



Is your website mobile-friendly?
Google says it better be, or else.

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The icXadvisor is a publication of icXlegal™ – The New Standard in Law Firm Websites

1: the issue

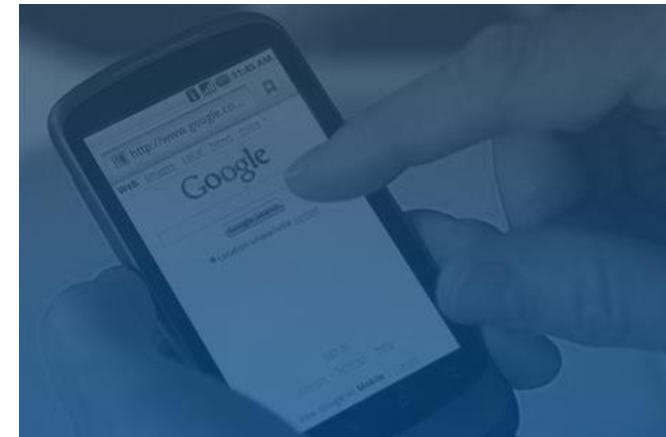
For more than a year, the rumors were circulating: Google was planning to lower the ranking of websites that are not user-friendly on mobile devices when using the search engine from a smartphone.

And now, those rumors are true.

At first, the penalties were experimental and temporary, ranging from short-term demotions to visual indicators next to the names of offending firms. These were warning shots.

But recently, the internet has started filling up with reports of more significant and lasting ranking loss. Even well-designed websites with highly relevant content are sliding down the smartphone slope because they aren't adhering to Google's new mobile policy.

Google's paradigm shift means that sites must now go beyond simply publishing content that is relevant to search terms. The sites themselves must also meet "qualitative" standards, with mobile-friendliness playing a critical part.



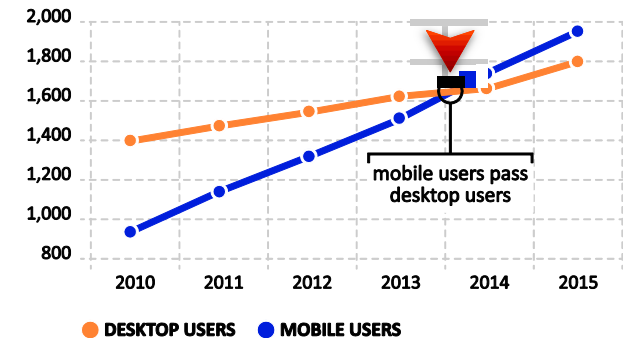
Google isn't just looking for content relevancy anymore. It is also passing judgment on how your website is put together... and whether it is worth clicking to.

2: why you should care

More than 4 out of 10 Google searchers are using a mobile device. Being invisible to them is a real concern that can affect your firm's bottom line. Even worse, your competitors may reap the rewards.

- Because some search keywords one would use to find your firm's website are also likely to produce those of other firms who do similar work, a competitor with a stronger mobile presence may leapfrog over you for a prospective client's attention.
- If you don't have a fully-compliant mobile site, it's a bit like playing musical chairs. Losing the game means someone else takes your spot. Think you can dance around the issue? Probably not... in 2015, mobile users will make up the majority of all traffic to your website.
- Mobile users have proven to be the most valuable prospects, converting into paying clients at a higher rate than desktop users. And because mobile users are far less likely to wade through multiple pages of Google results (due to smaller screens), mobile demotion becomes all the more damaging.
- Among AMLAW 200 firms, only 43% have a mobile site of any kind, and even among these, a number fail to meet all of the Google criteria to prevent demotion. If your firm is a boutique that competes against larger firms, you may be able to take advantage of this opportunity.

Number of Global Users (Millions)



With mobile traffic expected to surpass half all website visitors to your website in 2015, failure to remedy your site's mobile deficiencies may hit you where it hurts most: your bottom line.

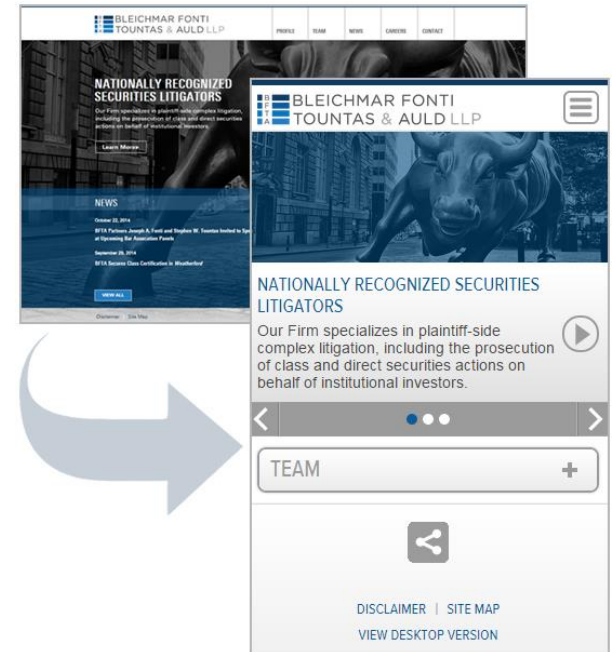
3: what you can do

Whether you are trying to head off a looming penalty, seeking to restore your website's proper ranking, or jump over a slow-moving competitor, the approach is the same.

You need a properly optimized mobile site with equivalents for each page and good load times. Here are the key components of Google's mobile policy:

- 1. Make it Mobile:** Create a mobile-optimized version of your site, and make sure that every page of your site is included. If you already have a mobile site, be sure to investigate the other criteria below.
- 2. No Misdirection:** Make sure all links to pages within your website lead directly to their mobile-friendly equivalents. Users should never be bounced to a mobile homepage or page with different content. If your mobile presence is executed as a separate site (not "responsive") use canonical tags to avoid Google's "duplicate content" penalties.
- 3. Quick and Painless:** Work to ensure that all mobile pages load quickly and load without any errors unique to the mobile version.

After implementation, when the site is next indexed by Google you are likely to return to your proper position in the search rankings. Be sure to ask your web vendor to accelerate the recovery by submitting an updated sitemap index through Google's webmaster tools console.



With today's technology, you can remedy the problem quickly and inexpensively... even if your site has already been penalized.

4: conclusion

Our reliance on Google to lead potential clients to our doorstep is an unavoidable reality. The firms who respond and adapt to changes in policy will gain a competitive advantage.

- Changes in Google’s algorithms and policies play a vital role in the search giant’s singular mission to maximize relevancy in an ever-expanding sea of web pages. But with every change Google makes, the competitive balance changes with new winners and losers.
- Luckily for the small to mid-sized law firm, Google’s new mobile policy and its associated penalties are relatively easy to remedy. Follow the guidance outlined above, and you will avert the loss of traffic that stands to hurt your firm’s online visibility.
- The ramifications of ignoring website mobile compliance are real and will adversely affect your law firm’s inbound traffic unless you take swift action.
- If you haven't gotten around to upgrading your site yet, you’re not alone. Most of the biggest and brightest firms have also failed to do so. The process to remedy your site will be much easier, faster and cheaper for you than for them.



Rarely does an event trigger the need to upgrade one’s website as much as Google’s new mobile policy has.

5: reading/resources



- **Google Guidelines for Smartphone-Optimized Websites**
<https://developers.google.com/webmasters/smartphone-sites/>
- **Search Engine Land: Key Updates on Mobile Issues**
<http://searchengineland.com/google-search-ranking-changes-to-auto-correct-your-mobile-seo-mistakes-162826>
<http://searchengineland.com/google-testing-smartphone-friendly-icon-search-results-204578>
- **Law Firm Mobile: 2014 BigLaw Report**
<http://lawfirmmobile.com/2014/01/lfm-biglaw-report-amlaw-firms-almost-half-way-to-believing-in-mobile/>
- **Huffington Post / Goldman Sachs: Why You Must Optimize for Mobile**
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/ian-mills/5-reasons-you-absolutely-_b_5122485.html
- **Vocus: 50 Astonishing Mobile Search Stats**
<http://www.vocus.com/blog/50-mobile-search-stats-and-why-you-should-care/>

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