How to Build Your Mobile-Centric Search Strategy

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When building a micro-moments marketing strategy, one place to start is with mobile-centric searches.

think with Google

So you want to create a killer mobile strategy. But where do you begin? There's no doubt that mobile has changed daily life and decision-making. After all, smartphones are the most personal of devices; They stay with us as we move across time, activities, and locations, and they have become the device of choice during the critical micro-moments when we want to know, go, do, or buy.

That means there are a lot of exciting possibilities for us marketers to reach consumers in the moments that really matter. If you're looking for where to focus first, one place to start is with mobile-centric searches—that is, searches which happen 75% of the time or more on a mobile device. These queries offer powerful insights into what your audience wants when they're on a smartphone, and how you can win by giving them the relevant experience they expect. It's about being there for them and being useful.

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Why mobile-centric searches?

Being there and being useful requires an understanding of consumer intent and context. The intent signal that search gives and the context signals that mobile can provide (such as location) can help you tailor your answers and experiences precisely for that consumer's micro-moment. "Near me" searches (like "coffee shop near me") is one example of this. These kinds of searches grew by more than 130% year over year[1] and they're much more common on mobile. Mobile makes up 88% of all "near me" searches,[2] with those mobile searches growing even faster at 146% year over year.[3] These mobile-centric "I-want-to-go" queries happen across almost all types of businesses, from hotels and rental cars to nail

salons, shoe stores, pizza parlors, and banks.

If you have a physical location, "near me" searches are probably popular for your business too. You can see why they happen so often on mobile; When we urgently need an ATM or have the craving for fro-yo, we naturally turn to the devices in our hands to solve our need.

Of course, a "near me" search is just one type of mobile-centric search. Let's look at examples of mobile-centric searches for a few specific categories and see what themes rise to the top.

Automobiles

You might guess that most car-related searches on mobile would be active shoppers looking for nearby dealers. But as it turns out, mobile searches are loaded with intent across various stages of the car-buying process. Among the top mobile-centric auto attributes:[4]

*   **for sale** (such as "Chevy Silverado for sale")

*   **price** (such as "Audi R8 price")

*   **dealership** (such as "Dodge truck dealership")

Those three themes represent different flavors of moments in a typical auto-shopping journey—from "is-it-right-for-me" moments to "can-I-afford-it" moments to "where-should-I-buy-it" moments.

And a small device doesn't mean a small purchase. Many of the most popular mobile-centric searches for autos are actually luxury car price inquiries: searches like "Tesla price," "Maserati price," and "Audi R8 cost."[5] Luxury car price searches like these grew nearly 90% on mobile from 2014 to 2015.[6]

Are they "I-want-to-know" or "I-want-to-buy" moments? That is, are these searchers walking by a valet-parked Rolls-Royce and wondering what

it costs, or are they shoppers thinking about moving up to a luxury car themselves? A tool like Google Analytics can offer more insight into the intent signals of the user based on how they navigate your site. Using that knowledge, you can deliver a response that speaks to the aspirational intent of some and the purchase intent of others.

Jewelry

When it comes to bling and baubles, rings are among the most mobile-searched type of jewelry, followed by necklaces, bracelets, and earrings.[7] But when you look deeper into rings specifically, things get even more interesting.

Some of the top mobile-centric search themes for rings are:[8]

- **promise rings** (such as "promise ring for girlfriend")

- **wedding rings** (such as "wedding ring set")

- **engagement rings** (such as "engagement rings for men")

Yes, the winner there is promise rings. In fact, promise ring-related mobile searches grew by 77% from 2014 to 2015.[9] As the chart below shows, interest in these rings on mobile has been showing a steep increase over the past several years in general, with searches tending to spike around the holidays (most likely "I-need-a-Christmas-gift" research moments) and then Valentine's Day. The mobile-centricity may be in part a function of the younger, mobile-first demographic tending to wear these rings.

Mobile Searches for Various Ring Types

- Promise Rings
- Wedding Rings
- Engagement Rings
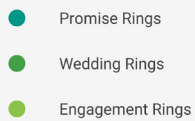
Source: Google internal search data, U.S. mobile devices, 2010–2015.

2010   2011   2012   2013   2014   2015

Hotels

Hotel searches cover a wide range of types and use cases, from the business person searching for a luxury hotel in New York City to the family of five (plus pooch) in a minivan looking for a last-minute place to sleep near Orlando.

Data from Hotels.com states that 74% of mobile bookings are made for same-day check-in.

When it comes to mobile-centric hotel searches, the themes leading the way include:[10]

- **near me** (like "pet friendly hotels near me")

- **cheap** (like "cheap hotels in Myrtle Beach")

- **price** (like "motel prices")

"Near me" searches are the clear mobile-centric winner in the hotel industry. This jibes with data from Hotels.com that states that 74% of mobile bookings are made for same-day check-in. In other words, near and now often go hand-in-hand.

Few things are more pressing than finding a bed for the night when you don't have one. Those last-minute hotel searches really show how people turn to their mobile phones in "I-really-gotta-book-something" moments.

What it all means for marketers

All three of these examples show that mobile can't just be a shrunken version of existing online ads and desktop content. It really calls for us to think bigger about consumers' context and intent so that we can cater to mobile-specific situations.

And rather than trying to think about all the possible mobile micro-moments your brand might win, mobile-centric searches help you focus. Understanding and optimizing for them helps ensure you're there and useful for the consumer in their moment of need.

Here's how to leverage mobile-centric searches in your business:

1. **Identify your mobile-centric searches and themes.** Talk to your agency and ask them to do an inventory of the mobile-centric searches for your category and brand. You don't have to master every moment at once, but make sure you know your key mobile-centric searches and especially the broader themes that rise to the top. These are places where your customers are calling out: "Please solve my need for me on mobile!"

2. Be there, **across the moments that matter.** Once you know the mobile-centric themes for your category and brand, be exhaustive in the keywords you use to address those themes and attributes. Try to really own a larger "share of intent" on the mobile screen for these searches. These searches are where hearts, minds, and dollars are increasingly being won and lost. Being there is the first step in winning them.

3. **Find new ways to be useful.** Put yourself in consumers' shoes for those mobile-centric moments. What situations are these people in, and what are they trying to learn, do, find, or buy on their smartphone? Then ask yourself, "Does the content of my ads and the functionality of my mobile site or app help my customers in their moments of need?" If you can find new ways to cut steps and be more useful, act there first.

For additional best practices for how to be there and be useful in consumer micro-moments, check out "Micro-Moments: Your Guide to Winning the Shift to Mobile."

Sources

1, 2, 5-7 Google internal search data, U.S., all devices, 2014-2015.

3, 9 Google internal search data, U.S., mobile devices, 2014-2015.

4, 8, 10 Google internal search data, U.S., all devices, 2014-2015. The searches within the category that took place 75% of the time or more on a mobile device were isolated. The searches within that set were then synthesized into themes or attributes, with the themes repeated the most being the "top" mobile-centric themes.