

Mobile Search Engine Optimization Parts 2 & 3: Requirements and Growth

Josh Tuscan & Justin Scarborough, January 2010

Part 2: Mobile Search Engine Requirements

Explanation

The mobile web is made up of the same technology as the traditional web, and thus adheres to the general best practices for search engine optimization (SEO) on standard sites. If these best practice standards are upheld in the development and optimization of mobile-specific sites they will, for the most part, be effective.

There are, however, several key differences for optimizing a mobile site that should be taken into consideration in order to get the most visibility. Search engines' mobile indexes rely on some specific flags and technical requirements in order to determine a mobile site versus a standard website. The requirements for a valid mobile site have been dictated by the W3C, and have evolved in order to ensure a consistent mobile experience across all mobile devices and operating systems. For some major search engines such as Google, adherence to these guidelines is a requirement for inclusion in their mobile index.

In many ways, SEO is more effective on mobile sites than on traditional ones due to the relatively short lifetime of mobile search, and thus the lack of competition found in the standard engines. When it comes to mobile ranking, many search engines prefer the mobile-optimized content and will rank it ahead of traditional results when that content is available.

Site Visibility

It is important to not limit the visibility of your mobile site. A common mistake is to restrict the site by either including it in the robots.txt of the standard site, or to only allow traffic from certain user-agents by redirecting users according to which browser or operating system they are using. These are both easy ways to have your site excluded from the index. This is because search engines, Google in particular, have their own algorithm for determining whether a site is mobile or not, and they will not include sites that aren't available to all mobile user-agents. Some things to avoid when setting up your mobile site to ensure its crawler visibility are:

- Do not restrict access to your site to particular ranges of IP addresses. This may block the search engine crawlers.
- Make use of the robots.txt file on your web server. This file tells crawlers which directories can and cannot be crawled. Make sure it's current for your site so that you don't accidentally block the search engine crawlers. Visit <http://www.robotstxt.org/wc/faq.html> and learn how to instruct robots when they visit your site. Do not disallow your mobile domain or sub-domain within the robots.txt.
- Allow search bots to crawl your sites without session IDs or arguments that track their path through the site. These techniques are useful for tracking individual user behavior, but the access pattern of bots is entirely different. Using these techniques may result in incomplete indexing of your site, as bots may not be able to eliminate URLs that look different but actually point to the same page.
- Make your content available to the whole world. If your content appears to be available only to a subset of all mobile users (for example, only to subscribers of a certain mobile service provider), it may not be indexed.
 - ➔ A safe way to provide device/OS-specific display without risking duplicate content or exclusion from the index is to provide a device/OS-specific CSS style sheet for each device/OS that further optimization is desired on. This way, the same source code will exist as one site while being displayed in an optimal way for any desired device/OS.
 - ➔ Host your mobile site in one the following sub-domains or TLD:
 - site-example.mobi
 - m.site-example.com
 - mobile.site-example.com
 - ➔ Content should include the term "mobile". This creates a simple way for search engines to flag a site as containing content valid to mobile users.

Site Validation

The most critical piece of getting your site indexed within the mobile search engines is to adhere to the [Mobile Web Best Practices 1.0](#) outlined by the W3C. These standards are set up specifically for developing mobile sites, and it provides consistency across multiple mobile platforms, devices, browsers, and operating systems. Many search engines, such as Google, require adherence in order to be included in their mobile index. Some key factors are:

- The mobile site needs to be coded in XHTML and be compliant for acceptance into the Google Mobile index. As noted before, the same SEO rules apply but you have a lot less space to apply them. The ideal user experience for mobile is minimalist. It requires a heavy emphasis on text-based content. Fast page load and other factors will mean the best user experience, and inclusion in the index.
- Use well-formed markup (WML, cHTML, XHTML Basic or XHTML MP).

- Validate your markup. For example, the [W3C Validator](#) can verify that your XHTML pages adhere to the markup's syntax.
- Use the right DOCTYPE for the markup language you are using. For example, an XHTML Mobile 1.2-compliant page, which is the recommended DOCTYPE, should include a DOCTYPE like this:
**<!DOCTYPE html PUBLIC "-//WAPFORUM//DTD XHTML Mobile 1.2//EN"
"http://www.openmobilealliance.org/tech/DTD/xhtml-mobile12.dtd">**
- Specify Content-Type correctly. The HTTP response should include a Content-Type header indicating the correct Internet media type for your document; it should also ideally indicate the character encoding used in the document. For example, an XHTML Basic 1.0 document using the UTF-8 character encoding should specify a header like this:
Content-Type: application/xhtml+xml;charset=UTF-8

Site Submission

Several of the major engines allow for mobile-specific site submission. This allows you to ping an engine with the URL or URLs of your mobile site in order to notify that engine of your site's existence. While it is not required in order to appear in the mobile indexes, this can help in the quick discovery of your mobile site, and its internal pages, as well as act as another signal that your site is indeed a mobile site. Submitting a site map has no effect on ranking.

Google

Google allows for mobile sitemap submission through their webmaster tools. Once you have a Webmaster Tools account, the following link will instruct you how to proceed:

<http://www.google.com/support/webmasters/bin/answer.py?answer=34627>

Yahoo

Yahoo allows for URL submission of mobile sites. You can submit the URL for your mobile site at the following page:

<https://siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com/mobilesubmit>

Bing

Bing does not have a mobile specific submission, but does have a sitemap submission tool:

<http://www.bing.com/toolbox/posts/archive/2009/10/09/submit-a-sitemap-to-bing.aspx>

Part 3: Mobile Search Engine Growth

Background

Like many mobile applications, two key barriers exist for mobile search growth: data penetration, and reluctance of carriers to open software to outside developers and vendors. However, the environment is rapidly changing with smart phone adoption, open source movements, and partnership deals between carriers and search engines. Mobile search is now poised for a substantial shift into mainstream usage, but it is currently in the beginning stages of development and penetration with only 8% (17.5 Million) of mobile subscribers in the United States using mobile search (ComScore M:Metrics). More importantly, mobile search is poised to create a considerable shift in the types of searches performed and the expectations of results as device capability grows- both of which will have direct implications for advertisers.

Defined

Five types of mobile search:

- On-Deck: mobile carrier's branded portal (increasingly supported by web search engines)
- Off-Deck: Google, Yahoo, Live.com, other engines
- Applications: downloadable apps for mobile, local, maps
- Voice: operator assisted search
- SMS: text messages

Today, the most common forms of mobile search are SMS, on-deck, and off-deck. But, it is important to note that application-based search is rising rapidly with iPhone, G-1, and other application heavy phones. The lines of mobile search types are blurring as evidenced by recent carrier and engine partnerships for on-deck search. This is also shown with the Google Search application for the iPhone that recently introduced voice enabled search.

Ostensibly mobile searchers are considered different than browser-based searchers because they want answers on the go, they demand answers instead of links, and they need real-time information. However, these expectations are changing with advances in device capabilities that have created two basic constituent types: smartphone and non-smartphone users.

Current Landscape

According to *eMarketer*, mobile search is expected to grow from 28.8 million in 2008 to 58 million in 2011 (in correlation to the increase in mobile Internet users).

US Mobile Internet Users, Mobile Search Users and Mobile Search Advertising Revenues, 2006-2011 (millions)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Mobile Internet users	27.0	31.1	36.0	42.9	52.3	64.8
Mobile search users	20.3	23.3	28.8	35.1	43.9	55.8
Mobile search ad revenues*	\$2.1	\$13.5	\$48.1	\$155.7	\$307.4	\$713.7

Note: *earned from sale of display or text listings alongside mobile search results

Source: eMarketer, July 2007

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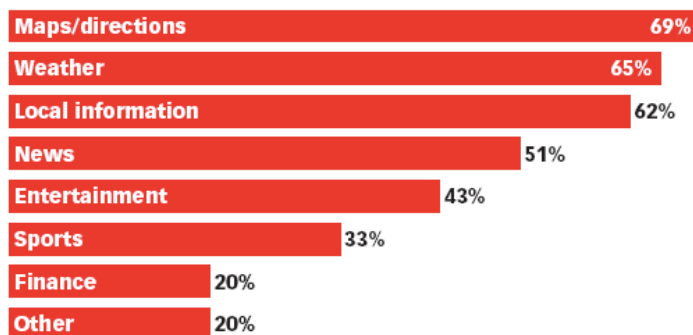
www.eMarketer.com

Advertising opportunities within mobile search are expected to increase rapidly over the next few years. eMarketer estimates that mobile search ad revenues in the United States will hit the \$714 million mark in 2011 (up from \$48 million in 2008). The same forecast anticipates that global mobile search marketing ad revenues will reach \$2.3 billion by 2011 (16.6 percent of the total mobile advertising spend). Also, the prediction noted that the mobile advertising market should reach over \$13.8 billion worldwide by 2011.

The SMS search marketplace consists of three major providers: Google, whose SMS product leads the SMS search market share, Yahoo, and a new player called ChaCha that has managed to create a completely different type of experience through human powered text based responses to questions. With an 800 percent monthly growth rate, ChaCha has leapt into second place to tie Yahoo as of June 2008, according to Nielsen Mobile.

While a \$715 million dollar mobile search ad spend market is not a foregone conclusion, further analysis of the behavior of mobile searchers indicates a significant opportunity for advertisers that capitalize on local and location-based services, as well as those with a strong interest for information, sports, and finance-related products and services (iCrossing, Inc., "How America Searches: Mobile," April 25, 2007).

Content Categories Searched by US Mobile Search Users, March 2007 (% of respondents)



Note: n=225 ages 16+

Source: iCrossing, Inc., "How America Searches: Mobile," April 25, 2007

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Along with increased data penetration, mobile search stands to grow substantially from the rise in adoption of smartphones. M:Metrics shows that smartphone users accessed web search 36.2 percent of the time, compared to only 6.1 percent for standard phone users. Even more astonishing was the rate of web search use among iPhone users, which was 54.5 percent. These trends indicate further adoption of mobile search among users of phones that have advanced functionality, furthering the idea that web-based consumption habits, including search, are becoming even more device agnostic as mobile and other hand-held devices develop PC capabilities.

Device Type	Projected Subscribers	Web Search Usage
All Mobile Subscribers	228,000,000	7.70%
Smartphone	21,022,976	36.20%
Not Smartphone	206,977,024	4.80%
Microsoft	6,778,152	32.90%
Symbian	1,052,500	21.50%
Palm	2,882,626	29.90%
RIM	7,691,004	37.30%
Apple	2,618,695	54.50%

M:Metrics - Three Month Avg Ending SEP 2008

Carrier & Engine Relationships

Major syndication deals announced in 2008 have firmly established search engines and carriers on opposite sides of a mobile search war. Although major long-term deals between Yahoo and both AT&T and T-Mobile have been solidified, a more interesting development has shaped up in the battle to become Verizon's mobile search provider.

Initially Google and Verizon had agreed upon a deal to make Google the primary destination for on-deck search with Verizon. As Verizon is slated to pass AT&T later this year to become the largest mobile provider in the U.S. with the closure of a deal to acquire Alltel, Google is looking to gain the upper hand on a market they already dominate through off-deck search. However in early November 2008, reports surfaced that Microsoft was on the verge of hijacking the deal by becoming the default search provider for all Verizon phones. Although no official deal had been reached at the time of publishing, reports say that Microsoft would share ad revenue with Verizon in the neighborhood of twice what Google was offering. Microsoft was also reportedly negotiating to put its Windows Mobile operating system on more Verizon devices, a combined deal that is valued at \$1 billion.

Although Microsoft Live.com is featured prominently on all Windows Mobile handsets and RIM (Blackberry) products, it should also be noted that Google will continue to maintain a solid stranglehold on all Apple iPhone users – through its prominence in Safari and other iPhone applications –carried exclusively by AT&T.

What's important in these two deals is the admission by carriers that handing over their mobile search businesses to Internet giants like Google or Yahoo is more profitable in the long run. Carriers that have traditionally seen on-deck search as lucrative, sacred, and not to be shared, have finally come to the conclusion that mobile search is both better controlled and better monetized by their web counterparts.

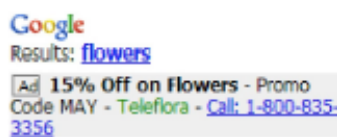
Tactics Overview

While there are a limited number of tactics in mobile search right now, each can add a unique value to mobile marketing efforts due to the very different nature of consumer interaction. Depending on the client and the campaign, all three types of mobile advertising tactics can help drive response and aid advertisers to gather insight into how their target responds to mobile marketing in the search space.

PPC (Pay-Per-Click): Like web paid search ads, mobile PPC ads are text links priced on the click of the ad, and an auction model and a bid price determine cost. However, these ads have mobile specific character limits and specifications that allow for quick and concise messaging, which creates a high impact as space is limited. Engines offer the ability to target by specific keyword, carrier, and soon by phone type, which will allow a customized, personal experience.



Pay-Per-Call: Pay-Per-Call is similar to pay-per-click in targeting and pricing, but the advertiser receives a phone call (primary interaction). While this method has failed to gain prominence on web-based search engines, the option is attractive in the mobile space due to the relative ease of connection and the lack of reliable, high-speed data service across a majority of web users. Advertisers who rely heavily on local search or quick transactional service (movie tickets, restaurants, etc.) may actually have a preference of pay-per-call advertising over pay-per-click when connecting with potential customers.



SMS-Based Query: SMS (short message service) is the most widely used vehicle, which is also known as "texting." Advertisers have the option of targeting SMS searchers that are looking for relevant content with SMS short codes (CSCs). Users get a phone number to send a text message in return for brand communications such as alerts, e-coupons, contest/sweepstakes entries and other marketing initiatives.

Vendor Overview



AdWords Mobile

- Description: Mobile .WAP based search service. Sponsored search ads on mobile specific results pages
- Details: Optimized search page (smaller logo, less links) and results (mobile optimized pages with indicator, reduced text, one link only)
- Specs
 - ➔ Ad Headline (18 Characters)
 - ➔ Ad Description (18 Characters)
 - ➔ Display URL (20 Characters)
 - ➔ Phone Number (optional)
- Ad Options: PPC or Pay per Call
- Targeting: Keyword Level, Carrier
- Inclusion Considerations: AdWords Account

Google SMS

- Description: SMS based query using unique identifiers
- Details: Text a SMS search query to 466453 ("GOOGLE" on most devices) and receive a text back with results based on topical identifier (local, weather, movies, sports)
- Ad Options: None
- Inclusion Considerations: Google Local Business listing

Google Voice Local Business Search (Goog-411)

- Description: Voice based local business search
- Details: Dial 1-800-GOOG-411 from any phone, state the location and business type, and connect to the business for free
- Ad Options: None
- Inclusion Considerations: Google Local Business listing



Yahoo Mobile Sponsored Search (Yahoo! oneSearch)

- Description: Mobile .WAP based search service
- Sponsored search ads on mobile specific results pages
- Program Details: Optimized search page (smaller logo, less links) and results (mobile optimized pages with indicator, reduced text)
- Copy Specs:
 - ➔ Short Title (20 Characters)
 - ➔ Long Title (40 Characters)
 - ➔ Display URL (20 Characters)
- Ad Options: PPC
- Targeting: Keyword Level (exact only), Carrier
- Inclusion Considerations: YSM Account

Voice-enabled Yahoo! oneSearch

- Description: Voice based natural language search
- Details: Speak into the phone using natural language to get relevant and accurate results
- Ad Options: None
- Inclusion Considerations: Only works on Blackberry Pearl (8100), Blackberry Curve (8300), and Blackberry 8800



Microsoft Live Search Mobile

- Description: Mobile .WAP based search service
- Details: Full web results optimized for mobile usage and mobile phone type
- Ad Options: None
- Inclusion Considerations: Only available on Windows Mobile, Blackberry phones, or compatible phones with data plan



ChaCha

- Description: Human assisted SMS based search
- Details: Ask a question to 242242 in natural language. A human assistant then searches for the answer, which is then returned to your phone as a text message within a few minutes
- Ad Options: SMS-based ads around transitional queries; custom solutions and white label opportunities
- Inclusion Considerations: None

Additional Vendors:

Phoja: Search with photos

Opportunities for Advertisers:

As stated, there are many benefits for advertisers in mobile search including:

- High engagement technology that demands advertisers to add value not just ads
- Relevant and performance based
- Ease of integration with current campaigns
- Build 1-to-1 relationship with consumer
- Great for direct response advertisers

As data service capacity grows and device functionality increases, mobile phone usage, including search, will begin to mirror that of the PC – furthering the idea of web device/platform agnosticism. With the change of consumer usage patterns, comes the increased expectation that advertiser-consumer interactions will be highly relevant and highly targeted, which puts search at center of the mobile advertising space. As with the PC, mobile search, regardless of the application, is poised to become the entry point to most web interactions and the first point of contact between advertisers and consumers.

About the Authors



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