



Lesson #42

Making Mobile Friendly Sites

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Introduction

Most offline clients tend to have simple needs. They rely on you to guide them as far as web technologies on their web site go. Once in a while, you will encounter some who would like to take their business beyond the normal web pages and blog or simply want to cater to their customers who are tethered to their cell phones instead of the computer.

As phones get more powerful, you may find you'll probably get more requests to make client sites mobile friendly. In this lesson, we will take a look at the current plugins that help you achieve this.

About Plugins And Mobile Browsers

At time of writing, the plugins mentioned in this lesson will help you do the job. The best thing about WordPress is, you don't have to do a bunch of work. The plugins do the bulk of it and there is little to no search engine penalty.

The down side to these plugins is, they almost always rely on browser detection method. This means sometimes, the plugin cannot determine the browser is actually a phone and will proceed to load the normal page meant for computer screens instead.

This is unfortunate and at the moment inevitable. If you think computer browser proliferation is bad, wait till you dive into mobile browsers. There are more different types of mobile browsers than there are computer browsers. Each one of them with their own way of interpreting your web design.

Thankfully, the plugin developers are pretty savvy about these things so they try to make the plugin as compatible with as many popular phones as possible and most of the time they do work.

If you install a plugin and your client says it doesn't work on their phones, there's a good chance it's because the plugin is not picking up his/her phone as a mobile browser. So you might want to try another plugin.

WordPress Mobile Plugins

WordPress Mobile Edition

This is what I'm currently using at TechBasedMarketing.com. It seems to work nicely, produces a slick iPhone like design that your clients will likely be pleased with. I say seems because I only have one phone and one PDA to test it out. But it's also the most complicated to work with.

WordPress Mobile Edition needs a special theme in order to work properly and this is the source of major confusion. The good news is, the theme – Carrington Mobile – is not packaged into the plugin so you don't have to scramble to download the files anymore.

But that also means, automatic install or upgrade may not work as well. This is one plugin you should install or upgrade manually.

After downloading the plugin file, extract it on your computer. Open the Readme.txt and follow the directions. The plugin needs to be in the plugins folder and the theme goes into your theme folder.

You do not have to activate the theme, it just needs to be uploaded there. The plugin will work with WordPress to automatically pick up those theme files when a mobile browser is found.

Activate the plugin as usual and you're done.

To edit the design, you'll have to edit the Carrington Mobile theme. This is the most challenging part because the theme is not using the normal WordPress template tags. I've personally not delved too much into the mobile design factor since I want to keep the design simple and the Carrington Mobile design works for me. I've only changed the .css files to match the colors of my site.

WordPress Mobile Pack

This is also another advanced plugin. It has a lot of options and much easier to work with. It even comes with 4 themes which are more like color schemes. I do

not like that it requires the wp-content/theme folder permissions need to be changed to 777 – server write enabled.

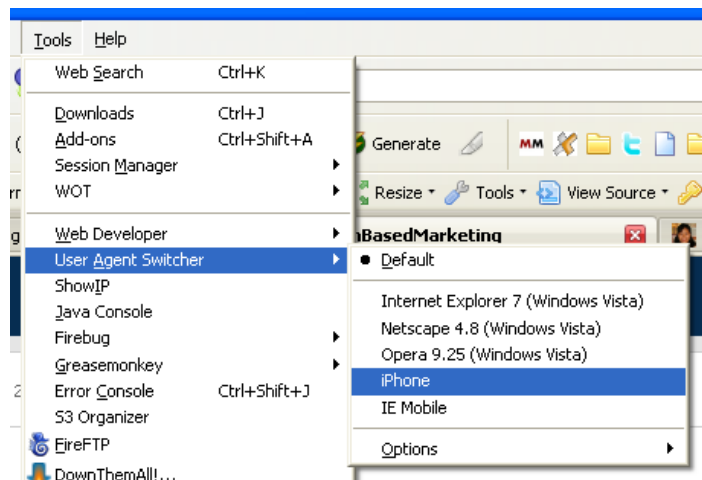
But the neatest part is, you can use a .mobi domain or m.clientsite.com domain through the domain mapping feature. I have not tested this out yet and it would mean more configuration to get it to work with these mobile domains.

How To Check Your Sites

All this is fine if you have a phone with unlimited data to test but what if you don't? Then you can use this Firefox Add-on – [User Agent Switcher](#). It's been very, very useful especially when working with the design because then, I can use Firebug to help me figure out where and what to edit.

Known issues about this add-on, it doesn't always work. Sometimes for whatever reason, the mobile version will display on my phone but even after switching the agent on the browser, it still displays the desktop version. This is not a problem when using WordPress Mobile Edition.

After you install this add-on on Firefox, whenever you want to test a site for mobile display, just go to Tools >> User Agent Switcher, select the browser you want to test with.



If you do not see iPhone or IE mobile, go to Tools >> User Agent Switcher >> Options >> Options >> Add enter the information below into the corresponding boxes.

For iPhone,

Description: iPhone

User Agent: Mozilla/5.0 (iPhone; U; CPU like Mac OS X; en)

App Name: AppleWebKit/420+ (KHTML, like Gecko)

App Version: Version/3.0

Platform: Mobile/1A542a Safari/419.3

Click OK

To add **Windows IE Mobile**, I repeated the same steps, this time I entered:

Description: Windows Mobile

User Agent: Mozilla/4.0 (compatible; MSIE 6.0; Windows CE; IEMobile m.n)

Everything else is blank.

Known Issue About Using Mobile Plugins

It can get complicated when you're using static home pages. You may only get a list of the latest blog posts and not the static home page as you have on the desktop version. This is true for the WordPress Mobile Edition plugin.

Good news is, you can tweak the theme.

Next Lesson...

WordPress changes... a lot. Sometimes these upgrades include improvements or changes that require you to update your theme as well. One of these is the comments template and image aligning. We'll talk about updating our themes to match WordPress updates next.

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