

Progressive web apps - Why brands might want to get progressive

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No, not politically. The progressive we're talking about here might be the game-changer that bridges the divide between mobile web and mobile apps.

Anyone who paid attention to Google I/O (the Google developer conference) last week may have seen one particularly important session, about a new type of mobile web creation called the Progressive Web App. So what is it, why is it so important and why might you want to use it?

Let's start with what it is

The most basic definition of a Progressive Web App is a mobile site that has the functionality of an app. That means interactive content, customised HTML components and the speed of in-app content compared to web pages.

That on its own should answer the question of its importance. Most brands, especially those with complex desktop sites, long for the same functionality combined with the reach of mobile. Apps are an option, but they are expensive, onerous to maintain and hard to retain users on.

Google's Progressive Web App development solves quite a few of those issues. Using a combination of Material Design and custom web components (built using tools like Polymer), it's possible to build a single page web app with interactive, "app-like" functionality, all from a user's mobile browser. These web app can even be added to a home screen, and send users notifications from their browser, just as apps do.

The core aspect of a Progressive Web App is speed and efficiency, which has immediate benefits for users (and therefore for brands and publishers) but what makes these web apps really powerful is their ability to use custom elements normally only seen in apps, on a standard browser.

If that isn't enough, Progressive Web Apps can also be built to be dynamic, to learn about users and use certain prompts as a trigger. These web apps can also be accessible offline, and can even store offline data and analytics for syncing when a user goes online. In future, it's expected that these apps will be linked to geo location, Bluetooth and other mobile device functionality.

So what are the downsides?

One of the disadvantages for media buyers is that for now, it's not possible to inject ad placements into progressive web apps, something which users might be very happy about. However, Google has indicated that this functionality will be available for publishers soon.

It may also take some time for devices to catch up - some Apple devices have already been flagged for not being compatible with some Progressive Web App features.

Sound incredible?



It is. While it's still quite new and while publishers are only just beginning to experiment with the functionality and import of this format, the use cases are infinite and the impact for brands may be significant.

With mobile first quickly becoming a reality rather than just a buzzword, and the ever increasing struggle to keep users on both mobile web and mobile apps, a development like this might truly bridge the gap between the functionality of an app, and the user experience of mobile web.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I am an internet addict, digital voyeur and early adopter. A desire to indulge the creative and analytical equally spawned my obsession with data visualisation and meaningful analytics. I believe data should always be interesting and beautiful and tell a story. I am fascinated by the ways different networks and user experience parameters interact with each other online, and the amazing plethora of information that people send out every second, all over the world. I'm a digital chameleon, with experience spanning everything from copy writing and video editing to digital marketing to development. Life goal: take over the world.

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