Does Your Website Meet the New Mobile Standards?

Introduction

Recently Google announced a major change to its algorithm, moving to favour mobile friendly sites in search results. Ultimately, for hoteliers, it means that your website will lose search rankings if it isn’t effectively optimised for mobile. Now is the time to make sure your hotel website raises its game in terms of its mobile friendliness. Without doubt, many of your customers may be finding you via search on mobile devices, but there are a host of other reasons your site should be mobile friendly.

Why should my site be mobile friendly?

Mobile internet usage surpassed desktop for the first time in 2015. This trend looks set to continue as smartphone penetration continues to rise, what with 72% of consumers in the UK owning a smartphone by May 2013 and over 50% of mobile consumers using their mobile device as their basic or only web access source also by that time. The majority of us are now constantly carrying tiny computers in our pockets, which we’re constantly using to search for things online.

Looking at averages across all Avvio hotel sites, mobile bookings continued to grow at a fast pace, with mobile bookings making up more than 52% of overall online bookings in 2014.

What’s more, smartphone conversion rate (the percent of site visits that become a purchase or qualified lead) is, without doubt, far superior when your website is mobile friendly. It’s time to check how your website is stepping up to the standard.

Prepare your website for ‘Mobilegeddon’

The continued shift towards mobile device usage has changed the fundamentals of internet browsing and best practices for website design. In April 2015, Google made updates to its search algorithm that negatively impacted the rankings of websites that were not deemed ‘mobile friendly’ (i.e. by having multi-device responsive design or its own dedicated mobile site). Google’s ‘Mobilegeddon’ move, as it’s been called,
received a generally negative response from SMEs and, in a study by Koozai, 42% of UK businesses surveyed saw a change in Search Engine ranks. Its stringency, however, relates to the fact that internet users are going increasingly mobile and are ruthless in their demands for a fluid, responsive, intuitive and streamlined browse and shopping experience. Mobile consumers are five times more likely to abandon a task if the site is not optimised. One thing is for sure, if your website isn’t mobile friendly, your business is likely to be suffering twofold – with poorer search rank positions and lower conversion rates.

**What makes a site mobile friendly?**

Quite simply, you can make that determination based on a clear and easy checklist:

- Your website layout and design must be optimised to best fit a variety of different small screen sizes (for smart phones and tablet devices, as well as desktops). This means that the site’s information architecture and navigation system should render differently so the user can easily find what they want and click where they want to go to without accidentally hitting an unintended button;
- It must be easy to find the call-to-action buttons: i.e. Book Now, Call Us, Sign up, etc. User engagement should be designed for touch screens with swiping, scrolling and tapping functionality in place;
- Imagery is key: images need to be present but compressed correctly to speed-up site loading. Mobile browsers are particularly intolerant of slow page loading times!
- Having a minimal number of shopping steps in place for site visitors to complete their booking transaction - keep it streamlined and free from distractions.

Ultimately, your mobile site should do all that your desktop version does - but via a design that makes everything very easy for customers who are on the move and viewing from smaller screen sizes.

**Go mobile friendly**

So the case is clear that having a mobile friendly website is vital for hoteliers today and there are some nifty tools available for you to run a health-check on your website’s level of mobile friendliness.

If unsure as to whether or not your website is optimised for mobile, Google offer a free **mobile friendly test tool**, which will tell whether or not your site is up to scratch. Also, you need to be aware of the design requirements of different screen resolutions, as one size won’t fit all. For example, the ‘book now’ button might be of adequate size on an iPhone 6, but may be far too small on a Samsung Galaxy Y or another phone with a smaller screen interface. To double check how your site renders (or displays) across a multiple of screen sizes, you can use **Screenfly** free-of-charge to view your site across all the most popular mobile screen resolutions, deciding how to make design updates so that it is optimised correctly across all potential customer touch points. You’d be surprised at just how much of a difference this can make.

While it’s natural to want to create the most visually appealing site possible, it’s important to be aware that your website’s standard of speed performance can also greatly affect the behaviour of your customers. In particular, uploading lots of high-res images to your site can add enormously to page loading times, leaving your site slow to navigate and frustrating for users – a big no-no in Google’s book. Customers want to see what you have to offer, but care less for high definition images in favour of adequately optimised images and fast page loading times.

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**A study from Kissmetric on site loading speeds** found that users were willing to wait 6-10 seconds for pages to load before abandoning a site. 79% of shoppers who are dissatisfied with website performance are less likely to rebook, while a one second delay in webpage loading time can result in a 7% reduction in conversions.

Hubspot also offer free use of their online **Website Grader**, which will allow you to check your site’s page loading times quickly and easily. Similarly, Google offer **PageSpeed Insights** to grade how quickly your site loads and highlights any factors that need addressing.

Google, who has included site speed as part of its search algorithm since 2010, is rumoured to be taking a more direct approach. By experimenting with “slow” warning tags (as shown in the next image) on its
search results page, the idea is to indicate slow website performance to those with little tolerance so it’s clear the website will not be to their liking.

It’s yet to come in, but if it does it will most definitely persuade all those who have been a little lax in their treatment of website imagery and document uploads to address the matter promptly. While this feature has not been officially announced, the message is clear: if your site speed isn’t sufficient Google will not do you any favours.

If your site is a little sluggish, be sure to ask your web partner to optimise your images. Alternatively, you can try to do so yourself with Kraken.io. Although using high-quality images is a great way to showcase your property, it can really drive up loading times so you need to find the right balance where you compress the images, but with minimal loss of picture quality.

While every website is different, here are a few best practices when optimising your mobile site:

- Never use pop-ups;
- Avoid using flash elements – many phones cannot handle this media type - use HTML5 instead;
- Include ‘tap-to-call’ numbers so people can easily telephone your hotel;
- Make the navigation and menus clear, with easy to click call-to-action buttons.

Despite having overtaken desktop in searches, mobile ad spend still lags behind computers. Even with its lower popularity, advertising is vital on mobile. Small screen sizes limit real estate above the fold (i.e. what is seen onsite without having to scroll) on search pages so use Google’s Adwords to get on top and use ad extensions to push mentions of your competitors down. This is a great opportunity to gain more direct bookings for less than the cost of using desktop pay-per-click (PPC).

The hotel marketing landscape is constantly evolving. Paths to market fall in and out of favour depending on consumer trends, expectations and preferences, and the technology advances that come to exist because of those. To stay ahead and ensure your online strategy is performing profitably it’s critical to keep abreast of the new channels, technologies and best practices.

To that end, we urge that you keep a close eye on how search engines regard mobile website performance to ensure you keep abreast of the potential penalties and lost opportunities around it. As the digital landscape and consumer behaviours evolve, it’s important to keep up or pay the consequence of being left behind.

If your website isn’t mobile ready yet, don’t despair, you’re not alone! Contact your web partner today and they’ll put a plan in place to optimise your site for mobile-effective performance.

Avvio (www.avvio.com)

Avvio is the premium booking platform for hotels, guaranteeing growth in direct business through our Convert 6.0 booking engine. Our advanced, cloud-based booking platform comprises of a responsive booking engine, Channel Manager, AB testing capability, a user-friendly CMS and integrations with all key third party technologies, including connectivity to Metasearch channels, property management systems and more. Coupled with website design, digital marketing and distribution consulting services, Avvio offers hoteliers an all-in-one direct-channel growth solution.

To learn how Avvio can help your hospitality business, contact Ken Morton on +44 (0)793 225 6551 or email sales@avvio.com.

www.instituteofhospitality.org
**Further resources**

Avvio – a world-class booking engine provider for hotels located in the UK, Ireland and North America.
www.avvio.com

Get Safe Online – free information for businesses about how to do business online, safely
www.getsafeonline.org/business

Google tools - tools to assist businesses in creating a mobile friendly website
- AdWords – www.google.co.uk/adwords
- PageSpeed Insights - https://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights

Kraken.io - provides image optimisation through image compression, resulting in greater speed and access to websites and apps along. Reduced need for storage space and no visual degradation of images.
https://kraken.io

Screenfly - view your site across all the most popular mobile screen resolutions
http://quirktools.com/screenfly

Website Grader - checks your site’s page loading times quickly and easily
https://website.grader.com

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**DISCLAIMER**

This brief is intended as a guide only. While the information it contains is believed to be correct, it is not a substitute for appropriate professional advice. The Institute of Hospitality can take no responsibility for action taken solely on the basis of this information.

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