

Why Top Internet Brands Choose Server-Side Solutions Over Responsive Design

White Paper



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If you are serious about providing a fast and well-formatted multi-device experience for your site visitors think *server-side solutions*.

The average size of a web page in 2012 is now 1249 KB, up 40% year-over-year, according to httparchive.org.ⁱ Assuming this trend continues, average page sizes in 2014 will be over 2 MB—*four times larger than average page sizes in 2010*.ⁱⁱ

Unfortunately the method of mobile web design, commonly called *responsive design*, is not adequately positioned to reverse this trend; in reality, it is likely to significantly add to average web page sizes.

Responsive design is often implemented using only client-side adjustments to web pages, meaning that both desktop computers and mobile devices *always download an entire web page*, along with its added code for handling formatting on multiple devices and screen sizes. This technique poses challenges for mobile web users, as 3G network speeds are 40% slower on average than desktop connections; even 4G/LTE connections are 12% slower on average than desktop connections.ⁱⁱⁱ

The key significant benefit of a server-side mobile solution is found in its fast and efficient delivery of content, an important consideration for mobile users who studies show^{iv} are only willing to wait a maximum of four seconds for content to load on their smartphones. Server-side powered mobile web pages are up to 500% smaller than their desktop counterparts, and have been shown to load up to 400% faster^v than web pages not using a server-side mobile solution.

This is the main reason why many top Internet brands including Google, Facebook, and Yahoo have chosen server-side mobile solutions. It's estimated^{vi} that 82% of the Alexa Top 100 sites use server-side solutions for their mobile websites.

The BraveNewCode and Mobile Joomla! teams have been developing the most popular mobile solutions for CMS platforms WordPress and Joomla! since 2008. Their recommendation is to choose server-side solutions (sometimes referred to as *dynamic serving*) to address mobile needs.

Server Side Solutions and Responsive Design Compared

"Responsive design is like going on a warm-weather vacation and bringing your ski wear, winter jacket, and business attire with you just in case," explains Mobile Joomla's Ugur Kaner. Content and assets for phones, tablets and desktop computers are all delivered—*whether the requesting device needs them or not*. The device is then

instructed what to display in order for the website to render its responsive layout. "All of this means sites become larger and unfortunately deliver slower experiences," explains Kaner.

Similar to responsive design, server-side mobile solutions work with the same content displayed on your desktop site. *Creation and maintenance of separate content for mobile visitors is not required, while SEO is not affected.* However, where server-side solutions depart from most responsive design practices is in what is actually sent to devices.

Server-side solutions leverage the benefits of detecting mobile device types like phones and tablets *before* sending anything. Server-side solutions eschew trying to modify and deliver large-screen desktop web experiences for small-screen mobile devices—instead sending unique, streamlined experiences tailored specifically for smartphones or tablets. The result is a fast, flexible and dependable mobile optimized web experience.

Server-side mobile solutions can be powered by easy-to-use and user-friendly tools, such as Mobile Joomla!^{vii} for the Joomla! platform, and BraveNewCode's WPtouch^{viii} for the WordPress platform. As an additional benefit to provide efficient and reliable mobile experiences, site owners who choose these solutions don't need to invest large amounts of resources in design or maintenance, and can instead focus on content and strategy.

About BraveNewCode and Mobile Joomla

Mobile experts on the BraveNewCode and Mobile Joomla! teams have over 20 years of cumulative experience developing mobile solutions. BraveNewCode co-founders Dale Mugford and Duane Storey are the creators of WPtouch, the most popular mobile solution for WordPress sites. First released in 2008, WPtouch has been downloaded over 3,761,000 times from the WordPress repository, and is currently used by over 30% of the top blogs on the internet that are using WordPress.

Ugur Kaner and Miikka Kukkosuo are the founders and developers of Mobile Joomla!, the most popular mobile solution for Joomla! websites. Mobile Joomla! has been used to mobilize over 15,000,000 Joomla! pages since its launch in 2008. The two teams combined serve a sizeable share of sites using open source CMS mobile solutions. Side stand behind server-side detection as a best practice for mobile content delivery.

Supporting Resources

- Responsive Design vs. Server-Side Solutions [INFOGRAPHIC], <http://www.mobilejoomla.com/media/press/responsive-vs-serverside/Responsive-Design-vs-Server-Side-Solutions-Infographic.jpg>
- "Responsive Themes vs. Server Side Optimization: WordPress Mobile Solutions Compared" by Martin Kuplens-Ewart, BraveNewCode, <http://www.bravenewcode.com/2012/11/responsive-themes-vs-ss/>
- "Responsive Vs. Server Side Mobile Solutions", Dev1.tv podcast interview with Dale Mugford from BraveNewCode and Ugur Kaner and Miikka Kukkosuo from Mobile Joomla!, <http://dev1.tv/entry-level/ep23-responsive-design-vs-alternate-mobile-solutions/>

- "Weighing Options: WPTouch, Responsive Design and Your Mobile Strategy" by Dale Mugford, BraveNewCode, <http://www.bravenewcode.com/2012/07/weighing-options-wptouch-responsive-design-and-your-mobile-strategy/>
- "400% Faster Responsive Joomla! Templates with Mobile Joomla!" by Mobile Joomla!, <http://www.mobilejoomla.com/mobile-joomla-blog/157-400-faster-responsive-joomla-templates-with-mobile-joomla.html>

ⁱ HTTP Archive. "Trends." as of November 6, 2012.

<http://www.httparchive.org/trends.php#bytesTotal&reqTotal>, (Accessed November 26, 2012).

ⁱⁱ Strangeloop. "Survey of top 2,000 retail websites finds that sites are 9% slower than in 2011." last modified September 18, 2012. <http://www.strangeloopnetworks.com/news/releases/fall-2012-state-of-the-union/>

ⁱⁱⁱ Bixby, Joshua. "Your mobile site is slower than you think," .net magazine, last modified October 17, 2012. <http://www.netmagazine.com/features/your-mobile-site-slower-you-think>

^{iv} Keynote. "2012 Mobile User Survey: Mobile User Preferences, Habits, and Expectations," Keynote. <http://www.keynote.com/docs/reports/Keynote-2012-Mobile-User-Survey.pdf> (Accessed November 26, 2012).

^v Mobile Joomla!. "Responsive Template Analyzer." Mobile Joomla!

<http://mobilejoomla.com/responsive-template-analyzer> (Accessed November 26, 2012).

^{vi} Cremin, Ronan. "Server-Side Mobile Web Detection Used by 82% of Alexa Top 100 Sites." CircleID *Internet Infrastructure*.

http://www.circleid.com/posts/20120111_analysis_of_server_side_mobile_web_detection/ (Accessed November 26, 2012).

^{vii} Mobile Joomla! <http://www.mobilejoomla.com/> (Accessed November 26, 2012).

^{viii} BraveNewCode. "WPTouch Pro." <http://www.bravenewcode.com/product/wptouch-pro/> (Accessed November 26, 2012).