

# Mobile Site Design for Content Publishers

Mobile Publishing Strategies  
for Usability, Design and  
Content Distribution

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**MEQUODA DAILY**  
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## Introduction

Usability doesn't end at Internet Explorer, Firefox or Safari. With the advent of iPhones and other SmartPhones, there is a sudden influx of people accessing information on-demand with their cell phones. Even Google needed to re-check their logs when they found out earlier this year that the iPhone accounted for *fifty times* the amount of traffic of any other SmartPhone.

So what does that tell us? That tells us that the easier it is to access the Web from a cell phone, the more likely a user is going to use it. Let's face it, we didn't have a lot to worry about when users were struggling and frustrated with working their tiny browser on a 2x2" screen. We should be much more worried for 2009 where the iPhone is in high demand and users accessing the Web from their mobile handsets more than ever before.

With the launch of the iPhone 3G and 3Gs, iPhones are now being used all over the world.

If you are an **online publisher**, mobile page views and clicks can make money for you right now. Online advertising for mobile is abundant. Allowing users to sign up for your email newsletter or ad-supported RSS feed through a mobile interface should be high-priority.

If you are an **online retailer**, SmartPhones are just the *beginning* of mobile eCommerce. Paypal Mobile is already integrated with sites like eBay, which allow you to pay on the go either by using the mobile interface or just by sending a text message.

## Mobile Publishing Superstars

According to AT&T Mobility president and CEO Ralph de la Vega, 95% of iPhone owners regularly surf the web, even though 30% had never done so on a mobile device prior to iPhone ownership.

This shift of the audience lens means that companies really do need to start accepting mobile as a publishing platform and not just an online accessory.

### Some of the top runners in mobile optimized sites:

**Computerworld** - (<http://mobile.computerworld.com>) - Not only do they offer a clean uncluttered look, but if you go to their search engine you'll find an ad for their free report, which is a database acquisition tool. Just hand over your email address and they'll send you a link for the case study. Bravo Computerworld.

**Facebook** - (<http://m.facebook.com>)- Facebook's mobile interface is by far the best in terms of functionality. Usability experts and users alike constantly praise it. Every aspect of the website was well thought out in order to make all tasks easy to complete, view, and search, with serious bandwidth optimization.

**PC Magazine** (<http://mobile.pcmag.com>): Complete with ads, font-sizing buttons and a sleek design, PC Magazine's mobile site is one of the best.

**MSNBC** (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com>): Automatically detected by your mobile device, and easy to use. No clicking "next", just everything you want and need right away. A very intelligently designed mobile site.

**Forbes** - (<http://mobile.forbes.com>) - Easy to look up quotes from the main screen and access to all articles. Complete with external advertising as well as internal ads embedded in articles for users to subscribe to Forbes mobile alerts.

**Car and Driver** - (<http://m.caranddriver.com>) - Perfectly balanced text and graphics that show up with ease and works on a huge variety of handsets.

**The New York Times** (<http://mobile.nytimes.com>): The site wouldn't be used to do any kind of research, but if you're just looking to read the latest stories, it's adequate and easy to use. It even offers social functions like the ability to email the story.

**Internet Movie Database (IMDb)** (<http://www.imdb.com>): IMDb is one of those websites that NEEDS a mobile presence, and movie fans are very happy with their mobile edition that self-detects.

**Google** - (<http://www.google.com/m>) - Even with an easy to use interface, users still like optimized websites, especially search engines. The mobile Google homepage has no ads unlike the Yahoo! Mobile optimized homepage.

**Amazon Mobile** - (<http://m.amazon.com>)- Very basic and optimized for the user who already has an Amazon account, but it's quick to load and easy to browse. Newer features include the ability to read user reviews on the go.

**Marie Claire** (<http://m.marieclaire.com>): Its simplistic design is perfect for mobile, which identifies categories first, then headlines, and then dives into the tip.

**Time** (<http://mobile.time.com>): Time doesn't offer all of its content for mobile, but what it does offer is complete and lengthy, if that's what you're looking for.

**Wapedia (Mobile Wikipedia)** - (<http://wapedia.mobi>) - Think mobile Wikipedia. Wikipedia does have its own lightweight version, but it was created by a 3rd party and is not as widely used or praised.

According to a survey by WebCredible from November 2007 - January 2008, which received 1010 answers and asked users '**Which would you use on your mobile/cell phone if speed & quality weren't an issue?**' here is how the content fared:

- 33% Email
- 25% Social Networks
- 20% Local information
- 13% Travel information/planning
- 9% Online Shopping

Many publishers still think that designing for mobile is not worth their time. But the truth is, that the Internet accessed only from a desk is a thing of the past. Now, it's for people on the go, in restaurants, in business meetings, walking their dog, in the bathroom while on a date and traveling on trains. If users are looking for you when they need you, don't you want to be there?

## Different Types of Mobile Usability Tests

If you are only testing usability AFTER your site has been developed, you are only looking for validation, not actual usability. But how can you test a website that has not even been written in a line of code so far?

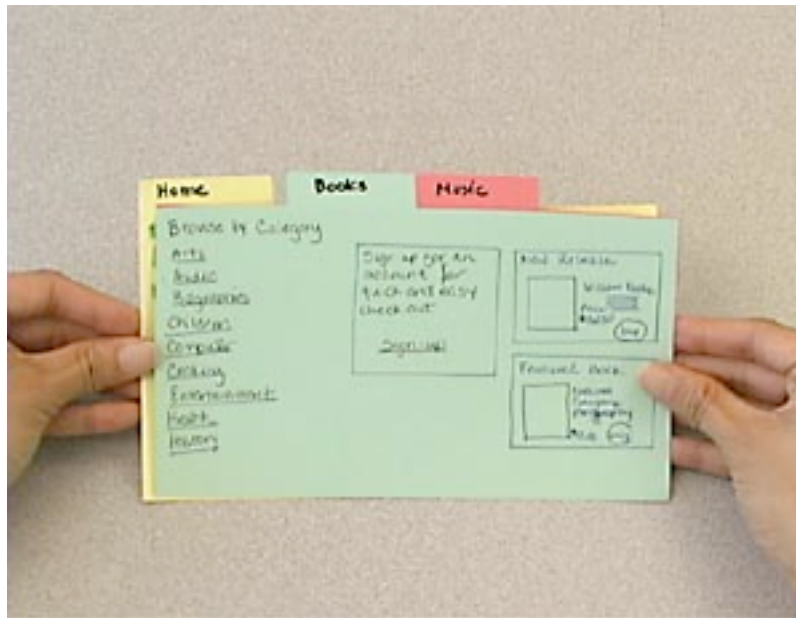
Like any website you'll ever build, there is a need for usability testing. Building a site for mobile users is like shooting in the dark unless you know what they're looking at and what they're viewing it on.

**Paper Prototyping:** This is by far the easiest way to prototype your mobile interfaces, because most mobile interfaces are simplistic. The process means simply creating a mockup of your interface with paper or cardboard and black marker. Ask users if your interface makes sense or ask them to move certain features to where they'd expect to find them.

### Here are three reasons to use paper prototyping:

1. Paper is easier, faster and cheaper than coding.
2. Testing with real users gives you insights into what they need.
3. Your team gets laser-like focus.

In a highly competitive market, usable intuitive websites and software get a powerful competitive advantage. Creating usable, intuitive products simply cannot be done without user involvement. Development is expensive. Paper prototyping is not. Ergo, getting users involved in the design of your website or software upfront, using a paper prototype to test the concept and design is good business sense.



Above is an example of a website paper prototype, but the same method can be used for a mobile site.

In an article called *Paper Prototyping* by Shawn Medero of AListApart.com, he writes:

A paper usability-testing session works much like any other usability-testing session. Begin by selecting a range of testers who represent your expected audience. Have scenarios ready for the user to perform. Document the testing sessions with video to review the users' emotional state when using your mocked-up interface. Debrief users afterward to measure interface recall. With paper, you can also:

- Allow users to mock up ideas they think would solve a problem.
- Mark on the prototype where a user attempted to “click” or otherwise interact with the interface.
- Ask users to draw what they expect to happen next.
- Keep going even if you don't have access to a testing lab or if computers, networks, or high-tech prototypes don't work as expected.

While it's valuable to measure the success of your interface via time-based benchmarks, the emphasis should be on getting your focus group to be creative.

**Improv Prototyping:** This is a usability test that happens in a live environment. This can be done with a paper prototype or with a working prototype. A mobile user is much more likely to get distracted in real life on a mobile device than in a usability test, so this makes real-life mobile usability tests encourage distractions

and an unstable environment. Uncomfortable lighting, background noise, movement and concurrent tasks are all welcomed.

**Diary Studies:** Ask users to keep a diary of how they use their existing mobile devices for at least a week. Ask them to write down any problems they encounter, sites they use frequently, and sites that they've tried and have been discouraged by.



## Mobile Usability Test Tips & Tricks

**Less is more.** Rather than displaying as much of your website as possible, try displaying category names at first glance. The second level can be your tips, and the third would be the tip. Pretend that it's 1994 and ask yourself how your site would have looked back then (before evil spawns "comic-sans" and "rotating gifs" started inhabiting the scene).

**Make it feel natural.** When creating a usable prototype, remember that the user will be holding it in their hands. If you are using a camera to test, try attaching the camera to a small wire that overhangs the device so that the user can hold, rotate and rock the device naturally and you are still able to see what they're doing.

**Test from concept to completion.** We know you're in a rush to offer users your fancy new platform, but it's important that you do it right the first time. Make sure you are conducting usability tests at all stages of development.

**Variety is key.** When you're testing the working prototype, make sure you are testing it on multiple platforms. What is pretty on the iPhone may not be pretty on the Palm Treo.

**Choose the underdog.** Use the "least likely to succeed" model of your mobile devices when testing. This way you can make sure that "if it works on this, it will work on anything!"

**Know in advance which types of mobile units your audience is using.** It's likely that this won't be an incredibly large list, but you should plan on testing with all of them.

**Remember user input.** Mobile devices differ in screen size and layout, but they also differ in the ways that people input their information, whether it be a QWERTY keyboard, stylus, numeric keypad, or dial-wheel. These should all be taken into consideration when developing your prototypes.

## Conclusion

Mobile prototyping should be taken as seriously as any other type of usability testing. You are reaching users globally, on many different platforms. In fact, you're reaching them on hundreds of different platforms, so make sure that the work you're putting into your form, you're also putting into your function.

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