Why Smartphones Aren't Mini Computers

As most of the Internet goes wild this afternoon over the release of the iPad mini — yet another mobile platform — a few people in the government tech world are taking a step back, noting how little of the jump from Web to mobile is really complete.

The folks over at the General Services Administration's Mobile Gov blog have put together a list [1] of six mistakes mobile designers often fall into. The list starts with "thinking of mobile as a mini computer." In other words, cramming your mobile application or mobile website with all of the content and functionality of a traditional website is a sure way to frustrate a guy who's rushing to work or waiting in a restroom line and just wants to grab a quick bite of information.

Five of the six mistakes basically boil down to not understanding who the mobile audience is, what they want and how much they can take in at once.

Government designers aren't the only ones struggling to adapt to mobile. *The New York Times* on Tuesday partially credited [2] the difficult transition to mobile for disappointing earnings reports by tech giants such as Google, Microsoft and Intel.

The nub of the problem is that the constraints on building content for a mobile device are much greater — a 2-inch screen, a distracted viewer — but the public's expectation of quality content is just as high. Government designers especially are also burdened by tight budgets.

"Most consumers don't understand the fundamental differences between a traditional website and a mobile-optimized site," the consultancy ForeSee noted in a report [3] on customer satisfaction with federal websites also released Tuesday, adding, "the truth is, they don't care either. They expect a seamless experience between the two channels."

The rush to mobile design has also been headlong, as the *Times* piece notes. Remember, the iPhone is only five years old. Web designers have had more than a decade to figure out their craft, on the other hand, and the process is still developing.

These are some of the reasons *Nextgov* [4] has been seeking private sector insight on how government agencies can improve their applications in our Building Better Apps project [5]. Our experts have reviewed 15 apps so far and we'll be publishing new reviews each month. Check out the reviews here [6] and here [7].

Read More [8]

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