

Mobile websites - a practical guide



A white paper from Mobestar



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Introduction

Recently the world population of mobile phones broke the 5 billion barrier. Does this mean that 5 billion mobile phones can access the web on the mobile. Not quite, but in the fullness of time we should expect that every mobile phone will be a smart phone and therefore web-enabled providing every brand with a new and improved shop window for their product or service. Roll the clock back a few years when the internet was coming of age and providing new channels of sales, marketing and distribution and imagine a major high street retailer without a web site. We will soon be approaching the point where a brand without a mobile web site will be treated with similar derision. Not only is there an exponential growth in the uptake of the mobile web – currently 400% faster than the internet but more than one in every seven minutes of media consumption now takes place on the mobile phone. With over 5000 different internet enabled mobile handsets available enthusiasm and engagement with mCommerce (buying on the mobile normally through a mobile web site) is growing by leaps and bounds. ABI Research have predicted that this market will have grown by to US\$ 119 billion by 2015 further predicting that that 51% of consumers are more likely to shop at retailers who have a mobile website.



The uptake of mobile websites has been surprisingly slow in the West compared to the uptake in Asia. Japan for example has a much higher mobile internet penetration than the US (approximately half of Japan's in 2009). This high usage of the mobile internet means mobile web sites in Japan are considerably more advanced than elsewhere. For example there are over 15,000 official sites on NTT DoCoMo's i-mode service alone (the largest operator portal in Japan) – that's more sites than mobile ad network AdMob has on its entire global network – and a fraction of the mobile sites in Japan. McDonald's Japanese mobile

site has over 16 million registered users – that's more than 12 percent of the Japanese population, and its mobile coupon service (now three years old) is used by 4.5 million people. Furthermore a staggering 69 million Japanese people accessed a mobile web site via their mobile device in 2009 - that's 62 percent of the 111 million mobile subscribers in Japan.

In some of the less developed parts of the world the utilisation of mobile websites is rapidly becoming a phenomenon with the African continent being a major exponent. From the deserts of Libya to the plains of Tanzania Facebook is fast becoming the continent's most popular and most visited mobile site as Africans use their phones to access the internet. Vast improvements in mobile web standards and faster data speeds have improved the user experience. Fierce competition has pushed mobile prices down for consumers making many of the latest crop of handsets available in Africa and allowing easy access to a growing number of mobile sites. Web browsers can also be installed on older phones. In some countries such as Kenya and Zambia, millions of pages are being accessed each month as handsets are often used by more than one person to get online. Across the continent roadside kiosks proliferate where people 'rent out' mobile phones. At first the devices were little more than a replacement for public phone boxes, allowing people to call friends and family, but increasingly they are being hired out as computers, allowing those who cannot afford a device of their own, to visit their favourite mobiles sites on a regular basis.

Creating a mobile website strategy

Before embarking on creating a mobile website planning a clear strategy is essential. Despite the obvious technological advances in mobile web site delivery many brands still fall into the trap of doing it just because everyone else is doing and slavishly following the pack with the net result that a massive opportunity is lost. Like any marketing plan there are a number of logical steps for integrating your mobile website into a B2B marketing program. For example are you trying to reach a new demographic through the mobile – if so your mobile site needs to reflect their aspirations. You might also benchmark your competitor’s mobile websites and audit the content on their sites. A mobile website ideally requires a mobile marketing plan and new and frequent promotions are essential. Finally a measurement of success factors are key before embarking on your program of mobile websites – so make sure that key milestones such ROI can be identified early

Early adopters

Early adopters experienced a number of sometimes painful lessons when releasing their first mobile website. Before the mobile web became a stable delivery channel, a mobile website needed to be created as a separate entity from the internet site and then integrated so data input e.g. enquiries, searches had to be fully synchronised. This gave rise to all sorts of latency problems. Many early adopters had to pioneer a number of new technologies and applications including device management, mCommerce and anonymous calling. As developers Mobestar learned what it was to be a pioneer in mobile websites – lessons that are equally and perhaps even more relevant today. Simple things such as slow content downloads poor synchronisation between mobile and main sites and a poor customer experience all led to a slow uptake.



Planning your mobile site

Even with today’s vast uptake of smart phones and faster data speeds do not expect the mobile web to faithfully recreate your website without thought and planning – you and your customers will be disappointed. Without mentioning any names, there have been some dire mobile sites created that can neither be viewed nor accessed without a large magnifying glass and infinite patience. Before getting into some of the key features and functions of your mobile site the following ‘7 Step’ plan should be adhered to.

- 1) The mobile screen is approximately 5 times smaller than most desktops so the features and functions of your mobile site should be in a similar proportion
- 2) Keep it simple – restrict all moving parts to a minimum – less is more
- 3) It is unlikely that the mobile site will recreate some of the more complex functionality of your web site like in-putting payment details, uploading vast amounts of digital information etc – so don’t try
- 4) Remember your end user audience is different – it is mobile and on the move so ensure key functions must be easily accessible and the site must be navigated simply

- 5) Do not expect that your internet customers/community/audience will immediately be the same size on the mobile – they need to be encouraged
- 6) A mobile marketing campaign will pay dividends and a successful campaign should be measured in terms of internet to mobile conversion
- 7) Mobile web site users are more demanding and fickle than web users so the user experience has to be crisp and compelling or they will be lost to you forever



A successful mobile web site incorporates all these lessons perhaps best articulated in a global sense by the Facebook's mobile offering which has utilised the many improvements in social networking and mobile computing platforms (particularly Apple's iPhone ecosystem). It has fundamentally changed ways people communicate with each other and the way developers / advertisers / vendors reach consumers through a mobile site. Facebook Mobile is perhaps the most successful mobile web site in the world. Created in 2006 to enable members to share and connect when on the move it reached a new milestone in 2009 with more than 65 million people actively using Facebook on mobile devices — a significant increase from 20 million just eight months previously. The site is being continually upgraded with home grown and acquired

technologies and is fully optimised for the latest devices and mobile operating systems. Facebook Mobile first started as a simple mobile site, in English, with a few of the core site features built in, such as status updates and photo uploads. Since then, it has grown far beyond what was then a fairly basic mobile site. The site has subsequently been translated into numerous other languages, deployed a wide range of applications for hundreds of mobile handsets, including Facebook for Blackberry, Facebook for iPhone and Facebook for Nokia. In creating Facebook Mobile, it is quite obvious that they have listened carefully to user to create the essential ingredient for success - namely a great user experience.

Finding your mobile site

It is essential that your site is searchable and guessable and will give people the best shot at finding it – thereby maximizing your audience. Once an organisation has designed, built and delivered its mobile website there is still the vexing question of how are consumers going to find the new site on their mobile –literally how is it going to be found 'on the go'. The all important marketing campaign is going to be essential to do this but careful thought will need to be applied to mobile search. Those same organisations must ensure they stay on top of mobile search, because the sector is growing all the time and an SEO strategy needs to be in place to make the most of it. Local search is of particular importance because it is this requirement which is at



the heart of most mobile search queries. Once again mobile searchers need to be treated differently to web searchers as there are number of differences between the two groups - one of them being that mobile visitors view fewer pages than web users. The reasons for this are relatively obvious, as people are unlikely to want to click around a lot when they are using their mobile phones, particularly if the sites are not optimised for this sort of viewing and are uncomfortable to navigate. Google recently revealed it has seen mobile searches rise by more than five times in the past two years, which further emphasises the importance of this sector. Most major search engines have implemented a mobile optimized version of their products that take into consideration bandwidth and form factor limitations of the mobile platform. For example, Yahoo has launched a product branded as Yahoo (One Search) and Google has launched a mobile friendly version of their search engine as well.

The mobile web industry has a host of supporting search enquiries to help get your mobile site found quickly and easily. Ideally they should be viewed as a set of tools to be implemented as part of your strategy. They are easily accessible and can be deployed by your mobile support group. For example:

1. There are a number of mobile search tools available such as Dynamic Mobile Selection Interface Services - a pre-selected set of possible search content is downloaded in advance by a mobile user and then allows for a final internet search eliminating search, search results, scanning and scrolling. By providing these services through your site you can make sure it is found quickly.
2. Ensure your site is on mobile directory services. Mobile directory searching (also be known as 'Find My Nearest' or 'Mobile Yellow Pages' services) provides a service which allow users to find local services in the vicinity of their current location. The services often use location-based technology to pinpoint exactly where the user currently is for example a user looking for a local cab or taxi company after a night out. The response usually comes with a map and directions to help the user e.g. Yell in the UK
3. Make the most of mobile discovery services and subscribe to them. They offer users recommendations on what they should do next e.g. buying a cinema ticket can be followed up with further suggestions in your chosen film genre. Within the mobile context, they are similar to recommendation engines provided by internet retail shops such as Amazon.com. An example of this service is the Directory Enquiries (DQ) from Orange UK - callers to the DQ service are given the business and residential numbers they have requested verbally by an operator and then sent a message with links to local businesses, services and other interesting information in the local area that the user has searched on.
4. Mobile navigation services are worth using and will provide an indexing structure to operator portals provided by mobile operators and mobile specific content that is available outside the confines of the portal.



Marketing your mobile site

Finally, your mobile web site, whilst now an important part of your overall marketing plan will also need its own plan to address a completely different audience. The mobile allows your brand to market its message to consumers across the world, many of whom may never own a PC. It's not just a western phenomenon, it's global. Beyond the numbers, the vast potential of the mobile web is also due to the way people think about and use their mobile devices and your strategy has to reflect this because the mobile phone is always on, it's always at hand and it is highly personal and rarely shared. Few if any marketing mediums can boast this potential, much less all three. In setting the objectives for the mobile campaign the following are suggested:

- Reach new audiences and demographics who many never visit a website or spend much time in front of the TV
- Evolve deepening relationships with your new audience by finding new ways to inform and entertain
- Delivering new services
- Demonstrating your brand values: (mobile campaigns say you are young, innovative and customer-oriented)
- Tying in with wider campaigns and integrating with your web campaigns

As part of your mobile strategy (how you plan to use your mobile site) marketing is key. However, recent surveys suggest that British companies have not dedicated enough time to implementing a mobile-optimised strategy for their internet marketing services. Your mobile site is ideal for reaching new demographics and geographies. It is the perfect vehicle for delivering simple and focussed messages to a new age group – for example a clothing retailer who wants to sell clothes to a younger age group can deliver services that recognize that their new target audience is on the move with location-aware, activity-specific experiences.

Whatever the goals of your mobile site you will need to parameterise your campaign to work within the confines of smaller screen. With no mouse, no printer and (potentially) restricted bandwidth a multi-tiered message might be better delivered on a series of pages. The mobile has physical limitations so plan accordingly.

Determine your mobile site's platform requirements from the outset. When planning the new site it is worth bearing in mind the physical limitations of the mobile phone as being differently 'abled' and whose advantages as a marketing medium far outweigh its disadvantages. Focus your site on these abilities - invite a call, invite uploaded content, use the video capabilities that tie into your brand, send and invite messaging, use the LBS features to lead your customers to the market place, utilise all the features to engender a community to consume your messages. The best mobile websites exploit the many things mobile devices can do.

If innovation is part of your brand values it is important that this message is reiterated through your mobile site and it should be used as a discrete and separate marketing tool from your internet site. Call your mobile site a mobile site and avoid replicating the web URL – use a *.mobi* domain or at the very least an *m.brand.com* to show you are a serious player. Your mobile developers should use the same innovative zeal when designing the site and be completely focussed on delivering a great user

experience – one click too many and your new audience might be lost forever. A two second response time is a good target for them to aim for.

Part of this innovation is continually evolving your site in response to customer feedback and constant testing is essential, particularly against the back drop of the constant emergence of new devices. Your delivery team should ensure that all content served is optimised for the mobile because there are many different permutations of device, operating system, chip and firmware with the result that content works perfectly and looks great on one device and can crash or look like hell on another. There are numerous tools out there to make this happen so make sure that your development know all about them.

Once you have determined the success criteria of your site, you will need a constant and focussed marketing campaign to meet those milestones. For example a simple and regular SMS campaign is still a highly effective tactic for reaching new customers whilst LBS will provide you with a great medium for message delivery. It is still surprising how many great mobile sites are under-promoted. If you advertise in print, on TV or in outdoor media, it's far more likely that your audience members are closer to their mobile device than to a PC. There are some things your customers will only be able to do on your .com site and others they can only do on your mobile site. The more you promote the mobile experience, the more people will turn to it.

Finally, it's a great big mobile world out there - perfectly ready for you to build a new and dynamic customer base for your organisation. It no longer needs a great visionary or rocket scientist to create a great brand experience through the mobile medium. You can control the success of this experience but it does require simple planning and execution to make sure that you are not at the mercy of various mobile browsers. Just build one version of your site optimised for all phones – you do not have to choose between the iPhone, Android or Blackberry – and make it available for you and everyone.