

UB Web Tips

Understanding Google mobile search changes and how they may affect your web traffic

For UB websites outside the UBCMS

On April 21, 2015, Google changes its search algorithm in such a way that websites that are not mobile-friendly will rank lower in Google searches.

Specifically, **any website that is not already mobile friendly** (i.e. using **Responsive Web Design – RWD**) will appear lower (below the fold of search results) when users search for you on Google.

This impacts your site if the following are BOTH true:

- Mobile users search for and find your site(s) using Google
- Your site is not already mobile-friendly

What does this mean for you?

UB units currently using UB's Content Management System (UBCMS) have received guidance on how to prepare for this change.

For UB units not currently using the UBCMS, this tip sheet provides some important information to help you prepare for this change.

It's important that you understand whether your website is affected by this change and to what degree. If you are at high risk, you will need to take immediate steps, so users can continue to find you online.

How do I know if this is a problem for my website?

The first step is understanding your mobile footprint: i.e. how many users find and visit your website by searching on Google using their mobile device.

UB University Communications created a custom dashboard in Google Analytics to give you an easy snapshot. If you're not sure if your website is Google Analytics-enabled, check with your webmaster or technical staff.

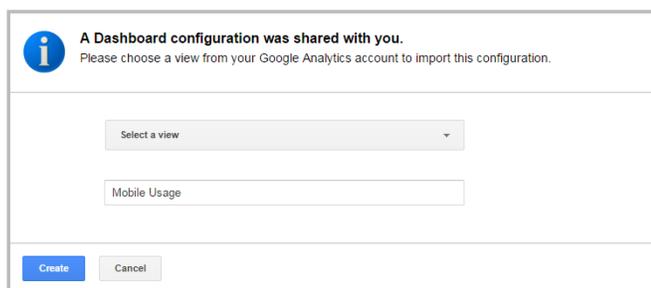
What's a mobile-friendly website?

An RWD-enabled, or mobile-friendly, website automatically adjusts its layout and behavior for whatever device a user is using (e.g. desktop, smartphone, tablet). People using small screens will be able to easily navigate your pages.

Step 1: Create a Mobile Usage Dashboard in Google Analytics

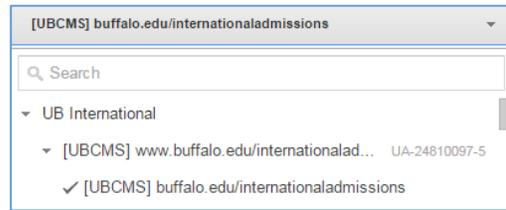
- Go to our custom dashboard in Google Analytics here:

<https://www.google.com/analytics/web/template?uid=-61hTSJSRQ-d2xSZwnTIPQ>

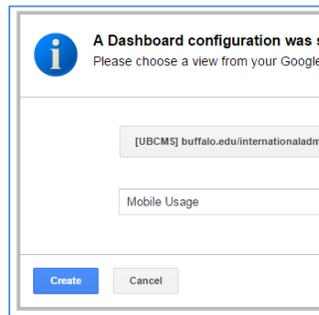


The screenshot shows a Google Analytics configuration dialog box. At the top, it says "A Dashboard configuration was shared with you. Please choose a view from your Google Analytics account to import this configuration." Below this is a dropdown menu labeled "Select a view" with "Mobile Usage" selected. At the bottom, there are two buttons: "Create" (in blue) and "Cancel" (in grey).

- Choose “Select a View” and find your website (choose the bottom-most option in the tree, as shown). *Optional: change dashboard name by typing over “Mobile Usage.”*



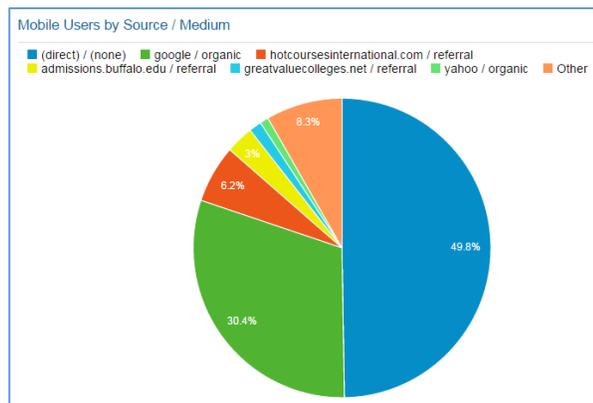
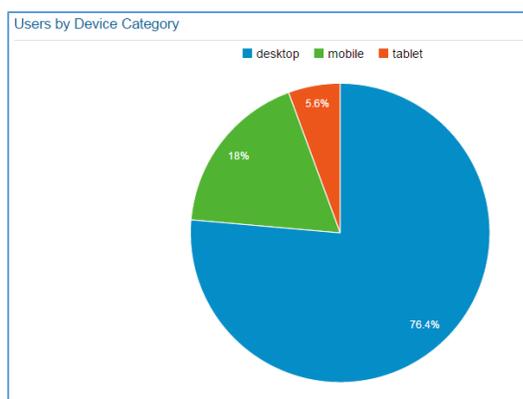
- Choose “Create”



Step 2: Calculate your Google Search-driven Mobile Footprint

You're now on the Mobile Usage dashboard which displays 2 channels:

- Users by Device Category
- Mobile Users by Source/Medium



- From the **Users by Device Category** chart, find the % for “Mobile” (example: 18%)
- From the **Mobile Users by Source/Medium** chart, find the % for “Google/Organic” and express it as a decimal (example: 30.4% becomes .304)
- Multiply **Users by Device** x **Mobile Users by Source** (decimal)

The result is your website’s mobile footprint for the date range listed at the top of your dashboard (i.e. how many users get to your website via Google search using a mobile device)

Example (see charts above)

Users by Device: 18

Mobile Users: X .304

5.47% Mobile Footprint

Step 3: Determine Impact & Plan to Rectify

If your website's mobile footprint is small, there should be little impact to your website traffic and no action is necessary.

If your website's mobile footprint is larger, you will see a dramatic drop in website traffic beginning in late April.

There is no formula to help guide your decision. For some units, even a loss of the smallest amount of traffic affects their business (e.g. loss of prospective student visits). For others, particularly those whose audience is very familiar with their website (e.g. current students), the concern may not be as great.

In the end it is up to you.

Some questions to consider in making your decision:

- Who is my primary audience? (Look to your business strategy to inform this)
 - Do they rely solely on Google Organic Search to find my site (or key information on my site)?
 - E.g. if my primary audience is UB Students, they can use the **UB Google Search** to find my site (NOTE: **UB Google Search** is NOT affected by this change).
- When I look at the **Mobile Organic Searches by Keyword** (see your [Mobile Usage Dashboard](#)) do I see keywords that indicate my users are searching on very specific terms? Or generic terms? While we don't know exactly how the Google algorithm will work, if your keywords can apply to any university, not just UB, you may have more of an issue.
- How much will this affect my business?
- What resources can I apply to addressing this issue?

To counteract the effect, you have a few options:

- 1) *Purchase Google Ad Words / Keywords*
(stop-gap measure, short-term - immediate impact)

Want to guarantee continued visibility but you can't get your site RWD enabled by April 21? Purchase Google Ad Words (<http://www.google.com/AdWords>). For a relatively low investment, Google Ad Words will elevate your website in Google searches.

Note: Watch for University Communications' upcoming "How to Use Google AdWords" tool. It will explain where to purchase keywords and recommend vendors who can help.

- 2) *Begin the process of RWD-enabling your website*
(permanent solution, longer-term)

- a. Perform a business and technical audit of your site. Google has some tools that will help you assess what needs to be done
 - Google Mobile-friendly Test
<https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/mobile-friendly/>

How do I know if my website is set up on Google Analytics?

If Google Analytics is enabled, at least one member of your team should have access to your website's analytics by logging in to Google. If you are unsure, check with your webmaster or technical staff.

- Google's Guide to Mobile-Friendly Websites
<http://googlewebmastercentral.blogspot.com/2014/11/helping-users-find-mobile-friendly-pages.html>

b. Develop and execute a remediation plan

3) *Purchase RWD-friendly themes (if you use Wordpress or Drupal)*

https://developers.google.com/webmasters/mobile-sites/website-software/?utm_source=wmc-blog&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=mobile-friendly

4) *Retain a Vendor to Help*

5) *Migrate to the UBCMS (long-term)*

If you are interested in migrating your website to UB's Content Management System (UBCMS), you can find more information below. All official UB websites are eligible to use the UBCMS.

a. See if your website is eligible

<http://ubcms.buffalo.edu/overview/tiers-of-participation.html>

b. Get started

http://ubcms.buffalo.edu/getting_started.html