

Expert Q+A

Mobile Website Testing



There's a lot to consider when you're thinking about user testing for your mobile website. What? When? How? Here are our answers to the questions we hear the most about user testing mobile websites.

Q. We have a successful computer-based website. How much should we worry about mobile?

- A.** It depends on your customer base. If you're sure that none of them ever use mobile devices, you probably don't have anything to worry about. But a majority of Americans now own smartphones, 40% have tablets, and about half of Americans age 18-29 say they primarily access the Internet on their smartphones. Ask yourself, if you're not active on mobile, are you leaving yourself vulnerable to competitors who are?

Most companies should at a minimum test their websites on mobile to make sure they work properly and meet user expectations. And you should seriously consider either designing a mobile site from the bottom up, or modifying your current one for smartphones and tablets. That involves rethinking not just how the site works, but what tasks users will want to do on mobile.

Q. Which mobile platforms should we test our website on?

- A.** The leading mobile web platforms in the U.S. are iPhone, Android phones, and iPad. So you should definitely test on at least those three platforms. We've also found a lot of incompatibilities on Android tablets, so we recommend testing on them as well. Amazon's Kindle Fire is the most popular Android tablet in the US.

Q. When should we test on mobile?

- A.** You should do user tests throughout the development process, so you can fix problems before they get too deeply embedded in your site. You can start testing as soon as you have anything to show to users, even if it's just conceptual sketches.

It's best to run frequent tests of a few testers each than to save up your tests and do them all at once at the end of development.

Q. What sorts of tests should we do on mobile?

- A.** When people hear “user testing,” they tend to assume that means only usability testing. That is, of course, one of the things you should do with user testing: Have users go through the main functions of your site, make sure they’re intuitive, and identify questions or hesitations users might have (this is especially important if you have a purchasing process on your site).

But it’s also important to test for emotional engagement. In other words, how do people feel about your site? Can they quickly accomplish what they want to do? Do they feel rewarded by using it? Mobile users are notoriously impatient and easily distracted. Even if your site is easy to use, people may not stick around unless they feel engaged.

You should also plan different tests for smartphones versus tablets. Smartphones are used most often for quick access to info while people are on the go. For example, in shopping sites, people frequently use smartphones to do product and pricing research, even though they may not be as likely to make the final purchase during their visit. You should test to make sure it’s easy for people to find product information, pictures, and price information on your site.

In contrast, tablets are much more likely to be used for long browsing sessions. Many e-commerce companies are finding that people are much more likely to make purchases when using a tablet, and some report that their most lucrative customers are likely to visit them through a tablet. So you should make sure that the tablet shopping experience is rich, engaging, and easy to use.

Q. I understand the importance of designing specifically for mobile, but I have trouble convincing the people I work with. How do I educate them about the specific needs of mobile?

- A.** We’ve published a whitepaper ([The Four Mobile Traps](#)) on the most common usability problems in mobile websites and apps. You’re welcome to download it and share it with others to educate them.

If you’re struggling with a specific design issue, user tests can be a terrific way to end the argument quickly. You’ve heard the old saying that “a picture is worth a thousand words”? In our experience, a user video is worth a thousand hours of debate. If your team is having an argument about a feature, you can use UserTesting to get quick video of some real users reacting to the proposed solutions. We find that those videos can be far more persuasive than a roomful of opinions.

Q. Should we focus on a mobile app or a mobile website?

A. No single answer is right for every company.

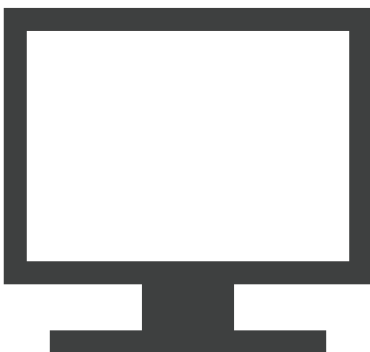
We're finding that many commerce companies choose to do both. The website is aimed at casual visitors, while the app is aimed at their most loyal customers (the people who are most likely to go to the trouble of downloading an app). So you use the website for prospecting and the app for deepening the relationship.

On the other hand, many major brands are using mobile apps as a marketing tool to help spread awareness and affinity. For example, Oreos distributed a popular game in order to freshen its brand image among young people. In this case, the target of the app is not current users, but new ones.

The most important thing is to understand what your mobile strategy is. How does your presence on smart-phones and tablets fit with all of the other ways you engage with customers, and what are you hoping to accomplish in mobile? We're long past the days when you could create something on mobile and expect users to respond to it just because it's trendy.

Q. We've done a responsive design for our website. Doesn't that take care of everything we need to do about mobile?

A. Probably not. Responsive design (in which your website reformats itself for small-screen devices) is valuable, but it's not a panacea for all mobile issues. The decisions you've made about how your website will scale may confuse users, so you need to test the responsive features on mobile users. And even if you've done the scaling well, you also need to ask what tasks your users most need to perform on mobile. Responsive designs usually focus on how a site is presented, rather than changing the actual functionality of the site. If the tasks change on mobile (and they almost always do), you may need a deeper redesign.



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