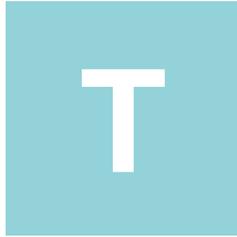


# Is the importance of mobile exaggerated?

Not in the slightest. More than 50 per cent of the world's population uses mobile devices and some publishers already see 50-75 per cent of their traffic coming from mobile. Get on board, or get crushed.





**POLL:** Do you use responsive design?  
**WATCH:** BuzzFeed's take on social driving mobile  
**SEE:** Global mobile use in one graphic

his is the “Year of Mobile”.

Honestly.

Forget all those other years that were declared “Year of Mobile” dating back to 2005 when former Yahoo mobile strategist Russell Beattie apparently coined the phrase.

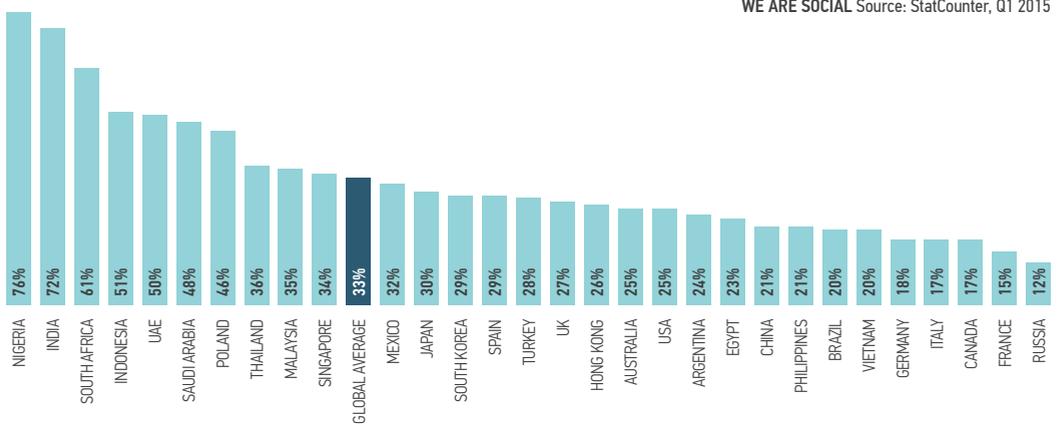
Well, to be fair, there was a gap in the use of the moniker in 2006-07 — CNET called 2006 the “Year of Mobile Malware” and CNN called 2007 the “Year of Mobile TV”. But since 2007, every year has been declared the “Year of Mobile” by an ever-increasing number of prognosticators.

But this year is really it. Hey, if Papua New Guinea will get close to 100 per cent of all its web traffic from mobile, wouldn't you say the “Year of Mobile” had finally arrived?



## MOBILE'S SHARE OF WEB TRAFFIC

percentage of total web pages served to mobile phones



Beyond Oceania, consider these statistics from the Digital, Social and Mobile in 2015 Report by global social media agency We Are Social:

- In September 2014, the number of unique mobile users passed 3.6 billion, or 50 per cent of the world's population
- The number of mobile devices surpassed the world population in December 2014
- And in 2015, for the first time more than one-quarter of the global population will use smartphones
- By 2018, more than one-third of consumers worldwide, or 2.56 billion people, will use smartphones, according to eMarketer. That figure represents more than half of all mobile phone users
- Nine out of ten 18-24 year olds and 85 per cent of 25-34 year olds worldwide visit social networking sites and apps on their smartphone. And in the US, those two age

groups spend an average of five hours and 12 minutes A DAY on their smartphones, according to BuzzFeed

- Web traffic is dominated by mobile around the world with an average of 38 per cent of all web pages served worldwide coming from mobile
- By contrast, laptops and desktops saw a 13 per cent decline in share of web traffic
- Countries with high mobile web access: Nigeria (79 per cent), India (72 per cent), South Africa (61 per cent), and Indonesia (59 per cent)
- Mobile commerce is increasingly being embraced worldwide with East Asia and China dominating (37 per cent of South Korean and 27 per cent of Chinese have made a mobile purchase in the last 30 days)

Given those numbers, perhaps we should just reconcile ourselves to the fact that, until the next big medium comes along, every year going forward will be the "Year of Mobile".

With smartphones and data plan prices continuing to drop precipitously, affordable web access will increasingly be within the reach of hundreds of millions more people every year.

International Data Corporation (IDC) cited the "increasingly cutthroat nature of pricing" of smartphones in a recent mobile report. "The impact of upstart Chinese players in the global market will be reflected in a race to the bottom when it comes to price," said Melissa Chau, senior research manager with IDC's Worldwide Quarterly Mobile Phone Tracker. "The biggest question now is how much lower can prices go?"

With the increasing ubiquity of mobile devices, especially smartphones, it is no surprise

*"Mobile is the Wild West; it's where everyone's scale is coming from."*

**Shane Smith, founder and CEO of Vice,**  
speaking to Bloomberg

that magazine media are seeing a fast-growing percentage of traffic coming from mobile.

### Mobile is driving force of growth

At media sites like BuzzFeed, *Sports Illustrated*, *People*, and *All Recipes*, between 50 and 75 per cent of traffic comes from mobile devices. And, despite the smaller screens, mobile is also now the primary platform where digital videos are consumed.

In late 2014, MPA - the Association of Magazine Media in the US - delivered a brand audience report with strikingly stark numbers: desktop and laptop traffic dropped precipitously and mobile traffic grew meteorically. Mobile is clearly the driving force of audience growth, especially for those magazine sites that are optimised for social sharing and search discovery.

Here are some examples from the 2014 MPA Magazine Media 360° Brand Audience Report:

- *People* magazine gets twice the number of mobile unique visitors (26.1 million) as it gets from desktop
- *Outside* magazine saw a 70 per cent increase in mobile traffic. The rise was due to four factors: “Responsive design, social media, SEO and original content,” site director Todd Hodges told *MinOnline*. Responsive design also makes for happier and more repeat mobile users, Hodges said. Replacing pagination and clicking with scrolling also helped, he said. Social traffic increased 1,515 per cent in 18 months.
- *Good Housekeeping* experienced a year-on-year increase in mobile traffic of 231 per cent, almost four times the growth of desktop/laptop.
- *All Recipes* has a mobile audience of nearly 18 million, almost triple its print and digital audience
- *Taste of Home* experienced 104 per cent mobile growth, five times the growth of its desktop/laptop audience. The magazine attributed it to responsive design: “The changes helped drive improvements in bounce rates, repeat rates and page views per visit in addition to record traffic KPIs,” Jessica Tomash, director of digital product management, told *MinOnline*.

*Sports Illustrated*, which didn’t even have a responsive design mobile site as recently as

## What are the seven mass media?

1. Print (books, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, etc.) from the late 15th century
2. Recordings (gramophone records, magnetic tapes, cassettes, cartridges, CDs, DVDs) from the late 19th century
3. Cinema from about 1900
4. Radio from about 1910
5. Television from about 1925
6. Internet from about 1990
7. Mobile phones from about 2000

Courtesy of Wikipedia

mid-2014, redesigned its website to accommodate all screens at once. The primary organising tools are tile-like templates that enable editors to move pieces around easily and enable the site to present itself well on screens of all sizes by stacking the tiles in varying number of columns depending on the width of the screen.

“I think the holy grail for every media company right now is just mobile,” Shane Smith, founder and CEO of Vice, told *Bloomberg*. “Mobile is the Wild West; it’s where everyone’s scale is coming from, but it is very difficult to monetise right now, very difficult to get our heads around.

**Here’s the conundrum:** Media companies can now reach more people than ever before with more, richer content and reach them at literally every hour of the day in almost every possible situation inside or outside of the home. However – and this is a BIG “however” – both the content model and the business model are unlike any that publishers have ever had to solve before.

“This is the first time in our lives any marketer can engage the consumer all the time,” Simon Khalaf, president/CEO of mobile analytics firm Flurry, told *Mobile Marketer*. “Marketers have not seen a medium to date so connected to the body of the consumer like mobile.”

“If you think of mobile not as a small screen

but as the seventh form of mass media, then the differences between it and the PC are like the differences between radio and print,” Luke Wroblewski, CEO of app developer Input Factory, told *Digiday*. “Mobile is the biggest, highest potential form of mass media out there. Everyone’s just treating it like a smaller version of the thing that came before it.” And that’s a big mistake.

### **Mobile is all about a complete mind shift**

Consumers have completely different expectations of mobile content than they do of desktop or print content. They have different needs when they’re using mobile and the platform has different limitations and advantages. Advertisers do not have the cookies that desktops and laptops offer to track and target consumers, and the limited screen space makes banners almost moot and makes transactions difficult.

Simply put, “mobile” is not about a platform or device, it’s about a completely different set of audience expectations and needs in a completely different environment, and requires a completely different set of editorial, advertising, and ecommerce tools and mindsets.

The mobile experience is as different from existing digital strategies as the internet experience was different from print.

“We are in the midst of a mobile mind shift. This is not just about ‘mobile first’ or apps. This is a complete change in the psychology of consumers,” wrote Forrester Research senior vice

president Josh Bernoff on his Forrester blog. “The [mobile mind shift is] the expectation that any desired information or service is available, on any appropriate device, in context, at your moment of need.

“In a change in behaviour that can only be called Pavlovian, people with smart mobile devices request information and receive service,” wrote Bernoff. “What’s the weather? That’s the weather. Where’s the nearest Gelato shop? There it is. Does this laptop have good ratings? Sure it does. What are my friends up to on Facebook? Each request cements the idea that smartphone has everything you need. As a result, consumers start by requesting, then expecting, and then demanding that companies give them instant service. That is the mobile mind shift.”

Too many publishers are ignoring that mobile mind shift and simply porting their desktop sites onto mobile. “Those experiences tend to be unusable, confusing and lacking a real strategy,” Dan Maccarone, CEO of Charming Robot, told *Digiday*. “Companies that take that approach are chasing a trend that they aren’t fully wrapping their heads around.”

They are not wrapping their heads around the fact that it’s not about a device or the size of its screen. It’s about the user and his mobility, expectations, time limits, and in-the-moment needs. Mobile consumers are on the go, and that presents a use-case publishers have not had to face ever before.

“Users want access to online information and services in whatever manner is most convenient for them at a particular moment, while also expecting those services to integrate seamlessly across all of their devices,” according to online visibility company Universal Business Listing vice president Damian Rollison writing in *Street Fight Mag*.

“We’re trying a lot of experiments, going first to mobile screen then online then TV, but it’s hard,” Smith said. “All the questions that came up with online three or four years ago – that’s all happening [with mobile] right now. Everyone’s looking at it. Google is looking at it, Facebook. It’s everyone’s number one concern.”

One of the biggest challenges of mobile is that it is harder than ever before to make money from this medium compared to monetising

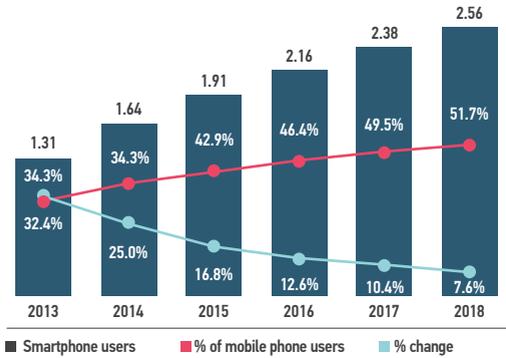
*“Users want access to online information and services in whatever manner is most convenient for them at a particular moment,”*

**Damian Rollison, vice president**

Online visibility company Universal Business Listing, writing in *Street Fight Mag*

### Smartphone Users and Penetration Worldwide, 2013-2018

billions, % of mobile phone users and % change



Note: individuals of any age who own at least one smartphone and use the smartphone(s) at least once per month  
 source: eMarketer, Dec 2014

print, television, radio, desktops, or laptops. We dedicated an entire section of this book on Mobile Advertising (See Page X).

The market is so huge, the disruption so deep, the challenges so perplexing, the opportunities so unique, and the pace so fast that savvy media executives feel there is no time to waste.

“We still don’t spend enough time talking about mobile,” Jeff Moriarty, chief digital and product officer of UK-based Johnston Press, told *Digiday*. “Someone said to me, if you’re in a meeting and mobile isn’t mentioned in the first ten minutes, leave. It’s that important. But however hard we try, we’re still defaulting to the desktop mindset.”

**Bottom line:** Magazine media content creators need to change the way we create content, the way we present it, and the way we organise and schedule ourselves to do all of that.

Journalists should “pay attention to the smartphone flow; it might help save their jobs – maybe even jolt their metastasised culture into change,” said Lewis DVorkin, chief product officer of Forbes Media, in his blog.

#### Traditional publishers slow to adapt

Magazine media must do exactly that, and quickly.

“This has got to be fixed because digital natives like BuzzFeed, Circa, Mic, Upworthy, Vice, Vocative and Vox are competing for – and in many cases winning over – the youthful readers coveted by publishers and advertisers,”

wrote media consultant Alan D. Mutter for *Editor & Publisher* in late 2014.

Mutter said traditional publishers are “dangerously slow to adapt [and] slow to recognise that mobile publishing is as different from print-to-web publishing as television is from cave drawings.”

So, what is the new “mobile-focused” mindset and organisational structure for content creation, presentation, and distribution?

For starters, publishers must optimise content for both constrained screen sizes and constrained time limits.

Mobile screen sizes require designs that involve the now-almost-natural scrolling and swiping associated with mobile devices instead of the clicking associated with desktops and laptops. The screen sizes also lend themselves to shorter stories.

And while people spend nearly 3 hours a day (or 19 per cent of waking hours) on their mobile devices, they do so in fits and starts.

#### The mobile ecosystem has new rules

The average mobile user opens his device 221 times a day, according to loyalty marketing company Tegmark’s 2014 survey. Mobile users constantly capitalise on small moments of downtime. That works out, on average, to less than 10 seconds per visit. So users are generally looking for short, quick, concise, easily-digested information.

“In other words, mobile publishing is the antithesis of traditional journalism, which favours deliberation and depth over the speed and sass characterising the top mobile sites,” wrote Mutter.

In a nutshell, according to Mutter and others, here are the new editorial guidelines required by the mobile ecosystem:

- **Reporting & publishing:** Mobile deadlines must be constant. Journalists must publish regularly and, where appropriate, as fast and accurately as possible. Even with feature content, mobile alerts can serve as the gateway to more in-depth reading later and/or elsewhere.
- **Presentation:** The limited real estate demands stories be as concise as possible with the most important information conveyed immediately. Easy to read charts, annotated maps, and short, punchy videos play well on

## How to tell if Google thinks your site is mobile-friendly

You and your editors probably haven't noticed it, but your developers and webmasters certainly have.

Would you want to discover that Google thinks your website is not mobile-friendly on the morning your search results drop to page 20, or would you like to know in advance and be able to avoid that fate?

Duh!

In February 2015, Google followed through on its threat to include mobile-friendliness as a criteria in its search engine algorithm. Beginning 21 April, 2015, Google's mobile ranking factors will not only label sites as mobile-friendly, but will also rank your site more highly if it is mobile-friendly. Google admitted this algorithmic change will have a "significant impact" in mobile search results, and will impact all languages worldwide.

Publishers must find out immediately if their sites pass Google's test. And, if not, they must take action immediately to correct the situation. Responsive design is one obvious step to take, but that won't be enough. According to Google, here are some other criteria:

- Avoid software that is not common on mobile devices, like Flash
- Use text that is readable without zooming
- Size content to the screen so users don't have to scroll horizontally or zoom
- Place links far enough apart so that the correct one can be easily tapped
- Make buttons big enough for the human finger to hit just one

How can you find out in advance if Google thinks your pages are mobile-friendly?

There are actually a surprising number of options for you.

The simplest is to do a Google search on any mobile phone and see if the "Mobile Friendly" tag shows up on your returns. If it does, congratulations! Go have a beer!

If you don't get that tag, don't panic. Move to step two.

Google offers an online tool to test your website. It's at:

### **google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly**

It is quick and simple and straight-forward. You'll get one of two messages:

- A warm green message saying: "Awesome! This page is mobile-friendly!" (it only applies to the page you sent, not your entire site), or
- A stark, dark red warning: "Not mobile friendly" followed by a list of what's wrong (e.g., Text too small to read; Links too close together; Mobile viewport not set; Content wider than screen, etc.).

The tool also gives you a rendering of how that page appears on a mobile device. And then it tells you how to "Make This Page Mobile-Friendly".

And don't think that just because you use responsive design that you'll automatically pass the test. It may still not be usable in Google's eyes. The links might be too close together making them difficult to tap accurately. Your videos might be embedded with Flash that doesn't work on mobile.

Here are some other tools you can use to test your site's mobile readiness:

### **Free and analytical:**

- **MobiReady:** This tool gives you a score (from 1 to 5) and terrifically clear analysis of your page's mobile-friendliness ([ready.mobi/launch.jsp](http://ready.mobi/launch.jsp))
- **W3C mobileOK Checker:** This tool checks usability, efficiency, and interoperability ([validator.w3.org/mobile/](http://validator.w3.org/mobile/))

### **Free and purely for appearance**

- **The Responsinator:** This tool gives you a quick look at how your site will render on iPhone, iPad, Android, and Kindle. ([responsinator.com](http://responsinator.com))

### **Page speed**

- **Google's page speed tool:** Google's own tool will tell you how fast your pages load. ([developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/](http://developers.google.com/speed/pagespeed/insights/))

"The proliferation of content consumption via mobile devices is forcing the industry to rethink how we package content."

the mobile space.

- **Analysis:** Mobile content needn't be just the facts. Analytical snippets can help readers connect the dots in complex stories, but, again, they must be short.
- **Voice:** Add as much sizzle to the steak as possible without degenerating into the snarky, cynical tone of much of the web. A neutral, boring tone pales next to its competition. Especially in headlines. For example, *The New York Times* published a story online headlined: "How Companies Learn Your Secrets". When Forbes wrote about the piece and the controversial topic (retail chains tracking purchases and making actionable conclusions), they changed the headline to "How Target Figured Out a Teen Girl Was Pregnant Before Her Father Did". No surprise, Forbes ultimately got 2.5 million views, massively more than the NYT.
- **Topics:** Write about what everyone's talking about, and reap social media benefits.
- **Sharing:** Mobile traffic, and mobile-referred traffic, is heavily social. Users want to share, vote, upload, comment, review, etc. Smart mobile publishers create huge social sharing buttons and display them prominently (above the stories because many users share before they read the piece, if they ever do). *The Los Angeles Times* even writes 1-3 suggested tweets and puts them at the top of every story!

Reuters started its mobile-focused transformation with new story length limits: In late 2014, the global news operation instituted the following mandates:

- 400 words for non-exclusive spot news stories
- 800 words for insights, exclusives and major update/wrap-ups
- 2,000 words for special reports

Beyond story length, here are eleven simple tips for creating and presenting mobile content, courtesy of mobile marketing company Blue Compass Interactive and others:

1. Make titles short. The BBC uses 5-6 words per title
2. Front-load your content. The first paragraph of text should be stuffed with the

*“Mobile publishing is the antithesis of traditional journalism, which favours deliberation and depth over the speed and sass characterising the top mobile sites.”*

**Alan Mutter, media consultant**  
Writing in Editor & Publisher

most important content (think inverted pyramid)

3. Break up content into short, simple paragraphs
4. Incorporate bullet points
5. Bold and italicise important words and phrases
6. Avoid complex sentence structure
7. Use descriptive sub-headings
8. Have a next-step or call to action in each article. (i.e., "Check out this book", "Attend this programme", etc.)
9. Always link to things you talk about (i.e., link to the catalogue when mentioning books, etc.)
10. Use provocative images: Content with images are shared and retweeted far more frequently than those without photo
11. At the end of stories, show readers your brand's most popular stories, not related stories. A variety of studies have shown that readers will click more often on the content that most people are reading and sharing than on related stories.

### The value of mobile is time saved

Many of the best mobile practices come down to wasting no words. American author Mark Twain's 1868 advice about tight writing is perfectly applicable to writing for mobile devices today:

“To condense the diffused light of a page of thought into the luminous flash of a single sentence, is worthy to rank as a prize composition just by itself. Anybody can have ideas – the difficulty is to express them without squandering a quire of paper on an idea that ought to be reduced to one glittering paragraph.”

From the mobile user’s point of view, the value of mobile content is in time saved versus time spent, according to Cory Bergman, co-founder/GM of NBC-owned Breaking News.

“Part of the problem is the industry’s fixation on ‘time spent’ as an engagement metric,” Bergman wrote on his *Mobile Media Memo* blog. “I remember a Poynter study a couple years ago that discovered the average ‘bail out’ point on a tablet is 78.3 seconds of reading. Their recommendation? Write the story in such a way that gets users to keep reading.

The obvious solution: write a shorter story. It’s often better to maximise ‘time saved’ rather than time spent.”

Bergman suggested mobile users would be much happier, for example, getting the nugget of a two-minute video in a 24-second clip instead – getting 80 per cent of the value in 20 per cent of the time. “For most mobile users, that’s more delightful than watching the full two minutes,” Bergman wrote. “The more delighted the users, the more frequently they’ll return, which all adds up to a lot of time spent per user at the end of the month.” That monthly engagement over multiple stories is far superior to having a reader finish one longer story.

However, the real magic of mobile is not in brevity or in instant gratification, according to Bergman.

## Native apps vs. mobile web: It’s not an either/or choice

Last autumn, a study by mobile analytics company Flurry appeared to have put the final stake through the heart of the mobile web.

Almost 90 per cent of US mobile consumers’ time was being spent on apps, according to the Flurry study. “The data tell a clear story,” Flurry CEO Simon Khalaf told the World Association of Newspapers (WAN-Ifra). “Apps, which were considered a mere fad a few years ago, are completely dominating mobile, and the browser has become a single application swimming in a sea of apps.”

Publishers joined the victory parade. “People who download our app visit much more frequently and consume 10 times more articles than people coming from the mobile Web,” Huffington Post CEO Jimmy Mayman told *Digiday*.

But somebody forgot to check the corpse for a pulse.

Two other studies delivered

the equivalent of a double defibrillator jolt to the mobile web. The January 2015 Harris study from the Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) sparked the mobile web back to life with results showing mobile users highly valued and regularly utilised the mobile web. The study results flew in the face of the previously “documented” statistical chasm in time spent (88 per cent on apps, according to measurement firm comScore).

“The results demonstrated that what looks like app time may actually be mobile web use in disguise,” said an IAB spokesman. Huh?

It turns out that mobile apps actually feed the mobile web. “More than half (52 per cent) of smartphone owners say they click links within apps that take them to content on mobile websites at least sometimes or more frequently,” said the IAB spokesman. “This means that while these users are technically

operating within an app, they are also spending time on the mobile web.”

The perception on the part of consumers is that they are using both apps and the web equally. “Only 18 per cent of smartphone owners who use the mobile internet on their phone say they spend significantly more time using mobile apps than browsing mobile websites,” said the IAB spokesman.

So mobile apps are actually mobile web enablers. And for certain activities, the mobile web came out ahead of apps. For example, 42 per cent preferred the mobile web for search versus 20 per cent preferring apps. And for shopping, 28 per cent preferred the mobile web while 22 per cent preferred apps.

The mobile web got another jolt of life from a second survey. This one, in March 2014, found that mobile web users in North America were more likely to click on ads than app users. More than one-third of mobile web

“Think of mobile content as portable objects that can connect with other content (Google Now), people (Twitter), locations (Waze) and actions (Google Maps, Uber). It can adapt with user context, getting smarter with more data from more sensors, learning from past behaviour,” Bergman wrote.

For example, at Breaking News, Bergman’s editors attach all sorts of metadata to each article, and in the process create new value beyond just the 500-word story. That metadata enables Breaking News to send push notifications – they call them “proximity alerts” – to anyone who is within an “impact zone” of a breaking story moments after it happens.

“That’s where the magic of mobile content begins to emerge,” concludes Bergman. “Content that isn’t just created to be consumed, but created to help us unlock new value, save

time, and live better lives. This is high quality, attracting the largest audiences, and making the biggest impact in the years to come.”

All of which comes down to organising our work not around devices (mobile versus desktop), but organising our work around the consumer.

“We must organise it around the person: Giving her relevant local information doesn’t mean tying her to a postal code,” writes media critic and author of “Geeks Bearing Gifts” Jeff Jarvis. “No, mobile means ‘around me.’ Mobile means context: where I am and what I’m doing.

### **Don’t be mobile-first; be user-first**

“Google and Facebook are in the relationship business. We are not,” writes Jarvis. “Perhaps our problem in media is that we offer but one

uses had clicked on a mobile ad versus 26 per cent of app users. So, what had seemed to be a closed case has been reopened, and the verdict may not be as black-and-white as it appeared. Let’s look at the arguments for each.

#### **Why apps?**

“Front doors [or apps] are where loyalties and habits are formed,” writes Cory Bergman in his Mobile Media Memo blog. “In the world of apps, people visit much more frequently than websites (including mobile sites), and when they do, they’re more likely to share content. It’s where users are most likely to connect with others and personalise their experiences, generating data that forms the core of mobile monetisation. Mobile apps are also becoming a personal content hub, controlling wearables, TV apps and in-car experiences – in other words, the future of audience growth.” Web analytics firm comScore also came out categorically for apps: “While the meteoric

growth of apps transpired quickly, this shouldn’t come as too much of a surprise,” declared the authors of comScore’s “US Mobile App Report” released in mid-2014. “After all, apps are the fuel that is driving mobile’s growth and where most of the devices’ utility comes from.

“Without apps, smartphones and tablets are merely shells – like a beautifully designed car equipped with every feature you could want, but without any gas in the engine,” the report concluded. To put an exclamation mark on their findings, the report cited one convincing statistic: A full 79 per cent of smartphone users accessed apps at least 26 days per month.

Apps are a powerful way to build a relationship with the members of your audience,” wrote Danny Bluestone, managing director of digital agency Cyber-Duck, an econsultancy. “After all, using your app is much more of a commitment and connection

to your business, compared to briefly visiting your website.” The US-based Poynter Institute also touted the utility and ROI of apps in its August 2014 “Unlocking mobile revenue and audience: New ideas and best practices” report. Unlike a mobile website, “the app is where you serve a loyal, familiar audience,” wrote Poynter deputy director and report author Jeff Sonderman. “They know you, and they’ve come here thinking, ‘Let’s open up the app and see what you have for me today.’ “Mobile apps users are more interested in your editorial judgement – what do you consider the top story of the moment, what to read first, and so on,” wrote Sonderman. “These app users are more interested in seeing each session as a journey that can be completed, rather than as an endless stream of content.”

#### **Why the mobile web?**

It wasn’t that long ago that every magazine publisher felt he absolutely had to have an app to

*continues next page...*

... continued from previous page

be seen as digitally savvy, and thus many apps were built in a hurry and at great expense. Have you looked at the Apple App Store lately?

Those digital darling apps are still there, but many have not been updated (or uploaded, for that matter) much, if at all, since their infancy.

The bloom is off the app rose, or at least the hysteria has abated. Two-thirds of smartphone users do not download any new apps in an average month, according to an August 2014 comScore report. Worse, half of all downloads are generated by just seven per cent of all users. And even if they do download an app, getting them to use it regularly is a

considerable task.

According to the same comScore report, even though most smartphone users access their apps almost every day, that usage is limited to a very small number of apps. As a matter of fact, a user's favourite app constituted 42 per cent of the total app usage. If you add the second-favourite app (17 per cent of time spent) and the third (10 per cent), and fourth (6 per cent), we're up to three-quarters of a user's time spent on just four apps.

#### Apps also:

- Cut content off from the rest of the web world (app content can't be found on the web, and websites can't link into apps)
- Are expensive to make
- Require constant (and expensive) updating
- Need advertising to help users find them and download them
- Need re-engagement advertising to get users to



thing: content, or at least that is how we present what we offer.

“Perhaps mobile will force us to get better at building profiles of our users as individuals so we can serve each of them better. Mobile can make us reorganise what we offer around our users rather than around our content. Mobile isn't just another content-delivery mechanism. Don't try to be mobile first. Be user first. Context over content, that's the lesson of mobile,” concludes Jarvis.

So how do we get there? How do we transform editorial departments from mass-consumption content creation machines to editors and writers focusing on serving individual reader's needs?

The American Press Institute convened a group of 40 mobile publishing leaders in

mid-2014 to develop a best-practices guide to mobile. The participants represented a cross section of the industry including editors, marketers, television executives, and developers from newspapers, magazines, broadcast and cable media, agencies, and tech companies.

Their recommendations for organising to create change emphasised coordination, collaboration, and the elevation of mobile to a status equal to print and web:

- Identify mobile benchmarks and KPIs before doing anything else as those goals drive decisions about people, technology, schedules, content, priorities, etc.
- Coordinate the priorities of editorial, business, and technology so they are working in concert, not, potentially, in competition

actually use the app

- Have not attracted much enthusiasm from advertisers (due to the small audience size)

“The Condé Nasts of the world would probably tell you that in many cases the traffic to their website is five or 10 times more than what they’re seeing on the native app side, which is why they’re starting to see how valuable a place the mobile web is to monetise their content,” Daniel Meehan, CEO of mobile software company PadSquad, told *Ad Exchanger*. “Even so, they need to have a native app in addition to mobile web.” Smaller publishers “can’t demand that their users go to a native app, if they have one, because they get most of their traffic from organic search and social referrals,” Meehan said. “The mobile web has become their main — or sometimes even their only — way to distribute their content and monetise it.” Content on the mobile web is also easier to find and easier to monetise than content on apps. Users do not have to shell

out money or download an app. They can share it and link to it.

#### **The verdict: Publishers must use both**

Both systems — native apps and mobile web — have their unique features that provide benefits the other cannot replicate. So, mobile web is not dead and apps are not as dominant as they appeared. Each serve a useful purpose and each should be optimised to deliver its unique benefits.

“A lot of publishers jumped on the app bandwagon early on when it was a requirement and their senior management said, ‘We have to have an app,’” Harry Kargman, CEO of online ad company Kargo, told *AdWeek*. “Now that the dust has settled, it’s more about having a balanced approach that will yield the most ad impressions to actually build the business.”

Mobile audiences must be seen as two distinct groups.

The first, and most valuable, are the loyalists, the subscribers and app purchasers who want your product in a complete

and finite form that is easily accessible (through the app). They love what you do as proven by their payments. Periodically, they may need to be reminded of their love for you with “re-engagement” advertising. They are also good advertising targets because they have registered with you and thus leave a behavioural trail, both things advertisers find useful and appealing.

The second audience segment are readers who come to you through the “side door” or mobile web via social media and other referrals. These visitors may know a lot, a little, or nothing about you, and are coming to you because you are the result of a search or a social recommendation. They are most likely to first encounter you on your article page at the end of a link, and thus, your job is to impress them, entice them in further, and give them calls to action that will build a relationship, loyalty, and, perhaps, a subscription payment or app purchase.

- or at cross purposes
- Require editorial, technology, and advertising to work more closely together
- Start planning meetings with a discussion of mobile to avoid persisting in the existing system of giving mobile “downstream” content from print and/or the web
- Review everyone’s job descriptions and add mobile-oriented responsibilities (Breaking-News requires every editorial employee to conduct three experiments per quarter, one of which must become a standing feature or practice)
- Conduct training with the goal of helping every employee become mobile-literate and focused
- Share mobile metrics with everyone; add mobile stats to the analytics dashboard
- Revamp the CMS to display mobile article

previews, ensuring that the stories look good and reinforcing the importance of mobile

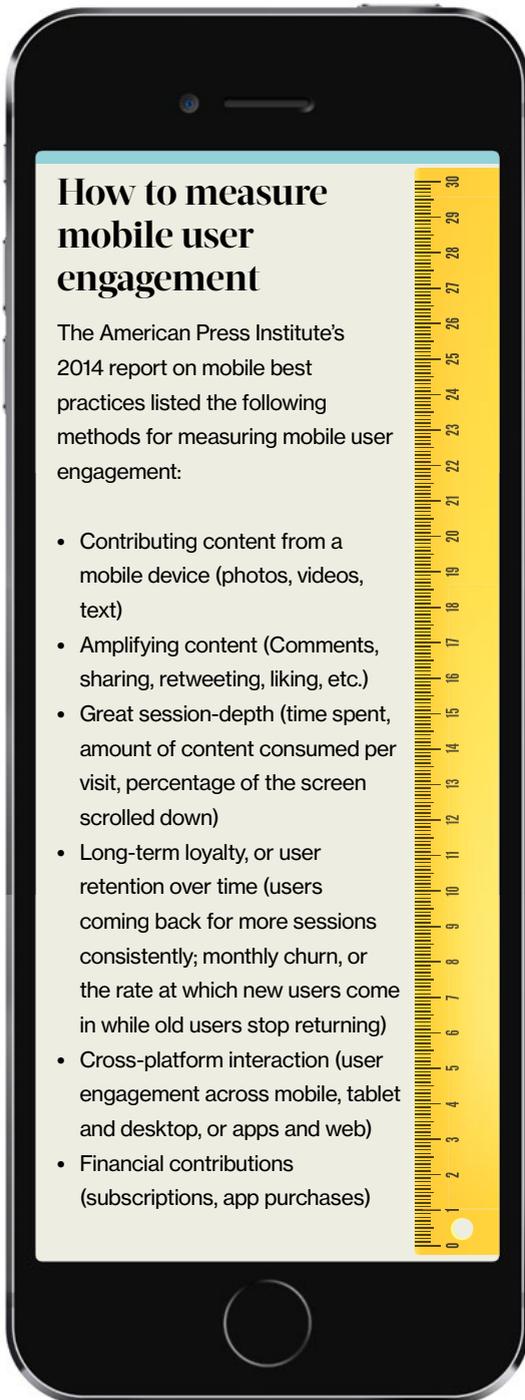
- Integrate mobile-minded editors and writers throughout the editorial department; do not isolate them in a “lab”
- If it’s affordable, do not farm out tech; develop in-house expertise
- Develop rewards in line with mobile goals; highlight the winners

#### **Nine mobile best practices**

So now you’ve reorganised your staff and teams to focus on customers and not the device, and you’ve pointed your company toward mobile-focused goals and KPIs. What’s next?

Now it’s time to execute the plan using best practices.

Since we’ve been in the Year of Mobile for at least seven years now (wink, wink), publishers



## How to measure mobile user engagement

The American Press Institute's 2014 report on mobile best practices listed the following methods for measuring mobile user engagement:

- Contributing content from a mobile device (photos, videos, text)
- Amplifying content (Comments, sharing, retweeting, liking, etc.)
- Great session-depth (time spent, amount of content consumed per visit, percentage of the screen scrolled down)
- Long-term loyalty, or user retention over time (users coming back for more sessions consistently; monthly churn, or the rate at which new users come in while old users stop returning)
- Cross-platform interaction (user engagement across mobile, tablet and desktop, or apps and web)
- Financial contributions (subscriptions, app purchases)

have had enough experience to be able to say they've developed proven best practices. Here are nine mobile best practices for magazine media publishers:

- Get email addresses to begin building a relationship.
- Promote app downloads to enable tracking and enhance engagement.
- Send push notifications, and where possible, make them personalised according to reader

interests.

- Don't abuse push notifications (a survey showed annoying push notifications as the top reason for deleting apps). Send no more than one a day.
- Schedule publishing around a mobile-friendly schedule. Your readers may be different, but most studies show mobile readership peaks in the evening. Don't publish something in the morning if your research shows it won't be read until the evening.
- Publish stories readers can actually finish. "A key feature of our News Digest app is that you can actually be done reading the news every day," Scott Burke, Yahoo's senior vice president of advertising, told attendees at the 2014 Alphonso.tv Summit. "It's the underlying insight of consumer behaviour that we're trying to listen to really closely."
- Make sure your developers are enabling "deep linking" – the ability to link between apps and websites. They should be tagging your mobile apps, and if relevant, your websites, with a linking structure that enables others to link directly inside sections of your apps.
- Buy advertising for your app to get downloads. Without advertising, your app will be lost in a sea of apps.
- Then engage in "re-engagement advertising" because getting users to download your app is only the first step. Getting them to use it, and to keep using it regularly, is the real trick.

With so much at stake and so much to gain, you'd think that the call for publishers to be "mobile-first" would be a slam-dunk.

Not quite.

Despite what the mobile-first high priests and priestesses say, mobile-first can have deleterious effects on a magazine's non-mobile sites.

One day, it struck Sam Kirkland, the digital media fellow at the Poynter Institute at the time, that some mobile-first sites were presenting far-less-than-optimal desktop sites. He was particularly puzzled because those publishing companies were still getting substantial traffic through desktop and laptop computers.

Sam asked one of the mobile-first high

priestesses (Knight Lab's chief Miranda Muligan, a responsive-design guru behind *The Boston Globe* website) if she saw a problem with making desktop websites suffer in the rush to mobile-first publishing.

Miranda's response was quick, sharp, and, let's be honest, more than a bit dismissive: "Advice from me and my bluntness:... don't be that guy who says "but what about reading on desktop?" Trust me, you don't want to be that guy." She followed with an email stating flatly: "If desktop reading experiences are less than optimal, that might have to do more with the fact that no one wants to read while sitting at a desk with ginormo [sic] machine."

Ouch!

"Sure," wrote Sam on the Poynter Institute blog. "But don't millions of us still sit at a desk in front of a computer at work all day? And don't some of us sometimes prefer the larger screen and multiple windows of a computer and the precision of a mouse?"

"Mobile rhetoric sometimes strikes me as a little – a little! – overzealous," he wrote.

"Mobile is growing, and will likely continue to grow, but should we assume desktop is going to zero? Once on board [the mobile-first train], I hope they don't speed away from desktop too quickly while readers are still there," concluded Sam, now a reporter at BuzzFeed News App.

### **Not mobile first, but platform appropriate**

There are other folks ready to abandon "mobile-first" too, but for different reasons.

A ruckus broke out in the spring of 2014 when *Financial Times* chief technical officer John O'Donovan speaking at the Mobile World Congress declared mobile-first to be "meaningless", warning publishing companies not to obsess on one platform but to focus on the wider picture.

"If you think about mobile first, you are thinking of a specific-point solution, which is only one way of dealing with your audience, and if you start to think about it too much you forget about the other pieces," O'Donovan told *The Drum*. "These buzz words start to get a life of their own and become sentient beasts – they will crawl all over you if you let them."

"The bigger game is to be as broad as possible, and how you do that is crucial – it's

about interacting with people through different touch points in a cost effective way," O'Donovan said.

The *FT* has adopted a "universal publishing strategy" designed to place content on all platforms where it makes business sense to publish. "We make more money from our content than from advertising which is a really interesting shift," said O'Donovan. "We are pushing boundaries in terms of how we are getting our content into these different services and platforms."

The *Financial Times* is not alone.

CNN's managing editor Meredith Artley advocates the "platform appropriate" approach, optimising content for each screen. "Who are we to say what screen is first," she said.

At analytics firm Chartbeat, they observed that while mobile is chipping away at desktop reading habits, the desktops and laptops are not going away any time soon. All those folks who use computers at work will be doing so for a long time to come. And many magazine media sites still experience one of their peak use periods during the work day.

"In general, it seems like each medium is strong when the others are weak," said Josh Schwartz, chief data scientist at Chartbeat. "People are using phones while they wouldn't be using desktops anyway."

It appears we will be looking at a bifurcated market for some time to come.

As a result, it would seem that the *FT*'s "universal" approach would make the most sense, right?

*"Mobile can make us reorganise what we offer around our users rather than around our content."*

**Jeff Jarvis, professor, media critic, and author**  
New York University, writing in 'Geeks Bearing Gifts'

## Nine steps to creating a mobile-focused culture

If your magazine media company is like most, you are a long way from becoming a mobile-focused operation. You need dramatic change in your organisation's culture and structure to make it capable of growing the attention and resources you need to devote to mobile.

The American Press Institute's 2014 report on mobile best practices outlined nine steps to take to build such an organisation:

- 1 **Plan** your next major project first for mobile platforms
- 2 **Change** your daily news meeting and the publisher's weekly department-head meeting to focus on mobile issues. At the publisher's meeting, discuss mobile technology, revenue, and

promotion issues first.

- 3 **Designate** a mobile leader in each department and provide the time, money, and training for him or her to gain expertise.

- 4 **Bring** these mobile leaders together in a group to develop mobile goals for the organisation and to choose metrics for meeting those goals. Make sure the group meets regularly and uses collaborative tools to share information.

- 5 **Tie** all of your management incentives for bonuses, or at

least the biggest ones, to mobile success.

- 6 **Add** a mobile preview to your content management system so journalists or designers working on content can see instantly how the content will display on a smartphone.

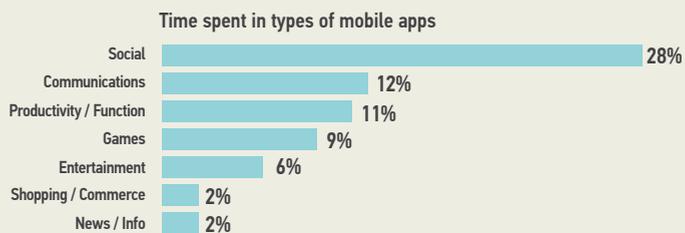
- 7 **Develop** a mobile app for a special event, project, or niche product. Developing an app builds mobile skills in your staff and will lead to better mobile performance in other ways.

- 8 **For** a big project or event, engage your mobile

community by providing incentives for contributing photos or videos. Make it easy to contribute by using a hashtag on social media, rather than making people e-mail to you or upload to your site. Curate the contributions using a tool such as Storify or RebelMouse. Offer a prize (contributed by a sponsoring advertiser) for the best contribution.

- 9 **Encourage,** reward, and demand mobile experimentation by your staff. A culture of experimentation must embrace failure as the path to success.

### Social media apps are the most popular



Well, yes, but with one caveat.

"From a consumer standpoint, they're right," wrote Breaking News' Bergman on his blog. "We should be doing everything. But for the vast majority of [editorial departments] with limited resources and tightly bound cultures, mobile-first is a rallying cry to aggressively turn the Titanic before it's too late.

"Over a decade ago, the industry saw the internet as just another distribution channel – another screen – instead of a disruptive new way of doing business. Without the urgency, changes were made too slowly, too tentatively, and the rest is history.

"If it [mobile] is just another thing, you won't change fast enough," wrote Bergman.

"Mobile first isn't about abandoning the desktop, it's about accelerating culture change to adapt to the fastest shift in consumer behaviour in the history of journalism... Mobile first is an urgent call to rethink our priorities, invest in new capabilities, relentlessly experiment, and redefine success metrics to succeed in a radically new marketplace.

"If 'mobile-first' forces organisations to focus too much on mobile, so be it. Because the alternative is a second wave of disruption and decline," concluded Bergman.

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