Building Mobile Friendly Websites

Updating your site, or creating a new website opens up a lot of options. An important consideration is to be mobile compliant. This leaves you with the choice: to use a responsive web design, or should you include a separate website for mobile visitors.

Responsive vs Mobile Version

An unbiased look at choosing to use either a mobile version sub-site, or a responsive design.

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Consideration	Responsive	Mobile Version Sub-Site
Mobile compliance	Responsive design, if coded correctly, will check as mobile compliant.	Mobile version will also be fully mobile complaint and responsive.
Responsiveness	Top level site will be fully responsive for desktop, tablet and smart phones.	Mobile version website will be fully responsive for desktop, tablet and smart phones.
SEO	Good for mobile ranking. Passes the **Google Mobile-Friendly Test.** The top level homepage will be mobile for better SEO.	Good for mobile ranking. Passes the **Google Mobile-Friendly Test.** Because the mobile site includes extra pages and content, this can be beneficial for SEO if you have unique or different page copy on the mobile site.
Ease of use	Responsive design is more restricting and difficult to work with. The design and load speed is more easily compromised by adding 3rd party	The major drawback with a separate mobile version is that you'll need to maintain two websites. This can make for extra work when

	applications and widgets, too many Google Fonts or images that are too large and/or do not include responsive widths. In most cases the top level website will include double the normal site code. Big corporations can keep people on staff to create high-end user applications that flex for smart phones. For the more casual webmaster keeping the responsive site properly responding can be a time consuming task.	updating. Redirection of some kind, user interactive, or automatic using a PHP script can be added. Because the mobile site is separate, the code is not lumped into a single site so how the css and html work is usually more easily understood.
Design	This type of design should be simple and include less design elements. As the site becomes more complicated it can be difficult to change any design elements. Because a responsive design must respond to many different devices, you will have to make many compromises if you plan to do a lot of layout changes.	Allows for total creative freedom on the full website. The sub-site should be treated as a responsive design.
User experience	It is more difficult to integrate elements and apps specifically for mobile, or specifically for desktop into a responsive design thus limiting what the website can offer. Generally will be slower and less mobile friendly due to design considerations built-in for desktop display.	The mobile site is specifically designed for smart phones and will display better and load more quickly.
Mobile and desktop	Will need to be a more basic design with a limited number of images and applications. All web pages must always work on all devices.	Because the site has one area specifically for desktop, and one for mobile, this allows for more creative freedom and tailoring of your website for different devices.
Speed	Will be a slower website due to including the css Media Queries code for responding. Additionally, there are usually many more webpage elements and above-the-fold content included to allow mobile flexibility. Speed matters for SEO. See **Google PageSpeed Insights.**	The mobile site, if coded correctly will be "stripped" of many elements that slow down mobile devices. With PHP auto-redirection smart phones are automatically re-directed and never load the full website. Speed matters for SEO. See **Google PageSpeed Insights.**

Updating an older site	If you are planning to update your current website to responsive, you will want to add some css Media Queries. In most cases a site can pass the Google SEO tests if fonts and linked images are made larger, elements are hidden for mobile and the layout is made to flex. This however requires learning about the Media Queries and quite a lot of design changes and testing.	If a site is very large, it may be better to add a mobile sub-site. This allows you to ease into mobile in a more seamless way. As you update the mobile site you can more easily see how the responsive design works. At any time, once you have the mobile site setup how you like, you can always make this site your top level website, replacing your older site with a responsive design.
Domain	Uses the top level domain.	Uses the top level domain but inside a "mobile" folder. The mobile site does not need its own domain name. Being inside a folder does not have any adverse affect on SEO.
Future considerations	If you plan no major design or layout changes this type of website should be compliant for many years.	As a website is updated over many months and years, typically the site will include many more pages and more design elements on both the full site and sub-site. At any time the responsive mobile sub-site can be moved into the top level hosting folder and become the main website.
Conclusion	While many think that responsive is the best answer, there are a number of drawbacks, most specifically the difficulty of updating and adding new elements. If you like the design you purchase, and do not plan to change the site layout then this is the best choice. This also is a good choice for experienced webmasters and new users that want to learn about this style of design.	If you like to add new elements to your website and change the design layout, a full website with a mobile sub-site version allows for much more freedom of design. You will be maintaining extra web pages with this option.