



RESPONSIVE WEB DESIGN: THE FUTURE

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Written by: Doug Schust, WSI Digital Marketing Expert

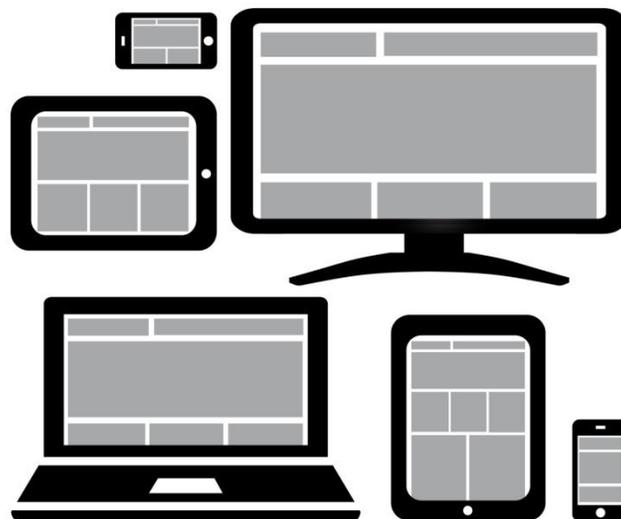
Responsive web design is generating a lot of buzz in the digital marketing space these days, even among the guru web designers. So what's all the excitement about?

Responsive design allows your web content (navigation, images, text, forms, etc) to dynamically respond to the platform or device that is requesting that information. This all happens in the backend automatically as grid elements reconfigure themselves to the optimum size, position and scale for the specific view of the requesting device.

Most websites that integrate responsive design focus on three or four sets of design sizes and devices: smartphone, tablet, laptop (960 grid system), and sometimes the larger screens of desktop computers.

Providing adjustable images across these various sizes presents one of the biggest challenges facing responsive design in terms of total bandwidth involved. There are, however, a few development tricks involving HTML5 and CSS (cascading style sheets) that can be used to load the correct image sizes and design functionality based on the device of the user.

Figure 1:



Responsive web design (Figure 1) is vital to most businesses going forward, even for those who have built mobile versions of their website. In their latest release of AdWords, Google identified three key elements: location, time and device. Understanding these changes and the impact they could have on your business will allow you to move quickly ahead of your competition.

Responsive design isn't trivial. It takes a concerted effort and dedication to make it work perfectly. Before diving into responsive development, one must carefully weigh the benefits and drawbacks.

By having common and consistent design for all devices that allows the user to have the best possible experience, responsive design is great for generating consumer engagement and can double or even triple conversion rates for various businesses.

So if you have an existing website you will need to seriously consider making the switch to responsive web design (if you haven't already).

For companies out there that have yet to move into the digital world yet, there is no better time than the present to make the move online.

Benefits of Responsive Web Design

Takes Human Behavior into Account

Day by day, the number of devices, platforms, and browsers that need to work with your site grows. Responsive design represents a fundamental shift in human behaviors. Google just recently came out with statistics that validate the main reason to move to a responsive website. They claim that 67% of all searches start on one device and get finished on a second device. This is key for businesses to understand how we as humans move between devices based on location and time of day.

It's also important to consider usability for menus and sidebars. Unlike traditional sites, which have a single layout, responsive site elements need to resize and reposition themselves across many different screens. When done right, these subtle transformations should go unnoticed by website visitors.

Responsive design can present a challenge for designers and developers, but if you select the right company to implement it for you, you will create an incredible customer experience across all platforms and improve your overall online presence.

Elements of Responsive Web Design Devices

Many older devices are not yet compatible with advanced HTML5 features. As a result, responsive websites might not load as well or look as good as they do on newer devices. Sites should "gracefully degrade" on older browsers—that is, even if the layout doesn't look as originally intended, important text and images will still be viewable.

New HTML5 features should be seen as additive, and should not break a page for users that don't have the latest, greatest mobile phone or software.

Responsive designs (usually three) will be reviewed by the business owner and all stakeholders. Additional design and development work will be required to make sure the different layouts have a unified look and feel. Thorough testing will also be needed when approving the final designs.

Design

Responsive design requires rough wireframes and "scaffolding" (interactions between elements) to be generated and approved by business owners before designs are implemented. Creating the designs requires more effort than a non-responsive web design and the design process effort will be multiplied by the number of additional scenarios and devices.

Development

After development starts, minor modifications to the design can become more complicated. Major changes might force a complete redesign so always keep this in the back of your mind. Once again, selecting the right web design company will help to minimize these additional changes and extra design costs.

Upgrades

If you are using an open source platform certain website modules may not be compatible with a responsive layout. You will need to discuss how those additional modules will fit into your overall responsive layout and strategy. It's possible you may need to source other modules to work with a responsive design.

Retina Display

New generations of displays on smartphones and desktop computers use high-density screens. Apple calls their high-density screens "retina" displays, since individual pixels are so small, they can't be seen at normal viewing distance. For comparison, a Retina Display iPad contains more pixels than big screen HDTVs. By packing a lot of pixels onto screens, websites look more like fine printed catalogs than traditional websites, but with the added advantage of interactivity.

The iPad, with a 9.7-inch Retina display, contains more pixels than an HDTV of any size. Text and images can look sharp when optimized for high-density screens.

So is It Worth It?

In the past few years, we've seen an explosion of tablets and smartphones in different shapes and sizes. Mobile-optimized sites are designed for existing devices, but what about future ones? Due to their adaptive nature, responsive designs are well-suited for the onslaught of new phones and tablets we'll see in the coming years.

Your business needs will determine if responsive design is right for your current site. Responsive designs work best for blogs and corporate websites that provide limited or similar content throughout the website, but it also works for homepages and content-rich sites.

Responsive web design is not only popular, it's required if you want to compete in today's digital world. There are many articles promoting its usefulness and some of those articles make it sound easier than it really is to implement. But if you choose a company that has a track record and can show examples of their previous work, your business is one step closer to having a great, responsive site.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doug Schust



Prior to his current position as President of WSI, Doug was the longest standing and highest revenue producing WSI Consultant. Having been a WSI franchisee since 1995, Doug has more than 16 years of experience in the Internet marketing industry and over 30 years of total marketing experience.

As a driving force for the WSI brand and a leading authority within the industry, Doug has an intimate understanding of both the challenges and, most importantly, the tremendous opportunity that exists in the digital space for businesses all around the world.