

Go Mobile or Stay Home

Responsive design makes it easier than ever to design and manage online properties across multiple devices.



Have you ever used your smartphone to check a store's hours while you were out running errands? Have you stood in a store aisle and checked the price of an item at another retailer? Have you searched for local businesses on your phone rather than turn on your computer?

Yes? You and everyone else.

As of May 2013, 91 percent of American adults had a cell phone, according to the Pew Center's Internet Research project. A full 63 percent of adult cell-phone owners use their phones to go online. And 34 percent of those people use their phones to go online more often than they use some other device, such as a desktop or laptop computer.

Smartphones play a greater role in planning and executing store-related shopping trips (33 percent) than desktop computers (24 percent), according to a 2012 report by Deloitte Digital. "The biggest impact of smartphones isn't direct sales generated through the mobile channel, but rather the influence they exert over traditional in-store sales to drive in-store conversion and in-store average order size," Deloitte reported.

Web and mobile measurement firm

ComScore reports that 55 percent of all time spent with online retail in June 2013 occurred on a mobile device.

So can your customers read your website on their phone? Can they find your hours, see your product selection, send you an email? Or do your drop-down menus disappear on a phone? Are buttons too small to click with a finger? Is key information buried in animation or images that don't load on a phone or tablet?

Take your website on a test-drive and try accessing it on a few different devices—an iPhone, an Android phone and a tablet or two. You might be surprised at what you find. Or don't find.

Fortunately, creating a website that can be read on a smartphone or tablet has become a whole lot simpler.

Not too long ago, having a mobile-friendly website meant creating versions of your website for various devices. This was expensive and time-consuming to create and to maintain. Every time you made a change to your primary website, you likely had to make the change on other versions of the site.

But responsive design has made all the difference in the world. A site built with responsive design uses grids and images that scale according

to the device on which it's being read. Increasingly, developers can even program a site to determine whether the device that's accessing it has a touchscreen and allow swiping and dragging. It's 50 percent magic and 100 percent marvelous.

Responsive design means you need only one version of your website—just one site to maintain and update, and one site that can be read on an iPhone 4, an iPhone 5, a Galaxy Tab or whatever comes next.

Of course, this also means you need to build a new website. If you're getting by for now with a mobile-friendly version of your site, you're at least in the game. But if you're planning to redo your website in the near future, or if you don't have a mobile site at all, responsive design is a compelling reason to get the plans in the works.

Still not sure it's necessary? In 2012, tablet shipments experienced 78.4 percent year-over-year growth, according to analyst IDC, exceeding 128 million units. Tablet shipments are expected to surpass desktop PCs in 2013, and portable PCs in 2014. A mobile site might make a difference in the growth of your store's numbers as well. ●



Julianne Will is a marketing consultant specializing in social media. A former advertising executive, she has crafted and managed social media plans for a wide range of businesses and business owners, including retailers.

Have some great marketing tips and tricks? Please share them by emailing Julianne at feedback@pdra.org.