



The designer's guide to creating better mobile sites

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Fast facts

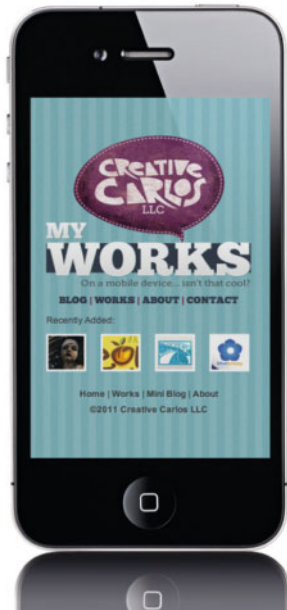
Good mobile sites are elegant and clean. Try to understand what people visiting a website will actually expect to see – ask clients what's important to them and consider what information their users will want to access quickly, such as reservation information, menus and location maps on a restaurant website.

Limited layers

Try to keep to a maximum of three levels of navigation through a mobile site – I usually aim for just two. Mobile users want to get information quickly, so they won't tap here, there and everywhere just to find what they're looking for.

Type right

While you should try to avoid using serif fonts unless they're very sharp and easy to read, mobiles have advanced enough that you can be more creative with type and you can now embed fonts on a mobile site. You still need to keep things as simple as possible for users though.



Shortcuts In Fireworks, quickly add a new button by hitting Ctrl/Cmd+Shift+F8

Big picture

Create graphics at 72dpi and they will be pixelated on mobile phones like the iPhone 4 with higher-res screens. It's fine to make an image that's bigger than the bare minimum – using an optimised JPEG so that the file isn't too large – and then let the code take care of shrinking it where needed.

User's viewpoint

Try to learn to use a device from a user's point of view. Test your design on that device and ask your clients to test it too, so you can see if there's any information that shouldn't be there or if anything's missing. User testing is always really important as well.

Lighten the load

When someone accesses a website from a mobile device it's likely they won't be at home – perhaps they'll be walking along a street or on public transport. Many mobile users are also subject to data limits, so if your website is too full of graphics it might be too expensive for them to load it up.

Build relationships

While it's the design that first sells your product, the relationship that then develops is between the user and the website – it's about how they interact with the site and whether it does what they want it to. Your presentation should be simple and fluid enough to build a strong relationship with your users.

Same differences

While you do need to be mindful of the fact that not everyone is using the same device – for example, not all smartphones have touchscreens – the technology used on different mobile devices is fairly similar. So remember that not everyone has the same screen resolution or input, but don't get too hung up about it.



Freelancing: the value of leisure time

By Brian Hoff, www.thedesigncubicle.com

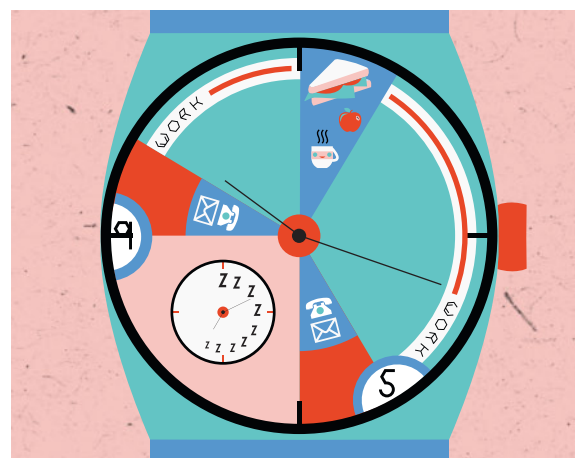


Illustration: Becca Allen

Try to stick to a nine-to-five schedule as much as possible in your freelance routine. When I started working on my own, I tried to adhere to that schedule right from the get-go.

I aim to shut my computer down by six in the evening every day, regardless of whether I've actually finished all my work. Three or four times a week I might think I could finish something if I spend another hour working, but I try to make myself turn off my computer because I'm done for the day and I know that I'll get the work finished tomorrow. And I don't touch my computer at all during the weekend unless I absolutely need to.

I know a lot of freelancers who work when they're on holiday. Sometimes clients expect me to do the same: "Oh, it's not like your office is closed." But the way I see it, I'm off work too. It all comes down to managing client expectations. If I get an email during the weekend, I'll wait and respond on Monday morning. If a client wants me to do something when I'm about to finish work, I'll tell them I can get to it in the morning. I don't want to find myself in a situation where my clients are managing my whole schedule for me. Just because you work from home doesn't mean that everything you do is going to be work-related.

I also have two set times for email: early morning and the end of the day. I check messages throughout the day, but those are my reply times. If you sit and respond to all of your emails as they come in, your concentration will be broken. One email can completely distract you.

Sometimes you just need to keep people out of the loop – you really don't need to report back to everyone about everything you're doing every second of the day. Clients should understand that you have other clients. They may be emailing to ask if you can do something for them really quickly, but if they want to be your only client, you'll need to significantly raise your rates.