



## Responsive design – is it pixels or percentages?

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Responsive web design (RWD) has become a big discussion topic among ecommerce practitioners over the last two years. So what is responsive web design anyway? Simply put, RWD is a design approach aimed at crafting websites to provide an optimal and consistent viewing experience with a minimum of resizing, panning, and scrolling across a wide range of devices by using flexible grids and breakpoints by screen size. Given that half of our online customers access websites via mobile devices, and given that mobile devices can range from smart phones to plus size smart phones to tablets to mini tablets, it follows that RWD is a “no brainer”. Here are some other good reasons to think responsive when it comes to design:

- Responsive web design allows for same site and content regardless of device
- Changes to your website need only be made once due to a single code base and a single set of URL's ... less expensive to maintain than multiple sites
- Responsive design can improve your SEO. Google penalizes bad or missing redirects, and with mobile specific sites, re-directs are needed for each page. (Example – more than half of all emails are opened on mobile devices)
- With Responsive you can leverage a single Content Management System without the need to duplicate content
- Maybe most importantly, RWD “forces” you to take a “mobile first” approach to design, and catch up to where the customer already is

Given all the reasons why Responsive web design is the “no brainer”, then why are not much more than 10% of ecommerce sites fully responsive? As usual, there are always two sides to every story. There are reasons for mobile specific sites and native mobile apps:

- There are not enough best practice cases from the leaders yet to sway the laggards.
- When retailers with websites first looked to go mobile, they found it quicker to build mobile specific sites due to the availability of third party templates (a reason why everybody's mobile sites looked the same).
- Partially as a result of the above, mobile specific sites are generally lighter weight and therefore faster to load. Starting from a desk top design and going Responsive with it will slow down performance.
- For RWD, while the tablet experience is often better, the smartphone experience may not be.
- Still relatively new, the technical skill set needed for the complexity of designing strong customer experiences in Responsive is relatively hard to come by in existing organizations.
- It is more complicated to A/B test a Responsive site vs. mobile specific site.
- Maybe most importantly, many larger retailers have re-platformed their sites in recent years.... A big and expensive undertaking, and RWD almost amounts to the equivalent of another re-platforming.

Today's agile connected consumer is a mobile consumer and she expects her favorite brands and retailers to provide optimal mobile experiences. It is increasingly challenging for retailers to keep up with the demands of the connected consumer. For more innovative “Retail Insights” visit our website [www.theretailthinktank.com](http://www.theretailthinktank.com). Follow us on LinkedIn and get all our updates.