

Best practices for mobile search engine optimization.

By Giselle Tsurulnik | Aug. 13th, 2009

Webmasters and marketers need to take specific steps to prepare their sites for mobile Web users.

Serving a Web page to render fully on a device browser requires unique steps and mobile search engine optimization requires a budget, according to Peak Positions, a company that specializes in SEO for online and mobile.



Google Mobile



Yahoo Mobile



MSN Mobile

"The amount of searching tied to mobile browsers is increasing rapidly," said Jack Roberts, president/CEO of Peak Positions. "We recommend to all of our clients that they take specific steps to address the growing mobile market.

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"Mobile SEO provides an incredible opportunity to increase exposure and gain market share worldwide," he said.

The first step in mobile optimization is to identify target markets by region worldwide because mobile habits vary greatly by region.

For example, the usage and support for WAP and other mobile browsers varies greatly throughout the world.

Additionally, most searchers on a mobile browser use shorter keyword queries and a majority of mobile searches tend to include geo-modifiers in their keyword query.

Mobile optimization should provide the Web site consistent coverage on all mobile keyword queries whether a geo-modifier is used or not, Mr. Roberts said.

It is important that Web sites optimize for mobile browsers, which can include: WAP browsers, mobile phone emulators, WML, micro browsers, PDAs and etcetera.

Peak Positions recommends that marketers take the following first steps:

1. Make sure to include in text all contact information with name, address, zip code, geographic location, phone numbers, emails and points of contact.
2. Create unique site maps specifically for mobile browsers.
3. Create unique pages specifically for mobile devices.

The mobile pages should feature unique, condensed versions of content specifically designed with the mobile consumer and mobile browser in mind.

Mr. Roberts said marketers should address code compliance, create unique CSS files, expand on the CSS files and minimize page code.

Jason Taylor, vice president of mobile products at Usablenet, New York, said that the strategies to get sites up to shape is fairly straight-forward. He said that there are guidelines for mobile sites and Web pages that will ensure companies have the best results

in SEO.

"Mobile Web SEO follows the same technical rules as that of Web SEO and importance is placed on page structure, use of headers, keywords, titles, along with XHTML browser support," Mr. Taylor said.

"Mobile indexers like Google will not process information in JavaScript or other formats so simple pages will index better, as in the Web world," he said.

Mr. Taylor specified that W3C has useful recommendations. Here is W3C's list of best practices:

- Ensure that content provided by accessing a URI yields a thematically coherent experience when accessed from different devices.
- Exploit device capabilities to provide an enhanced user experience.
- Take reasonable steps to work around deficient implementations.
- Carry out testing on actual devices as well as emulators.
- Keep the URIs of site entry points short.
- Provide only minimal navigation at the top of the page.
- Take into account the trade-off between having too many links on a page and asking the user to follow too many links to reach what they are looking for.
- Provide consistent navigation mechanisms.
- Assign access keys to links in navigational menus and frequently accessed functionality.
- Clearly identify the target of each link.
- Note the target file's format unless you know the device supports it.
- Do not use image maps unless you know the device supports them effectively.
- Do not cause pop-ups or other windows to appear and do not change the current window without informing the user.
- Do not create periodically auto-refreshing pages, unless you have informed the user and provided a means of stopping it.
- Do not use markup to redirect pages automatically. Instead, configure the server to perform redirects by means of HTTP 3xx codes.
- Keep the number of externally linked resources to a minimum.
- Ensure that content is suitable for use in a mobile context.
- Use clear and simple language.
- Limit content to what the user has requested.
- Divide pages into usable but limited size portions.
- Ensure that the overall size of page is appropriate to the memory limitations of the device.
- Limit scrolling to one direction, unless secondary scrolling cannot be avoided.
- Ensure that material that is central to the meaning of the page precedes material that is not.
- Do not use graphics for spacing.
- Do not use images that cannot be rendered by the device. Avoid large or high resolution images except where critical information would otherwise be lost.
- Ensure that information conveyed with color is also available without color.
- Ensure that foreground and background color combinations provide sufficient contrast.
- When using background images make sure that content remains readable on the device.
- Provide a short but descriptive page title.
- Do not use frames.
- Use features of the markup language to indicate logical document structure.
- Do not use tables unless the device is known to support them.
- Do not use nested tables.
- Do not use tables for layout.
- Where possible, use an alternative to tabular presentation.
- Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element.
- Do not rely on embedded objects or script.
- Specify the size of images in markup, if they have an intrinsic size.
- Resize images at the server, if they have an intrinsic size.
- Do not use pixel measures and do not use absolute units in markup language attribute values and style sheet property values.
- Use style sheets to control layout and presentation, unless the device is known not to support them.
- Organize documents so that if necessary they may be read without style sheets.
- Keep style sheets small.
- Use terse, efficient markup.
- Send content in a format that is known to be supported by the device.
- Where possible, send content in a preferred format.
- Ensure that content is encoded using a character encoding that is known to be supported by the target device.

- Indicate in the response the character encoding being used.
 - Provide informative error messages and a means of navigating away from an error message back to useful information.
 - Do not rely on cookies being available.
 - Provide caching information in HTTP responses.
 - Do not rely on support of font related styling.
 - Keep the number of keystrokes to a minimum.
 - Avoid free text entry where possible.
 - Provide pre-selected default values where possible.
 - Specify a default text entry mode, language and/or input format, if the target device is known to support it.
 - Create a logical order through links, form controls and objects.
 - Label all form controls appropriately and explicitly associate labels with form controls.
 - Position labels so they lay out properly in relation to the form controls they refer to.
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An aside for consideration are the the distinct segments within the field of Search Engine Optimization. Clarification and separation are required in terms of paid search marketing, sponsored search advertising, pay per click, email marketing (spam), and the foundation of strategic internet marketing: Organic Search Engine Optimization (Organic SEO) are also referred to as Natural Search Engine Optimization (Natural SEO).

Key Organic Search Engine Optimization Facts:

- Keyword search is the 2nd most popular online activity, rapidly approaching the popularity of email retrieval.
 - 90% of all new website visitors are delivered by a major search engine and/or directory.
 - 98% of all keyword search activity results are powered by the big 4 search engines: Google, Yahoo, MSN and AOL.
 - Keyword search results on Google, Yahoo, MSN and AOL are determined by search engine spiders and/or robot crawlers.
 - Recent internet marketing studies confirm that keyword searchers prefer the organic results at a 6 to 1 ratio vs. pay-per-click sponsored search advertising listings.
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