Mobile Websites for The Day After Tomorrow

By Matthew A. Perosi

I was an early adopter of mobile technology and mobile websites. My first mobile experience was in 2001 when I programmed a website to communicate with alpha pagers. Then in 2003, I built my first truly mobile website. While mobile technology advanced slowly ten years ago, personal computers, the internet, and software programs were rapidly advancing side-by-side. The same side-by-side rapid advancements are now happening today with mobile technology.

This mobile technology website race has been going strong since Apple introduced the iPhone in 2007. Large online retailers like Amazon and Blue Nile tweak their mobile websites every time a new Nexus, Samsung, or iPhone is released. They also continually test their mobile websites to see how customers react to subtle changes.

Other than large e-commerce jewelry websites, independent retail jewelers have been slower to launch mobile versions of their websites. Slow adoption was understandable a few years ago when mobile programming costs were high and the potential return was unknown. Some companies offer inexpensive 5-page mobile websites as an alternative to those expensive mobile websites. These solutions were adequate for a while, but now your customers are demanding more.

In June 2014, 43.12% of the visitors to jewelry websites were using some type of mobile device. That's up from 39.88% in April 2014. It's becoming more and more important to make sure your website is not only mobile-friendly, but also gives your customers immediate access to the information they seek.

June 2014	**43.12%**
April 2014	**39.88%**
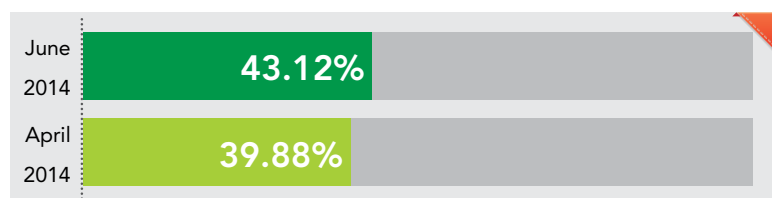
As a way to lower the cost of mobile website programming, many website agencies now offer all-in-one websites using something called a "responsive website design." These responsive websites have the ability to change how they look in order to fit the size of the screen they are using. The hope is that the website will look just as nice on a large screen TV in your living room, as on your 17" laptop, and on your 4" smartphone. Responsive designs usually succeed rather well at reorganizing the same information on different screen sizes.

A few months ago, I started noticing that the consumer's expectations with mobile websites are now higher than what these responsive websites can deliver. Although responsive website design is a cost-effective way to create a mobile website, it's starting to look like they are just a link in the evolution that mobile technology is heading.

Even though I adopted mobile websites in the technology's infancy, the last four years probably represent the phase of early adopters in the jewelry industry. I tip my hat to you if you have a mobile website up and running as you read this.

But, now you probably need to redesign it.

Before redesigning a mobile website, you should hire someone to track and analyze your existing site, so you can discover what mobile experience is best for your specific customers. If you can't perform your own research, then another option is to refer to the general mobile research information found on the "Think with Google" website at http://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/.

The Think website has several years of data about mobile usability that will help you understand what features you can and should build into your site. On one hand, they recommend a responsive website; but on the other hand, they recommend some highly sophisticated programming that could only be built into a dedicated mobile website.

One of the recent Think studies points out that the home page of a mobile website needs to display information that satisfies customers who have a completely different purpose than those customers using a desktop computer. Responsive design really can't do that, and many large e-tailers are already heading away from one, single responsive site.

Responsive websites are not suited to display different information, only to display the same information, differently. In the future, I see the potential for a single website to have three responsive versions for use by desktops, tablets, and smartphones.

At this rate, it looks like your mobile website will one day be more important than your desktop site. So, make sure you consult with your website analyst several months before your next redesign so they can guide you through the latest variations your site should address.

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Matthew Perosi is the Founder of the Jeweler Website Advisory Group (jWAG), a research team devoted to reporting how jewelers can use websites, mobile technology, and marketing trends to further personal and jewelry store goals. A library of articles, videos, and an archive of jWAG daily email "Nuggets"is freely available at www.jwag.biz. Matthew invites your feedback at matt@jwag.biz.