Ask SCORE

I sell sports collectibles and memorabilia online. My website, which was designed some time ago, works well on a computer, but doesn’t translate well when viewed on mobile devices like a smartphone. How can I correct this?

With Google changing the game in April 2015 by giving better search results page ranking to mobile-friendly websites, many small businesses have cause for concern. According to an infographic by Greater Rochester SCORE, 93.3% of small/medium business websites were not yet mobile friendly at the end of 2014.

That’s a big deal considering that in May 2015, Google announced more Google searches take place on mobile devices than on computers in the United States and nine other countries.

Trying to navigate through and view a website that doesn’t present well on a mobile device frustrates users and can create missed opportunities for your business.

If you’re unsure if your website is mobile friendly or not, you can run a quick test at www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/ to determine that. If your website is not yet mobile friendly, you’re probably wondering about your options for making it so.

Here are three ways you can turn your website into one that will play well with mobile devices:

Develop a mobile version of your desktop website.

By using a conversion platform, your website developer can create a separate version of your website that will appear when someone views your site on a mobile device. This is a relatively quick way to make your website mobile friendly, but it has some drawbacks; you’ll need to maintain and update content on two separate websites and visitors on mobile devices may get frustrated because your website’s mobile version will likely not have the breadth of information that your desktop site has.

Use a mobile plugin for your site.

Popular website content management systems like WordPress, Drupal and Joomla have plugins you can install to make your website mobile friendly without creating a version separate from your desktop website. For more information about how you might make your existing site mobile friendly using plugins, visit Google’s Mobile Guide, which provides links to software available for various website platforms.

Recreate your website using a responsive web design.

Responsive design takes a mobile-first approach and provides a solution that gives you one website with design and features that adapt to screens of various sizes (smartphones, tablets, etc.). From the start, it takes into account how design, content, features and functionality must be incorporated to ensure a positive user experience regardless of whether your website is accessed from a mobile device or desktop computer.

Typically, the separate mobile version of a desktop site and the plugin options are viewed as temporary fixes, while responsive design is considered a more permanent solution. Each solution has some pros and cons, so consider talking with a website design professional to determine what makes sense for you in the short- and long-term. Not sure where to turn? Contact your local SCORE chapter for guidance and resources to help you with all aspects of starting and growing your small business.
This column is brought to you by the Merrimack Valley Chapter of SCORE, celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2017. The chapter has nearly 60 current and former business executives available to provide free, confidential, one-on-one business mentoring and training workshops for area businesses. Call 603-666-7561 or visit merrimackvalley.score.org for information on mentoring, upcoming workshops and volunteer opportunities. SCORE is a national, non-profit organization and a resource partner of the U. S. Small Business Administration.