

From the Great Jakes Blog

# Responsive Design for Law Firm Websites – 10 Questions Answered (part 1)



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It's been a few months since I spoke at the 2013 Legal Marketing Association conference in Las Vegas. My talk was about the new mobile website technique known as "responsive design." Since then, I've fielded many questions about it. I thought that it would be helpful if I share a few. Please feel free to email me with more.

## 1. What exactly is responsive design?

Responsive design is a new coding technique that adjusts each page of your firm's website to fit any size screen, automatically. Regardless whether someone is viewing your website on an iPad, an iPad Mini, an Android "phablet," a Kindle, a smart phone, a desktop computer or some other device, the technology will adjust your firm's website to display perfectly.



## 2. Why does it make sense for law firms to have this?

The simple answer: your client's behavior has changed. Take a quick look around – *every* business professional, regardless of age, consumes content on some type of mobile device. Many of us have more than one.

Quick facts:

a) Global mobile data traffic grew 70 percent in 2012. By 2014 – or 2015, by some estimates – mobile internet usage is expected to surpass internet usage via a desktop or other fixed-location device.

b) Great Jakes recently analyzed the website traffic for all our law firm clients and found that mobile traffic had increased a whopping 101% in the last year.

The preponderance of mobile devices has altered the “content journey” for visitors to your website. It is now common to begin reading an article, viewing a video, or perusing a presentation on one device, like an office computer, and continue researching on another, like an iPad or smartphone.

Additionally, the articles, news, event descriptions, videos and other content that your attorneys are creating are being shared online via email and social media (like LinkedIn) – two of the most-used applications on mobile devices. Not having a website with responsive design means that all that shared content will be difficult to read, resulting in less engagement with the firm. In short, without it, marketing the firm will become increasingly more challenging.

If your firm expects its content-marketing efforts to grow, then responsive design makes sense. It will make the experience of consuming that content much easier.

### 3. What does it look like?

Here are examples from our clients Moss & Barnett, one of the 10 largest business law firms in the upper midwest, and Patterson & Sheridan, an intellectual property law firm that serves many of the world’s largest technology companies. As you visit each on a smartphone, iPad and desktop, you will notice two things about the content of the website:

a) The content that you’re looking for, whether it be video, text, audio or graphic, will be where you think it is, regardless of the device you use to access it. The only difference is that the format will have adjusted slightly to suit the size of the screen being used to view it.

b) The experience is smooth. Starting to read an article on your smart phone and then finishing it on your laptop entails no frustration and does not require a magnifying lens.

### 4. We have a mobile website. Isn’t this good enough?

The “mobile website” was conceived in 2007 when the iPhone was introduced. It was designed to work on one type of device: smartphones. But in 2013, there are *dozens* of types of mobile devices, each with a different screen size, and all being used to view your firm’s website. Additionally, mobile websites are often slimmed-down versions of the main website. That means that content that appears on the firm’s main website might not show up when users view the mobile website.

In contrast, a user viewing a website crafted with responsive design sees the same website on their desktop computer, iPhone or any other device. That's a far more satisfying user experience.

#### **5. What's the argument against building our next website with responsive design?**

The arguments are a bit muddled and seem to boil down to the fact that implementing responsive design is not easy. You need to work with professionals that will carefully consider the user experience for each page on each device type.

There are some use-cases that apply to other industries (like retail) for why a mobile website or a mobile app might make more sense than responsive design. But for law firms, responsive design makes sense for many reasons. Among the biggest is that users of your website (clients and potential clients) have become less conscious of what device they happen to be using. [Brad Frost](#), a leading voice in the mobile responsive movement, said it best:

Mobile users will do anything & everything that desktop users will do, provided it's presented in a usable way. Assuming people on mobile "won't do that" is a losing proposition. Don't penalize users with missing content & features.

Your website visitors want the information that they're looking when they want it – regardless of how they arrive on your website. That's the fundamental driver of responsive design.

Stay tuned for Part 2 of this piece...