



POV: GOOGLE GIVES MORE PREFERENCE
TO MOBILE-FRIENDLY WEBSITES

APRIL 2015



GOOGLE TO GIVE MORE PREFERENCE TO MOBILE-FRIENDLY WEBSITES IN SEARCH RESULTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recently, **Google announced** plans to give mobile-friendly websites more preference in search engine results rankings. The algorithm change, going into effect April 21, is part of Google's ongoing effort to improve the quality of search results for mobile users. Google confirmed this change's significance in its **announcement**: "This change will affect mobile searches in all languages worldwide and will have a significant impact in our search results."

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GET MOBILE-FRIENDLY FAST

Google cites that smartphone users are a significant and fast-growing segment of Internet users. This algorithm change is consistent with Google's recent history of focusing more and more on the mobile search experience, pushing websites to get mobile-friendly fast. Pharmaceutical marketers should make note of this change, specifically, since we know:

- + 52% of smartphone owners seek health information on their phones, according to Pew Research Center. Pharma websites that don't appear in Google mobile search results run the risk of virtual invisibility to consumer and HCP searchers.
- + Pharma website content is not updated frequently due to legal, medical and regulatory review cycles. This may make it even more critical for pharma websites to get mobile-friendly fast, because the less frequently a page is updated, the less frequently Google will crawl it. If a site or page sits static for a long period of time and remains un-friendly to mobile users, it will surely get buried in Google's search results pages.



- + Pharma website updates often don't happen quickly due to LMR review cycles, so marketers must plan far in advance to prepare for changes like this.

This Google update is important for pharma marketers to note, as it provides good reason to prioritize builds, re-builds and LMR reviews of mobile and responsive websites.

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WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PHARMACEUTICAL WEBSITES

Are all of your live or in-process websites currently mobile-friendly? If not, they likely won't be by April 21. But don't panic. Three points to understand include:

- + The new mobile-friendly ranking factor is only for the mobile search algorithm, meaning it will **only impact searches made via mobile device**.
- + The update will run in **real time**, meaning **you won't miss any update windows** if you aren't mobile-friendly by April 21.
- + **This update looks at individual pages** instead of websites as a whole. That's good news for pharmaceutical brands already running successful landing pages (for example, for CRM programs) or smaller websites such as campaigns or brand approvals.

YOUR APPROACH WILL DEPEND ON YOUR SITUATION

How should pharma marketers react to this change? Your course-of-action depends on your unique situation, but overall, we recommend getting as mobile-friendly as you can as quickly as you can. Below, we've broken down how this update will impact those with existing mobile site structure and those who have not yet developed any mobile-friendly structure. You may or may not see organic efforts slip while you work toward making your website 100% mobile-friendly.

IF YOU HAVE SITES WITH AN EXISTING MOBILE STRUCTURE

For websites with existing mobile structure, you most likely either have mobile-specific pages (m.example or example.com/mobile), or you've adopted **responsive web design**.



If you've implemented RWD correctly — meaning your site is using break points to break down content for specific screen sizes and devices without serving a secondary mobile page — then you are in good shape, and nothing else needs to be done.

If your site has a mobile-specific structure, it's time to evaluate how effective it is from both a technical and UX perspective. Websites with a mobile-specific structure serve secondary mobile pages. These pages operate independently of the desktop versions, and complex technical configuration helps ensure it all functions correctly for users and search crawlers alike. You may consider two steps to prepare for Google's upcoming change:

- + Perform a technical audit to ensure all pages are running smoothly for both users and search engines.
- + Similarly, a UX audit may also be beneficial. This audit will uncover mobile usability errors and content that's tough to consume on smaller devices.

IF YOUR SITES NEED MOBILE STRUCTURE

If you have the budget to build it, a responsive website is the best way to create an online experience that will expand with the needs and desires of your consumers, no matter which platform they use to visit your site. If you aren't already doing so or don't have the resources available, several other options exist:

For Large Websites, Consider Going Mobile

Building a mobile website isn't a bad choice for large websites, such as a content-rich brand.com. This option will be cost-effective and efficient in the short run compared to jumping straight into a complete responsive rebuild with a long LMR process. The drawback is that this option is not a long-term solution. Essentially, you'd be building an additional website; all future updates and content changes would apply to two versions (desktop and mobile). When considering cost, long-term maintenance and approvals on mirrored sites can become time-consuming and expensive.

For Smaller Websites, Rebuild to Be Responsive

If you have a smaller website, rebuilding your website to be responsive is the most efficient option. Avoiding a secondary website is less expensive, takes less to set up and maintain technically, and can be done relatively quickly. And for sites already in need of a creative refresh, going responsive is a no-brainer. If this approach still presents too steep of a price tag,



consider retrofitting only certain, high-performing sections of your site with responsive web design.

For Large Sites With High-Performing Landing Pages, Consider a Hybrid Approach

Blending a retrofit with a mobile rebuild is a good choice for larger sites with high-performing landing pages. By retrofitting high-value landing pages in RWD, you will maintain momentum and important ROI while you work to either build an entirely new mobile or responsive site, or retrofit the rest of the site to be mobile-friendly.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT AND CONCLUSION

Picture a patient, sitting in his car in his doctor's office parking lot after receiving a distressing diagnosis. Before turning the key to his car, he reaches for his smartphone and searches Google for more information on his now-diagnosed condition. If your disease awareness and educational websites are not optimized for mobile per this new Google algorithm change, you will have lost a critical opportunity to connect. Considering how healthcare professionals use mobile devices to search Google for treatment information, as well, mobile optimization is a must-have.

As Google drives the entire Web to be more and more mobile-friendly, pharma marketers must pay attention to the signals or run the risk of being buried forever in Google's results.

As always, if you have questions, reach out to a professional to help guide your decisions. Consulting with your partners at Intouch Solutions will help you employ the strategy best suited for your brand's objectives.

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