

Is your website UX ready?

On 21 April Google launched a new mobile-friendly algorithm that rewards websites that are fully optimised for mobile with higher rankings in search results.



This update aims to make Google even more useful to people by training its bots to search more like humans. Outlawing text that's too small to read, links that are too close together to tap, and software uncommon to mobiles like Flash, [among other factors](#), it all comes down to improving the overall user experience (UX).

"Businesses that optimise their sites for mobile with fast-to-load, properly-displayed architecture will capture more attention, clicks and sales," says Jana McMaster-Wepener, UX expert at digital marketing agency [Shapeshift](#). "But, it's not just about improving your design - you also need to strategically look at whether your architecture is intuitive to navigate and will make it easy for users to complete a task."

"Before you start converting your website to mobile, are you sure that your current site meets the UX needs of your customers?" she asks.

"Even big companies don't always understand exactly who their online users are, how they're consuming information and how content should be delivered accordingly," says McMaster-Wepener. "Before businesses spend their money on building responsive sites, dedicated mobile sites or mobile apps, they should start with the user and establish whether they answer their UX needs. Or, your investment in mobile isn't really going to improve sales."

Google's Mobile-Friendly Test

In a crawl of 300 JSE-listed company websites using Google's [Mobile-Friendly Test](#), Shapeshift has found that only 34% of sites passed the test. A number of websites from the almost 400 listed companies could not even be found by Google's search bots. Compared to [56% of Fortune 500](#) companies passing the same test, South Africa's figure is quite low, says McMaster-Wepener.

"Mobile-friendliness is about giving users the experience they really need," she says. "It's not just about converting your existing website into a mobile format."

Mobile sites need to be optimised for information on the go and may have less content, different navigation or other special UX requirements, she says. For example, depending on the customer's environment, they might be using a tablet or a smartphone with different sized screens, struggle with patchy bandwidth that needs quicker-loading sites, or be in a hurry

that requires key information to be easily accessible.

McMaster-Wepener says one approach to create online experiences that evolve with the real-time needs of today's customer is [Design Thinking](#). At its core, this includes:

1. **The discovery phase:** Defining the customer (who are the real users, what do they think, feel, see, hear, say and do), finding a test subject and doing research into their environment and what needs they have that should be met.
2. **Concept stage:** Taking the research into a strategy phase to brainstorm ideas and define how to build new solutions and content that can meet these needs, redefining the information architecture and building a prototype with interactive wireframes.
3. **Test, rinse, repeat and refine:** Testing the prototype with users and further refining it with their feedback, doing the design and testing it with users again, coding and deploying the site with close monitoring of usage metrics for future upgrades.

"Some businesses need more intensified responsive sites than others," says McMaster-Wepener. "In cases where the desktop website holds a lot of information and a responsive design isn't the definitive solution, you might need a redirect to a dedicated mobile site with a special menu or even design mobile apps, like the banks are doing."

According to The Mobile Africa 2015 study, on average, 40% of those surveyed in South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, use their mobile phones to browse the Internet. With South Africa leading the charge with 34% app downloads and 41% of instant messaging, use a mobile-friendly website will become increasingly vital, she says.

McMaster-Wepener says there are ways for businesses to start at any point of the process: "You don't have to spend a fortune immediately. Good strategic thinking could make your current UX much more effective and stretch your budget further."

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