

Small businesses should take advantage of Google's new "mobile-first" approach

In March Google announced it had started rolling out a phased approach to the long-awaited implementation of "mobile-first indexing". Since then Google's search algorithms have shifted to using the mobile version of a website's content.



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This is a massive opportunity for local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), says Mike Laws, managing director of mobile marketing consultancy, Imaginatrix.

Concise mobile-only web presence

"Small businesses that were never able to spend vast sums on a complex website replete with tens of pages and dozens of bells and whistles can now simply leapfrog the corporate competition with a concise mobile-only web presence," explains Laws. According to him, leapfrogging, in the marketing sense, refers to "going straight from zero to hero, without any of the usual evolutionary steps or stages in between."

South Africa in the 1990s going from no significant history of mobile phones straight to state-of-the-art digital cellphones, without ever having to bother with analogue cellular, was one of the world's best examples of leapfrogging in recent telecoms history.

Google's plan to change the way its search index operates based on the company's recognition that most of the world now searches the web using mobile devices, and not desktops, means SMEs can invest in a scaled-down, three or four page, mobile-friendly website and actually be ranked better by Google than a 100-year old corporation that spent millions on its web presence.

"How satisfying for the small business owner, who went out on a limb and maxed out his credit card to launch his dream, to do better in cyberspace than the grey suits who spent a ton of other people's money to come second," adds Laws.

Mobile-first task team

In December 2017, Google said it had begun to transition a handful of sites to mobile-first indexing. According to the company at the time: "Mobile-first indexing means Google will use the mobile version of a web page "for indexing and ranking, to better help our – primarily mobile – users find what they're looking for." In March 2018, the move to mobile gathered significant steam.

The search engine giant has previously explained that it will have one index for search results, not a mobile-first index that's separate from its main index. In other words, it will start to look to the mobile web pages to index the web, not the desktop version. "This is huge," says Laws. Both SMEs and large enterprises need to immediately appoint a mobile-first task team to get their online presence in order or risk being relegated to the bottom of the pile."

Businesses are advised to slash their written web content to the bare minimum, for example, so that it's easy to read on mobile devices like tablets and cellphones. This will mean mobile web surfers are not lost as they shut down and exit content-heavy pages that appear overwhelming.

"Google has moved faster than anyone expected to implement its mobile-friendly policies but this means plenty opportunities for SMEs and other nimble firms able to quickly get their mobile-first house in order," concluded Laws.

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