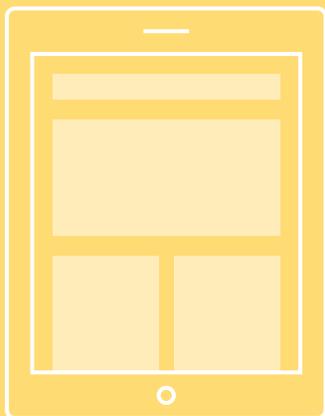


Don't Miss the Mark: Responsive Design & Content



/ Designing for Responsive Content

Responsive web design — a design pattern that allows websites to respond and adapt to display well on any device and screen size — is one of the fundamental pillars of modern web technology, and its importance only continues to grow. Today, mobile and tablet devices make up more than half of all web traffic, so if your site isn't responsive, you can bet that your competition is ahead of you.

A truly responsive site doesn't begin and end with technical design, however. It doesn't matter how good your responsive theme is if your content isn't up to snuff. When it comes to responsive sites, taking a content-first approach and integrating your content and technical teams not only saves money, but enables better results. A good responsive site balances technical expertise with a strong understanding of content performance.

About FFW

FFW is a digital agency focused on creating digital experience platforms that ensure our clients' success, always moving forward at the speed of digital innovation.

Since 2000, the world's largest brands have relied on us to build accessible, creative, and user-friendly digital solutions that deliver results. We are more than 375+ people across 10 countries, with a track record of over 1,000 digital solutions delivered.

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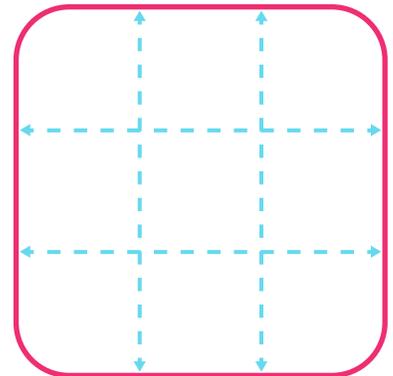
/ The Basics of Responsive Design

Responsive web design means, quite simply, **designing a site that displays the same page across differently sized-devices**. Depending on screen or window size, the site's layout will "responsively" scale and adapt to utilize the available space in the best possible way.

Regardless of content or type of site (ecommerce, news, and so on), every responsive site has a few things in common from a design, implementation, and optimization standpoint. These are:

Fluid and Adaptive Grids

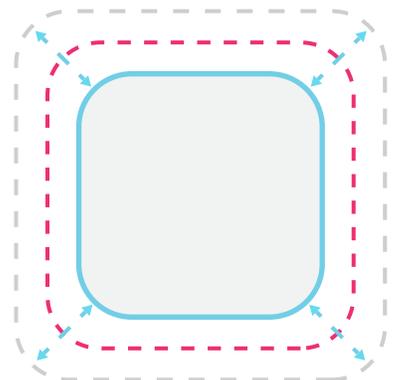
Both fluid and adaptive grids allow the sections of a page to scale depending on the size of the user's screen. This means your users can experience the same context of information no matter the viewport. In a **fluid design**, the content has designated percentage widths — for example, an image might take up 50% of the screen or container width — while with **adaptive grids**, media queries are used to determine the screen size and resize the layout accordingly in fixed increments.



Relative Units and Flexible Media

Relative units are self-referential measurements in a page's CSS that can flexibly scale design elements like width, margins and padding. Instead of hard-coding a container using pixels, using relative units such as percentages, ems or rems keeps a design flexible and fluid, and allows it to adapt to its context.

Similarly, media elements (such as images and videos) should use relative units in order to scale up and down relative to the size of their container. This is called **flexible media**, which gives the user access to rich media tailored to their device.



Media Queries and Breakpoints

Media queries allow designers to create conditional CSS rules based on the size of a browser. Essentially, media queries provide a way to continually query the browser about the type of device (screen or print) as well of the size of the browser window, and only apply certain CSS properties if the query matches the criteria we have set.

This allows organizations to determine and design around specified **breakpoints**, or predefined sizes or points at which a layout will change — for example, a point at which two content blocks might change positions from side-by-side to a vertical stack. Columns are a good example of breakpoints: a site might display one column of “stacked” content on a mobile device, but change to two columns at a tablet breakpoint, and finally three columns in a desktop browser.



Flow

Designing with things such as relative units, fluid grids and breakpoints means that we have to design for “flow.” **Flow** refers to the way that content reacts to changing browser sizes and “flows” to new positions. As an example, the same paragraph of text may take up a much larger vertical portion of a screen on a mobile phone than it will on a desktop, so designing a text element with a fixed height will result in text suddenly overlapping with other parts of the page. Instead, designs should be flexible and flow so that whatever content is beneath will be pushed further down to avoid any messy overlaps.

Progressive Enhancement and Graceful Degradation

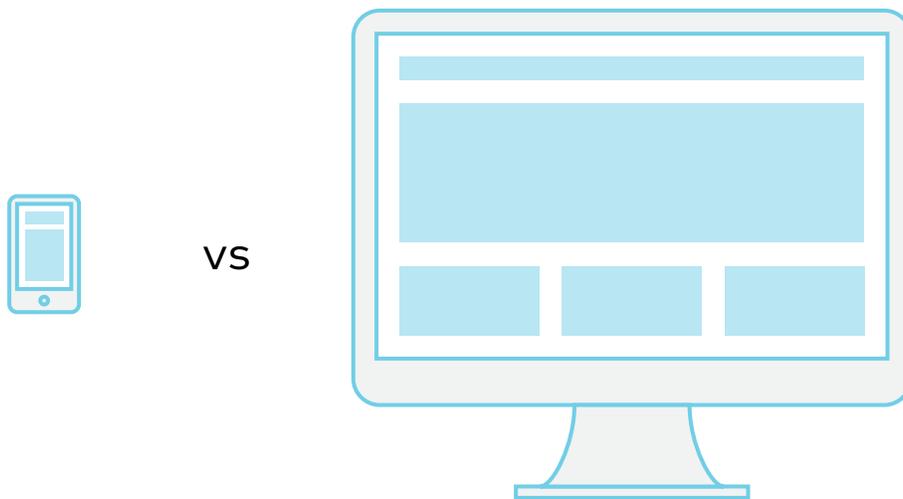
While not directly related to responsive design, an important factor to consider in your responsive strategy is how to deal with the different ways that various browsers and devices may interpret HTML and CSS. Generally speaking, there are two different strategies for dealing with this challenge: progressive enhancement and graceful degradation.

Progressive enhancement is an optimization strategy that starts with the basics. The idea is to first ensure a simple, basic version of a page is designed to work in even older, less capable browsers before considering and enhancing the design for the more advanced layout capabilities of modern browsers.

Graceful degradation, on the other hand, refers to the strategy of designing the optimal version of your website first using the the technology available to modern systems, and only then ensuring that the website degrades "gracefully" to a less capable version on older systems. Essentially, it provides a certain level of user experience in more modern browsers while making sure the site still displays content gracefully in older browsers.

Mobile-First vs Desktop-First

While a responsive design will take both desktop and mobile designs into consideration, starting with **mobile first** is often considered a best practice. The reason is that the limited screen real estate on a mobile screen adds a clear design constraint, forcing organizations to make any difficult prioritizations about content from the get-go. However, designing **desktop-first** certainly also has its merits (as long as mobile is still considered), and often modern designers will effectively design for the various sizes in tandem, considering every design choice in the different contexts to ensure the best results. Generally the approach is a personal preference, and depends on the project and the vendor you're using to help design and build your responsive site.



Ultimately, the technical flexibility of responsive web design means that users can consume the same content on every device in ways that are useful and may be unique to each device. However, this also means it's not just up to your technical team to make sure your site delivers an exceptional responsive experience: it's up to your content authors as well.

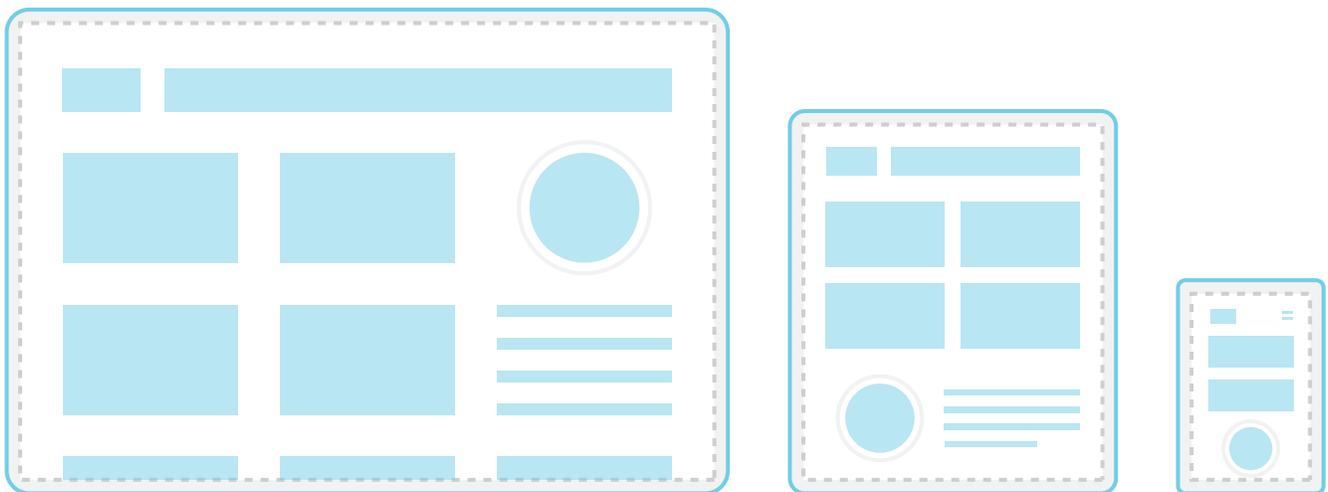
/ The Role of the Content Author in Responsive Design

Responsive web design delivers the same content across devices, which means that content authors need to be aware of each device's strengths and limitations. This may mean leaving off tables, keeping sentences or paragraphs shorter, and optimizing images (large and small alike) for multiple different screen sizes. Making sure that the copy and body of content is flexible gives the technical team a greater ability to tailor experiences across devices.

“ We should embrace the fact that the web doesn't have the same constraints [as a printed page], and design for this flexibility. ”

– John Allsopp, "A Dao of Web Design"

This is what makes it so important to have an integrated team working on content and design. For organizations looking to succeed, it's critical to have a joint perspective on the strategy, and a core alignment on an iterative, agile approach to responsive web design.



/ The Importance of an Integrated Team

Integrating your content and technical teams isn't something that you only do once you've got your responsive website built. Often, costly mistakes are made early in the process, when designs are compiled either without a sense of the impact on technology, or of how responsive principles should be applied. Here's how to make sure your team puts responsive design first through every phase of site building:



Discovery Phase

The discovery phase is where you pinpoint what you have and what you need. A thorough discovery phase will allow you to identify pain points for your organization and for your audiences. This is the time to develop a content inventory, research the kinds of devices your users will need screen support on, understand navigation hierarchies, and determine other key aspects of your project plan.



Content Strategy

Once you've developed your content inventory from the discovery phase, it's time to make a plan for maximizing content usage and placement across channels and devices. How will content be used? How will it be displayed? What content still needs to be created? These are questions you should ask during the content strategy phase.



Visual Design

This is the phase where things visually come together. During the visual design phase, your site will get a whole new look — if you want. This is where design for mobile devices begins: choices such as adaptive vs responsive grids are made, and breakpoints are determined. During this phase it's helpful to have a brand guide, and to have your content and your messaging prioritized for building out responsive displays.



Prototype

During the prototyping phase, you'll take all you've learned and begin building a solution that's responsive and easy-to-use. This is the best place to identify gaps in your strategy before moving into a full implementation. It's important to take time to validate the content direction during the prototype phase, and to verify that your site is responsive in a way that frames the most important content in valuable ways.



Develop and Test

This is an iterative phase where your develop team (or the web development company you've contracted with) will transform concepts into reality using industry best practices. There are cycles of development and testing across devices so that any potential problems can be addressed as early in the development phase as possible.

/ The Big Benefits of Building Responsively

When sites are built with only one screen size in mind, the results aren't pretty: generally an entirely separate mobile theme is implemented, with poor results.

In best practices, the design process is agile, flexible, and collaborative: a multidisciplinary team means that the site is beautiful, and content displays and performs precisely as intended. Building responsively keeps projects on budget and on track — adding mobile as an afterthought, on the other hand, generally causes budget and delivery problems.

Treating responsive design as an afterthought (or even a given), rather than as a core pillar of your design strategy, will doubtless result in a poor experience overall for your site visitors. Putting mobile at the center of your digital strategy and getting buy-in from every team is what takes a digital platform from "good" to "amazing," and what will set you head and shoulders above your competition.

When choosing a company to help you build your website, go with one that builds responsively and iteratively. For better results now, contact the FFW team to talk about your responsive design needs.

Time To Start Building

There's no need to struggle with building a responsive site. This whitepaper can help you — and so can we.

For more help building an integrated team, designing a responsive site, and building content that works for you, contact FFW. Our team of digital experts is here to help you make the most of your site — no matter what device it's being viewed on. For advice, assistance with design, and more, contact us. We'd love to hear from you.

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