

Mobile Usability

Testing your website in the real world



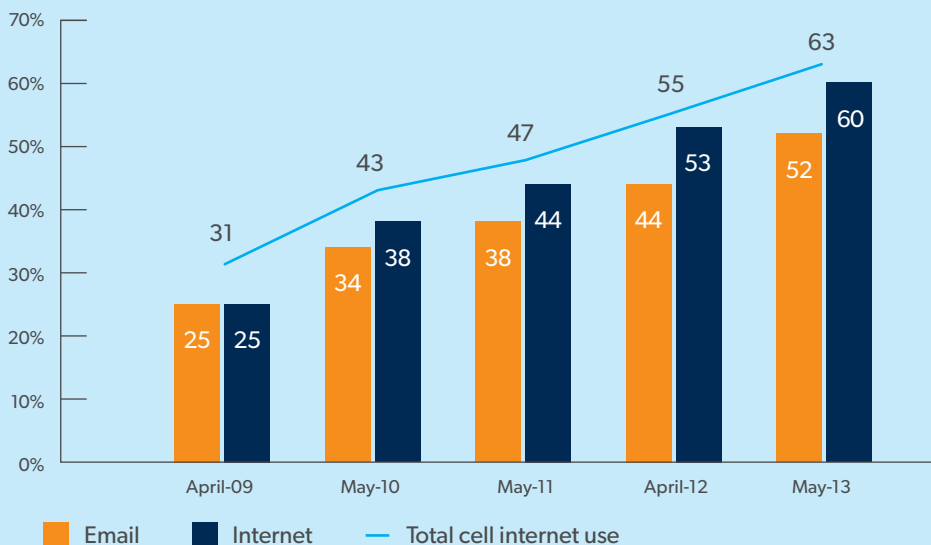
With more and more people regularly accessing the Internet from hand-held devices, websites that are not optimized for mobile are going to be left behind. Creating a seamless user experience for visitors on mobile devices is critical to your ability to connect with site users, and ultimately, for meeting your key performance metrics.

Testing for mobile usability is often viewed as difficult, expensive, and time-consuming. While this is typically the case for traditional testing methodologies, there is an alternative approach to mobile research and testing that is faster, easier, less expensive, and more accurate than the old-school paradigm.

But before you're ready to test, you'll need to understand the expectations of mobile users and the rules of design for mobile.

ALMOST TWO-THIRDS OF CELL PHONE OWNERS GO ONLINE USING THEIR PHONES

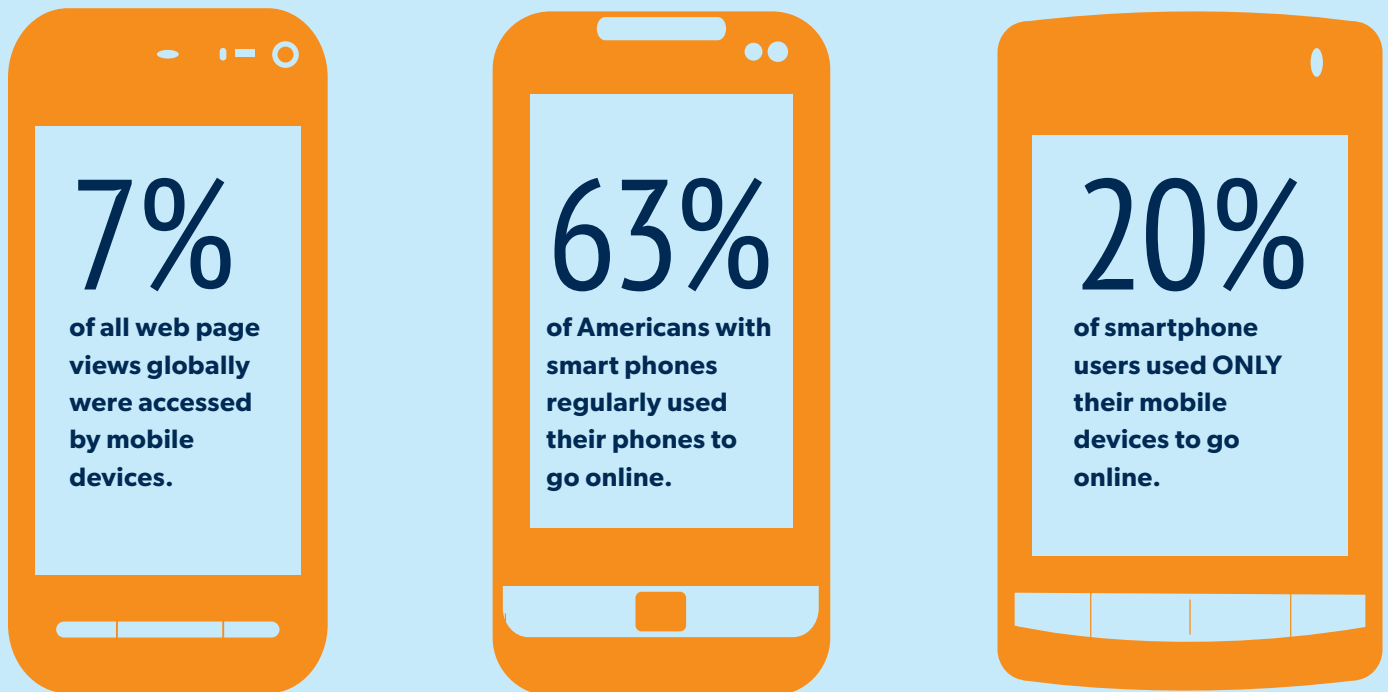
Among cell phone owners, the percent who use the internet or email on their phone



Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Spring Tracking Survey, April 17 – May 19, 2013. N = 2,076 cell phone owners ages 18+. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish and on landline and cell phones. The margin of error for results based on cell phone owners is ± 2.4 percentage points

OPTIMIZE FOR MOBILE OR GET LEFT BEHIND

Why is it so important for your organization to optimize for mobile? Easy answer. Mobile usage is growing astronomically. According to research conducted in summer 2013:



The numbers are expected to continue their upward climb. Clearly, if your web content can't be delivered effectively on a hand-held device, you're behind the game.

DESIGNING FOR MOBILE

A better user experience on smaller screens

Designing for mobile is inherently different from designing for desktop. Take something as simple as the mail program on your phone. When you pick up your mobile and launch the email app, you don't expect it to look and function the same way as the mail app on your desktop. Clearly the smaller screen sizes of mobile devices require different interfaces to achieve the same quality experience provided on a desktop.

The same idea applies to websites. A website that has been shrunk to fit a mobile screen – with no changes to its navigational structures or content — does not provide a great experience for mobile users. Despite that, it's still very common to see “Mini Me” websites on mobile devices, much to the frustration of mobile users.

Research and experience working with clients across industries has proven three general principles about what users want and expect from websites accessed on their mobile devices.

What users want from a mobile website:

1

Minimize the negative impact of the smaller screen size

2

Optimize the positive impact of the device's mobility and convenience

3

Where possible, capitalize on device features — phone, location services, camera, video, texting, etc.

MOBILE WEBSITE TESTING

Don't test your mobile site on a desktop

When you're ready to begin user testing to understand how your mobile optimized website meets the needs of site visitors, there's one thing you'll want to keep in mind. Testing a mobile interface on a desktop computer doesn't cut it for a number of reasons:

Roll-overs. You can't "roll-over" on a mobile touch device. If you use roll-overs to trigger navigation or content on your desktop version they won't automatically translate to mobile devices.

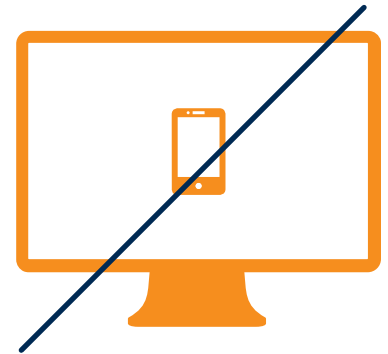
Re-sizing. The very nature of the smaller mobile screen means that you need to test re-sizing for photos, design elements, head structures, and running text.

Overlays and Pop-ups. Features such as light boxes and slide shows that use overlays or pop-ups can lead users into navigational dead ends on mobile devices.

Location Services, Video, etc. If you capitalize on the mobile device's features (which you should), you will not be able to test them on a desktop machine.

Environmental Factors. Mobile devices are used in a much wider variety of environments. You will want to test your designs — color choices and textures — in a variety of environmental light settings.

Test Where/When Your Customers Use. If you are tied to a desktop environment for your testing, you will never be able to assess how your websites are used when and where the user uses them.



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The Challenges of Traditional Mobile Testing

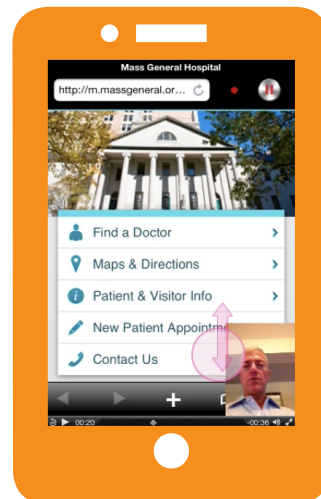
Knowing that it's ineffective to test your interface solely on a desktop computer, you'll want to plan to test it using a mobile device.

Unfortunately, most organizations are not set up to conduct this basic research and, if they are, they employ awkward phone "holders," dongles, and multiple video cameras that constrain the test taker in a desktop environment.

In addition, the post-production expense of synching video and screen captures for traditional mobile testing is time-intensive and expensive. Using this old-fashioned approach, a test can take weeks to conduct and cost several thousand dollars. Luckily, there is a better, more effective approach.



Traditional Mobile Testing: Awkward, rigid, multiple video monitors, and confined to desktop environment.



New Mobile Testing: Portable, inexpensive, no external video cameras, and ability to test in real-world environment.

THE NEW MOBILE TESTING METHODOLOGY

Faster, Less Expensive, More Accurate Mobile Testing

There is a new methodology for mobile website research and testing that delivers results that are not only more accurate, but also faster and less expensive. Researchers and user experience designers have adopted this approach, which leverages cutting-edge technology, because it offers a number of advantages:

No External Video Cameras. Software that records screen captures — touches and clicks — as well as video and audio of the subject as he/she performs each task is used so that external video cameras are unnecessary.

Completely Portable. Because video cameras are not required, the phone does not have to be tethered to a carriage or harness.

Testing in Real-world Environments. Websites are tested wherever the subject regularly uses them. For example, if a user were visiting a retailer with a brick and mortar store, testing could be conducted while the customer used their phone at the location.

Quick Turnaround. Extensive post-production work is not required so the testing process — planning, testing and reporting — can be completed in as little as three days.

Inexpensive. A shorter turn-around, the elimination of excessive video editing and the ability to go directly to the user's environment reduces the amount of expense associated with old methodologies.

Testing a mobile website using this approach does require some key components, including a trained usability expert. Their expertise is necessary not only for creating a test plan that will serve as a guide for the testing, but also for leading the subjects through the test process.

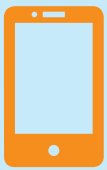
The smaller screen sizes of mobile devices require different interfaces to achieve the same quality experience provided on a desktop.

KEY COMPONENTS FOR NEW APPROACH TO MOBILE TESTING



Recording Software

Video software that records screen touches, pinches, scrolls and expands as well as subject facial expressions and audio feedback.



Mobile Device

This will typically be an iPad or an iPhone due to the constraints of the available recording software.



Website or Website Prototype

The testing approach is designed for websites, not downloadable apps.



Test Plan

A plan should include test objectives, subject screener questions, and three to five test queries.



Moderator

The test leader should be a professionally trained usability expert experienced in ethnographic interview techniques.

TESTING PROCESS CONSIDERATIONS

What you need to know before you test

To ensure accurate and meaningful research results, best practices guidelines for testing must be followed. You'll want to think about:

Test Subject Procurement & Screening. Even if the best testing methodology is followed, results will be inaccurate if the wrong people are tested. Creating user personas that segment customers by demographics, behavior patterns, and attitudes will help identify test subjects that are representative of your personas. A screening survey will not only help to identify people who routinely use their mobile devices to browse websites like yours, but will also be helpful when analyzing test results to report individual user segment trends.

Test Sessions. Testing in places where customers most frequently use your website on their mobile devices will provide the most accurate results. Since the new testing methodology doesn't require a video crew or use a phone holder, testing in real world locations like coffee shops or store aisles is easy. Test sessions are most effective when they are less than 45 minutes — anything longer can result in diminishing returns.

Client Observation. Depending on the testing location, "live" observation may be difficult, however video will allow all stakeholders to review the reactions, expressions, and user behavior of the subject after the test is complete.

Sharing Findings & Recommendations. Testing results should be compiled into a findings and recommendations report outlines both aggregate and individual feedback from test subjects. Expect a balanced report that highlights both positive and negative feedback. After all, no application or website is perfect and there is always room for improvement and continuous testing!

KEY TAKEAWAYS

As the number of website visitors accessing your site using a mobile device grows, creating an optimized mobile user experience is a priority. Usability testing is an important part of the mobile website design process. As you think about testing, remember:

- A mobile website isn't fully launched until mobile user testing has been completed, the findings have been analyzed, and the site has been fully optimized based on the testing results.
- For some organizations, testing may be an ongoing process as new mobile site features are introduced and updated.
- The new best practice approach for mobile usability testing is faster, less expensive, and more accurate than the traditional methodology and it allows for testing in real-world environments.

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