lions share of the profits to be made.

We're not just looking at monetary gain here. Think about it... If you position yourself at the head of a new major trend and direction change, you set yourself up automatically as being one of the premier authority "go to" sites... so that when others catch up and the market quickly becomes saturated – an all-too-familiar pattern – you'll already be firmly established at the top.

The Dangers of Technological Apathy

Even if you don't have a mobile phone at all, whatever you do, don't ignore this vast market that even now threatens to dwarf internet access via computer. Sit back a moment and think of all the millions of (rapidly growing) mobile users who are giving up huge percentages of computer time, to replace it with mobile phone use.

And it's not just mobile phones. People are accessing the net from all sorts of mobile portable devices.

If you are a technophobe or a Luddite, relax! There are ways of going mobile that don't involve becoming a rocket scientist. Just knowing a few things and applying them can help ensure you don't get left behind. But first...

Demystifying Mobile Technology

If you consider yourself a technophobe, and you're feeling confused about what exactly is out there, and which devices can handle web access, here's a quick overview of current mobile technology...

PDA (*Personal Digital Assistant*) – Think of this as a “pocket computer”. It’s a small, hand-held mutation between a cell phone, calculator and computer that allows you to use it as a:

- Phone
- Internet browser
- Organizer
- FAX

It can be operated by voice recognition and handwriting recognition – you can actually scribble real-time notes with a stylus (metal pen), which are then converted to “typed” notes. Data can be synced with your computer. It usually comes as a stylus version, a keyboard (Datapad) version, or a combination of both – and, of course, the latest ones also operate off “touch” screens.

Palm Pilot – The original digital organizer, it now comes with the capacity to browse the internet.

SmartPhone – This one is the current rising star of 21st century life. It's the most effective combination personal computer/mobile phone/PDA... but it looks just like a mobile phone, to the uninitiated.

You can use it:

- As a storage device for information
- As an Email browser
- For installing programs and apps (applications)
- Browsing the web
- Taking photographs
- Managing your social networking

These mobile devices all run off different operating systems than computers, the most widely used ones being Windows Mobile, Symbian OS and Palm OS.

Tablet PC – This small notebook type portable computer operates with a stylus. You jot notes on the screen and it's either converted to "typed" text or kept as handwritten – your preference. (You can also use your stylus to tap out "typed" messages on a simplified "keyboard".)

Netbooks - A “Netbook” is nothing more or less than a low-end notebook. They are the smallest of all laptop computing type devices, and run on either Linux or Windows XP (but not XP Pro). They are not meant for sophisticated, memory-hogging programs, being noticeably under-powered. Graphics are integrated, but they do run with Wi-Fi (but not Bluetooth) and have USB ports for headphones. Microsoft is preparing to allow them to run Windows 7 as of this writing. They are very basic, and you definitely have to consider this when creating mobile websites. Yet they still get the job done, by all accounts.

Notebooks - Larger version of Netbooks. A few more bells and whistles, and everything is integrated: You cannot, for example, add more memory or change a graphics card.

Laptop Computer - Portable PC, with many of the same features and sometimes even more capacity than older PC’s. Its innards can be customized easily (new graphics cards inserted, more memory added, etc.)

Your Mobile Market and You

Look around you: Almost everyone is using some sort of wireless device, and in case you missed my point earlier, these devices are replacing an ever-growing portion of internet PC use. Failing to consider this could mean you are currently ignoring a 25% share of your actual market – and that will only grow in the future.

How Can You Adapt?

The simplest way to make sure your website is mobile-ready is to change it to blog format. Even if you don’t want it to look like a blog, you can easily make it appear exactly like a static site by removing post dates and

comments, and setting it up with pages instead of posts. Most WordPress blog themes are mobile ready – unlike many static websites.

And... you won't need a web designer! Blogs are complete, user-friendly **content management systems**, with drag-and-drop capacity.

But there are many more ways you can take advantage of Mobile technology – the old “if you can't beat ‘em, join ‘em”.

You can:

- Create apps for mobile devices and market them (it's easier than you think to outsource this and hire a developer)
- Use mobile coupons
- Market yourself and your products through mobile-ready social media such as Facebook and Twitter
- Hold mobile-only contests
- Take advantage of user-friendly mobile development platforms to easily transform your website to mobile-ready
- Set your site up for M-commerce

What is “M-Commerce”?

Glad you asked. “Mobile commerce” basically means that companies and individuals are now ignoring traditional channels and actually transacting business via mobile devices. Having a website that is mobile “friendly” means that your company (or you) will go to the top of their “preferred lists”, if you make it easy – and instantaneous – for them.

Keep in mind that there are now...

- **Payment processors** specifically for mobile devices
- **Advertising** specifically for mobile devices
- **Tracking** specifically for mobile devices

And let's not forget the huge advantage of **instant communication**. You can reach anyone, anywhere, without having to locate an internet café, or book a computer at a library.

A recent informal survey of students at Georgian College, in Barrie, Ontario, proved that over 62% said they spent more time accessing the web via their mobile devices (Blackberries, SmartPhones, PDA's, and especially iPhones) than they did using PC's or Macs.

Their reasons?

Here's a sampling...

- "Can access the info I need instantly, from anywhere, on my iPhone"
- "There are only a limited number of school computers, and they're always tied up"
- "I've got enough stuff to carry around without adding my laptop, and since I got a mobile with a keyboard, I find I don't even need it"
- "I'd be totally lost without my iPhone!"
- "It's easier with my Blackberry"
- "I don't need a computer"
- "It's fun"

These are tomorrow's market – and in many cases, today's market! It pays not to ignore them. Especially now that more and more websites from major companies and players in the world of M-Commerce have made it as easy for customers to use their services or buy their products via wireless phones – and in some cases, even easier!

There's also the fact that when all the major players and websites go "mobile", it's only a matter of time (which passes rapidly in cyberspace) before you're left behind, if you decide going mobile is too far out of your comfort zone.

Myths about Going Mobile

Here are the most common myths and objections about going mobile with your website:

- "It will cost a fortune"
- "I don't need it. I'll be fine, running things the way I always have"
- "People won't be able to access my site properly on a phone"
- "It's too complex"
- "I'll need to hire a web designer"

And the most common myths about mobile devices themselves:

- “They’re not reliable”
- “They don’t have the capacity”
- “They’re limited”
- “You can’t do all the things on mobiles that you do on computers”

Just keep in mind that developers and major business players are doing their best to overcome every one of these objections – and consider the improvement in mobile devices just in the last two years alone!

The truth is, people wouldn’t be switching to mobile devices, if it wasn’t so absurdly easy nowadays to use them that a rapidly-rising number of children (almost 50% in Canada; more in the U.S.) even have their own mobile phones! Even those over 55 – traditionally the most resistant to technology, have increased their usage to 48%, according to a 2006 Canadian government study conducted by Decima research – a growth of 167% between 1996 and 2006.¹

And if you’re still unconvinced that you need a mobile ready website, consider that last myth: “You can’t do all the things on mobiles that you do on computers”.

That’s true...

Nowadays, you can often do more.

¹ <http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/oca-bc.nsf/eng/ca02267.html>