

# The Keynote Dec. - Jan. Mobile News and Portal Index

Wireless Week Staff

Happy New Year! Another year arrives and with it another Keynote Mobile News and Portal Index to review.

We've talked a lot in the past about how some of the leading mobile news sites can improve their performance by paying attention to key best practices for site design. These include limiting the number of redirects on a page, shrinking page weights, and organizing image content in such a way as to reduce loading time.

This month, we thought we'd look at another key mobile web site metric - availability. Having responsive web pages is fantastic, but if a site visitor encounters errors, they might not stick around to appreciate the fast experience!

So what is the difference, you may ask, between availability and performance, and why does a mobile web site need to focus on both?

Performance is basically how long it takes for a page to load. Users have only a certain level of tolerance for delays when trying to get something done on the web, and faster page loads mean happy users. Availability looks at what percentage of all page load attempts are successful and load without errors. Availability can be impacted by poor performance. For example, we've all experienced the message that says "the page is taking too long to respond". That's going to bring down a web page's availability level. Users expect pages that are highly available and fast to load, and the best mobile web sites deliver that experience.

Keynote's best practice for availability is for 99.5 percent or better. It's extremely difficult to achieve 100 percent all of the time. The Internet is not always perfect, and despite best efforts, sites are sometimes prey to just some of the Internet's slowdowns. The good news is that we are seeing many mobile sites meeting that 99.5 percent target level.

However, we would consider just a drop to 97.8 percent as a serious availability problem - the expectations are that high. So really the main action in measurement takes place just in that 97-100 percent range. Anything below that is so non-industry standard the site really must have fundamental problems.

In our latest Keynote Mobile News and Portal Index benchmark (December

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16-January 15), we see average site availability actually increase by .3 percent overall. The biggest improvement in availability was seen for the homepage of Bing, Microsoft's search engine, going from 98 percent to 99.3 percent. In recent months, Bing had a relatively high error rate for the redirection that took mobile device users from [www.bing.com](http://www.bing.com) to [m.bing.com](http://m.bing.com). This kind of error is especially bad for site visitors, as it causes the page to fail before the main document on the page has a chance to load. A site visitor will see the browser change to a blank page after the initial request comes back with a redirection, but the error on the second request results in no new page rendering in the browser. In many ways, this is worse than delivering an error message - users sit and wait and grow increasingly frustrated that the page is not loading.

What was interesting about these errors is that the high error rate occurred on just one of the three carriers we measure across. Site visitors using the other two major US mobile carriers were not as impacted. This raises an important point of course around testing approaches - accurate testing needs to be across more than one carrier to get a true picture of how a site performs for all site visitors. If you use only a single network connection or a single location for external site monitoring, you risk missing important problems.

Although Bing had improved availability in this reporting period, not all sites in the index are doing so well. One of the worst performers this time around was ABC News, at just 97.6 percent available. The issues are very similar to what we saw with Bing a month ago. ABC News has too many redirections early in the page load, and the second redirection is frequently the one that is timing out. As happened with Bing, the result is nothing rendering in the browser which only means one thing - frustrated site visitors.

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[http://keynote.com/keynote\\_competitive\\_research/performance\\_indices/startup/index.html#](http://keynote.com/keynote_competitive_research/performance_indices/startup/index.html#)

Keynote tests the sites in the index hourly and around the clock from four locations over the three largest U.S. wireless networks, emulating the browsers of three different devices. Data is collected from San Francisco and New York and then aggregated to provide an overall monthly average in terms of both performance and availability.

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