



Will Responsive Design Work for Your Website?

From a designer's perspective, responsive website design is beautiful. It is simple: one site, many devices. With a responsive design, your site will transition seamlessly from desktop to mobile without the need for distinct urls. In addition, responsive designs often emphasize white space and large elements, giving sites room to breathe at all sizes. And, the consistency offered by employing responsive design is a valuable brand-building tool, since people will always be interacting with the same look and feel, no matter how they access a website.

With mobile internet usage expected to overtake desktop usage within the next few years, most firms interested in SEO are also interested in mobile-friendly websites. In particular, having a site that functions properly on a mobile device is critical to local search marketing efforts. More and more, people are just as likely – if not more so – to perform a local search on a smart phone as they are on a desktop or laptop machine.

The necessity of having a mobile website may be well understood, but the issue of whether a responsive design or a separate mobile website is best for SEO is still hotly debated. Google has indicated its preference for responsive design, and that is certainly a consideration. In fact, Google refers to responsive design as an industry best practice. But that has not stopped some from arguing that responsive design is bad for SEO. Here are some pros and cons from arguments on both sides:

User Experience

Pros: Having a website that transitions seamlessly from device to device makes it easier for users to interact with your content. If someone shares something from their desktop, that person's friends, who might access the content on their phones or tablets, will see the same thing. They will not be taken to a stripped down version of the site, which may or may not contain the shared items. Conversely, someone might first see an item on a mobile site – say at work – and make a note to do more research at home. Later, if they access the site from a laptop or desktop and have to navigate through a different site, they could experience frustration. In Google's mind, a responsive website creates the most seamless, and therefore the best, user experience. And, since a good user experience is supposed to help with rankings, it is good for SEO.

Cons: People may use your mobile site and your desktop site in very different ways. Before going with a responsive website redesign, consider what the user's primary goal as they access the site from various devices. If you find these goals to be similar, responsive design will work for you. If you find that mobile users want something entirely different, it may be necessary to create a targeted mobile site.





Search Marketing

Pros: Responsive design makes your search marketing efforts easier to manage. Overseeing one campaign is less of a hassle than tracking two separate campaigns. If you have one well-optimized site, it is less likely that items will slip through the cracks or be forgotten in otherwise busy and hectic schedules, causing one or the other site to fall behind. Splitting your time between two campaigns can be more costly in terms of both time and money spent. It is important to determine if the investment is worth it before eschewing responsive design.

Cons: People may be using different keywords when searching from a mobile device. It is important to look at your analytics and see what terms people have used when they land on your pages from mobile devices versus those used by people searching on desktop computers. If these two sets of keywords are not compatible, it may be necessary to create two sites optimized for two different sets of terms. However, if there is overlap, remember that there is no reason one responsive site cannot be optimized for both desktop and mobile searches. Keywords are keywords, and as long as they make sense within their context and the content on your site flows naturally, they can be doing double duty.

The debate over whether responsive design is good or bad for SEO is not likely to end soon. This is partly due to the fact that there will never be a single right answer that fits everyone's needs. The simplicity and ease of use that responsive design offers are certainly worth considering. But the final decision will rely on knowledge of your users and how you can make their interaction with your site as positive as possible.

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