

Google Announces Switch to Mobile-First Index

Google announced recently that it will change the way it ranks websites. Instead of crawling desktop versions to determine how sites will rank in search results, it will soon start crawling mobile versions instead. As [Google explains](#), "Although our search index will continue to be a single index of websites and apps, our algorithms will eventually primarily use the mobile version of a site's content to rank pages from that site." According to the Google Webmaster Central Blog, the changes will start rolling out soon and are expected to take some time for the system to be fully migrated.

What Is the Google Web Index?

Google uses "web crawlers" to find public pages on the Internet. These web crawlers bring information back to Google servers that then catalog a giant database of webpages. As [Google explains](#):

"The web is like an ever-growing public library with billions of books and no central filing system. Google essentially gathers the pages during the crawl process and then creates an index, so we know exactly how to look things up. Much like the index in the back of a book, the Google index includes information about words and their locations. When you search, at the most basic level, our algorithms look up your search terms in the index to find the appropriate pages."

With the move to a mobile-first index, the web pages in Google's "public library" will primarily be mobile pages.

How Will Google's Change to a Mobile-First Index Affect Your Website?

If you have a responsive website or a dynamic serving site where content is generally the same on desktop and mobile, you shouldn't need to make any changes. Continue to optimize your pages per best practice.

If your website has a separate mobile version, the content may not be consistent across devices. Mobile pages that have fewer links and less content may lose ranking position in search results.

For websites without a mobile version, Google says they will continue to crawl and index these sites using a mobile user agent.



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What Should You Do to Maintain Your Current Visibility in Search Engines?

There are a few things you can do to maintain your website's visibility in Google.

1. Test your web pages for mobile compliance.

As we've been saying for quite some time, your website *should* be mobile-friendly. Google recommends using responsive design whenever possible, although there are alternative formats for mobile.

To find out whether your webpages meet Google's mobile-friendly guidelines, use their [mobile-friendly testing tool](#). Pages that meet Google's mobile-friendly guidelines will rank better in search results than pages that don't meet the guidelines. For most law firms, that represents somewhere between 15 and 40 percent of all website traffic.

2. Provide an exceptional user-experience to mobile visitors.

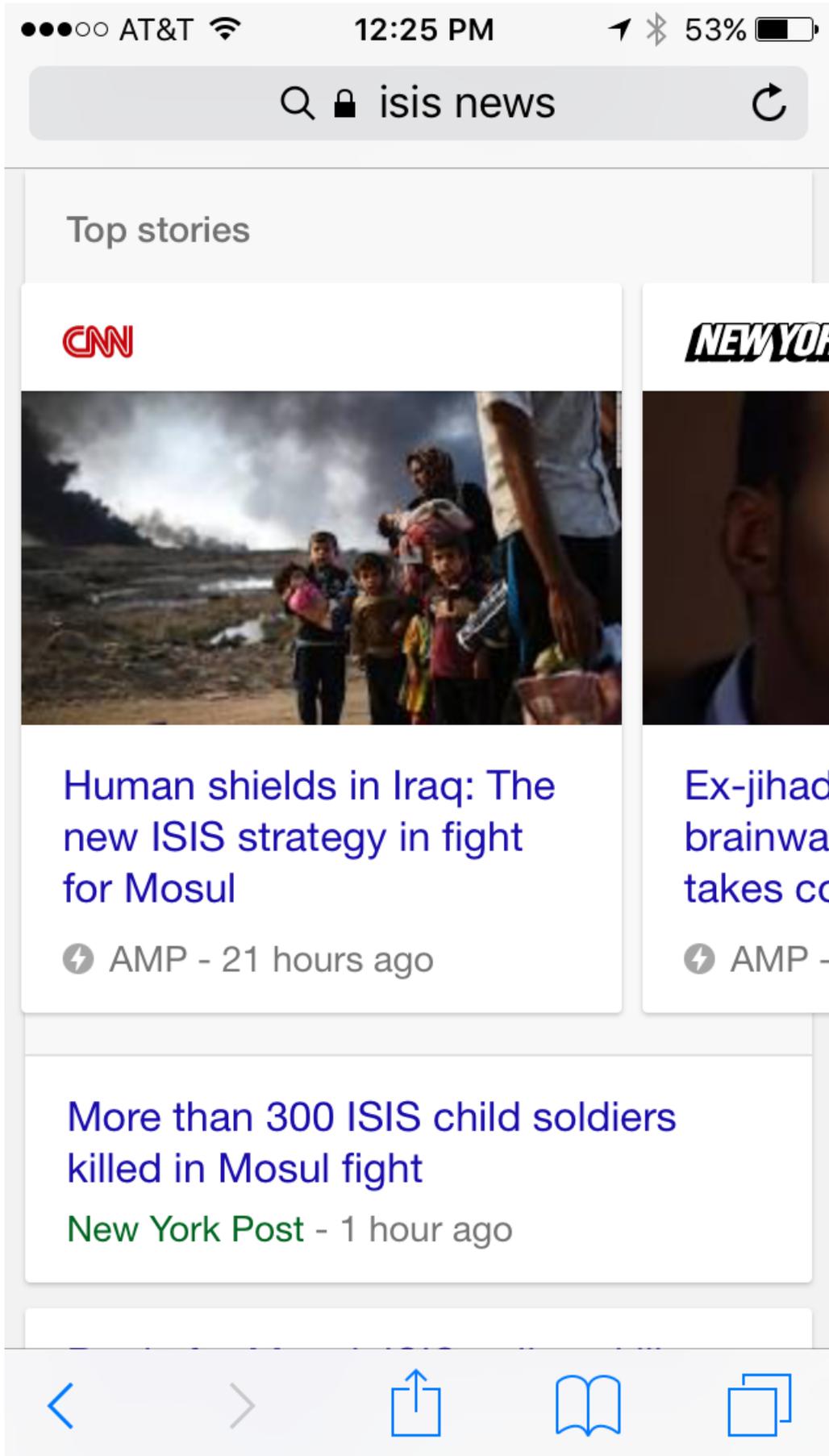
Make sure the pages you want to rank on mobile search deliver a user-friendly experience. That means: Text is readable without pinching and squeezing, photos don't slow down page load, styling is kept to a minimum and content "stacks" in a relevant order. Since mobile pages often have a long vertical scroll, ensure that your most important content appears at the top.

3. Avoid unplayable content.

Some websites still have visual media that require Flash. Since many mobile devices do not support Flash, ensure that your videos and animations are supported on all devices. Google implies that pages requiring Flash will not rank well in mobile searches.

4. Follow the evolution of Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP).

Earlier this year, Google introduced [Accelerated Mobile Pages](#). Webpages that have been AMP-optimized load *really* fast and feature prominently in mobile search results. Most mainstream media sites are using AMP technology to compete in mobile search. As an example, see this screenshot:



Even though these pages load really quickly and provide an excellent user experience,

there are a few factors that could negatively affect your SEO strategy. At this point in time, we aren't seeing many legal websites or legal news media using AMP, but it's definitely something to keep your eye on as Google continues to change the mobile landscape. Be sure to consult with your webmaster or SEO expert before implementing AMP-optimized web pages.

If you're worried about potential negative effects of Google's upcoming changes, or would like to discuss mobile optimization, feel free to email me at mtrudeau@jaffepr.com.