

Google adds mobile-friendly usability factors to its mobile search algorithm

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Google [has announced](#) that [mobile](#)-friendliness will be a ranking factor for all mobile searches starting April 21. Pages that are mobile-friendly according to Google's usability tests will receive a [boost](#) in results for searches performed on a mobile device.

According to Google Webmaster Trends Analyst Gary Illyes, the update will run page-by-page. There is no site-wide penalty. If your site were to have 20 mobile-friendly pages and 10 pages Google does not deem to be mobile-friendly, the 20 will receive a boost, and the 10 will not. The mobile-friendliness — or lack of mobile-friendliness — of a page will only affect that individual page's ranking.

However, to reach the maximum number of prospective clients, all pages of your firm's website should be mobile friendly. As of Thanksgiving 2014, mobile [traffic](#) eclipsed desktop PC internet [traffic](#) for the first time. And Google usability studies show that 61 percent of visitors will move on to another site immediately if they click on a result that is not mobile-friendly. To make sure no visitor is becoming frustrated and clicking away, plan a mobile design strategy that affects all pages seamlessly.

Mobile search is particularly relevant to attorneys due to the number of local searches performed on mobile devices. Over 90 percent of people with smartphones use them to search for local information. And mobile visitors are more likely to convert — quickly. Mobile searches lead to action on a site within an

hour of a visit 70 percent of the time.

Immediate benefits

The [algorithm](#) will run in real-time, although Google has not specified whether this means real-time as it reindexes pages or real-time as a user types in a query. To be safe, assume that your pages will not see a ranking benefit until Google crawls them, reindexes them and sees that they are mobile-friendly.

If you update your site frequently, Google most likely crawls it regularly to look for new content. The April 21 deadline may not be as crucial in this case, since pages will see an immediate boost once they are reindexed as mobile-friendly.

If Google crawls a site several times and sees no updates, it may begin indexing pages on that site less often. If your site is not updated frequently, you may have to wait longer for Google to crawl it and see any new mobile-friendly pages. In this case, working to be fully mobile-friendly by April 21 should be more of a priority.

What do visitors want?

In the third-quarter of 2014, people spent more time on mobile devices than they did watching TV. People take their devices with them when they go out but still use them most often when they are in. According to Google's [guide to mobile-friendly sites](#), 77 percent of searches occur at work or at home — times during which a desktop or laptop is likely available.

As mobile becomes a ubiquitous experience, people expect more from the websites they visit. Sites need to meet some basic criteria to live up to user expectations. These include:

- 1. Easy to complete tasks.** Mobile users expect to be able to easily perform tasks on a mobile site. They do not want to spend time searching for information, and they do not want to have to zoom in to find tiny links or read tiny text. If, for example, your main goal is to prompt mobile visitors to call your firm, clicking to call should be the easiest task they can perform. Menus should be clearly labeled, text large enough to read and links clickable.
- 2. Speed.** Users also want fast load times. On average, mobile users expect a site to load in two seconds or less. Retention drops steadily for every second over two it takes a page to load. Keep load times in mind when optimizing web assets and determining which elements to show users. People on phones have different needs than people on desktops, and pages should display relevant information to each group accordingly.
- 3. Consistency.** Many people will perform an initial search on a mobile device and return to the search on a desktop computer to dig deeper or complete a specific task. Because users will be accessing your site from multiple devices, the desktop experience should not differ significantly from the phone experience. While pages should be optimized for display on different devices, the overall interaction visitors have with your firm's brand should remain the same on any machine.

To help people prepare for the coming algorithm update, Google has developed a [Mobile-Friendly Test Tool](#). Simply enter a url, and Google will tell you whether the page is mobile friendly, show an example of how the page looks on a mobile device and, if applicable, offer suggestions. The tool also lists errors and gives reasons for deeming a page not to be mobile-friendly.

Google has also built online [mobile-friendly guides](#), which give step-by-step advice on several aspects of mobile-friendly site development.

The goal of the update, according to [Google's blog](#), is to help users “get relevant, high quality search results that are optimized for their devices.” Take steps to make sure your firm's pages are in those results.

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