



Mobile Web Search: Be Mobile-Friendly Or Be Lost On Google (Or At Least Not As Visible)

With the proliferation of mobile devices of every shape and size and the average person carrying at least one connected device these days, it's no wonder that about 60% of online traffic now comes from mobile searches.

On April 21, Google acknowledged this trend and changed their mobile search algorithm to favor websites that are mobile-friendly. These are sites that are responsive to screen sizes when viewed on mobile devices or they feature mobile-friendly pages that offer simplified navigation and content to provide the optimal user experience on a mobile device.

So what does this mean? With mobile search growing at 10x the rate of desktop, businesses that don't have a mobile-friendly site could miss out on a good chunk of traffic. According to research firm SumAll, more than two-thirds of Fortune 100 companies are not considered mobile friendly, meaning this change could have a big impact on companies both large and small.

According to Google, "users will find it easier to get relevant, high quality search results that are optimized for their devices." Sounds great, right? That is, unless your site isn't responsive. Google's mobile ranking factors will now label your site as mobile-friendly (or not) and then use these labels to determine if your site should rank higher in search results over those that are not mobile-friendly. Essentially, Google will reward websites that are mobile-friendly.

Basically, the algorithm will now scan each page on the site, checking for load times, responsive design elements, and mobile best practices. For now, searches on tablets won't be affected, but expect that to change.

The good news is there are options for retrofitting sites to bring them in line with this update, and this change may even be the push needed for small and medium-sized business to finally bring their sites completely up to date.

Basic points to focus on when making a site more mobile friendly include using text sizes that are readable without zooming, content that is formatted properly (intuitively) and properly spaced links so tapping the right one is easy on a small screen. Flash is a problem too, it's not commonly supported on mobile devices and Google will hold it against you if you use it.

It's important to remember that the algorithm is applied page-by-page and not to the entire site. This means that different pages can become mobile friendly and can benefit from the SEO boost offered by this update. Homepages and commonly used areas of your site (ordering, scheduling, RFQ and contact forms for example) are the priority if you're not in the position for a complete overhaul.

Google will also be looking at the usability of a site – how many clicks it takes to perform a particular task – meaning that SIMPLE IS BETTER.

The bottom line is that responsive web design and having a site that adapts easily to a mobile environment has become increasingly important and is a development factor that is not going away any time soon. Don't get left behind.

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