

## HOW 'RESPONSIVE' IS YOUR WEBSITE?

Ryan Freeman, a member of SAF's Technology Vendor Partners program, is one of several guest columnists who will be periodically invited to contribute their tech expertise to *Floral Management* in Renato Soguelco's monthly *Plugged In* column.

> We've heard predictions about "The Year of Mobile" for at least five years, but with an explosion in tablet sales, along with the continued popularity of smartphones, 2012 was clearly the tipping point. Thanks to the "Four Screen Living Room" — TVs, tablets, laptops and phones glowing side-by-side — mobile searches on Google in the evening (after 6 p.m.) passed desktop search in mid-2012.

The question of how to engage customers through mobile devices is especially important for local retailers, as an estimated 40 to 53 percent of mobile searches have more of a local intent, compared to 24 percent of searches made via desktop, according to veteran digital marketing and ecommerce com-

developers made sure that the standard sites would at least render properly in the phone's browser, even if the text was too tiny to read and required pinching, zooming and horizontal scrolling.

The shortcomings of this approach led to the tactic of creating a separate mobile site. Large companies created parallel websites designed for mobile devices, often on a subdomain (ex: m.example.com). This approach required a significant investment in both IT and manpower to maintain content and functionality on both sites. Smaller businesses turned to third-party companies that deployed quick and easy mobile sites, usually on a separate domain (ex: www.examplemobile.com), an option that significantly increased monthly costs. Both solutions were problematic. They created duplicate content and a poor user experience and they hurt companies' search engine optimization (SEO) efforts. (More on that point later.)

### Tiny Steps Forward

To combat these shortcomings, developers started deploying mobile themes. The website would detect a mobile user and serve them a stripped down (often generic and poorly branded) version of the website, typically with limited content and functionality. While this was an improvement over operating multiple sites, it still led to a poor overall customer experience due to inconsistency between the main and mobile versions.

Clearly, there had to be a better approach. Developers needed to make mobile browsing — and shopping — quick, convenient, and satisfying, while at the same time being realistic about the resources available to business owners. Like most small-business owners, florists have trouble finding the time to maintain one website; operating multiple sites is out of the question and, ultimately, counterproductive. Good SEO is critical to online business success, and operating two or more similar sites will duplicate content, divide link equity and cannibalize social sharing. This problem is further complicated by range in screen sizes — 4- to 5-inch smart-

### GAUGE YOUR RESPONSE

To see if your site behaves "responsively" when viewed on mobile devices, use this free tool: <http://responsive.is/>.

phones, "phablets" (phones the size of small tablets), and 7- to 10-inch tablets.

### The Latest Evolution

Enter: Responsive Web design, a relatively new concept still, but a nonetheless superior approach to website creation than some of its predecessors (so superior, in fact, that AOL has decided to convert all of its content properties to responsive formats). A responsive website will adjust its layout, navigation and content arrangement based on the size of the user's screen. This means one consumer can browse a page on his smartphone and share the link with three friends viewing tablets, laptops and giant desktop screens. Each friend will see the same page and content, but formatted and ordered in a way that is optimized for her screen. In addition, it's better for SEO: All links go to one domain, with no duplicate content. It's Google's preferred method for serving mobile users. That streamlined benefit likewise applies to sharing via social media: one link suits all devices.

### Good Design Comes at a Cost

With responsive Web design, a designer must think in terms of designing for five or more different canvases while using mostly the same elements. It's a revolution in design philosophy, and it comes with a cost. Good responsive design — not yet available through cheap overseas labor — can take up to twice as much time in design, planning and coding, so expect to pay a premium, but with the understanding that it allows you to better serve customers. 🐦

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**ONE PAGE, THREE WAYS** Responsive web design means your website looks the same, whether viewed on an iPad, shown here, a mobile phone or a PC. (Test this one out on all three devices, [www.CountryLaneFlowers.com](http://www.CountryLaneFlowers.com).)

munity, Econsultancy.com. Ignoring mobile consumers is no longer an option. If you haven't done so already, it's time to think about making your online storefront mobile-friendly, via an important emerging trend known as "responsive Web design," which allows for optimal website viewing regardless of the user's device.

### Early Efforts, Plenty of Drawbacks

When mobile Internet was just for the techy fringe, it was acceptable to have a standard website that *might* display on a phone. After all, that small audience of early adopters expected poor results. As mobile use grew, forward-thinking Web