

# Five Steps for Optimizing Mobile UX: Designing for Digital Consumers

Future customer- and citizen-focused mobile websites will be more dynamic and responsive. These five steps will deliver this experience.

## Accessibility and Mobile UX

President Biden's 2021 Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government emphasized the importance of accessibility for federal agencies and departments. In 2022, the Department of Justice issued a clarification on web accessibility and the Americans with Disabilities Act, stating that state and local agencies and businesses open to the public must ensure their websites are accessible.

## Mobile accessibility includes:

- Text size options
- Color contrast
- Simple touchscreen gestures
- Changeable screen orientation
- Easily accessible buttons
- Screen reader compatibility
- Translation for non-native speakers

The future is mobile. As of March 2023, 54.26% of all web traffic in the US came from a desktop computer versus 45.74% from a mobile device, according to Statcounter GlobalStats.<sup>1</sup> That represents a significant shift since 2012, when only 11.96% of US internet traffic originated from a mobile device, according to the same source. Customers increasingly want to access the information and services they need at their own convenience on a tablet or mobile device. Whether they're looking to book an appointment with their doctor or apply for a passport, they want to accomplish tasks seamlessly via tablets and mobile devices.

However, many government and business sites have suboptimal mobile experiences. Some do not even allow users to complete certain tasks or access certain information through mobile websites or portals. To meet the needs of users in the future, a more holistic mobile user experience (UX) is a necessity. Whether the problem is nonadaptive or nonresponsive design, limited functionality, lack of mobile accessibility, or poor design based on an unclear understanding of mobile user journeys and desires, the message is clear: An optimized mobile UX is no longer optional—it's essential.




For government entities, upgrading mobile design is especially important considering recent directives and executive orders focused on improving customer self-service and accessibility. It's critical to think about how user behavior will change over the next five years, making mobile sites especially important. For businesses, web accessibility is also key, since improved mobile UX often translates into higher customer satisfaction, greater adoption of self-service, and improved digital business outcomes.

Designing for the future digital user requires following these five steps for mobile UX optimization: Assess the current situation; understand your users; decide what your mobile web experience will offer; address relevant mobile design considerations; and review and refine your design. Throughout these steps, it's imperative to keep real people and your end users at the center of your development process through a Human-Centered Design mindset. That includes taking into account users' desire for fully functional and accessible mobile experiences.

## 1. Assess the Current Situation

Before starting a mobile redesign, it's important to assess the current mobile experience and what the needs and desires of stakeholders are for the redesigned experience. Human-centered design—the approach that makes user needs the top design priority—aims for desirability, viability, and feasibility.

<sup>1</sup> [Desktop vs Mobile vs Tablet Market Share United States Of America | Statcounter GlobalStats](#)

 <b>Desirability</b>	<p><b>User Needs.</b> Deeply understanding users' needs entails quantitative and qualitative user research. This involves evaluating how different kinds of users use or will use the site, what their experiences and journeys with the product or service are, and what they need to improve their mobile experience.</p> <p><b>User Goals.</b> What are your users trying to accomplish? What kind of information or service are they searching for on mobile devices versus desktops? What would be their ideal experience?</p>
 <b>Viability</b>	<p><b>Business Goals.</b> Understanding the various goals your organization is trying to accomplish with its mobile site is essential. Perhaps your site is focused primarily on providing information, or maybe the ultimate goal is to enable more self-service. Maybe it's a bit of both. Business goals help drive design direction.</p> <p><b>Stakeholder Needs.</b> Your users may not be the only ones who will use a mobile device. Stakeholders may include staff, departments, shareholders, and citizens. What might they need from your mobile site?</p>
 <b>Feasibility</b>	<p><b>Technology.</b> What is the current state of your organization's underlying web technology? Some online portals and assets aren't optimized for mobile, which might put constraints on the project.</p> <p><b>Project Scope.</b> Is the whole site going to be redesigned for mobile or just a part? Scope often is restricted by budgets, other upcoming redevelopment projects, technology, or personnel limitations.</p> <p><b>Resources/Budget.</b> What resources and funding does your organization have to devote to a mobile redesign project? This includes staff time to devote to supporting or completing the redesign work as well as funds for new technology, external consultants, and design firms.</p> <p><b>Constraints.</b> What other constraints might limit a mobile redesign? For example, perhaps certain elements must stay as part of the design or funding for the project must be spent by a specific date.</p>

## 2. Understand Your Users

Understanding users is critical to creating an optimized mobile site. For example, knowing that the majority of your users are disabled and might have special accessibility needs would change how you design an experience. Similarly, recognizing what kinds of actions they want to perform on your mobile site ensures you make user's experiences, journeys, and tasks easier to complete.

**Audience.** It's imperative to understand who your core audiences are for your mobile experience. Is it being developed for external users or are you looking to redesign an internal staff portal? Is it aimed at current customers or potential customers? Is it meant to enhance the current experience or to add features or services?

**Demographics.** A site that is primarily used by older users with mobility issues should be designed differently from a site that is mostly used by digitally native Gen Z users. Similarly, a site typically used by non-English speakers should have different design priorities. For sites with broad user bases, it is important to understand everyone's needs so you can appropriately prioritize them.

**Motivations.** What are the reasons that your users prefer a mobile experience? Are they busy parents? Do they not have access to a desktop computer? Are they trying to accomplish something quickly? Understanding this will help guide your design.

**Pain points.** What are the main stumbling blocks for your users when they're on your mobile site? Are they unable to perform tasks they can do on the desktop site? Do they have a hard time understanding the navigation?

## Responsive vs. Adaptive Design

### Responsive design

automatically shows content based on the available browser space. In responsive design, a dynamic layout is calibrated to fit the format of the device type.

#### Pros

- Uniform and seamless
- Lots of templates to choose from
- Easier to implement
- More cost-effective
- More SEO-friendly

#### Cons

- Less design control
- Elements and components can be out of place
- Longer mobile response times

**Adaptive design** has multiple fixed layout sizes for common screen widths. The website identifies the device type and loads the appropriate tailor-made layout.

#### Pros

- Customized layout for the appropriate device
- Devices sense user's environment
- Optimizable based on user needs

#### Cons

- Labor-intensive
- Often suboptimal for tablets
- Challenging to SEO — content on multiple 'sites'

## Mobile Design Process



## 3. Decide What Your Mobile Web Experience Will Offer

The next step in creating an optimized mobile experience is using your research and considerations from the previous two steps to make user-centered choices about what your mobile experience will offer. That will involve analyzing your user research, synthesizing various stakeholder needs with project constraints, and solving the following three aspects of your mobile design.

**Look.** Adapting your branding to a mobile experience can be a complex process of translation. How do you incorporate your branding with functionalities and services your users need in such a small area? This is when you make those complex choices and trade-offs.

**Feel.** In mobile design, how satisfying the user's journey feels is just as important as how it looks and its usability. Great UX is often about providing an intuitive and seamless feel for your site.

**Usability.** Usability refers to the quality of a user's experience, including things like the efficiency and effectiveness of the design and the overall satisfaction of the user. Designing a great user experience means paying significant attention to multiple user types and demographics at this stage in the design process so you can optimize usability for all of them.

## 4. Evaluate Key Mobile Design Considerations

To ensure your mobile UX will meet the needs of users, it is also important to understand key aspects of their mobile experiences and make choices that will ensure you serve their needs.

**Know where your users will be accessing the web.** If your users are accessing your site on slow or unsecure networks, what design considerations should you include to protect yourself and your users? Are your users using the mobile site because they are on the go, or do they just prefer phones to computers? Make sure to also think about the variety of current and future screen sizes for mobile phones and tablets.

**Understand what your users' main actions will be.** Mobile design often must be streamlined to improve usability. Making sure that the most common actions users will perform are easy and accessible is key to simplifying their online experience.

**Decide between adaptive and responsive design.** Depending on user needs, business goals, and budget, either design approach might be the better choice. It's important to carefully consider the pros and cons of each.

## 5. Review and Refine Your Design

The final stage in the mobile UX optimization process is to review the considerations and prioritized design solutions; prototype, test, and iterate on a solution; and ensure compliance with accessibility standards.

**Sketch and prototype.** Creating wireframes and prototypes is an effective way to visualize, try different design solutions and configurations, iterate quickly, and shift strategies with user and stakeholder feedback.

**Test with users.** It is essential to test any mobile web design across diverse user demographics and on multiple types of mobile phones and tablet devices. This helps identify a wide variety of user pain points and opportunities to make improvements before the site goes public.

**Get feedback and iterate rapidly.** Prioritizing and implementing user and stakeholder feedback in order to make quick site iterations will contribute significantly to an effective and efficient design process that optimizes your mobile UX and keeps your users at the center of each step. If permitted, conduct multiple rounds of feedback to ensure you are receiving plenty of feedback on multiple versions of the mobile site.

**Comply with W3C standards.** While accessibility work should be included at all stages of the process, it's critical to test and ensure compliance with W3C's web accessibility standards—particularly those for mobile development. It's important to note, however, that compliance with W3C standards does not ensure compliance with the ADA. Depending on the use case, further accessibility optimization work may be recommended.

Organizations that optimize their mobile UX will see significant return of investment in user satisfaction, user self-service, user retention, accessibility, and more. If your organization has a suboptimal mobile experience, continuing to wait to fix it often means it will be more costly and difficult.

Guidehouse's customer experience (CX) and UX strategy teams have supported both commercial businesses and federal agencies on a number of high-value and mission-critical web experience redesigns. Our substantial experience working on commercial and government projects, combined with our expertise in design, strategy, and change management, makes Guidehouse a great partner for transforming mobile experiences.

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