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Get friendly or get to the back of the line



By April Dahlquist Associate Editor, Mobile

Whether or not a website is optimized for smartphone screens now affects Google's search results when consumers search on a smartphone.

Starting April 21, Google Inc. will factor how mobile friendly a web page is into how it ranks that page in search results for consumers searching on smartphones.

Google says the change will significantly impact search results.

"Users will find it easier to get relevant, high-quality search results that are optimized for their devices," Google writes on its official Webmaster blog.

Already, Google has added the label "mobile friendly" below each search link and before the description in smartphone search results.

A page is eligible for the mobile-friendly label, Google says, if it meets the following criteria, as detected by Google's web crawler:

- Avoids software that is not common on mobile devices, like Flash.
- Uses text that is readable without zooming.
- Sizes content to the screen so consumers do not have to scroll horizontally or zoom.
- Places links far enough apart so that the correct one can be easily tapped.

The change makes sense, says Tim Kilroy, CEO of search marketing technology vendor AdChemix.

“This is putting the searcher ahead of the advertiser or content owner,” Kilroy says. “It is saying you are going to get a good experience here, because that’s what Google wants.”

“Google is just protecting the searcher,” he adds.

For larger retailers who have invested in their mobile sites for a while, such as Macy’s Inc. and Target Corp., this change to Google’s search algorithm won’t have much of an impact, Kilroy says. The change will affect smaller retailers who may have [invested in search engine optimization for desktops but have not caught up with mobile](#), he says, adding that Google’s change may help spur retailers to invest in mobile optimization.

“This isn’t a bad thing,” Kilroy says. “It might seem like a bad thing for retailers, but this is really a good thing. For customers, they get a better experience.”

The day is not too far off when all first page search results will be mobile-friendly websites, he says.

Google offers a free tool to help retailers and other businesses determine if their sites are mobile friendly. [Click here](#) to use the tool.

While how mobile friendly a web page is will factor into Google’s algorithm for results shown on smartphones, Google will still display the best search results for words entered, Kilroy says. The algorithm change also won’t affect results on tablets because Google treats tablets like desktops, he says.

[Google also recently announced it would take app indexing into account in search results](#). So if retailer A has properly coded its Android app's pages and retailer B has not, retailer A ranks higher than retailer B in search listings. Google cannot crawl the Apple App Store, so iPhone and iPad apps are not affected.

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