

# Mobile SEO Optimisation vs. Desktop Optimisation: Preparing for the Domination of Mobile

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Mobile SEO Optimisation vs. Desktop Optimisation

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## **Mobile SEO Optimisation vs. Desktop Optimisation: Preparing for the Domination of Mobile by Chris Tomlinson**

### **An Introduction to SEO**

Before we can discuss the differences between mobile and desktop optimisation, it helps to have an understanding of what SEO is. Search engine optimisation (SEO) is the name given to a collection of different tactics designed to improve search results. It's all about organic or natural search, not paid advertising, so you can immediately take PPC and other forms of paid marketing off the table.

### **A few examples of optimisation include:**

- Keywords implemented within website copy
- Meta tags completed with appropriate keywords
- Image alt tags completed with appropriate keywords
- Content (articles, blog posts, whitepapers, reports, ebooks, etc.) written on topic and made available through the website
- Links back to your website from authority, established sites

Now, these are the general principles of basic desktop SEO. They do play a role in mobile optimisation, but they're not the whole story. Why is there such a difference? Really, it comes down to search methods as well as several other factors, which we'll discuss shortly.

When searching on a desktop computer, you generally only use the keyboard. You open your browser of choice, go to Google and type in your search query. Whether you're looking for a stylish new pair of shoes, a new dog collar, or a new web design provider, all searches basically start the same. That's not true of mobile.

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## A FEW EXAMPLES OF OPTIMISATION INCLUDE

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-  **KEYWORDS IMPLEMENTED WITHIN WEBSITE COPY**
-  **META TAGS COMPLETED WITH APPROPRIATE KEYWORDS**
-  **IMAGE ALT TAGS COMPLETED WITH APPROPRIATE KEYWORDS**
-  **CONTENT WRITTEN ON TOPIC AND MADE AVAILABLE THROUGH THE WEBSITE**
-  **LINKS BACK TO YOUR WEBSITE FROM AUTHORITY, ESTABLISHED SITES**

### Mobile-Only Search Methods

One of the key differences that you must account for in mobile optimisation is how your visitors start their search. Sure, they can type it in just like desktop PC users do, but they have other options, including voice search and gesture search. While those might seem like negligible differences, they need to be accounted for due to one simple reason.

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## **The user doesn't have to go to Google.**

**Why does that matter? Simply put, it can change how a searcher's intent is conveyed, and it can also change the type or even the frequency of a user's needs. Add to this the rise of virtual personal assistants like Siri, Google Now and Cortana, which give users the means to search just by speaking, or even offer alternatives to what a mobile user searched for verbally.**

Then there's the keyword conundrum. While it might seem strange, mobile search often relies on different keywords than a desktop search does. Sometimes they use the same keywords, but the intent of the search is different.

For example, you might be out to dinner and searching for a mobile coupon that could be scanned on the screen of your smartphone, rather than searching for coupons that can be printed at home and then used later. The intent is different, but the keyword or search phrase will be the same.

Obviously, this means you need to pay attention to the keywords your mobile customers are using because they might 1) be completely different from those used by your desktop visitors, and 2) might be the same keywords, but used with a very different intent.

If you're not able to target mobile users, or you're incorrectly targeting them, your results will be dismal.

## **A Word on User Intent**

**Google is striving to do a better job of not only embracing a user's intent when conducting a mobile search, but anticipating their intent. According to Cindy Krum of MOZ, "This means that often, Google is presenting the information a searcher requests directly in the search result above the organic rankings. SEOs are used to this for local-mobile searches, but it is now happening for all kinds of searches, so it can steal traffic that would otherwise go to the site and can skew success metrics."**

To add to this, organic search results are being pushed farther and farther down the page by aggregated, sponsored results. In fact, they're likely to end up below the fold in a short period of time.

## **Mobile Web and Mobile App Optimisation**

When you think of mobile devices, what comes to mind first? Is it searching with Chrome? Probably not. More than likely, you think of your favourite apps. Maybe you're a dedicated Facebook or Instagram user in your downtime. Perhaps you're a lover of Apple's News app. Maybe you prefer a good game of Peggle, or Plants vs. Zombies.

Maybe you're a smartphone photographer with loads of apps that let you adjust, edit, crop and add filters. In any event, it's the apps that really make today's smartphones stand out from the limited cell phones of yesteryear.

What does that have to do with optimisation?

Simply this if you have a mobile app for your company, it needs to be optimised. Can apps actually be optimised? Yes, they can, although it's a very different process from what you'd follow to optimise

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a mobile website or even a standard website.

There are several important steps to follow here, including optimising your app description in iTunes or Google's App Store. You also need to encourage your users to write reviews of the app, and get involved in relevant communities to boost popularity, which is the single most important factor in determining what apps show up first.

Now let's discuss mobile-only websites. Sure, they were once very popular, but that's waning with the focus being put on responsive design. Do you need a mobile-only version of your website? The answer is, "only if you're not using responsive design". To be clear, most users neither know nor care that you're using a mobile-specific site or a responsive design for your normal website. All they care about is user experience - how fast do the pages load? Are the buttons laid out correctly for fingers rather than a mouse cursor? Is the content optimised for viewing on a mobile screen? With that being said, responsive design does offer some benefits to businesses that we'll discuss shortly.

Let's discuss something else first - do you need an app, or should you use a website, either a mobile-only site or responsive design? Actually, the web is the way to go for most businesses. Apps can be very beneficial, but they're not right for every business out there. To determine if you need an app to complement your online presence, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is my website maintenance heavy?

News outlets and the like have heavy maintenance and a mobile app can be easier to update than a website in these cases. However, if you don't have heavy maintenance, a website is the better solution.

- Will my customers/visitors be accessing the app enough to offset the cost of development and make it worthwhile?

If your visitors aren't going to be spending a lot of time in the app, there's little use in having one developed. After all, only 7% of the mobile population will ever see your app, and over 90% of apps are only used once and then either forgotten about or deleted.

- Will your customers actually care about your app?

If your app doesn't really offer your customers anything of value beyond yet another touchpoint with your company, then there's very little need to have one developed in the first place. A mobile app should provide value to users first and foremost, and if yours wouldn't do that, spend your marketing budget where it counts - on website development and optimisation.

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Regardless of whether you can benefit from a mobile app or not, a mobile website is not an option. Whether you choose responsive design, which is our recommendation, or a mobile-only site, this is a requirement.

## **DO YOU NEED A MOBILE APP**

**ONLY IF YOU ANSWER YES  
TO ALL THESE QUESTIONS**



**IS MY WEBSITE MAINTENANCE  
HEAVY?**



**WILL MY CUSTOMERS BE  
ACCESSING THE APP ENOUGH TO  
OFFSET THE COST OF  
DEVELOPMENT AND MAKE IT  
WORTHWHILE?**



**WILL YOUR CUSTOMERS ACTUALLY  
CARE ABOUT YOUR APP?**

## **Understanding Mobile Search Quality Signals**

Google continues to ramp up its efforts to give mobile users the best possible experience and that means utilising a number of different quality signals. There are many potential options that can be

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harnessed and used, too.

### **QR Codes:**

Yes, these have fallen out of favour somewhat, but the “paper-based hyperlink” remains a powerful tool that can be utilised by both businesses and by Google. The search engine giant is already using these links to learn more about how mobile searchers interact with the offline world and make search more relevant to them.

### **SMS:**

Text messages can be invaluable tools for building a better search experience for mobile users, particularly with the rise of text-based marketing and the inclusion of hyperlinks in the messages. A user simply taps the link and they’re immediately taken to the corresponding page without even having to manually open their browser.

### **Mobile Bookmarks:**

Google has access to your bookmarks on any mobile device provided you’re using an Android device, or using Chrome, and that information can be used to inform how the search engine serves information, as well as providing data about quality and website authority.

### **Mobile vs. Desktop Search Volume:**

Search volume is an important metric for Google, and mobile vs. desktop search volume is an equally important consideration, particularly when it comes to mobile search quality signals.

The most important thing to understand is summed up well by Will DeKrey. “Google knows it has to surface websites that painlessly get users what they need at the time that they need it. Google doesn’t want to send mobile users to websites that provide a frustrating browsing experience – that would damage Google’s promise to its users to always deliver helpful, relevant content.

But this algorithm change is not what marketers should be reacting to. It’s a signal of a much larger shift that’s afoot. It’s the canary emerging from the mine shouting, ‘Consumer behaviour is changing! We must adapt!’ Building a mobile-friendly website is step one, but tweaking your website will not keep you ahead of consumers’ changing behaviour and expectations. In short, you have to infuse your marketing strategy with a mobile mind-set.”

### **Engagement Levels and the Importance of Top Positioning for Small Screens**

When it comes to engagement, nothing trumps mobile. Mobile users are deeply engaged, but they have different needs and expectations than someone searching on a desktop PC. For instance, a mobile searcher is engaged in what Google calls a “micro-moment”. It’s a moment full of intent, need. They NEED to find something, do something or buy something. That means they’re highly engaged, but not interested in scrolling through pages of search results. Desktop users on the other hand, are generally more likely to go through at least the first two pages of results.

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Here's what Google has to say about those micro-moments. "Micro-moments occur when people reflexively turn to a device - increasingly a smartphone - to act on a need to learn something, do something, discover something, watch something or buy something. They are intent-rich moments when decisions are made and preferences are shaped."

You need to ensure that you can capitalise on these moments of high-engagement and intent by offering an intimately responsive experience. For instance, if you're a user of Apple's Passbook, you know that it will automatically load your card when you pass a coffee shop. Rental car companies like Hertz are now sending customers emails when their airplane touches down to let them know that their rental cars are ready to go.

Of course, that comes with a couple of caveats. One of the most important to understand is the limited real estate available on mobile devices. Tablets and smartphones have nowhere near the screen space available with even a basic desktop PC monitor, let alone large screen systems, dual monitor systems, or setups that use a television for a monitor.

That means positioning is incredibly important for mobile search. It's about more than just screen size, though. Positioning changes for mobile users. Run the same search on your smartphone and your desktop and you'll see exactly how different the order and placement of results can be. Others include the following:

### **Personalisation:**

One of the most important things that changes search result delivery for mobile users is personalisation, particularly with Android users, although it also applies to iOS users on Chrome to a lesser degree. Because these users are always logged in, search results are always personalised to their account and their specific location, which alters not only the order of results, but the actual search results delivered.

### **Vertical Results:**

When you run a search for a query through Google on a desktop, you have a pretty basic layout for the results. However, the order and placement is different on a mobile device. For instance, rather than a single line of "images for XXX", mobile searchers generally get two rows of images and they're placed higher on the page. The same applies to videos served up - they're split into two rows. This pushes other content farther down.

### **Fewer Filters:**

When you run a search through Google, you have a row of filter options at the top. However, mobile users have fewer filters from which to choose, which will possibly alter the CTR of websites with mobile versus desktop Internet access.

As Google says in the company's book, *Zero Moment of Truth*, "First position matters even more in mobile. That's true whether you're talking about search results or ad positions. The digital shelf gets really small on the mobile screen! A drop from first to fourth position on a mobile phone can mean a CTR drop off of more than 90%."

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## Local and Mobile

### The Correlation with Higher Local Results Positioning in Mobile Search

Once, the World Wide Web was the great democratiser. It enabled businesses around the world to compete on almost even footing and consumers embraced it for that. However, consumer habits, as they always do, began to shift. Today, the web still democratises commerce, but it's become more about local than ever before, particularly with the rise of mobile.

Why has local become so incredibly important? It all has to do with how people use their mobile devices. Suppose you're in town and the afternoon is wearing on. It's time to find a place to get a bite to eat, but where? You could go with a few of the names you know, but what if you want to explore a little bit? You fire up your smartphone, type a query into Google, or just tap the icons for suggestions about what's nearby, and you're immediately given results about what to eat, what styles of food are served and even customer reviews to help you make up your mind.

That same concept – finding information about local businesses while in the immediate area or very nearby – is fuelling all other aspects of local search. Customers are using their smartphones to find coupons for their preferred shops. They're using their tablets to find movie show times and reviews. They're buying tickets to local events and a great deal more. While the World Wide Web was once about global competition, today it's become something different, something more.

There's more afoot here than just local search, though. Navneet Kaushal weighs in on the rise of what he calls micro-local. "There's almost certainly going to be more of a focus on micro-local search," he says. "I say micro-local because it really goes beyond local search. Local search involves a geographic region, such as a city or town.

However, micro-local search takes it a step further to a particular place of business or even a street corner. Thanks to the emergence of wearable technology and advancements in the Google algorithm, expect to see people search for terms on mobile devices that return results promoting a retail outlet within walking distance. Digital marketers who ignore geo-targeting do so at their own risk."

As you can see, it's no longer enough to be cognisant of local search. You have to be aware of how consumers' habits are changing, and what that impact will be on local and micro-local search. If you're not geo-targeting during your mobile optimisation, you risk being essentially invisible to the very customers you need most.

## Responsive Design - The Ideal Choice for Business Websites

As mentioned, we need to discuss web design options. You have a few available to you. You could ignore mobile completely and stick with the same old site you have, which would be a tremendous mistake given not only Google's increasing focus on mobile, but the seismic shift in consumer habits that is sparking a massive rise in mobile in the first place.

You could go for a mobile-only site in addition to your regular site. Or, you could opt for responsive design. Of those choices, responsive design is by far the best. Even Google thinks so, although they try very hard not to come out and say it directly.

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What is responsive design and why does it matter so much? To put it in a nutshell, responsive design does exactly what it sounds like. The website automatically resizes and reorganises to fit the device your visitor is using. That means your single site will look different to a user visiting on a desktop PC and one using a smartphone to browse your pages.

John Rampton writing for the Huffington Post provides some illumination. “A responsive design simply means a website that has been constructed so that all of the content, images and structure of the site remains the same on any device. For example, when a user accesses a site on their desktop, they are getting the full view of the site. But when that same user goes to visit the site from their smartphone or tablet, the site will retract to fit on the smaller screen. You don’t have to worry about having different websites for various devices or making sure that your site runs properly on a mobile device.”

Why does that matter so much? There are several important reasons. The first and most crucial is that it delivers the best possible user experience (UX). Not sold on the importance of user experience? Consider these startling statistics:

- 88% of users who suffer a negative experience will not return to a website
- Almost 100% of a user’s first impression is created by design elements
- Almost 60% of people say they would not recommend a company if their website is poorly designed

Obviously, UX is a huge consideration for businesses in every industry and niche. If you’re not delivering the experience your customers expect and deserve, they will go elsewhere. You can bet that your competition is taking steps to change their UX.

Rampton also has some insight on UX in general. “According to Google’s Think Insights on Mobile, whenever someone arrives on your mobile website and is frustrated, or doesn’t see the content that they are searching for immediately, there’s a 61% chance they will leave and head to another website. However, whenever a user has had a positive experience with your mobile website, that individual will be 67% more likely to buy a product or use a service. Furthermore, 48% of users stated to Google that when a site doesn’t function on their mobile device, it makes them feel that the company does not care for their business.”

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## NOT SOLD ON THE IMPORTANCE OF USER EXPERIENCE?



**88% OF USERS WHO SUFFER A  
NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE WILL NOT  
RETURN**



**ALMOST 100% OF A USER'S FIRST  
IMPRESSION IS CREATED BY DESIGN  
ELEMENTS**



**ALMOST 60% WOULD NOT  
RECOMMEND A COMPANY IF THEIR  
WEBSITE IS POORLY DESIGNED**

Responsive design also offers some significant benefits for businesses. For instance, you don't have to invest the time and money required to create a standard website and a mobile-only site. You can also avoid penalties from Google for poor or broken links and redirects, which are very common when attempting to translate a regular website into one for mobile users.

Of course, a responsive design also means that your website is easier to manage and maintain when it comes to SEO. With both a standard and mobile site, you have twice the work when it comes to updates, upgrades, content propagation, keyword implementation, tagging and more. You also have

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double the campaigns and accounts with Google and other SEO tools. That adds a lot of unnecessary complexity to what's already a stressful situation for you.

Now, all this begs the question of what are the best practices for responsive design? Actually, they're pretty straightforward.

### **Accommodate Multiple Sizes:**

Your responsive site should be able to accommodate any size device. This is more important today than ever before, when a smartphone might be four inches or six inches, or even larger. Then you throw in the wide range of tablets on the market, from the iPad Mini to the Surface Pro, and things get even more complicated. Don't design only for small screens. Don't design for only large screens. Plan for all of them.

### **It's about More Than the Right Fit:**

It's easy to get bogged down in thinking that responsive design is just about ensuring your site can resize to fit a particular device. However, there's more to it. You also need to consider the context in which your visitors will be going to the site. What information are they looking for? Sure, many mobile visitors want contact information or your address, but what if they're actually in the store at the moment? What information might they be looking for? Plan for the context of use, not just for screen size.

### **Important Features Only:**

Yes, you want to give your users access to all the "bells and whistles", but understand that there's such a thing as having too many options. Rather than trying to cram absolutely every feature into the website design, determine which features matter most to your visitors and add them first. If you're unsure if a feature really needs to be there, then chances are good that it can be deleted without too much worry.

### **How Content Is Presented:**

You cannot survive without a content-rich website, even in the mobile-first world. However, you need to take a long, hard look at how you're presenting that content to your website visitors. While you might be able to include a lot of different elements on a site designed for a standard computer monitor, you might have to change things up for smaller screens. For instance, if you regularly feature news articles, you might need to consider eliminating bio pictures or other extraneous tidbits from teasers so you can fit more actual content onto the main page. Only include those elements that are critical to the teaser, and leave the rest for the article itself. Alternatively, you can remove them completely if they're not really necessary.

### **Navigation:**

Yes, you need a way to let your visitors navigate your website, but it shouldn't be the same for all screens. Just shrinking or expanding the navigation menu isn't enough. You need to make it scalable to fit right on different screen sizes and with different content layouts. It's very possible that you'll need to create different navigation solutions/systems for different screen sizes. However, make sure

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that you are consistent across all sizes in terms of labels and designs, as well as fonts, text colour and more. You want the feel to be the same, even if the functionality of the navigation menu is different for smaller or larger devices.

### **Page Load Speed:**

The speed at which the pages of your website load is an important consideration for desktop SEO, but it's also critical for mobile, perhaps even more so. A lot of different factors affect page load speed, including image size and quality. Remove any visuals that aren't strictly necessary. The page-spanning images that are the norm today with website designed for use on the desktop should not be used with a design created for mobile devices. Use icons correctly and eliminate as many bottlenecks as possible. Remember that mobile users are often using a slower connection than what's available at their homes for desktop access, and page load speeds will be slower off the bat for that reason.

### **Font and Font Size:**

When designing for multiple screen sizes, you need to pay close attention to the font, colour and size used. You need fonts and designs that are easily read. Make sure that the style of the font ties into the overall design of the website correctly, as this is a very important part of creating the right feel since you'll most likely be creating a graphics-lite site. Ensure that the individual letters and numbers are very readable on smaller screens, and ensure that any headers are clearly distinguishable from the body text.

### **Testing, Testing, Testing:**

One of the most important parts of any website design, not just for responsive designs, is testing. You need to ensure that you're testing your website with multiple devices so that you can see first-hand how it performs on different screen sizes, with different hardware and more. It's also essential that you conduct a thorough inspection of the entire site on each device. This can help you hone in on problem areas that are present on certain mobile devices but not on others, ensuring that you're able to provide a positive user experience for all visitors.

### **Conclusion**

When everything is said and done, optimising for mobile isn't optional. It's a requirement. Mobile isn't the future. It's here and now. If you're not optimising your website and your marketing campaigns for mobile users, not only will you miss out, but you might actually be invisible to mobile users. Google has announced that it will penalise sites that don't comply with mobile best practices by eliminating them from mobile results.

Your efforts should start with defining the keywords and search phrases that mobile searchers use to find products or services similar to yours, as well as those that actually bring mobile searchers to your website in the first place. Of course, this requires significant analysis of dense data that might not be readily available, posing a stumbling block for business owners and decision makers.

On this foundation, you can then begin to build a robust optimisation strategy that will bolster your visibility in organic SERPs for mobile devices. However, mobile optimisation goes well beyond merely

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defining the right keywords and phrases.

You need to know the intent of your customers when they search for your products and/or services, as well as local and micro-local searches. Are they in the area, and looking for an address so they can pay a visit in person? Are they actually in your location, perhaps looking for nutritional information on your restaurant's menu? Maybe they're comparing your products to a competitor's, or they're searching for a mobile coupon. Intent is incredibly important, and one of the most common things missed in mobile optimisation campaigns.

If you have an app, then it needs to be optimised properly, but more and more businesses are finding that apps aren't strictly necessary. A website, on the other hand, is absolutely essential. It can't be just any old website, though. You'll need to choose between creating one site for regular surfers and one for mobile-only users, or creating a single responsive website, which is our recommendation, and Google's, too.

Once you've decided on the type of site, you have to start designing and laying it out, planning how it will interact with users on different devices with varying screen sizes. You need to consider all aspects of the website design, from how images will resize to page load times to the very font and colour used for your content. It all has an incredible impact on your visitor and their experience.

In the end, it comes down to giving mobile users not just a positive experience, but the experience they deserve. Users are more frequently move from one device to another. For instance, they might initially use a mobile phone and then change to a laptop and then a desktop and later a tablet, for instance. Because of this, businesses must be able to follow along and provide the same quality experience on each device. Not only that, but businesses must be able to begin anticipating their customers' needs and providing an intimately responsive environment.

If all of this sounds overwhelming, it doesn't have to be. At Peppersack, we offer a full range of solutions designed to help businesses not only rank well in desktop searches, but in mobile searches, too. We can also provide a full suite of web design offerings to ensure that you're able to build the responsive site necessary to offer your visitors the experience they deserve no matter what device they might be using. From analytics and data science to CRM and website development, Peppersack has you covered. We invite you to learn more about how we can help you grow your business.

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Peppersack Limited, Atlantic Business Centre, Atlantic Street, Altrincham, WA14 5NQ

Tel: 0161 926 3670 Email: [info@peppersack.com](mailto:info@peppersack.com) Web: [www.peppersack.com](http://www.peppersack.com)

Registered in England and Wales 11th August 2009, Registered Number 6997254, VAT Number 981 3013 36

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## About Peppersack

Peppersack is a leading digital marketing agency providing SEO and content marketing services that deliver results. Our search engine optimisation services will help to raise your page rank. We deliver proven results in the form of traffic to websites and sales inquiries through integrated inbound marketing campaigns. We make it easy for your potential clients to find you. These services are based on a disciplined approach to research, analysis, business planning and reporting. Support services include content development, social media management and creative design and development.

## Contact Peppersack

Please contact us for help and advice with your digital marketing and communications

Email: [contact@peppersack.com](mailto:contact@peppersack.com)  
Telephone: 0161 926 3670  
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Atlantic Street  
Manchester  
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