

Google Made Mobile-Friendliness Mandatory—Is Your Website Making the Cut?

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If Google says it, it's gospel. Its pronouncements affect every Web designer, developer, marketer, and anyone else who relies on creating websites for a living. And the omnipotent search engine recently announced its latest law.

"Starting April 21, we will be expanding our use of mobile-friendliness as a ranking signal," states the Google Webmaster Central blog.

"This change will affect mobile searches in all languages worldwide and will have a significant impact in our search results."

On the surface, this change may seem like cause for concern, but it's actually an opportunity. This is the perfect time to approach your clients, explain what is going on, and upsell them on a comprehensive solution. It's a complete win-win. But what solution? From a technical standpoint, what will cut the mobile-friendly mustard and what won't?

Google supports three main ways to build mobile-friendly websites:

1. Traditional responsive Web design
2. Dynamic serving
3. Separate mobile site (usually m.domain)

However, just selecting from these three site-building methods is not enough to necessarily pass [Google's Mobile-Friendly Test](#). You may create a completely responsive website... and *still* be dropped from mobile search. That goes for the other two choices as well.

When building new sites for clients or updating their current Web presence to get in line with Google's mobile-friendly standards, take into account all the new technical and UX criteria. As Google itself clarified in a recent interview, there are no degrees of mobile-friendliness.

A Web page either passes the [mobile sniff test](#)... or it doesn't.

Design Guidelines

You should adhere to some general design guidelines, such as links not being placed too close together and using appropriately sized text (Google recommends starting at 16px), despite which method for site building you choose. But there are also unique needs that come with each type of recommended design approach.

For example, a dedicated mobile website requires a mobile redirect to connect it with a desktop version. A mobile redirect is a small bit of code added to the desktop site, which detects whether a visitor is on a mobile device. If they are, and the redirect is set up properly, they should be redirected to the mobile-friendly site. (It'd be wise to point out this approach to becoming mobile-friendly has the added benefit of employing an existing website's SEO strength.)

Redirection Issues

One of the biggest pitfalls a Web professional or marketer can run into is a faulty redirect.

There are a couple of reasons this can go awry. The most common problem with many mobile redirect implementations is users always being redirected to a mobile site's homepage, no matter which desktop page they were trying to access. That is a *very* bad experience in Google's eyes.

Another issue is simply keeping mobile redirects up to date. As new smartphones enter the market, the user agent lists for mobile redirects need to account for these new device types, and maintaining a current and accurate list can be difficult.

Properly functioning mobile redirects are a very important part of meeting Google's new requirements for dedicated mobile sites, but they certainly aren't alone. The use of rel="canonical" tags, site speed, and a variety of other needs also must be addressed.

Dynamic serving can also come with its own technical traps and design errors. For example, it's essential that you [signal to Google](#) that the site is based on dynamic serving technology instead of responsive design. That can be accomplished by adding an HTTP header setting to the website that indicates the website varies content based on the use-agent. That lets Google know that it should expect different content on different device types.

Mobile Experiences Matter

Perhaps the most crucial lesson to take away from Google's latest SEO announcement is mobile experiences matter. After all, that is the common reason behind all these new requirements.

Google wishes to provide users with the best mobile experience possible, but this is good news for Web professionals and businesses across the world. In all three methods of site building, if you've created an optimal experience, users are much more likely to engage with the site, demonstrating your value as a Web professional and driving conversion for your clients.

With some estimates as high as [60%](#) of online searches now coming from mobile, the necessity of being mobile-friendly can no longer be ignored.

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The mobile search world is changing forever, and this is one update you want to get out ahead of. Luckily, there are a variety of online tools that can help you with everything from creating mobile-friendly websites to analyzing a site's SEO strength to ensure a smooth transition.



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