

BrightEdge Point of View: Google Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP)

Mobile is the future of the search. Over 57% of all searches online now happen on mobile, and Google says that their search algorithm will embrace a full mobile-first index, which means it will separate and prioritize the mobile experience over desktop.

Speed and responsiveness are crucial to SEO across all devices, but especially on mobile. This makes sense, since mobile devices will often be accessing the internet via cellular networks on data plans that may or may not have monthly data caps on them.

Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP), a type of HTML optimized for mobile-enabled pages to load extremely fast on a mobile device. Essentially, with the use of AMP markup a site can present a separate version of a page optimized for fast delivery on mobile. With that in mind it's easy to think AMP pages are a one-size-fits-all solution you should use across your entire site, but that's not necessarily the case.

How AMP works and what it looks for

Here's an outline of the main ways AMP works:

1. **Addition by subtraction.** Several HTML tags cannot be used on AMP
2. **Lazy loading.** Images won't load until they are on screen
3. **Less JavaScript.** AMP comes with its own JavaScript library, but AMP pages effectively cannot run third-party JS
4. **Less CSS.** More simple layouts from a narrower set of options
5. **No fetching.** AMP pages are cacheable so that they can be served to the searcher directly without having to be fetched from your servers

Additionally, certain AMP pages may show up in a special content carousel at the top of the SERPs for certain keywords.

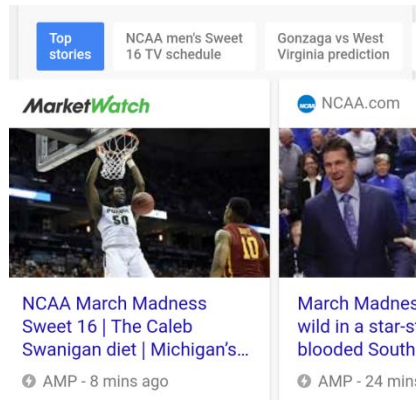


Figure 1: Example of an AMP content carousel

What does AMP do well?

By putting restrictions on what kinds of HTML tags, CSS, and JS can be used on an AMP page, the number of visuals and other complex elements that can be present is highly limited. Readability of text is the main emphasis of AMP pages. It also tends to work best for short form text-centric content like news and blogs, especially when AMP content gets placed in the carousel illustrated above.

What does AMP not do well?

Not every kind of page will work well as an AMP page. Here are a few examples:

- **Complex conversion pages.** If conversions on your site are driven by monetization flows or other middleware-driven forms, those pages may not render properly within AMP's restrictions on complex JS
- **Interactive tools or video-heavy pages.** Strict rules on file sizes and JS make it hard to run large videos or interactives on AMP pages
- **Keywords without AMP-preferred status.** Not all mobile search queries generate an AMP carousel, so if your strategy is to gain carousel placement for a plurality of pages, confirm that they're optimized for AMP-preferred terms

A 2016 SearchEngineLand study by columnist Barb Palser showed a low CTR for pages in the AMP carousel with a dramatic drop-off from 11% for Position 1 to 2% for Position 2. As with other position 0 placements in the knowledge graph, search marketers need to expand their frame of reference from rank-click-visitor to engaging prospects throughout the customer journey. Additionally, if AMP exists, some site will be in first position even if you decide to forgo the opportunity. Being cannibalized by your own AMP page is better than being cannibalized by your competitor's AMP page.

It's also important to note that creating an AMP-enabled version of a page won't eliminate the fully featured version. A mobile visitor who lands on your AMP page will be able to navigate back to the original version. With that in mind, brands should also optimize for mobile – such as responsive design, image and video file size minimization, and fast loading – on your standard pages. Lastly, your site must be HTTPS for your AMP pages to show up.

Recent research has shown that AMP-enabled pages outperform non-AMP pages even when the search results are not showing AMP results. This is probably due to the improvements in speed that sites that are AMP-enabling achieve.

Is AMP right for your site?

If you're in the process of optimizing for mobile, your priority should be compressing images, minifying CSS and JS, removing extraneous code, and doing anything else to improve your overall site speed. Once that's complete, you can begin the following evaluation process:

1. Determine which site sections receive the most mobile organic traffic
2. Evaluate whether the content on those pages would still benefit users within AMP's more limited environment
3. Conduct keyword research to see whether those pages' target keywords are AMP preferred

User experience is Priority #1. Implement AMP pages only if you're confident they will enhance the experience for the visitors engaging with your content, not as an attempt to "beat the algorithm" or find a shortcut to the top of the SERPs.

The Takeaway

Yes. Speed always helps content perform. Determine what % of your top topics and content are AMP-preferred, information which BrightEdge reports. If you find meaningful representation, you can deploy AMP pages for those sections or topics.

If you would like to discuss the topic, please call your Customer Success manager or call us at 800-678-8023.

About BrightEdge

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