Mobile Strategy and Design

A Guide for Publishers

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Overview

This paper outlines mobile strategies and deployment guidelines for publishers. The impetus for the document is the new HTML5 standard and the impact that it will have on content publishers. Decision makers, business analysts, managers, editors, and others who are involved with publishing, news, blogging, media, marketing, or any other creator of time sensitive information should find this document of value.

Why You Need an HTML5 Mobile Site

If you have been up on the recent buzz in publishing, you are most likely aware that HTML5 is the leading alternative to native mobile apps. Effectively HTML5 makes your website function like a well designed iPhone or Android app, but with several key advantages.

> On average expect that 30% of mobile phone users in the US are reading email newsletters on a smartphone.

For one, unlike native mobile apps, users can click directly to a page on mobile website from email or web while on their mobile device. If new or current subscribers are clicking through from newsletters, social networks, or content aggregators this is an important consideration. A mobile website is also more dynamic and easier to maintain. Updates are automatic without initiation from users. The well designed HTML5 mobile website will work on all tablets, smartphones, and other devices that support HTML5 browsers. Further a mobile website need not exist in isolation, but can be made to fully integrate with existing websites and email newsletters.

On the revenue side there are no restrictions for advertising or collecting payments with a mobile website. This means that publishers can sell subscriptions and manage their own ad placements. Existing systems and relationships can be maintained.

As mobile web browser capabilities improve, end users are expecting more from mobile websites. However, few mobile web sites are yet utilizing the advanced features offered by HTML5. This may in fact be one reason individuals are not using the mobile web more. A lack of well designed mobile sites with advanced mobile feature has acted to reduce mobile web traffic.

> Publishers have a unique opportunity to gain market share and increase revenues by employing the right mobile web strategies

Recently a well publicized stat from Comscore indicated that close to 7% of all US web traffic came from mobile devices. At the same time according to Bultwith.com, as of November 7th 2011, less than 5% of the top 10,000 websites are using HTML5 and less than 1% are using advanced HTML5 features. This would indicate that the demand for mobile web is strong even without the wide availability of websites with advanced HTML5 features. The same study by Comscore also points to the significant “incremental reach through mobile” that is possible when adding a mobile

offering. This represents a unique opportunity for early adopters to gain market share via an effective mobile strategy.

Another study by Journalism.org completed in February 2010 suggests that at that time 26% of adults in the US viewed news on their cell phones. While, a study by Adobe last year suggests that mobile users prefer getting news content from the mobile web over mobile apps by significant margins.

Email is further driving traffic to the mobile web as users click through from emails and newsletters while on mobile devices. A recent study by Nielsen.com indicates that 40% of mobile phone users in the US have smartphones. A survey by Pew Research reveals that 76% of smartphone users in the US read email on their phones and another study also by Pew Research indicates that 90% of college educated individuals or those earning more than 50k per year have cell phones. This means that publishers can expect that on average 30% of their audience with mobile phones (27% overall) will be reading emails and newsletters on smartphones. For publishers with professional business or higher net wealth audiences this percent could be significantly higher. In Europe smartphone usage is close to 60% of the mobile phone users according to a study last year by comscore.

Mobile web has a greater degree of omnipresence than the traditional desktop web. An individual who has their smartphone with them at all times, will always be able to use mobile web to connect with a particular publisher. So, even if the individual has an option to connect to a publisher via a desktop computer, they may still prefer to use the mobile device. This is particularly true if the mobile experience is as good or better and the individual has become conditioned to get their content via mobile.

> Mobile web has a greater degree of omnipresence than traditional desktop web. It is always an option for subscribers even when at their desktops

Publisher Specific HTML5 Features

There is much talk about the many new features available in HTML5. Here we outline the capabilities derived from these features that will be specifically useful for publishers. Among the new capabilities especially worth noting include:

- **Store Content on Device for Offline Viewing -** In the past only mobile apps could do this. Even with increases in bandwidth mobile users by definition will be be moving in and out of coverage areas. Also with many mobile devices still at slower bandwidth speeds and performance issues with some browsers, the ability to cache content can greatly improve user experience.
- **Ad Serving and Ad Placement Control** – A big advantage over dedicated mobile apps is the ability for publishers to control ads and ad placements.
- **Browser Side Ad Placement and Rotation** – This is not a direct feature but with the right

HTML5 site design and ad management system, ads can be queued for offline rotation.

- **Offline Activity Tracking and Storage –** This allows recording of ad and article views for later transmission to tracking and reporting systems. Not a direct feature but with the right design and Content Management System this can be implemented easily.

A big advantage over dedicated mobile apps is the ability for publishers to fully control ads and ad placements.

- **Queue Up Offline Ad Clicks** – If an ad is clicked offline the event can be recoded and transmitted to the ad management system when the device returns online. A follow up email can be sent or more information can be retrieved for immediate display on the mobile website.
- **Display Alteration Based on Past History –** For example publishers can use this feature to arrange or highlight content so that subscribers can more efficiently navigate through what content they have read and what is new.
- **Direct Video Support –** this well publicized feature makes it easier to manage video across multiple mobile devices and platforms. Although multiple formats might still be needed, this is an improvement. To take advantage of this publishers need an integrated way to host and stream video from content and media systems.
- **Better Tracking and Targeting –** The mobile device provides some unique subscriber information that be used for better tracking, reporting, and dynamic preference adjustments.

The new HTML5 features will have limited value without proper support from ad and content management systems.

What Will I Need?

The exciting new HTML5 features will have limited value without proper integration and support from ad and content management systems. Here are some of the requirements needed.

Content Management System Requirements:

- Abiltity to record offline access to article and page views
- Efficient delivery for media and video streaming or integration with a Content Delivery Network
- Java-script access to registration and login components
- Java-scrip access to content archives
- Access to content collections by issue or publication that include articles as well as video and other rich media assets
- Inline website adaptation for mobile device detection and ability to alter the page and content accordingly.

Ad Server Requirements:

- Ability to place mobile specific ads and to handle multiple types of ads and ad formats
- Support for ad placement and rotation while the mobile device is offline.
- Ability to record and track offline ad views
- Respond to offline ad clicks when subscribers/devices return online.
- Target ads by subscriber profile, location, and page context.

A few more requirements:

- You email service provider will need the ability to deliver mobile optimized emails and newsletters. If your emails do not work on mobile no one will be clicking through to your new mobile site.
- Your mobile site and regular site should share the same URLs. This means that when viewers share links they will be sharing the same links whether on mobile or on the desktop. Also by having the same URLs bots and search engines wont get confused. It is possible to have separate mobile web and desktop website domains. However, this approach will require more effort to maintain and will be more error prone.

Choosing the Right Mobile Website Strategy and Design

There is no one-size-fits-all. Different types of publishers will be better suited to different strategies and designs. Here are a few general design approaches.

Type of Publisher	Description/Example	Suggested Mobile Design Strategy
Continuous Publishing	Newspapers, media outlets, active blogs, trade publications, news sites.	Cache current content and other resources on the device. Limit navigation to cached content while offline. Optimize ad position for mobile display and cache ads for offline display and rotation.
Issue Centric Publishers	Publish multiple articles at once and may include multimedia content. Example magazines, trade press, newsletters.	Cache content by issue and allow for multiple issues to be cached on the device. Display video and audio links only while online. Dynamically display current ads in past issues to keep revenues streaming from archive views. Combine with mobile optimized email newsletter.
Data Centric	Infrequent updates. Content is lookup driven.	Consider storing popular content and data on the device based on what is frequently requested.
Subscription Site	Pay to view full articles.	Integrate subscription options and use special mobile form elements to support easier registration and payments.

Sample Mobile Websites

> A well designed mobile website is cost effective to maintain, will work with all mobile devices, and integrates seamlessly with existing websites and email newsletters.

One publisher that has had much fanfare with their move from mobile app to mobile web is FT.com (see the article by ReadWriteWeb.com and Media Post) Continuous Publishers and Issue Centric Publishers should view this mobile site to get ideas and discussion points. This is a good looking mobile site and well designed. However, the ad placement abilities are weak and the mobile site is separate from the main web site which makes it harder to maintain and keep their URLs in check. Since it is primarily a subscription site these short falls are probably secondary, but would be issues for an ad supported publisher or other site looking for build audience.

Ad Strategies

Ad placements for mobile web should coexist with desktop web placements and it should be possible to have ad creative specific for each. In the future HTML5 video ads will become more popular it will be easier to have the same ad on mobile and desktop web versions. Image ads will work on both as well but dynamic size adjustments are often needed. Standard leaderboard ads are 728px wide, for example, but the width of a typical smart phone is around 320px.

Email Design Strategies

Email subscribers on mobile will be clicking through to access landing pages and to view full article. A website that adapts to mobile views by serving the mobile version without having to redirect to another URL will make the click through process from mobile email quicker and problem free. Many publishers have choose to treat mobile is a separate medium but pay the price when the URLs for the web do not correspond with those on mobile versions. This is often particularly a problem for preference center and login pages. Having the URLs in the emails work directly with out redirection will improve subscriber experience.

Having a mobile optimized email design is important. Subscribers should not need to do any extra work to read your emails and get your message. Making the reader stretch, scroll, or squint means more effort, and this will decrease response and interaction rates on subsequent mailings. Another consequence of poor mobile design is that subscribers can push side bars off the viewing area; thus, mitigating the impact of embedded marketing messages and ads.

There are two approaches to making emails easier read and navigate on mobile.

Big Font Format - Make the width smaller (less than 650px) and make the fonts bigger.

Flex Format - Remove the all fixed width requirements in the email and assure that no image is wider than 320px.

The Big Font approach is good for mobile, but often looks too narrow on a desktop. It works well when fixed widths are required for a uniform look across all email readers. Marketing mailings with heavy use of images are best suited for this approach.

The Flex Format approach will let the email adjust to the email client. Narrow mobile email readers will push down wide navigation, logo areas, and titles to display the email optimally for different mobile widths and orientations. Desktop email readers will expand the email to fit the wider screen space. This approach is best for newsletters, alerts, and single article commentaries.

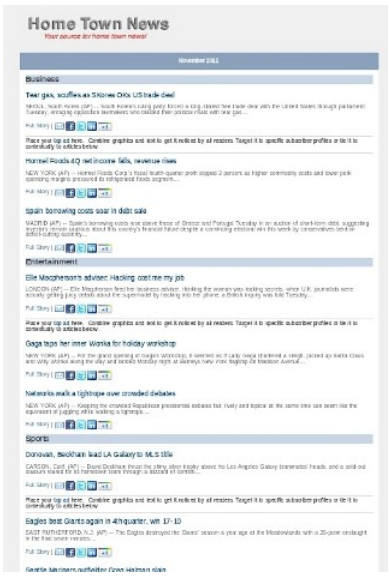
Also in the Flex Format approach, ads can be made to adapt as well by using narrow images combined with stylized HTML text. Since the newsletters with this design approach are more likely to be read without altering the viewing area the flex format ads will always be viewable. Another tip is to use a max width option, if desired, to limit the width on desktop email clients, but this option is not supported by all email clients (for example Outlook).

Below are 3 sample screen shots from an iPhone and 3 samples from an Android phone displayed to scale. The 3 different templates were used, a 650px width (standard email newsletter layout), a big font approach with a 550px fixed width, and the flex format approach respectively.

Standard Newsletter iPhone

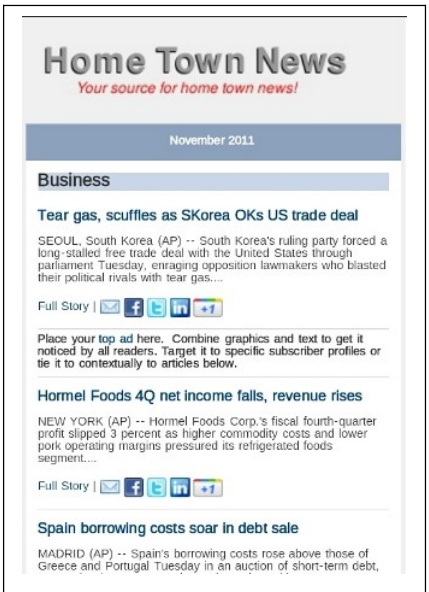
Big Font Newsletter iPhone

Flex Format Newsletter iPhone



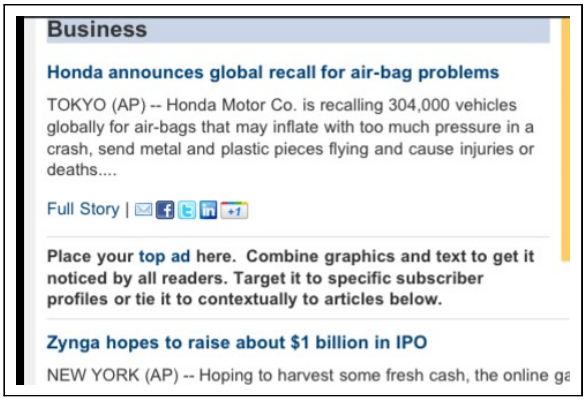
Standard Newsletter Android

Big Font Newsletter Android



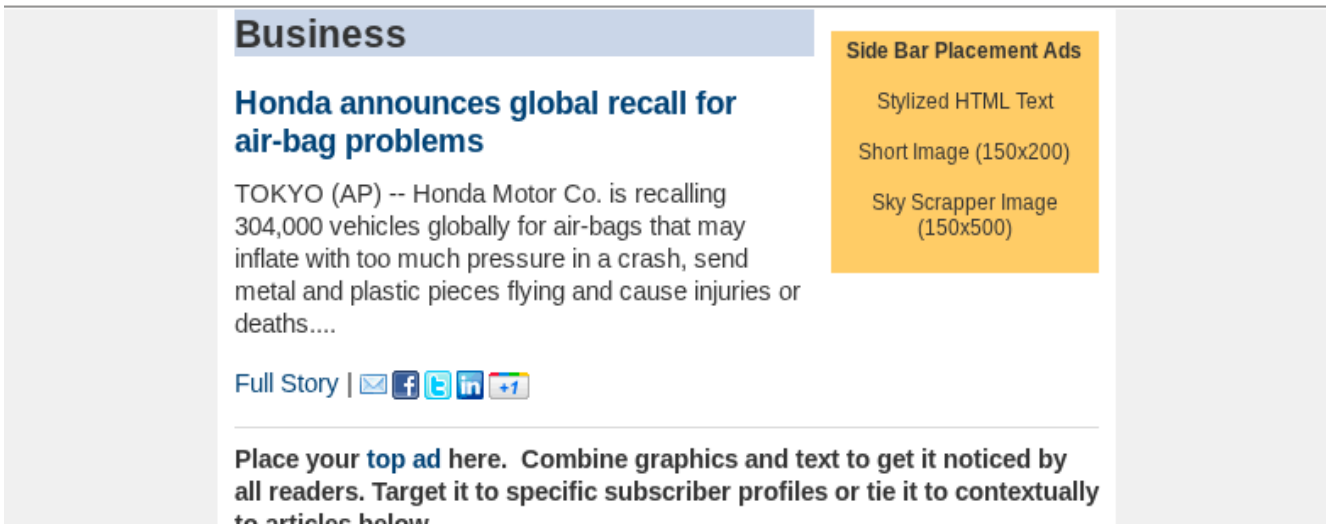
Flex Format Newsletter Android

For most newsletters the flex format approach yields better results as branding and ads can be made to be prominent in the display and font sizes are comparable to default fonts in mobile apps. What typically happens with a mobile email is viewers shift to horizontal display and stretch the view to enlarge the text then adjust the view so that the sidebar is blocked out. Here is an example of how subscribers maybe typically viewing standard format newsletters:

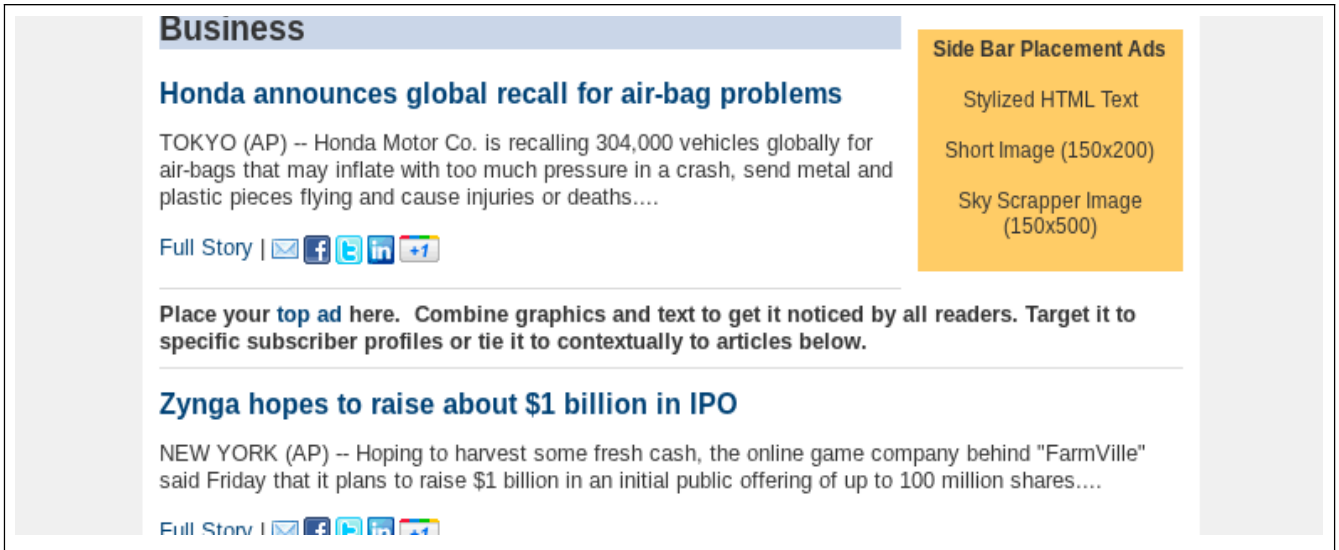


As it turns out the flex format may also be superior for email newsletters on the desk top as well. In

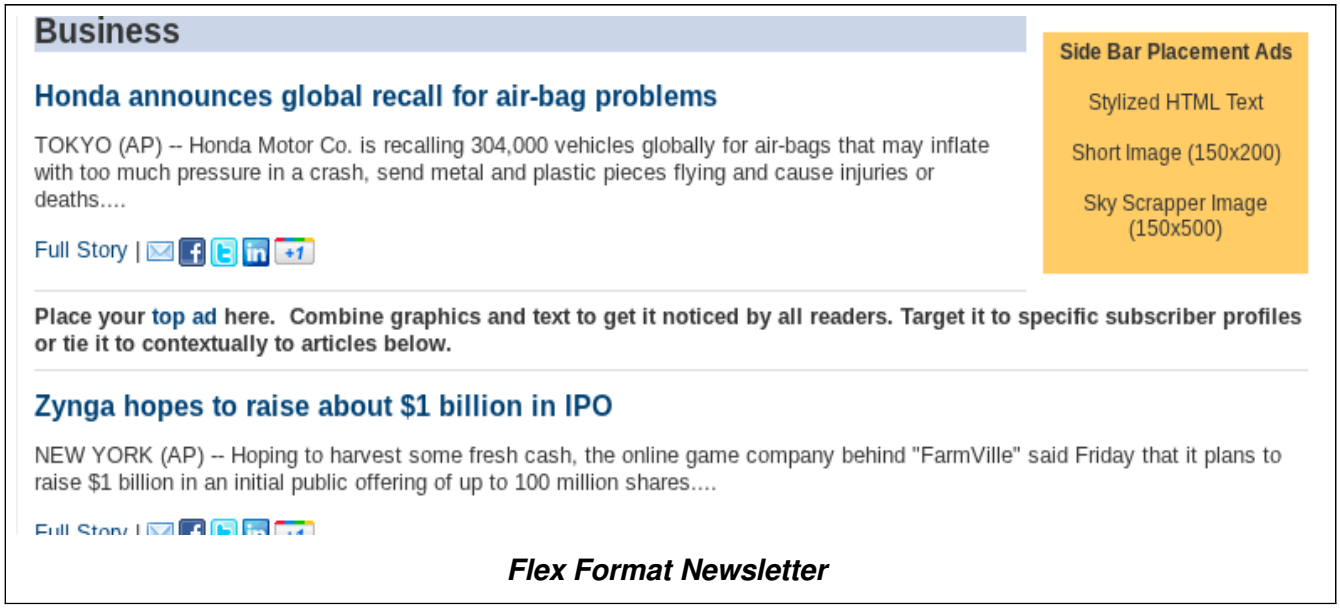
the screen shots below the sample newsletter was viewed on a desktop email reader with a window width of 780px. The flex format sample better utilized the available screen size area. While the big font formated newsletter sample would require more scrolling to view.



Big Font Format Newsletter Desktop View



Standard Format Newsletter Desktop View



Flex Format Newsletter