Real Estate Website Optimizes Mobile Search to Grow Business

Changing search functionality increased leads and revenue

Introduction: As a leading online media company and owner of several real estate websites, RentPath relies on website optimization to maximize revenue across its web and mobile properties – including ApartmentGuide.com.

ApartmentGuide.com is an online marketplace that allows property management companies to post apartments, and renters and buyers to search for them. The website monetizes by generating leads – in this case, apartment-seekers – for property management companies and by selling Spotlight Property placements to companies that wish to showcase their listings at the top of the site's search results.

Challenge: As RentPath's optimization and usability analyst, Scott Ehly is always looking for digital tactics to grow the business's bottom line. After seeing the popularity of ApartmentGuide.com's mobile site take off, Scott wanted to find a way to grow revenue generated from mobile users. In the past, ApartmentGuide's Spotlight Property placements existed only on the desktop site. Scott wondered if he could apply the same paid placements to the company's mobile site, where, by default, search results were sorted based on the searcher's location only.

"Spotlight Properties were something we'd always been doing on the main site, but hadn't tried yet on mobile," Scott says. "We wanted to find out if adding them would have a detrimental effect on leads to the extent that it would counterbalance the revenue generated from the featured placements."

Hypothesis: Scott hypothesized that adding Spotlight Properties to the search results on ApartmentGuide.com's mobile site would increase revenue overall. He believed this change in search functionality would ultimately cause a slight drop-off in total leads generated but would make up for the loss with the revenue generated from property management companies paying for the featured placements.

Before making any permanent changes, however, Scott opted to run a mobile website test with Optimizely. If Spotlight Properties greatly decreased the number of leads generated from the mobile site, Scott reasoned that they would not be cost effective overall.

Test: Scott used Optimizely to test search results pages on the current mobile site against variation pages that featured the Spotlight Properties at the top of all search results. Optimizely's mobile website testing feature allowed Scott to see exactly how the test would appear for site visitors on their mobile device or tablet.

At a Glance:

Customer:

RentPath™

Website: www.ApartmentGuide.com

About: RentPath Inc. helps millions of consumers find apartments, houses for rent, and new homes for sale through its Internet, mobile, and print products, including ApartmentGuide.com and Rentals.com
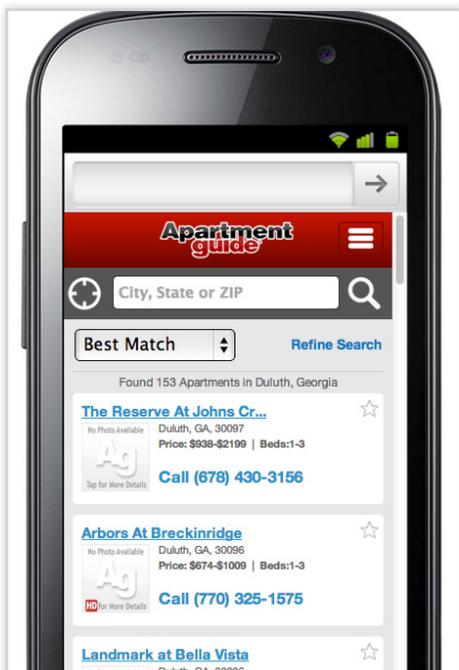
Goal: Increase revenue from mobile website

> " One of the biggest mistakes a company can make is to just assume that the functionality on the big screen will work on the little one. You have to be smart, and pick and chose."
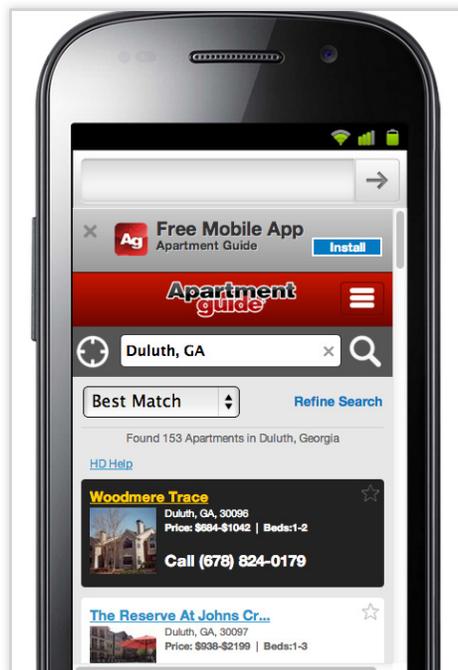>
> **Scott Ehly**
> Optimization and Usability Analyst, RentPath

ORIGINAL   VARIATION

The original mobile pages displayed search results primarily based on location. The variation mobile search pages inserted a Spotlight Property at the top of all organic search results.

He was able to make search functionality changes without altering the website's code, using custom Javascript to create a cookie that would serve up the new functionality to visitors in the experiment. The cookie ensured that site visitors in the variation experience would see featured properties above their location-based search results.

"Being able to use Javascript with Optimizely made it possible to deliver the new search functionality immediately instead of waiting for backend resources," says Scott.

Scott used Optimizely's targeting feature to show the test to the right audience – mobile visitors. He targeted the experiment to be shown to only users visiting ApartmentGuide.com from a mobile browser.

To track leads generated during the test, Scott set a pageview goal on a "Thank you" page that visitors saw after submitting their information on the site.

Results: After running the test for one week, Scott discovered very surprising results. The mobile variation featuring Spotlight Properties actually increased the number of leads generated by 1.6%. This seemingly small number had a huge impact – both verifying that the new search functionality was cost effective for mobile and that users were actually more engaged on the site as a whole.

"People generally come to our site from Google or Yahoo search. Our goal is to get them to continue searching on our site instead of going back to that search engine. The ability to actually see that we are increasing leads per visit, even slightly, becomes more and more significant," explained Scott.

About Optimizely:

Optimizely is a world-class website optimization platform that enables users with and without technical expertise to make dynamic changes to their websites, test the variations to live traffic, gather immediate results and start achieving goals.

Optimizely helps more than 7,000 clients drive more leads, sales and conversions through simple website testing and optimization.

Optimizely By the Numbers
(As of May 2014)

7 Billion
web experiences delivered

500,000+
experiments run since launch

7,000+
customers

Happy Customers:

Disney | Starbucks
Go Daddy | Microsoft
SONY | NBC
theguardian | GILT

Segmentation

Scott used Optimizely's segmentation feature to dive deeper into the test results. For this test, he filtered the results by device type to look at specific visitor segments coming from iPhone, Android, and Blackberry.

"If the results are particularly surprising, we use segmentation to break them down one device at a time," explains Scott. "How is this experience being viewed or perceived by people coming to our site from different devices?"

Breaking down the information in this way helped Scott understand how specific groups of visitors were engaging with the site and confirmed that there were no outlying factors influencing the test results – for instance, if users on Blackberry were converting with a much higher frequency than users on an iPhone. He plans to use information about these visitors segments to build targeted tests for each device group in the future.

Takeaways:

- *Dive deeper into test results with segmentation.* No two site visitors are the same. Understanding how specific visitor segments interact with your site will help you provide a more personalized experience to maximize conversions. Scott segmented his results based on device type. Segmentation is also available based on a number of other parameters, such as browser type, campaign, referral source, custom segments, and more.

- *Mobile vs. Desktop – two different beasts.* Visitors to your mobile site behave much differently than visitors on desktop. They're on the go, using a significantly smaller screen to find what they are looking for in just a few clicks. What performs well on your desktop site won't always translate to mobile. It's critical to test both sites to maximize conversions.

- *Big business gains from small lifts.* For Scott, a 1.6% increase in conversions was extremely significant. This metric validated the ROI of ApartmentGuide.com's new search functionality and gave Scott real data to back up his business decisions around mobile. Try looking beyond traditional conversion goals – optimization data can provide big picture insights on how your business is performing.

See Optimizely in action. Schedule a demo today.
www.optimizely.com/demo