Chapter 13

Ten Great Mobile Sites

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Creating the best design for the mobile Web isn’t easy, especially if you want your site to work on a wide variety of devices. The sites featured in this chapter illustrate some of the best early adopters on the mobile Web, complete with screenshots so you can see how the site designs vary across devices.

The sites selected for this top ten list won their place in history for creating Web sites that look great on everything from an iPhone to a Motorola RAZR. The sites featured in this chapter win points not only for their mastery of mobile technology but also for their innovative and effective presentation of information within the constraints of the small screens of mobile phones. Creating a great mobile Web site, such as the ones we feature in this chapter, requires more than just mastering a few new technical skills and cramming information onto a small screen. What makes the mobile Web different is that it requires an almost Zen-link ability to concentrate on all the tiny details, while at the same time remaining cognizant of the bigger picture. Only by having a strong grounding in the technical limitations and expanded functionalities of the mobile Web will a designer truly be able to give the user the right content in the right place at the right time — and then go a step further to ensure that the site functions on the device each visitor uses.
For each site, we include a screenshot of the desktop version (taken in Internet Explorer 8, on a computer monitor set to a resolution of 1024 x 768) and screenshots taken on the iPhone 3G, BlackBerry Bold 9700, and Motorola RAZR V9x.

We chose these phones because they represent the main categories of devices on the market today: a touch-screen phone (the iPhone), a smartphone (the BlackBerry), and a feature phone (the RAZR). With every device, we entered the URL for the site’s home page and let the site redirect us to the version it thought best for the phone we were using. (You find out how to set up a site to redirect visitors like this in Chapter 6.)

Comparing the designs on each device in this chapter can help you figure out how best to take advantage of the limitations and features of each phone type.

Over the coming months and years, these designs are sure to evolve, and the list of favorite mobile sites is sure to grow (we already have a longer list of great examples than we could ever include in this book). Keep up with our favorites and send us yours via the e-mail link on our blog at www.mobilewebdesignblog.com.

**Facebook Keeps You Connected**

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the best designed sites for the mobile Web was created with the goal of helping people connect with each other. You can take your friends from your home computer to your office to any mobile device you have with you when you sign up for an account on Facebook. The Facebook site performs well on everything from the simplest low-end feature phones to the latest smartphones to touch-screen phones, with a special version optimized for each type of phone, as shown in Figure 13-1. Facebook reports that more than 100 million people access their site via the mobile Web, that those users are twice as active as non-mobile users, and that more than 200 mobile operators in 60 countries are trying to make sure that their users can access Facebook on their mobile devices. And yes, of course, Facebook has an iPhone app with additional features.

The premise of this book is that every Web site needs to be optimized for mobile devices, and some may warrant an app as well. Facebook is a great example of a company that does both well.
The team at Facebook understands that mobile technology facilitates a dramatic cultural shift as people rely more and more on cellphones to connect *IRL* (that’s *in real life* for those who don’t text much). Yes, most still want to get together IRL at least once in awhile, and that’s part of why Facebook has become such a popular part of the Internet. The addition of mobility to Facebook makes it easier than ever to stay in touch all the time no matter where you are and to hook up almost anywhere when you’re in the same neighborhood.

![Figure 13-1: Facebook is optimized for each phone.](image)
BBC Sends News Around the Globe

www.bbc.com

Serving a diverse international audience, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) recognized earlier than most the importance of creating a mobile version of its Web site that would work on a variety of devices. An early player on the mobile Web, the BBC succeeded in creating one design that looks good on a wide variety of devices — no small feat for a site that’s updated around the clock with breaking news. In Figure 13-2, the designs vary across all three types of phones, but they all are quite different from the desktop version. Like most news sites, the front page of BBC.com is packed with stories, photos, and advertising when viewed on a desktop computer.
On the mobile phone version, the site is stripped to the bare minimum, with just three tiny photos and links to quickly follow the top stories or navigate to the section that most interests you with just a few clicks. The most dramatic difference between the desktop and mobile version is hard to appreciate in the black and white figures in this book. The desktop version is red, and the mobile version is blue — a popular color among mobile designers because blue displays well on many devices under a wide variety of lighting conditions.

Google Wants to Know Where You Are

Google, the most popular search engine on the Internet, pays close attention to the explosive growth in wireless Web surfing. Google has not only optimized its designs to work well in a variety of devices, but it also produces different search results when you search the mobile site. Although Google guards its search algorithms closely, the search giant favors sites that are optimized for mobile devices when delivering results to mobile phones. In Chapter 2, you find a few tips for optimizing your mobile site to score better in Google and other mobile search engines. (You find the URLs for several other mobile search engines on this book’s online Cheat Sheet; see the inside front cover for details.)

In Figure 13-3, you can see that Google’s minimalist design requires little adjustment on the mobile Web. Most sites limit the amount of information they present in the mobile version, but Google, king of the We Love Whitespace home page, actually added text to the mobile version that’s not on the desktop Web site.

In the iPhone version, you see My Location: Off followed by a Turn On link. If you click the link, Google asks you to confirm that you want to turn on this feature, which uses geo-location technology (either GPS or triangulating via the signals from the cell towers) to enable Google to provide location-specific information when you search.

Anytime you want to collect information through a Web page, especially something as potentially revealing as the exact location and movements of your users, take a lesson from Google (a company that has faced its share of controversies over privacy) and ask permission first.
You can clear off the bookshelves and empty your student backpack because soon you will have every reference manual you could ever need in the palm of your hand. Start with Dictionary.com (and don’t forget Wikipedia, a non-authoritative but still useful site when you want to start exploring a topic, which has also been optimized to display well on mobile devices).
In Figure 13-4, you see the difference in designs at Dictionary.com. In this case, the designers stripped the site to its core function — looking up words. The focus in the mobile version is the search field, and most of the other information visible on the home page of the desktop site can be found only by following links deeper into the mobile version’s site.

If you include advertising on your pages, you may want to pay special attention to how Dictionary.com delivers ads. On the RAZR and the BlackBerry, a small banner ad is included in the page design. Although you can’t see an ad in the iPhone screenshot, when you open the Dictionary.com site on an iPhone, a full-screen ad loads and then you move on to the home page.

Figure 13-4: Dictionary.com is an example to follow if you want to efficiently include ads on your mobile site.
Discovery Channel Creates a Sense of Wonder on Any Platform

www.discovery.com

From popular television shows, such as Deadliest Catch, MythBusters, and Dirty Jobs, to games, blogs, and other Internet-only content, the team at Discovery Channel works hard to make sure you can interact with their award-winning content anywhere, anytime. In Figure 13-5, you can see that stripping this highly interactive multimedia site to just the core elements wasn’t easy.

Figure 13-5:
The Discovery Channel site becomes a bare-bones site that still delivers key content on the mobile platform.
On Discovery mobile, you don’t find all the cool features of the desktop version — the main part of the desktop site rotates through a series of full-screen, rich media content related to each of its shows. On the mobile versions, especially on a low-end feature phone, you find a much more limited set of links and very few images, but you can still access key content and keep up with Discovery Channel’s most popular shows.

The Wall Street Journal Serves Its Well-Heeled Audience on Any Phone

Internationally respected as a carefully researched news source on business and the economy, The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) was an early player on the mobile Web. The newspaper’s readership, made up primarily of business executives and financial experts, serves an audience that’s likely to carry the latest in mobile gadgetry.

An unusually high percentage of readers of The Wall Street Journal is likely to have BlackBerrys, and the designers created a special version for these smartphones (see Figure 13-6). Like many sites, WSJ delivers the desktop design to the iPhones, also shown in Figure 13-6. The iPhone can display most Web pages without requiring special markup, and many iPhone surfers prefer the desktop version (one of the reasons it’s considered good practice to include a link to the desktop site from any mobile version you create). Although the experience isn’t as rich, you can still access the WSJ’s stories even on a low-end feature phone, as shown in Figure 13-6.
Figure 13-6: Knowing its readers are likely using a BlackBerry, The Wall Street Journal offers a special site for those users, as well as a nice look on other phones.

Share Photos with Anyone on Flickr

www.flickr.com

One of the most popular places to share photos on the Internet, Flickr has devised the magic formula to maintain its impressive collection of interactive features while still being accessible from a variety of mobile devices (see Figure 13-7).

From the high-resolution images you can access with a desktop computer to the stripped-down version for feature phones, Flickr makes it as easy to upload photos as it is to download them. Since so many phones now come with cameras, it’s a natural fit for Flickr to empower you to share all the snapshots you take.
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Figure 13-7: The Flickr photo site enables visitors to share photos via any type of phone.

YouTube Brings Video to (and from) the Masses

www.youtube.com

Unfortunately, a large percentage of video on the Web is completely inaccessible to mobile devices because it’s presented in the Flash video format, which isn’t supported on many mobile devices, including the iPhone.

All the more reason to admire YouTube for figuring out how to deliver different versions of its videos, optimized to play well on nearly any mobile device on the planet. In Figure 13-8, you see a video clip from one of author Janine Warner’s training videos. Thanks to YouTube, this video plays on the lowly feature phone almost as well as the iPhone.
If you want your videos to display well on a mobile device, uploading them to YouTube and then linking to them from your mobile site is an easy shortcut to ensure that your video looks good to a broad mobile audience. (You can read more about adding multimedia to your mobile designs in Chapter 8.)

Figure 13-8: The YouTube video-sharing site enables visitors to play video on any type of Web-enabled phone.

Checking Flights on American Airlines

www.aa.com

The American Airlines site offers rich, interactive features, including the ability to check your gate while you run through the airport to catch your flight. (Assuming you can juggle your carry-on bags and your phone while you dodge and weave through the airport.)

The form tag, which creates search options and other interactive features like the ones at AA.com, works fairly consistently across most mobile devices. But anything you can do to more easily allow visitors to fill out forms, such as offering multiple-choice options instead of requiring users to type a lot of data,
makes it easier to interact with your site on a mobile device. (You find a list of form tags supported in mobile markup languages in Chapter 5.)

When you look over the four versions of AA.com, shown in Figure 13-9, note that the mobile versions offer just a few options — the things you’re most likely to need if you’re about to catch a flight. Note that on the desktop site, making a reservation is the most prominent option on the home page. If you scroll down the page on the mobile versions, you find links that take you to a page where you can make reservations.

When you adapt a site for the mobile Web, determining what content is most useful to someone on a mobile phone is often the most challenging and most important part of the job.

Figure 13-9:
The American Airlines mobile site pares down content to just what visitors need on the go.
Mobile Web Design Blog

www.mobilewebdesignblog.com

Of course your authors’ Mobile Web Design blog (see Figure 13-10) is optimized for a wide range of mobile devices. We include the process by which to install and activate a simple plug-in that makes WordPress blogs mobile-friendly in Chapter 9.

For updates, and a list of great online resources, visit the Mobile Web Design blog on your favorite device (or desktop computer).
Testing in DeviceAnywhere

Special thanks to the great team at DeviceAnywhere. We used the DeviceAnywhere online service to test all the sites in this chapter and to take all the screenshots of mobile devices that you find in this book.

DeviceAnywhere makes it possible to access a long list of devices. After you open the device in the DeviceAnywhere software on your desktop computer, you can access any page on the Internet as if you were actually using the phone. You can even make phone calls, play music or games, or send text messages. You can read more about testing sites on mobile devices, and about using DeviceAnywhere, in Chapter 7.