NationalJournalCommunicationsCouncil

Media University

AMU 102

Adapting to the Mobile Web

July 31, 2015

Our Time Together

Setting the Foundation: Why Everyone's Talking About Mobile

→ How Media Companies Are Thinking Through Mobile

→ (Painful?) Lessons Learned in the Association Space

→ Considering the App Rationale

→ Other Mobile Considerations: Video, E-Newsletters

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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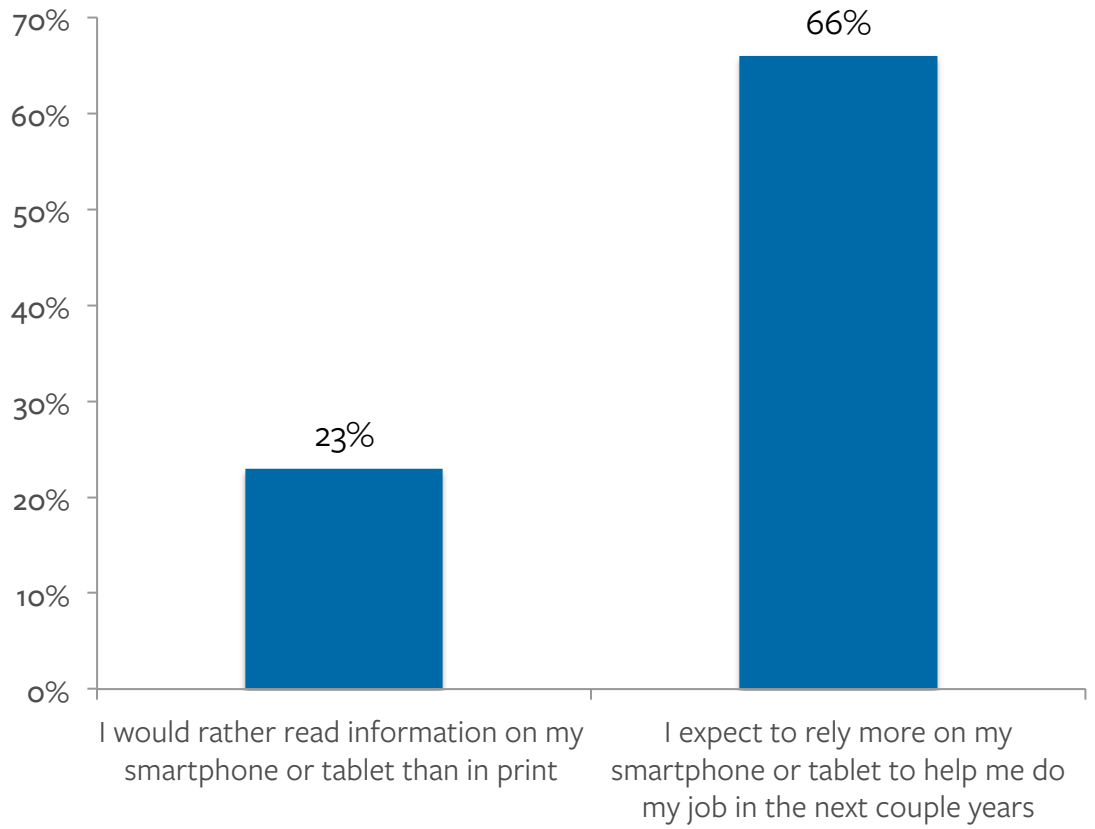
The Time for Mobile Optimization is Now

Opportunities for Mobile Engagement Stem from Day-to-Day Realities of Mobile Use

Gap in Current Mobile Experience and Future Expectations

Percentage of Respondents, WIA 2015



Source: National Journal Communications Council Research and Analysis.

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Google Continues to Change the Mobile Game

Mobile-Friendly Sites Now a Requirement for Higher Mobile Search Rankings

From "Un-Optimized" to Mobile-Friendly

February 2015

- Google announces that mobile-friendly websites will get a rankings boost in searches come April
- Google starts using indexed apps as a search factor, allowing app content to appear in search queries for users

April 2015

- ✓New Google guidelines for mobile sites go into effect internationally, affecting mobile search results in all languages
- ✓All individual pages must be optimized (not just the website homepage)
- ✓Un-optimized sites will not be penalized on traditional desktop browsers

Source: Google Webmaster Central Blog article "Finding more mobile-friendly search results" and "Rolling out the mobile friendly update," National Journal Communications Council Research and Analysis.

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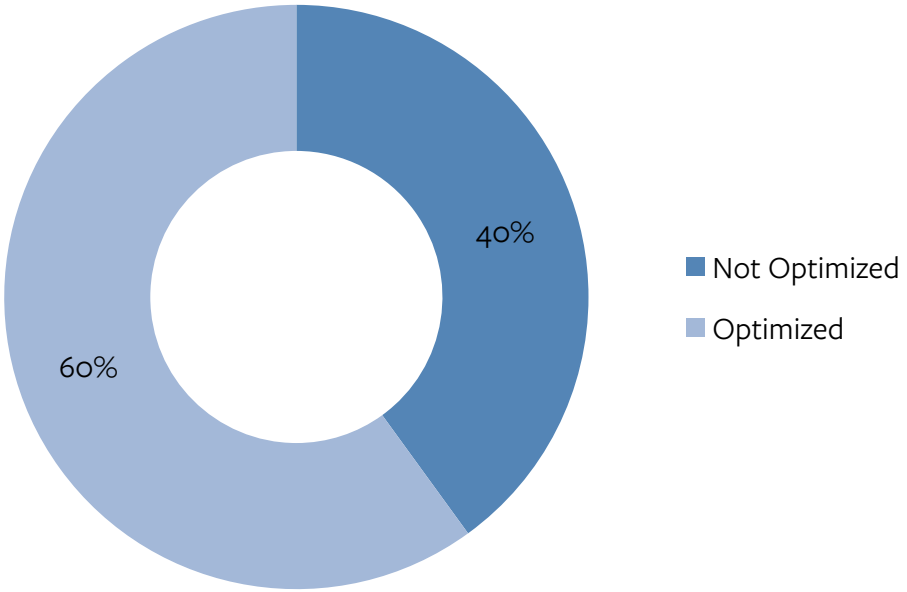
Mapping Mobile Optimization Within Membership

Meeting Google Standards Should Be First Step in Building Organizational Mobile Strategy

Current Mobile Optimization of Member Websites (according to Google); *n=40*



How Google Identifies a Less-Than-Optimal Site

- ✓ **Text Design and Size:** Appears either too small or too big; lacking consistency with rest of site
- ✓ **Link Spacing:** Links too close together or too far apart; detract from web design
- ✓ **Pulled from Desktop Design:** Does not fit with design elements inherent to mobile device; appears as it would on a normal computer
- ✓ **Content Size and Appearance:** Page is either too small or too big to fit screen

Source: National Journal Communications Council Research and Analysis.

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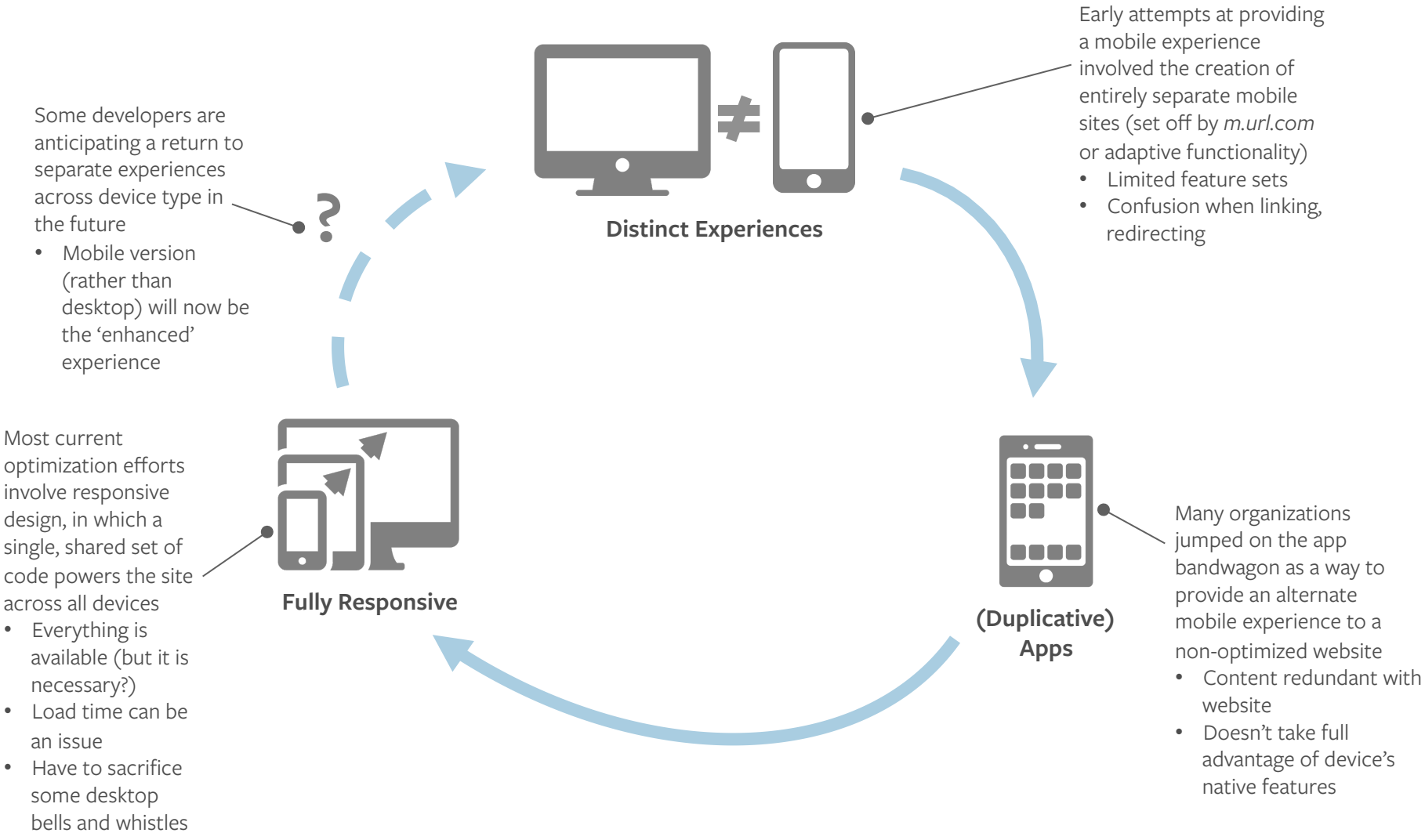
Where the Mobile Attention is Spent

Strategies for Adapting to Mobile Have Evolved From Duplicative Systems to More Uniform Ones



Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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Traditional Organizations Turn the Tide

Legacy Organizations Have Adopted Mobile in Fits and Starts

Responses to Rising Mobile Use Signal A Changing of the Guard…

The New York Times

- ✓ Created NYT Now as a free standalone app to curate content from around the web and provide access to certain NYT stories
- ✓ **How:** Devoted an extended period of time to working solely with mobile platform, ignoring traditional desktop / print work

The Economist

- ✓ Recognized core value of traditional print publication but needed to expand into mobile to reach younger users and new audiences
- ✓ **What:** Launched Economist Espresso app offering five short stories per morning free for subscribers and cheaply for others

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

- ✓ Underwent a notable "rejiggering" of its mobile presence for the first time since 2008 when mobile only represented 10% of users
- ✓ **What:** Launched a hybrid "mobile-social" strategy to better integrate mobile engagement with social media ambitions

CNN

- ✓ Redesigned website in 2014 to better streamline external presence across desktops, smartphones and tablets
- ✓ **How:** Initiated an 8AM meeting in the newsroom for writers and designers to think critically about how to best optimize mobile content

…But Newer Players Aren't Immune to Disruption

BuzzFeed

- Accustomed to social media and arguably biggest player in space, but lacked a robust mobile presence in recent years
- **Change:** Now owner of three distinct mobile apps ranging from serious to silly and a much more optimized mobile site

YouTube

- In spite of rising viewer consumption (up 40% from last year), users expressed frustration with mobile optionality
- **Change:** Revamped mobile app allows for vertical video viewing, easier uploads and more straightforward access to subscriber content

circa

- Helped pioneer notion of an "atomic unit" of mobile signifying smallest sharable bit of mobile content for user consumption
- **Change:** Shut down in June 2015 due to lack of funding in spite of innovative push notifications and niche yet committed fan base

Source: National Journal Communications Council research interviews and analysis.

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Go Where the People Are

Lessons Learned at AMC Sparked Shift from Pure Media Company to "Service Provider" on Mobile

For Every Challenge on Mobile...

- ✓ Legacy organizations are difficult to push out of their traditional box
- ✓ Expensive to be everywhere at once while doing everything else (e.g., print, digital, newsletters, mobile)
- ✓ Good developers come at a premium (est. $120k in DC)
- ✓ No shortage of competitors on mobile
- ✓ Smaller screen = less space to work with = less ad revenue
- ✓ Business model can be difficult to articulate

...There's an Opportunity...

- ✓ AMC properties seeing rapid transition of user base to mobile site use (40% for The Atlantic)
- ✓ Partnerships to improve mobile presence create opportunities for cross-industry collaboration (e.g., Defense One and Sapient)
- ✓ Audiences reward websites and apps that are native to mobile and leverage full suite of mobile capabilities
- ✓ Push notifications get you in front of core audiences where they are for a significant chunk of the day

....And It's All About the Audience

3 Keys to Making the Mobile Leap

According to an NJ Senior Leader

1. **Partnerships:** Brainstorm organizations that could potentially see value in working together on a mobile joint venture and establish relationships ("these partnerships take time but are invaluable resources...I wish I could do more of them")
2. **Push Notifications:** Understand the inherent power of reaching people where they are; "If I told you that you could get direct access to your audience during the six hours of the day that they are on their mobile device, **you would stop thinking about the challenges and start thinking about how to get in front of them.** Push notifications help you do just that."
3. **Putting the Audience at the Center:** Analyze your audience base, project where they plan to be over the next few years and develop your mobile approach accordingly ("start with where the audience is and build strategy around audience preferences")

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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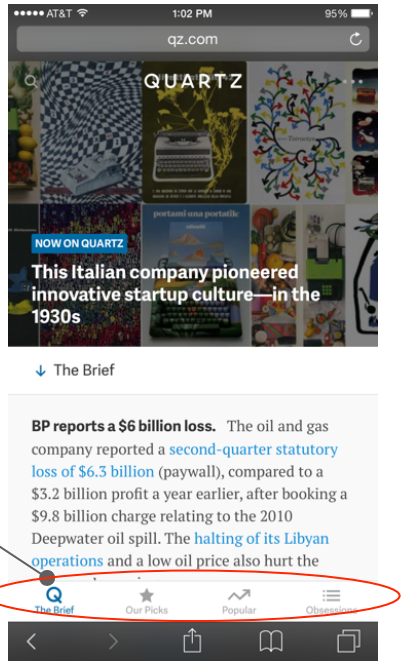
Quartz Sets the Tone for Cross-Platform Engagement

Emphasis on Design and Content Fuel Success

Main Website Created with Mobile-First Approach...



Includes quick navigation icons at bottom for seamless site surfing

Homepage optimized for both mobile and desktop view

...But Desktop Experience Remains Consistent

Key icons at the top of the page, yet do not distract from main image

Key Design Considerations

#1 *Democratized Access*

- ✓ Consciously decided to avoid apps or paywalls in order to increase accessibility to all
- ✓ **From the Editor:** Intended to be "global, digitally native and designed for mobile and tablet devices that increasingly dominate our lives"

#2 *Revenue Built Around Product*

- ✓ Imbued with robust, responsive advertising platform but not consumed by it
- ✓ **From the Editor:** Smaller ad focus preserved by alternative revenue streams (e.g., subscriptions, events)

#3 *Minimalist Approach*

- ✓ Streamlined the homepage so that it displayed one large story with a news agency photo at the top
- ✓ **From the Editor:** Understood difference between app and mobile web users; chose to create site that felt like an app on a mobile browser

#4 *Editorial Prudence*

- ✓ Privileged most digestible stories for a mobile audience both in form and content (remember the "atomic unit" of mobile)
- ✓ **From the Editor:** Wants stories that can be easily "sucked off the screen of a smartphone in a swaying subway train"

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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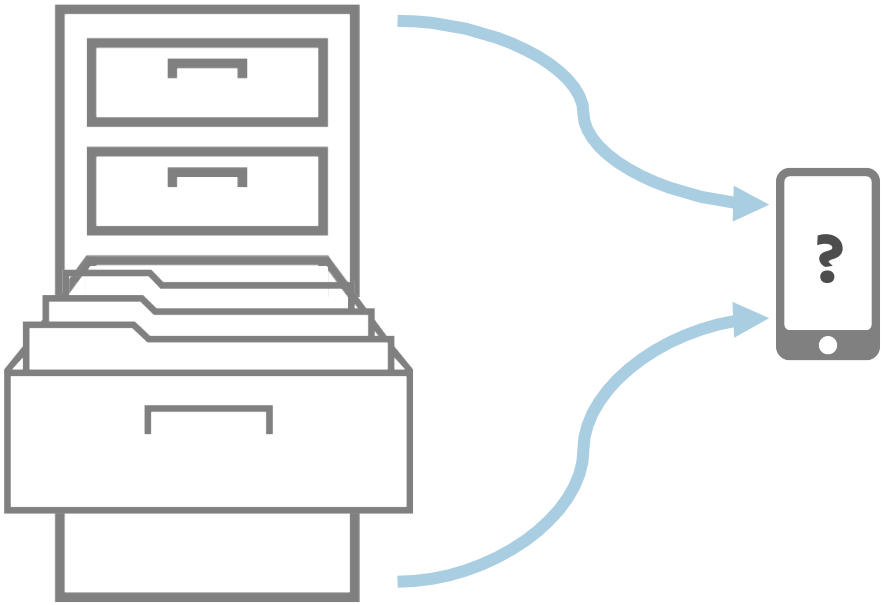
In Need of a New Metaphor

Mobile Demands That Organizations Move Beyond Characterizing Websites as Content Repositories



Rearranging the Drawers

"A mobile site is a handwritten letter made exclusively for you. It's a gateway or portal...the ability to rearrange the drawers of the filing cabinet on demand to serve up exactly what you need."

- Creative Director, National Journal

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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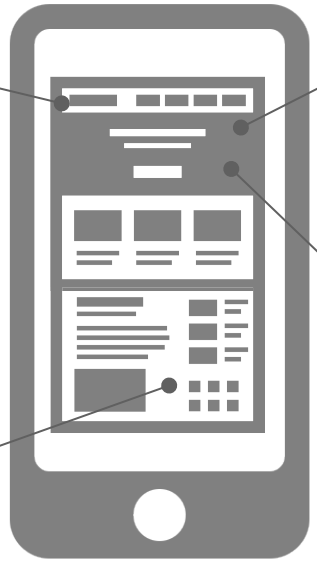
But the Drawers Don't Always Open on Demand

Common Design and Development Mistakes Can Derail an Otherwise Functioning Mobile Site

Categorizing the Common Lapses in Mobile Judgment

Design
Rather than focusing on the homepage (especially the desktop homepage) at the start of the design process, focus on an internal content page and build outward toward larger and more complex pages

Functionality
Mobile sites should feel instantly familiar to first-time users, so when navigation doesn't behave as expected or links aren't clearly identifiable, users will lose trust—and patience



Features
Certain add-ons like image carousels can be an efficient way to add engaging content on the desktop site, but they are a source of constant mobile headaches; users won't wait for images to cycle through before scrolling, and thus content remains buried and inaccessible

Testing
No two devices or operating systems are completely alike, so sites must be tested across as many as possible to ensure that interactivity (e.g., swiping, zooming) and other content-dependent features perform consistently

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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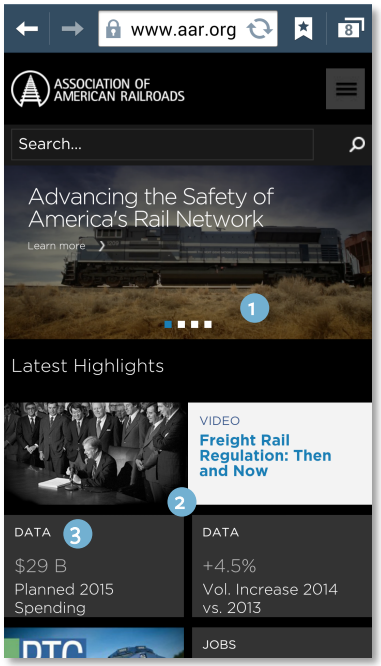
Mobile-Optimized Site in Action: AAR

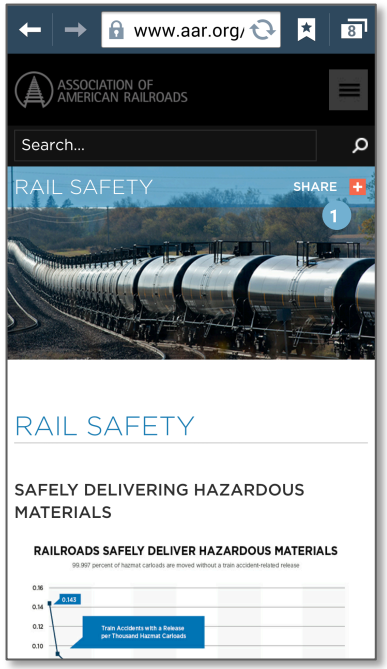
Not Testing Across Multiple Devices Results in Critical Loss of Functionality (and on iPhones, No Less!)

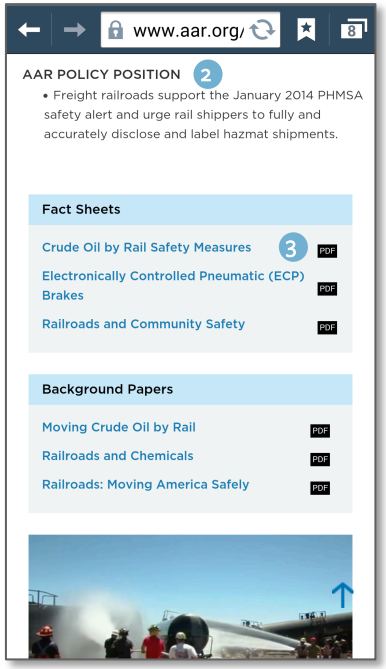
Responsive Homepage Creates Snackable Pathways to Relevant Content for Users



1. While appropriately trimmed down from the video-heavy desktop site, the image carousel is not functional across devices
2. Modular content call-outs are easy to consume, with enough contrast to be easily viewable
3. Everything has relatively the same weight, making it hard to discern hierarchy; consider adding icons in place of 'data,' 'video,' etc. tags

...But Internal Pages Suffer from Accessibility and Usability Issues





1. Share button lacks proximity to content actually being shared; more typical placement is next to headline, byline or summary
2. Font is too small, and iPhone users can't zoom in, making this a crucial accessibility issue
3. Users expect to download a pdf when clicking on the links, but instead are taken to a member log-in page; likewise, users aren't cued as to when they're looking at related vs. featured content

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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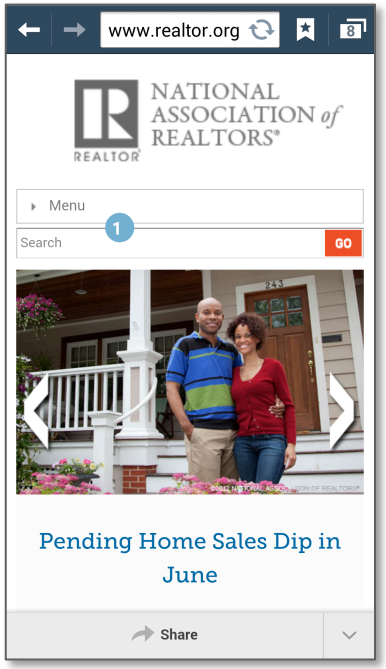
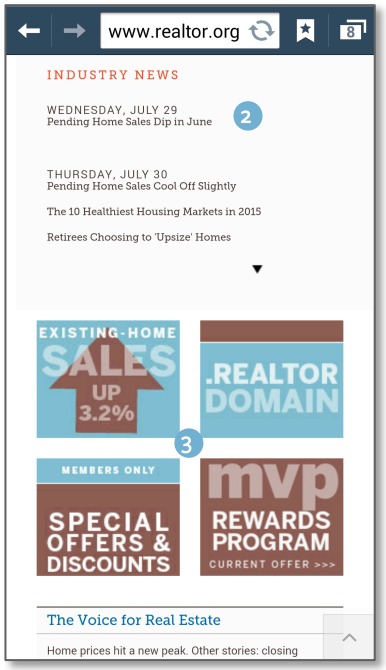
Mobile-Optimized Site in Action: NAR

Too Much Reliance on Default Settings Results in an Inconsistent User Experience

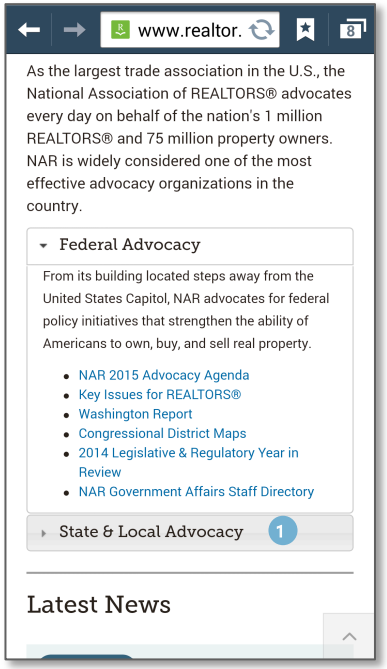
Everything Fights for "Real Estate" on the Homepage

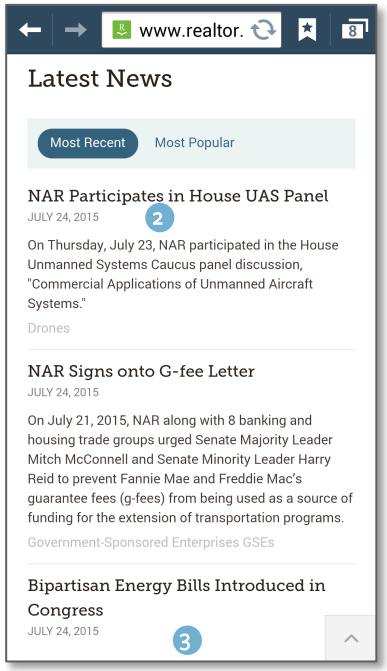




1. Navigation options indicate that they didn't take the time to figure out how users were looking for content, so they prioritized both methods
2. Functionality suffers when a "font rainbow" is employed, making it difficult to discern hierarchy or set expectations on linking
3. Features like "hover state" don't carry over to mobile; images lack suitable context or calls-to-action to set expectations

...And Internal Pages Lack a Consistent Identity Throughout





1. Progressive enhancement feature (collapsible menu) doesn't allow users to fully hide content, hindering skimming capabilities
2. Pages lack internal cohesion; fonts, links, and colors are inconsistent, and as a result, users don't know what is clickable
3. Little visual definition between primary and related page content, making it difficult for readers to skim and assess length

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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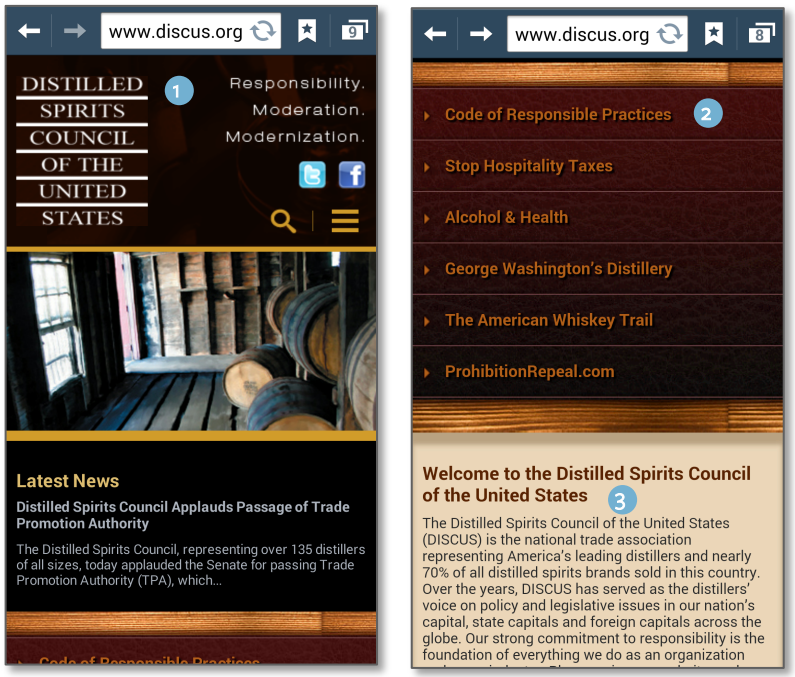
Mobile-Optimized Site in Action: DISCUS

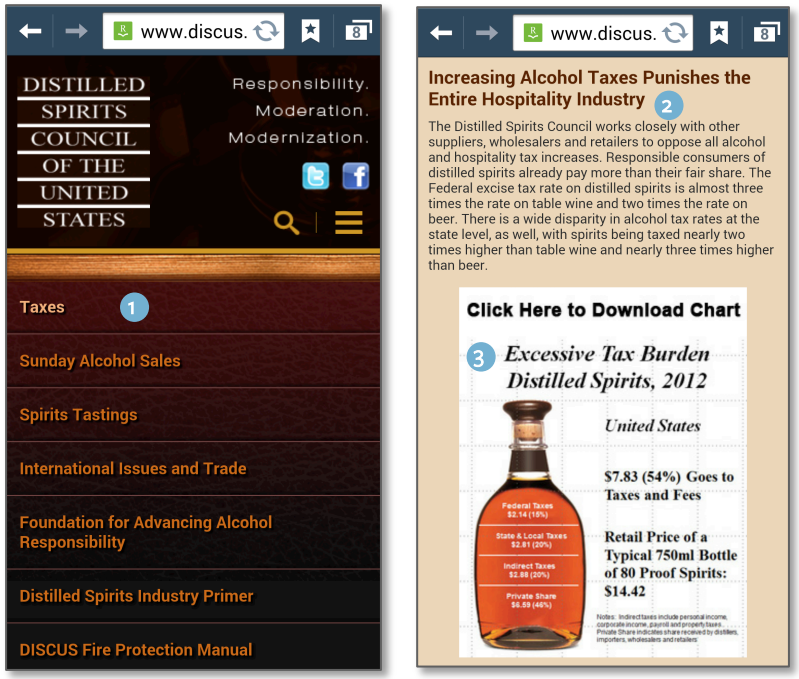
Strong Branding Choices, But Less Attention on Architecture and Internal Content

Homepage Is Clearly Where Most of the Design Effort Was Expended



1. Strongly branded header, possibly at the expense of hierarchy; users are looking for specific things, and a tagline likely isn't one of them
2. Multiple layers of navigation provide ways to access nearly everything within 1 click, but menu items lack context and don't appear to be thematically related
3. The resulting experience is reflective of "building the ship as we sail it" – a lack of forethought put into information architecture

...While Internal Pages Feel Unfinished, Like Afterthoughts



1. Page sub-menus appear before content, forcing users to scroll immediately to get to what they're looking for
2. Internal pages lack the "love" put into the homepage design, and feel like afterthoughts
3. Solidly colored page backgrounds can be tricky, both for the lack of contrast, and for not being friendly with standard graphics produced on white backgrounds

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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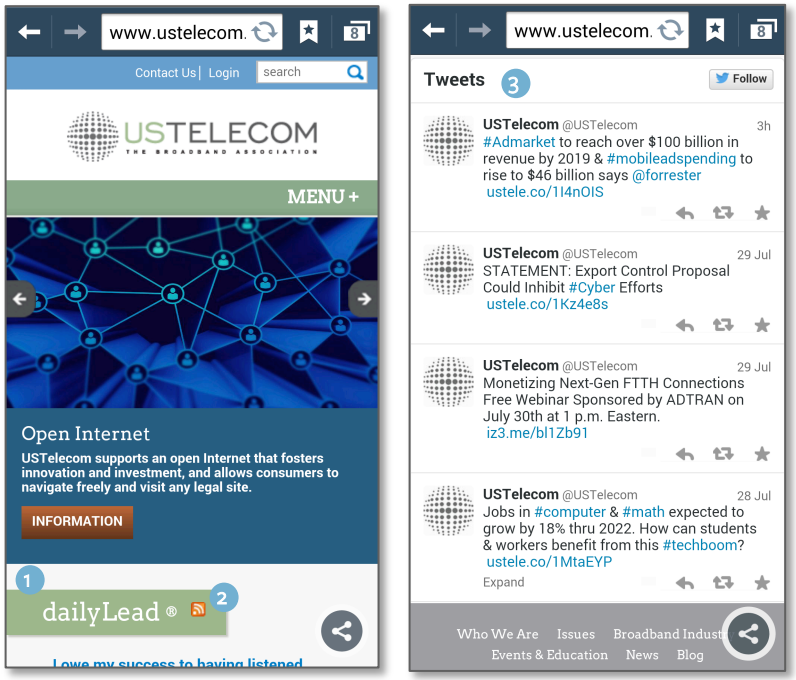
Mobile-Optimized Site in Action: US Telecom

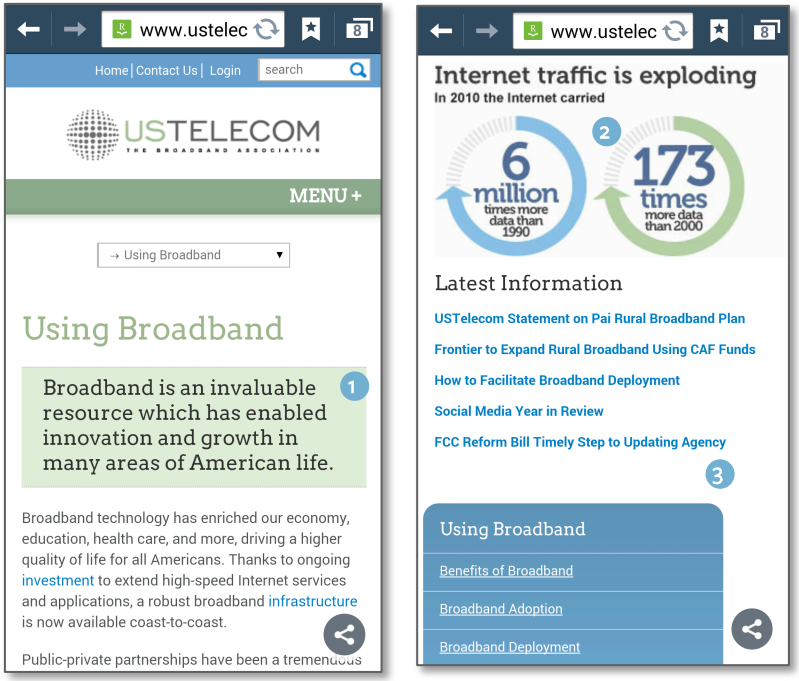
Simple, Functional Site Proves That You Don't Need All the Bells and Whistles

Homepage Hierarchy is Clear, and User Expectations are Well Communicated



1. Solid hierarchy, well communicated by bold, consistent headers, spacing and visual identity
2. Sets expectations well by providing icons when content will open in a new window; however, RSS feed icons behave inconsistently across devices (opening in podcast app vs. browser)
3. Twitter widget a risky choice; unless there's a strong purpose (beyond gaining followers), it's not worth the load time it adds to a mobile site

...And Internal Pages Are Quickly Navigated and Consumed



1. Summaries of each internal page is a strong choice; content is skimmable, and design feels coherent throughout
2. Infographics can be unwieldy on mobile; giving users the option to expand to full screen, or to email/share can be a good workaround
3. Related content is adequately set off from the primary page content through design and spacing

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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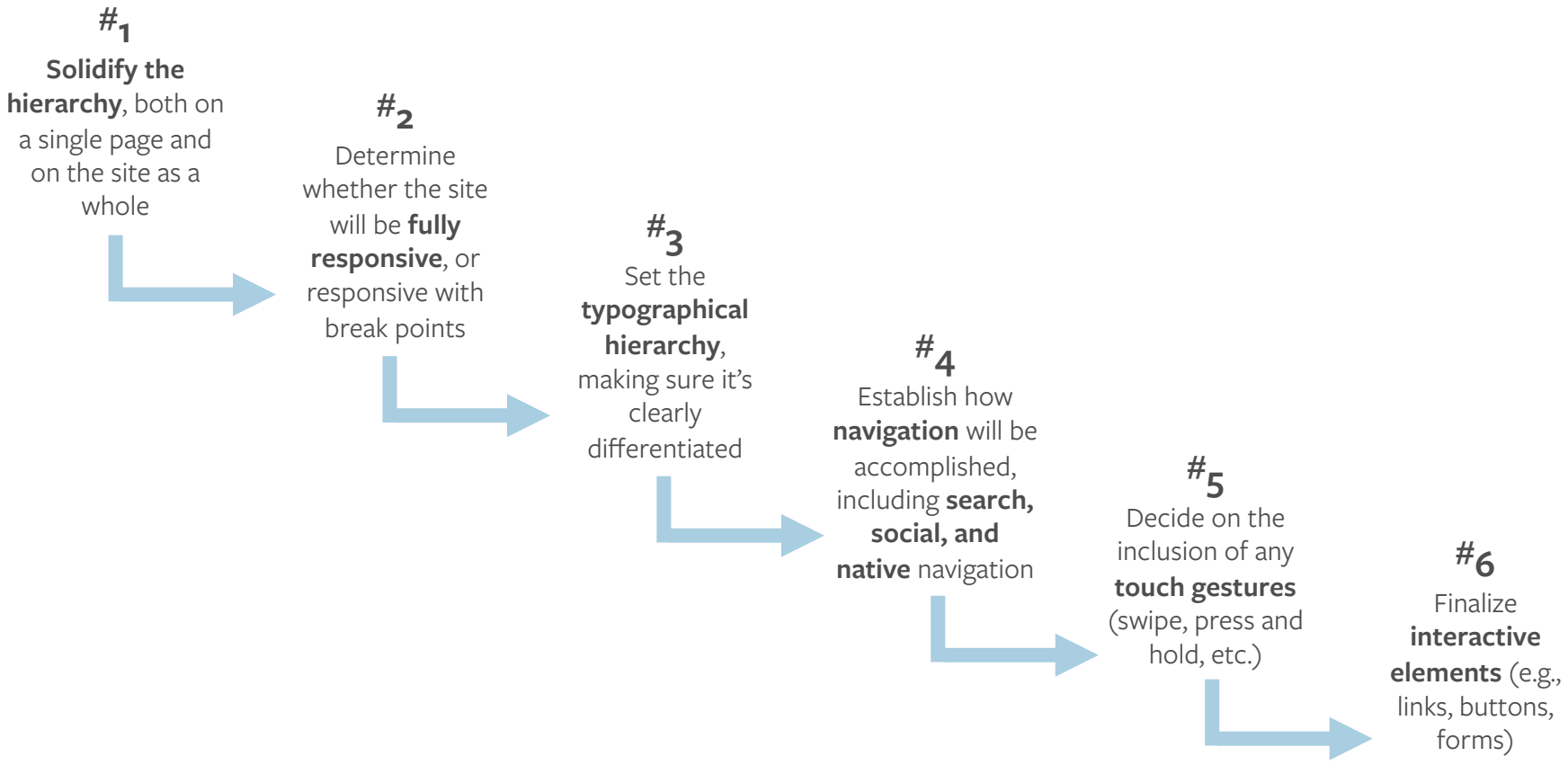
Building the Ship Before We Set Sail

Avoid Making Crucial Design Decisions on the Fly



The 5-7-5 Approach to Design

"Mobile forces you to think clearly about hierarchy; it forces discipline. It's Haiku—it has to be restrained in design."

- Creative Director, National Journal

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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On Establishing Hierarchy

Veteran Designers and Developers Emphasize the Importance of Getting the First Step Right

DO:

Study analytics of the current site

- What are the most read pages?
- What generates the most excitement? What's shared the most?

DO:

Talk to people closest to the users

- What questions get asked the most?
- Which resources are most popular?

DON'T:

Feel like the homepage has to show everything

- Mobile users are OK with clicking
- Utilize clear navigation and related content to create pathways

DON'T:

Ask the CEO for homepage recommendations

- Users are seeking specific pieces of information on mobile – not the mission statement, welcome letter, etc.

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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Getting to Know You

Create Mobile User Personas to Understand Top Use Cases

Key Questions to Establish Motivations and Limitations…

- ✓ What are they trying to accomplish?
- ✓ Is this task different on-the-go?
- ✓ Where are they? (e.g., commuting, waiting in line, watching TV, etc.)
- ✓ What time of day is it?
- ✓ How much time do they have?

…And Washington in the Information Age Data Can Help, Too

The Socializers:
Millennial Staffers

- Highest average # of social media accounts
- Instagram and Snapchat adoption high
- Trust high in Inside-the-Beltway sources
- Use print because it's readily available

The Optimists:
Private Sector Gen X-ers

- Heaviest users of mobile for work-related purposes
- Expect to use social, mobile and video more than other groups
- Higher trust in trade publications

The Hybrids:
Private Sector Boomers

- Traditional in reliance on local news, but more optimistic on roles of mobile and social in future work than Skeptic peers
- Attach credibility to print more than others

The Skeptics:
Federal Exec Boomers

- Lower trust in all media sources, especially Inside-the-Beltway publications
- Place lower credibility in print, but still aren't sure of roles of social or mobile in future

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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Toward a More Perfect Union

Knowing the Right Questions to Ask of Your Agency Partner Can Eliminate Costly Missteps

Agency Preparedness Checklist

	Key Questions
✓	**1. Collaboration** • How collaborative is the agency's process? • Will we receive intermediate deliverables (e.g., wireframes, etc.), and if so, at what time intervals?
✓	**2. Internal Processes** • What is our internal workflow? • Who approves, and when? • Have we adequately communicated this to our agency partner?
✓	**3. Making Changes** • What is the process for making changes? • How many rounds of edits will we get? • What are the associated timeframes and costs?
✓	**4. Quality Assurance** • Whose responsibility is testing—the agency's, or ours? • How many people are involved in testing? • How long does the testing process last? • Are we testing on real devices, or emulators?

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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"Mobile-First" Approach Crucial in New Media Landscape

The Twelve Commandments of Top-Tier Mobile Engagement

Search-Friendly

- Avoids penalties bad mobile sites incur in SEO rankings (per Google's algorithm)

Easy to Access

- Ensures free and open engagement with all aspects of product

Distinguishes Mobile App from Mobile Site

- Recognizes differing audience appetites across platforms and adjusts accordingly

Simple, Elegant Design

- Streamlines mobile site for easy reading on-the-go

Mobile-Optimized Editorial Content

- Embraces more bite-sized material and snappier dialogue (not an MFA thesis)

Custom and Personalized

- Provides users with options to manipulate content as desired

Uses Push Notifications

- Gives users what they want, when they want it (and reminds them to check in)

Offers Service-Oriented Tools

- Encourages active engagement and engenders goodwill with users

Leverages Mobile Technologies

- From sensible site navigation to location-based functions, must maximize platform-specific capabilities

Achieves Seamless Ad Integration

- Avoids cluttering mobile site with obtrusive pop-up ads or unwanted "spam"

Converts Visitors Into Customers

- Builds in clear value proposition for continued engagement via subscriptions, social sharing, etc.

Leaves a Great First (& Last) Impression

- Design interface and content leave users wanting more, triggering repeat visits

Source: Images from the Noun Project, National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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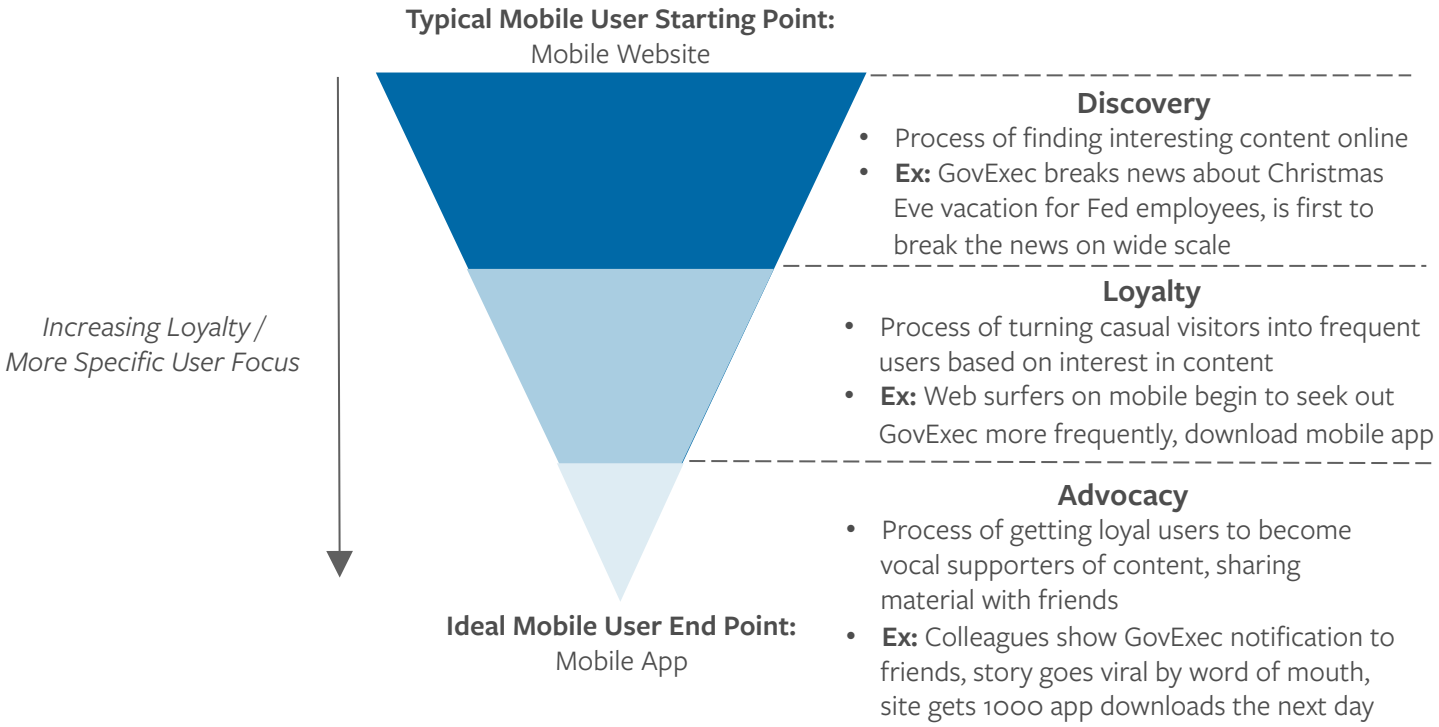
To App or Not to App?

Apps Can Solidify Mobile Engagement, But Building Loyalty is Key

Elements of Cultivating a Sustainable Audience Should Guide Transition from Mobile Web to App Presence

Case Study: A Win for GovExec on the Night Before Christmas (Eve)



A Lesson for Associations

So Do We Need An App: "...It depends on where the customers are. Apps give you utility while the web is for people seeking information. People loyal to the brand will use an app, but most users start with the mobile web. For that reason, it's fundamental to have a good mobile web presence that will get people to invest in the app. **This is where associations get into trouble: some may have a good mobile web presence but they only get "drive-by" visitors and never turn that into consistent courtship...that's where the app comes in."** – Senior Leader, *National Journal*

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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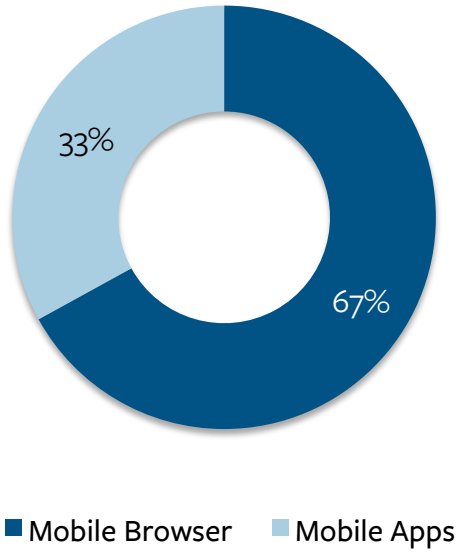
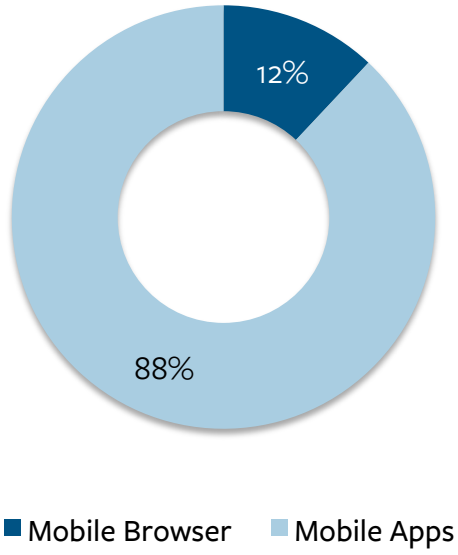
Mobile App Preferences Fall Short of Mobile Websites

Apps Dominate Actual Usage, Despite Stated Preferences for Mobile Browsers

Preferred Platform When Using a Smartphone
KissMetrics 2014 data



Reported Time Spent By Platform
IAB 2014 data



Preparing for the Future

- **Shifting Tastes:** Smartphone users prefer desktop use to smartphone use and mobile browsers to mobile apps, yet consumers expect to be using their smartphones more in the coming years and as a result are already using mobile apps more than mobile browsers
- **Member Opportunities:** User transition to app-first approach signals opportunities for growth that associations can leverage by leading the engagement push

Source: KissMetrics, "Beyond the App: What makes a great mobile experience," BeyondCurious, National Journal Communications Council Research and Analysis.

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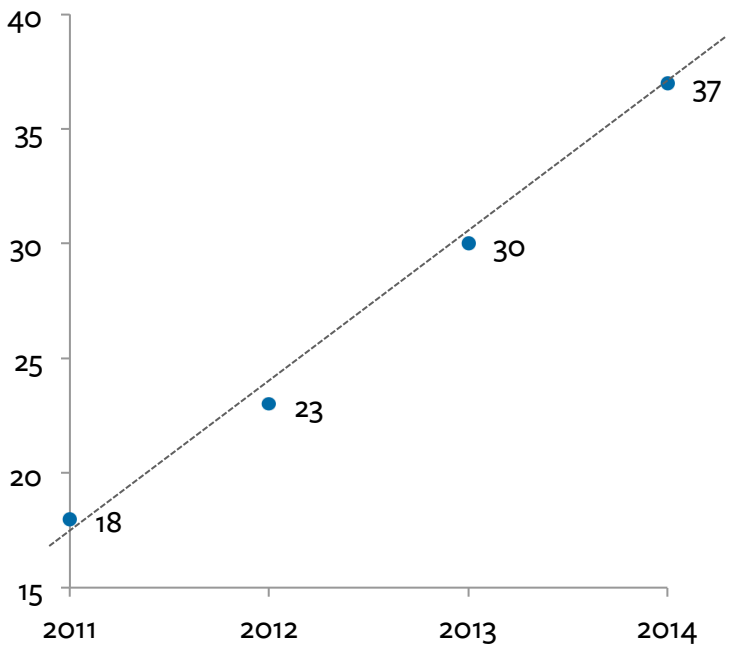
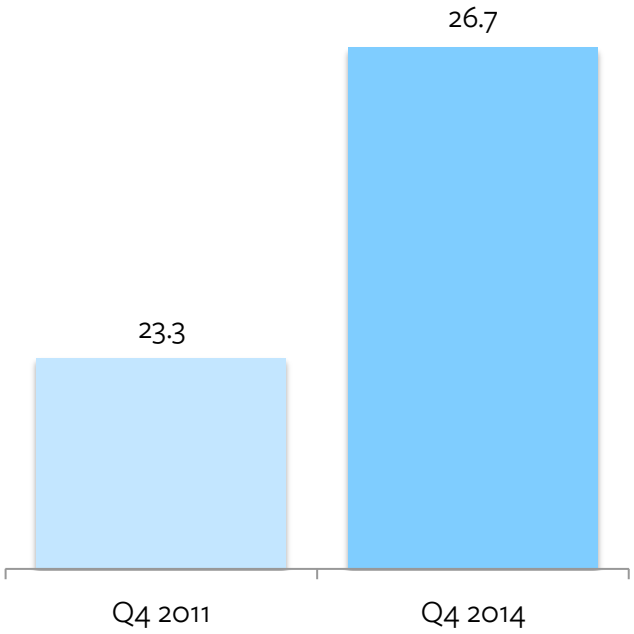
A Select Few Apps Monopolize User Consumption

Time Spent on Apps
Average Number of Hours Per Month



- Time spent on apps has grown more than 100 percent between the end of 2011 and the end of 2014...

Average Number of Apps Used Per Month



- ...Yet the number of apps on an average smartphone owner's OS has only grown 15 percent over the same three-year period, illustrating that a handful of apps dominate the current marketplace

Source: "We Are Spending a lot More Time In Our Mobile Apps," Business Insider, National Journal Communications ***Council research and analysis.***

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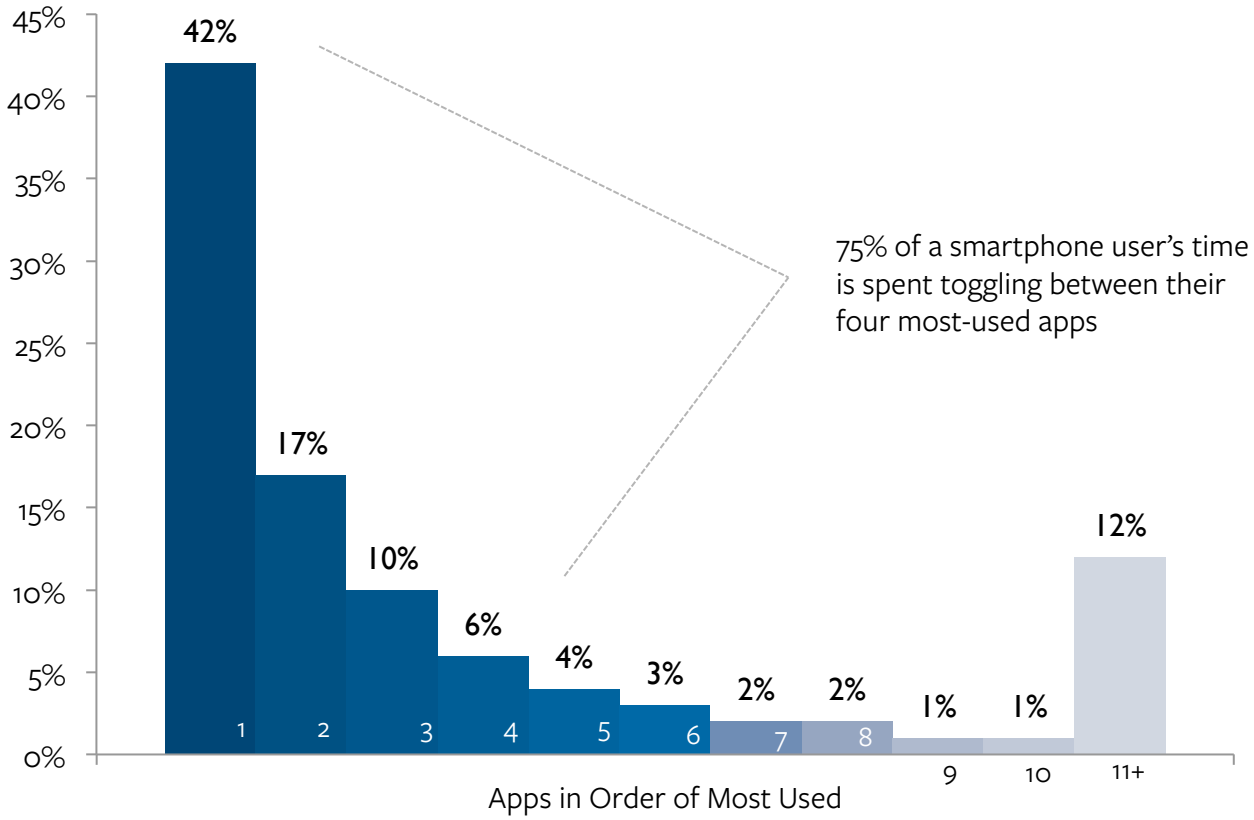
The Proof is in the Data

Over Time, Even Fewer Apps Will Dominate Users' Consumption

Use of Smartphone Applications

Percentage of Time Spent on Most-Used Apps (in descending order)



Source: The U.S. App Report, ComScore, National Journal Communications Council Research and Analysis

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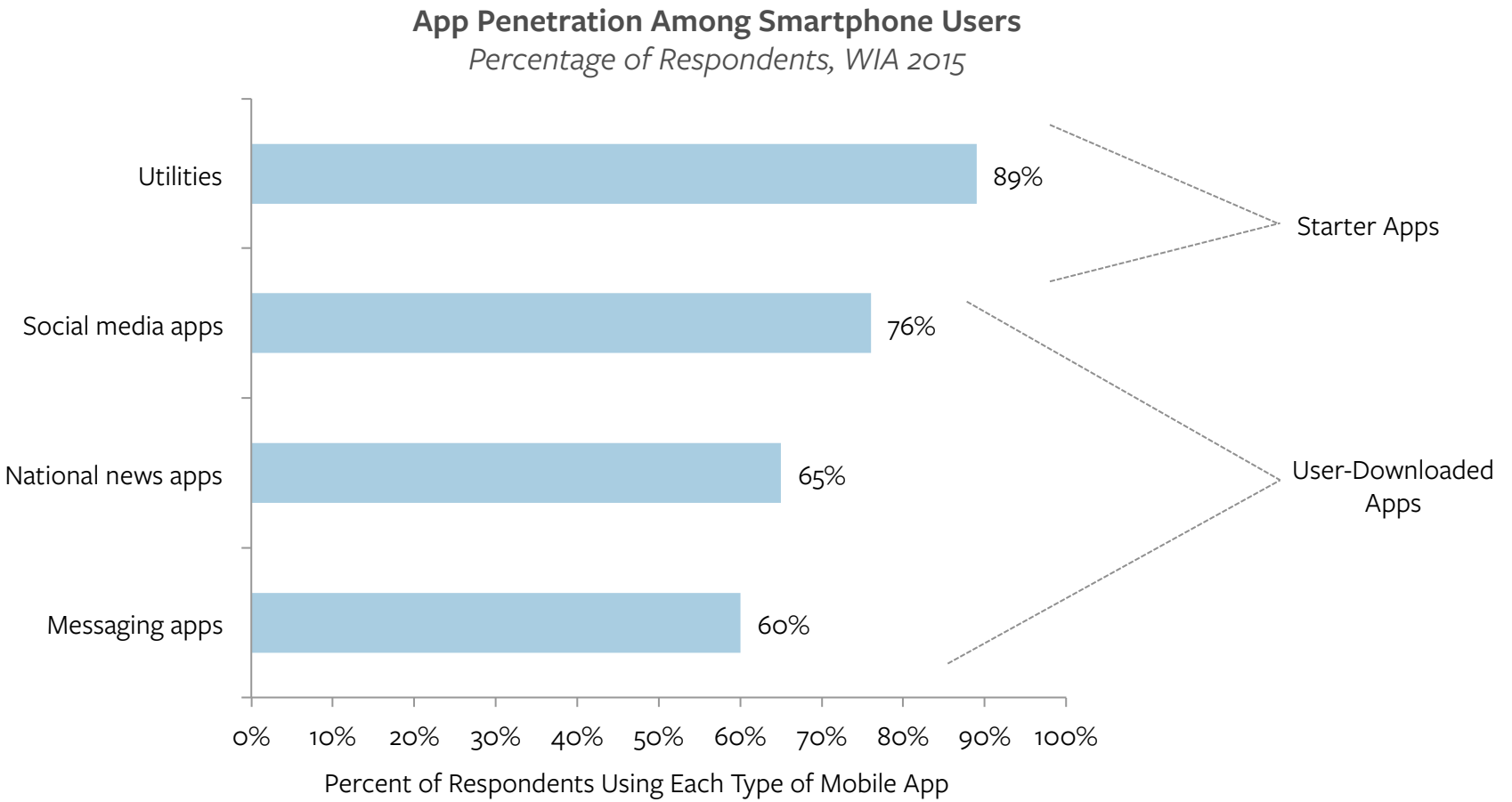
Washington in the Information Age Affirms App Tastes

Inside-the-Beltway Smartphone Owners Spend Most Time on "Universal" Apps



*Computed by aggregating respondents who indicated using these apps on their smartphone or on *both* there smartphone and a tablet

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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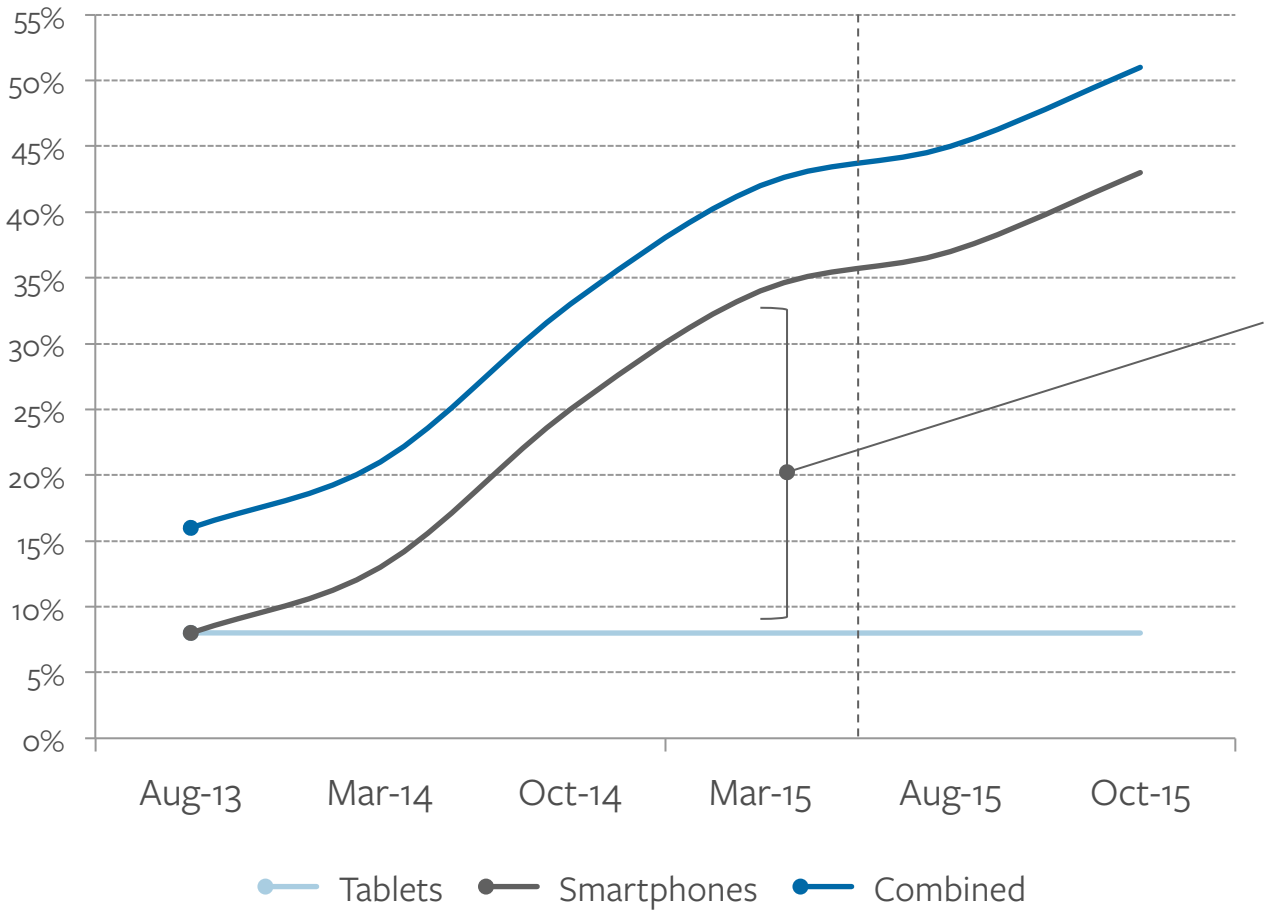
Growing Video Consumption on the Shrinking Screens

Mobile's Share of Online Video Plays Anticipated to Reach the Majority by Q3 2015, Driven by the Small Screens

Share of Total Online Video Plays by Device Type

Growth by Quarter, Q3 2013 to Anticipated Q3 2015



Smartphones are largely responsible for the growth in mobile video plays, outnumbering tablet plays more than 4 to 1 in Q1 2015.

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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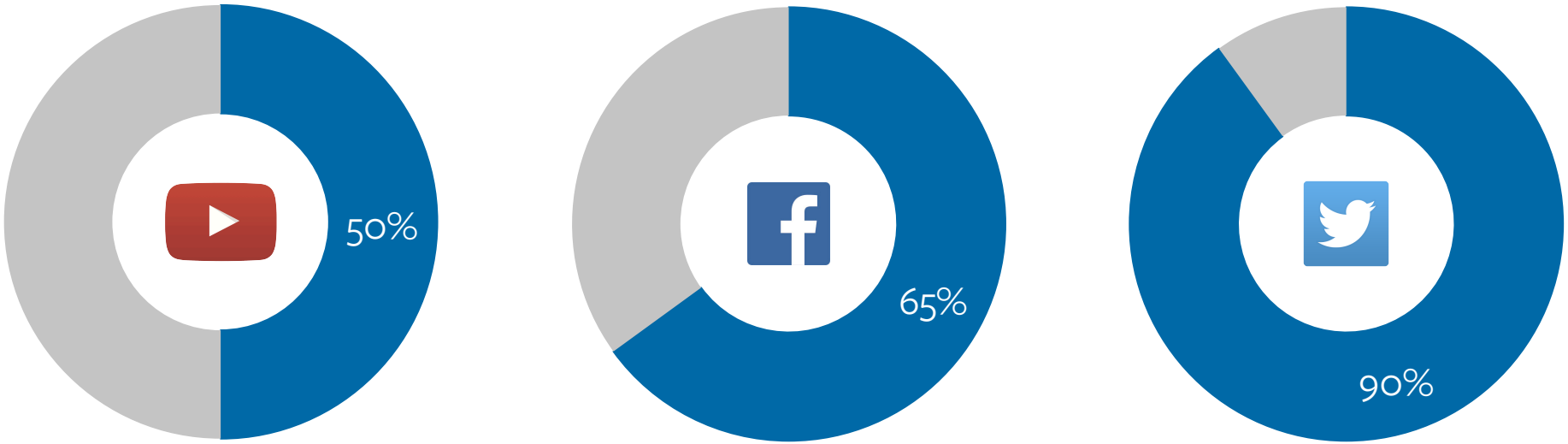
Videos Served Up Socially Are Increasingly Mobile, Too

Majority of Video Views on Traditional Social Media Now Come From Smartphones and Tablets

Video Views on Three Major Social Platforms by Device Type

Percentage of Mobile vs. Non-Mobile



...and Social Users are Sticking Around

The average length of a YouTube session on mobile was 40 minutes in 2014.

In the U.S., more than 50% of users who visit Facebook daily watch more than one video per session.

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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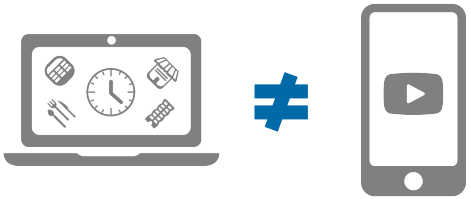
Mobile Video Viewers are Surprisingly High Quality Viewers

Research Shows Mobile Viewers Have Several Advantages Over Desktop Viewers

#1 Attention

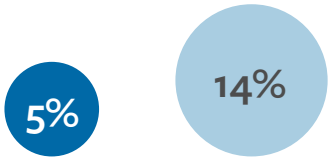


Unlike on desktops or laptops, videos on mobile command 100% share of screen time.

#2 Engagement

Average Click-Through Rates

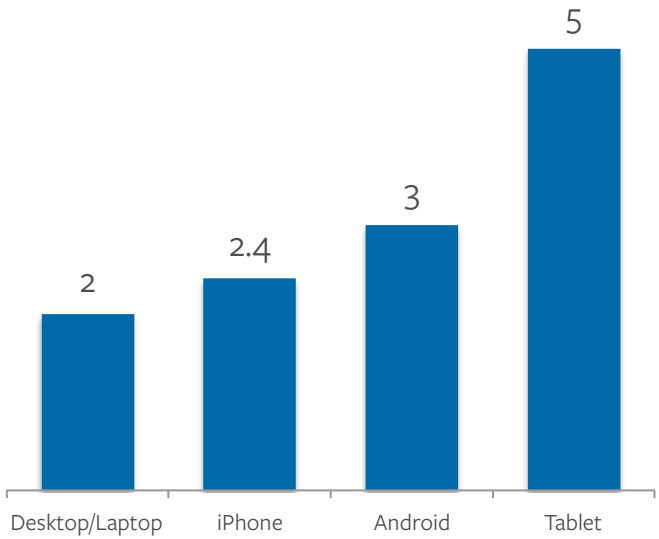
Online Video Plays by Device Type, Q3 2014



#3 Patience

Average Time Spent Watching a Single Video

Time in Minutes by Device Type



Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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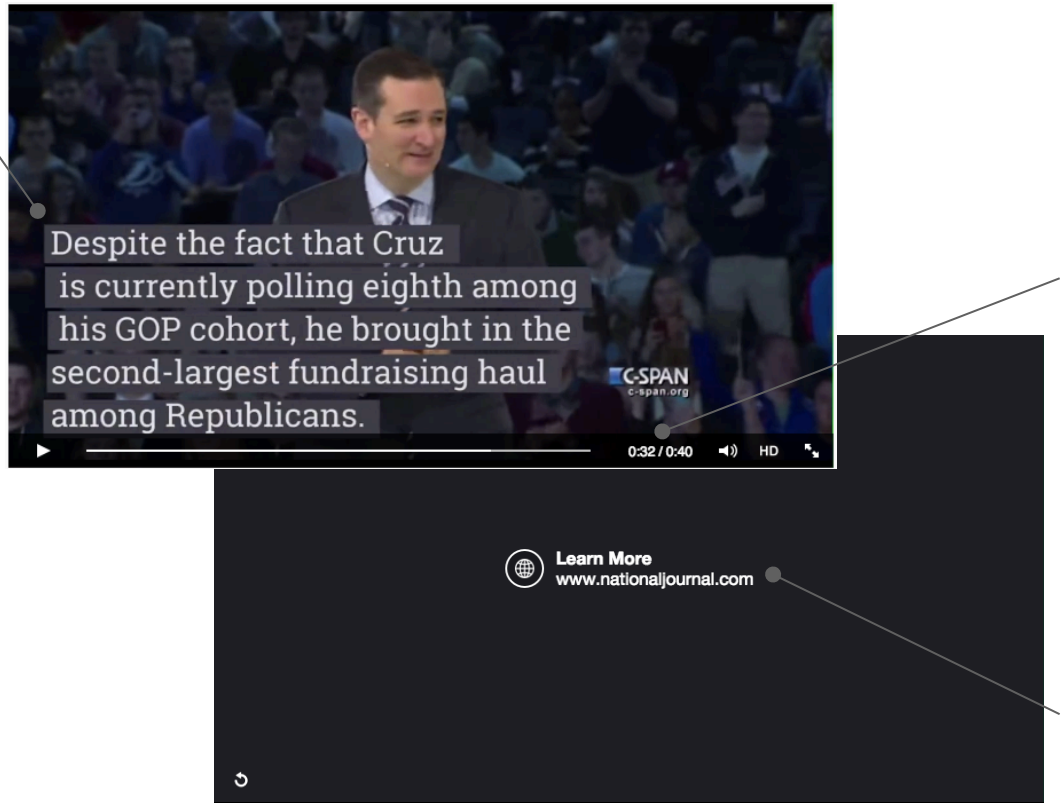
Mobile-Ready Videos Taking a "Volume Agnostic" Approach

Key Features Make Video Content Engaging With Or Without the Muted Autoplay Functions of Social

Here's Who's Winning the 2016 Money Race
(National Journal)

1. Supplemental Elements

- ✓ Bold, easy-to-read text that duplicates any quotes and provides a stand-alone narrative
- ✓ Audio enhances but isn't necessary (background music, soundbites that are summarized on screen); or, presence of audio provides a different experience entirely
- ✓ Animations and data visualizations provide a visual narrative



2. Timing is Everything

- ✓ Text lingers on screen long enough to be digested, but short enough to keep viewer engaged
- ✓ Video length is in the optimal 1-3 minute zone

3. Further Engagement

- ✓ Calls-to-action link back to related content and articles
- ✓ Facebook and YouTube have built-in features that allow direct linking from the videos themselves

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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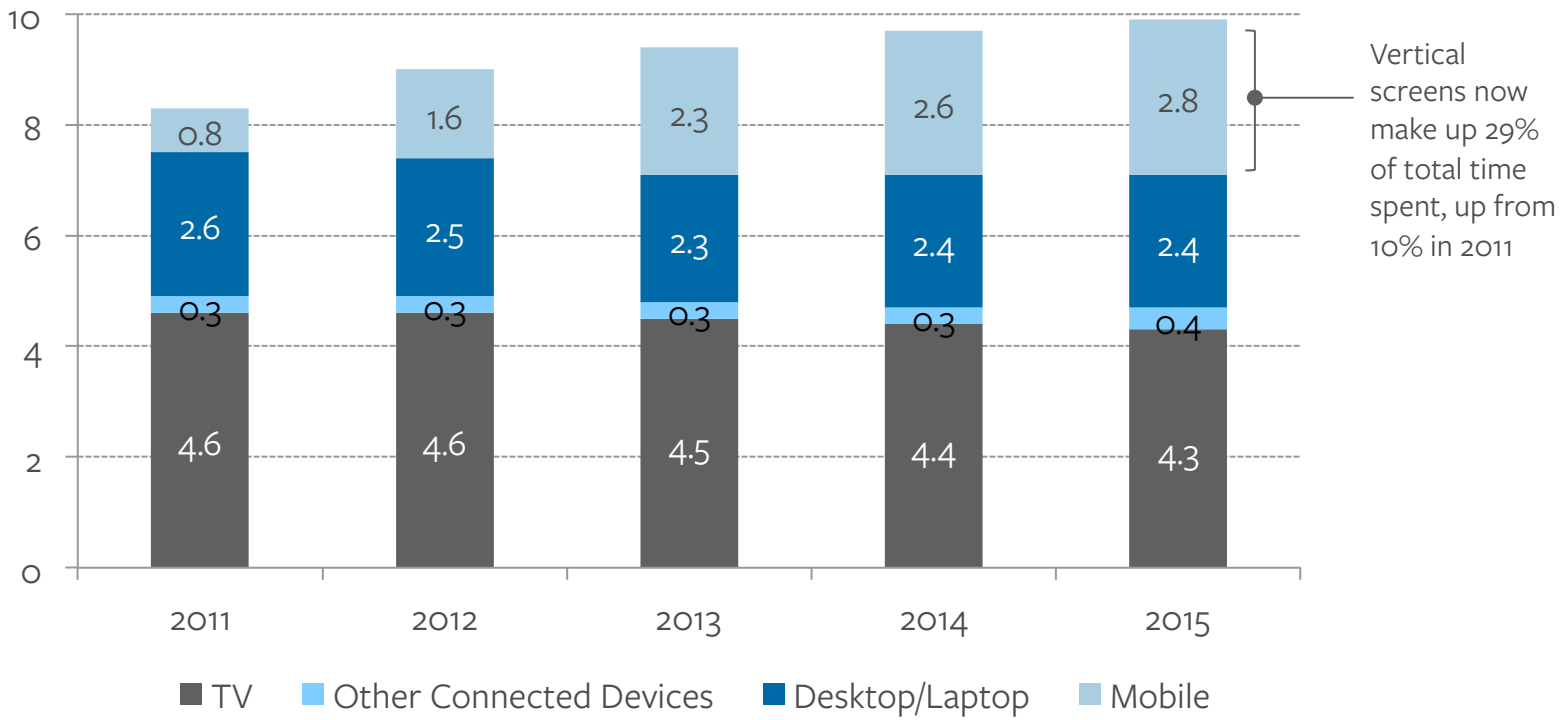
Much-Maligned Vertical Video Gaining Traction

Increased Pressure to Match the Orientation of the Only Screen Type That's Seeing Continued Growth

Time Spent on Screens by Device Type

Total Hours Per Day



Vertical Natives?

"It's hard to overstate the importance of these changes in just the past twelve months. The web is maturing, and at the same time a first generation of digital natives are embracing the devices they've grown up with. This means new behaviors, vast changes in how audiences are engaged and connected, and **a rapid evolution from the old world of horizontal 'lean back' viewing to a new handheld generation of vertical viewers** who both create and share as a natural extension of their social experiences."

– Stephen Rosenbaum, Forbes.com

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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A Change in Perspective

As Platforms Begin to Support (or Prioritize) Vertical Video, Content Creators Embracing Creative Opportunities

Vertical Video Vanguards
Growing Platform Support on Social

First the Tween- and Millennial-focused messaging apps...

...then the live streaming social apps...

...and now the traditional social video juggernauts

- Snapchat's "Literally Can't Even" series made its debut in 2015, with nine 5-minute episodes
- Per Snapchat's data, its users are 9 times more likely to completely watch a vertical ad than a horizontal one

Words of Wisdom for the Vertically Challenged

"I do think with vertical video, it is a more intimate experience for the audience."

- Tom Dunlap, 72andSunny

"To me vertical video content series are always going to make the most sense when it's in the moment, if not live, and with few exceptions outside of that."

- Andrew Cunningham, Snapchat

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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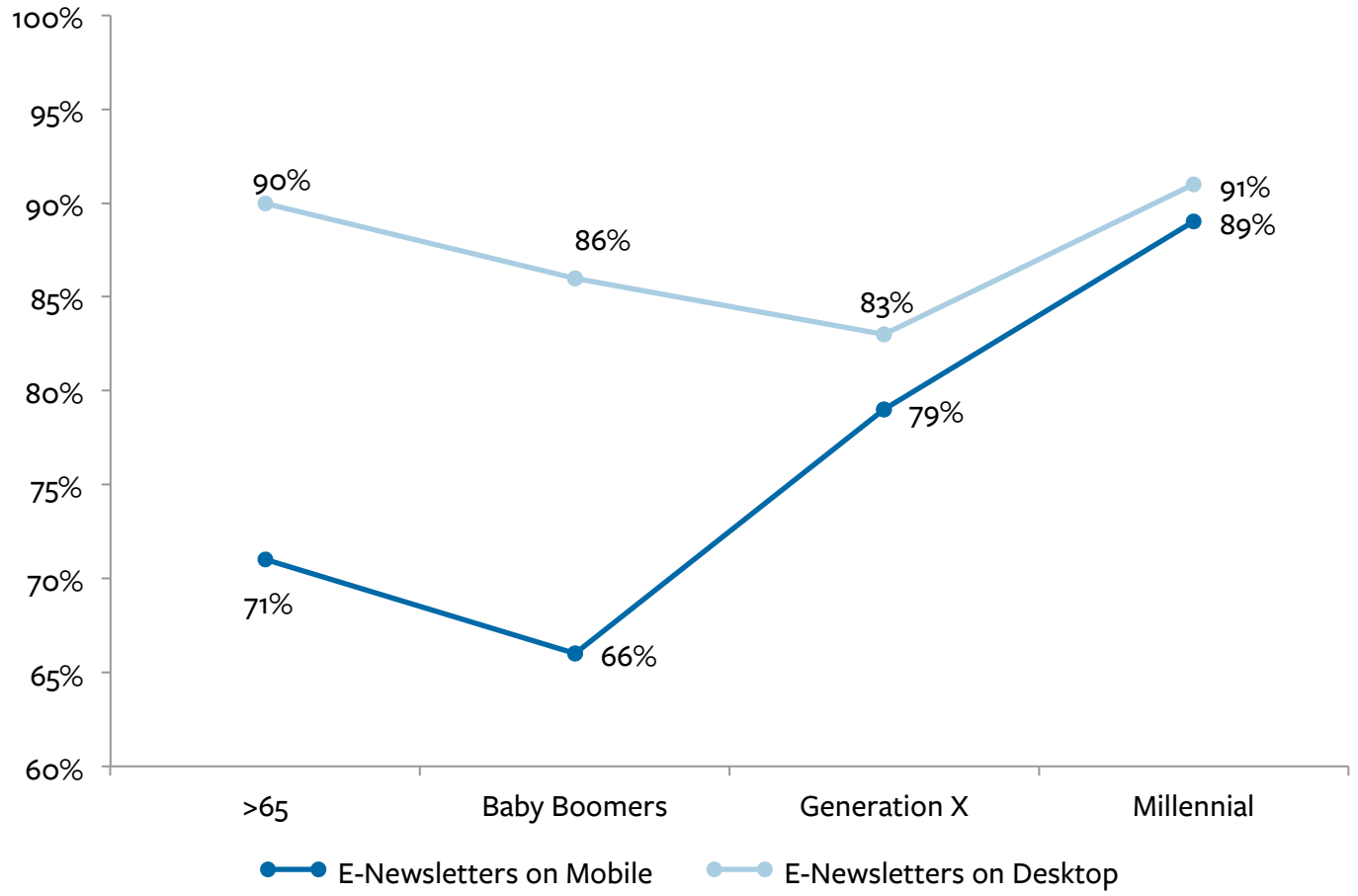
Younger Generations Share Similar E-Newsletter Habits

Multi-Platform View Rates Reinforce Importance of Template Optimized for Desktops and Mobile

A Narrowing Desktop-Mobile Newsletter Gap in Washington

Percentage of Respondents by Generation, WIA 2015



Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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Ideal Mobile-Friendly E-Newsletters in Action

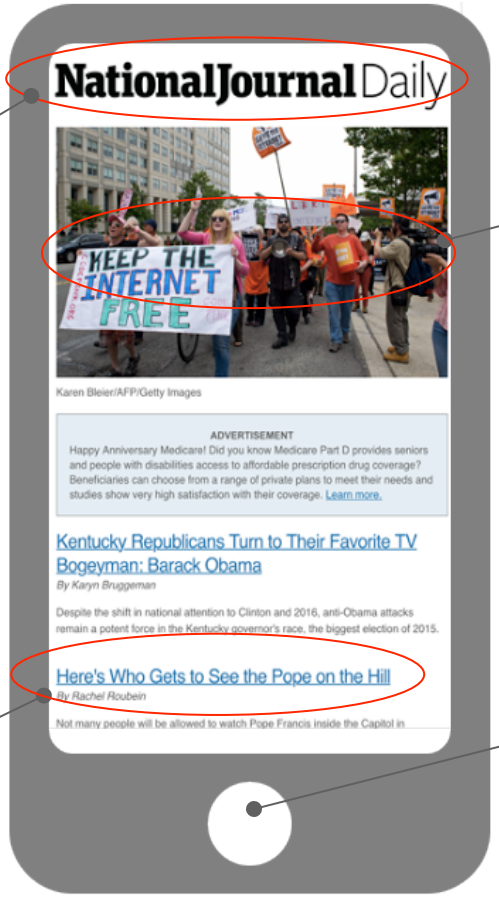
Great Newsletters Balance Expectations for Desktop and Smartphone Readers Alike

Keep the Subject Short

- ✓ Smaller screen exacerbates the need for short subjects
- ✓ *FIPP* (*The Worldwide Magazine Association*) recommends keeping subject lines under 45 characters

Match Fonts and Colors with Format

- ✓ Fonts should be in the "Goldilocks Zone," capable of being read comfortably on a desktop and smartphone
- ✓ Colors should be high contrast as many smartphones have brightness toned down



Minimize Photo Use

- ✓ Takes longer to download than text for most phones
- ✓ On Android, the photo default is preset to "off" (so photos may not show up at all)

Test the Result

- ✓ Does your newsletter have a crisp look and flow well on an iPhone or a Droid?
- ✓ Keep all mobile options in mind when formatting

Source: FLIPP, the worldwide media magazine; Noun Project; National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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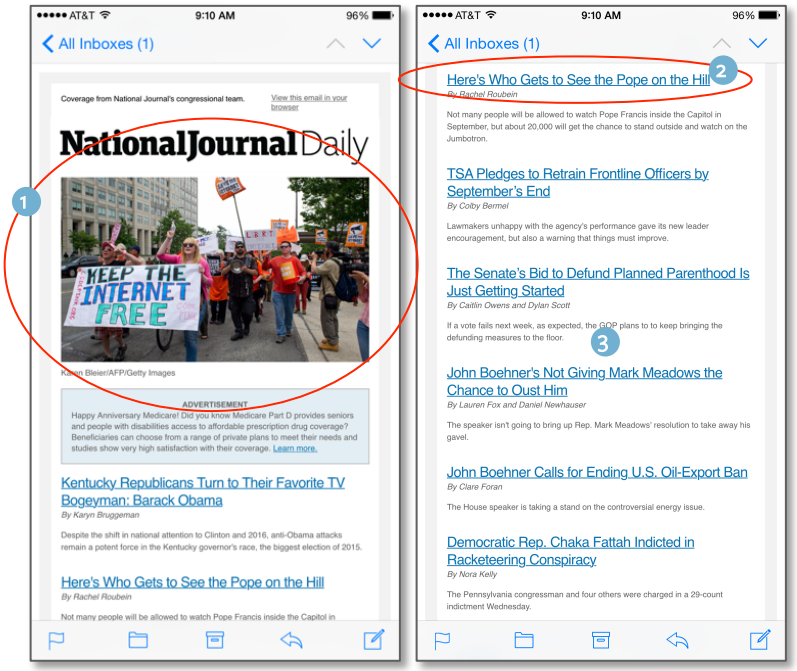
Mobile-Optimized Newsletters in Action: NJ Daily

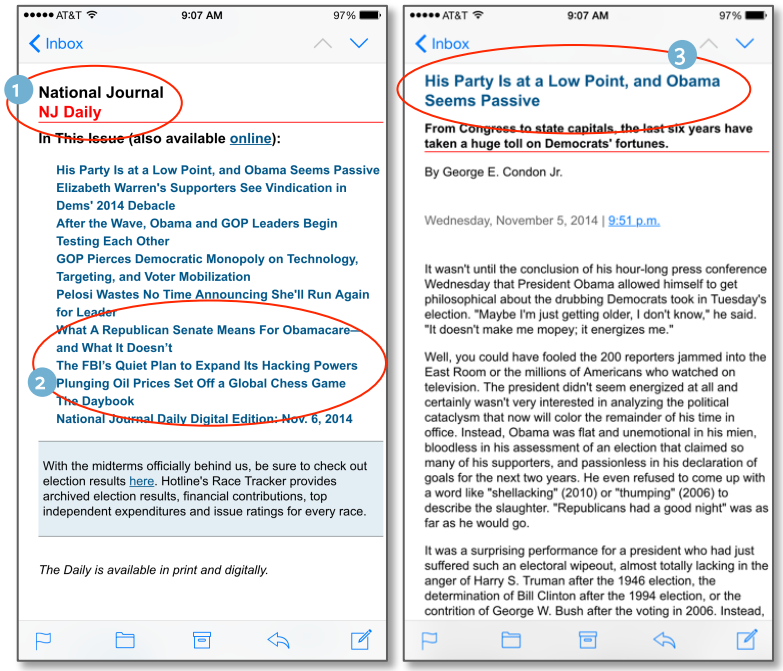
Recent Iteration Emblematic of Streamlined Design and Emphasis on Brand

Recent Redesign Emphasizes Brand and Prioritizes Links to Content with Clean Interface…



1. Attractive image and bold publication title at the top situates reader in both the brand and key topics
2. Clear hyperlinks with larger font connect back to main articles of interest without taking up significant space
3. Streamlined interface highlights only the most important stories and ideas for quick consumption (whole newsletter can be snapped in three images)

…While Previous Version Relies Too Heavily on Text to Send Strong Message



1. Smaller header and inconsistent subject line makes newsletter feel more spammy than the product of a high-end brand
2. Article hyperlinks bunched at the top of the page, linking to full-length articles as the user scrolls down
3. Entire newsletter would need to be snapped in 10+ images; unwieldy and blocky interface doesn't seem to encapsulate key news of the day

Source: National Journal Communications Council research and analysis.

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