



Living In a Mobile-First World

5 Key Insights for a Proactive Engagement Strategy

The shift from desktop to mobile readership has shown no signs of slowing.

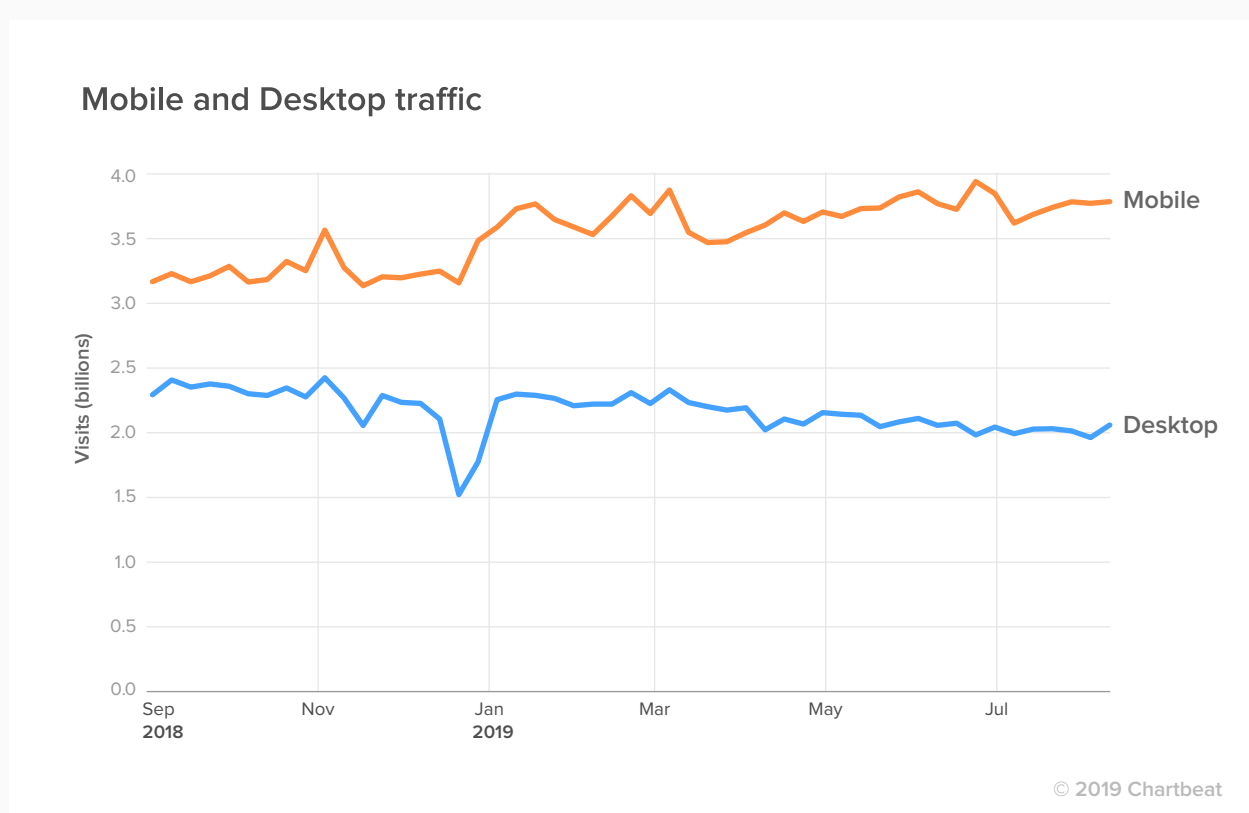
This year alone, the overall number of visits taking place on mobile **increased by more than 20%**. A growing mobile audience presents a new challenge for content creators — shifting from a desktop-first mindset to one that’s leaning mobile.

Below, we discuss five trends that shed some light on this evolution, supported by data that can help inform your audience engagement strategies moving forward.

1 Create more content tailored for mobile visits

Two out of every three visits takes place on a mobile device — a number that could rise to as much as 75% within the next two years. On the other hand, we saw a roughly 10% decline in desktop traffic for the third straight year.

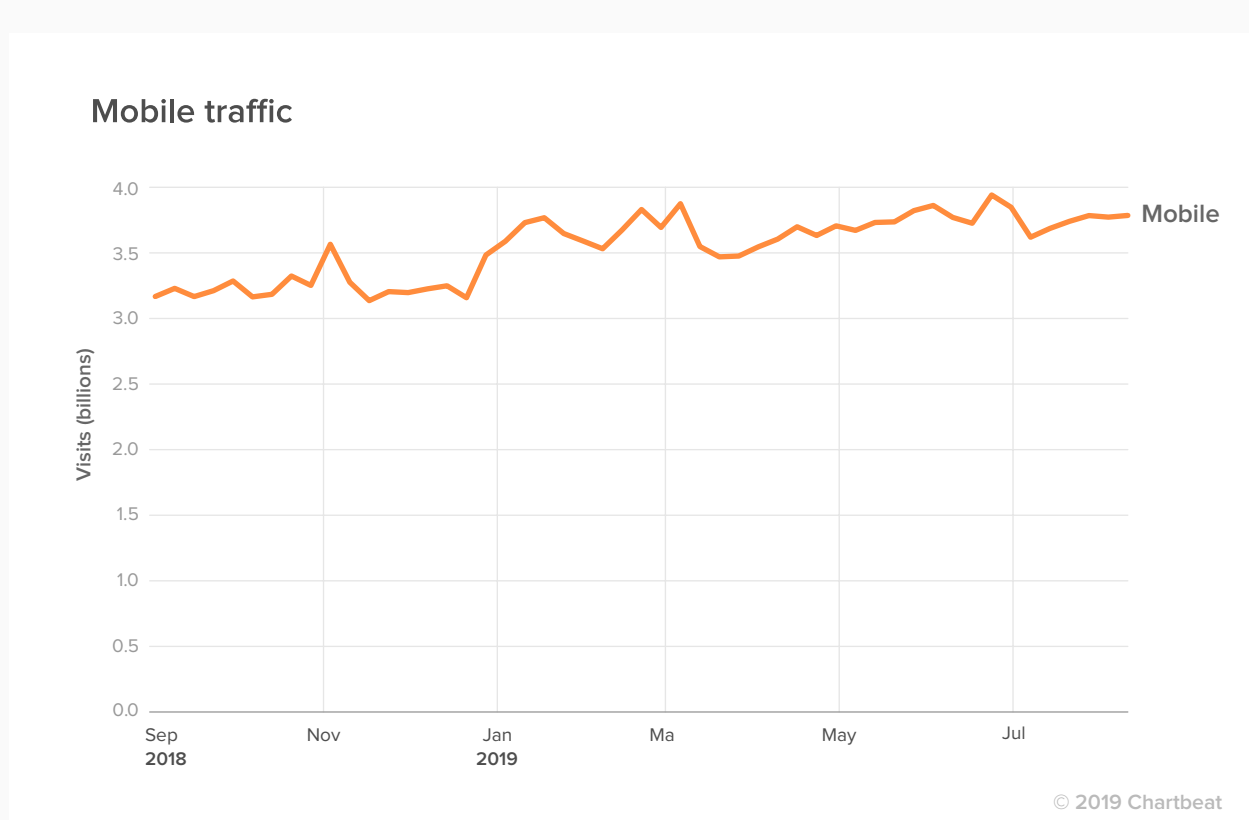
When evaluating sources of the increase, we’ve seen the growth in referred traffic from [pages using AMP](#) as one of the main drivers of this surge. However, our data points to an evolution in how we consume information — one that is mobile-first.



2 Mobile direct traffic shows no signs of slowing

Direct traffic is still the largest driver of audiences to content, yet its source is evolving rapidly. There has been an approximately 18% decline in desktop direct traffic and about a 15% increase in mobile direct traffic, a trend that has continued for the past three years.

About 40% of direct visits take place on mobile. More importantly, our data scientists predict that mobile direct traffic will cross a major threshold in the next two years, with more than 50% of homepage visits taking place on a phone. Strategic conversations around the optimization of mobile pages need to begin sooner rather than later.

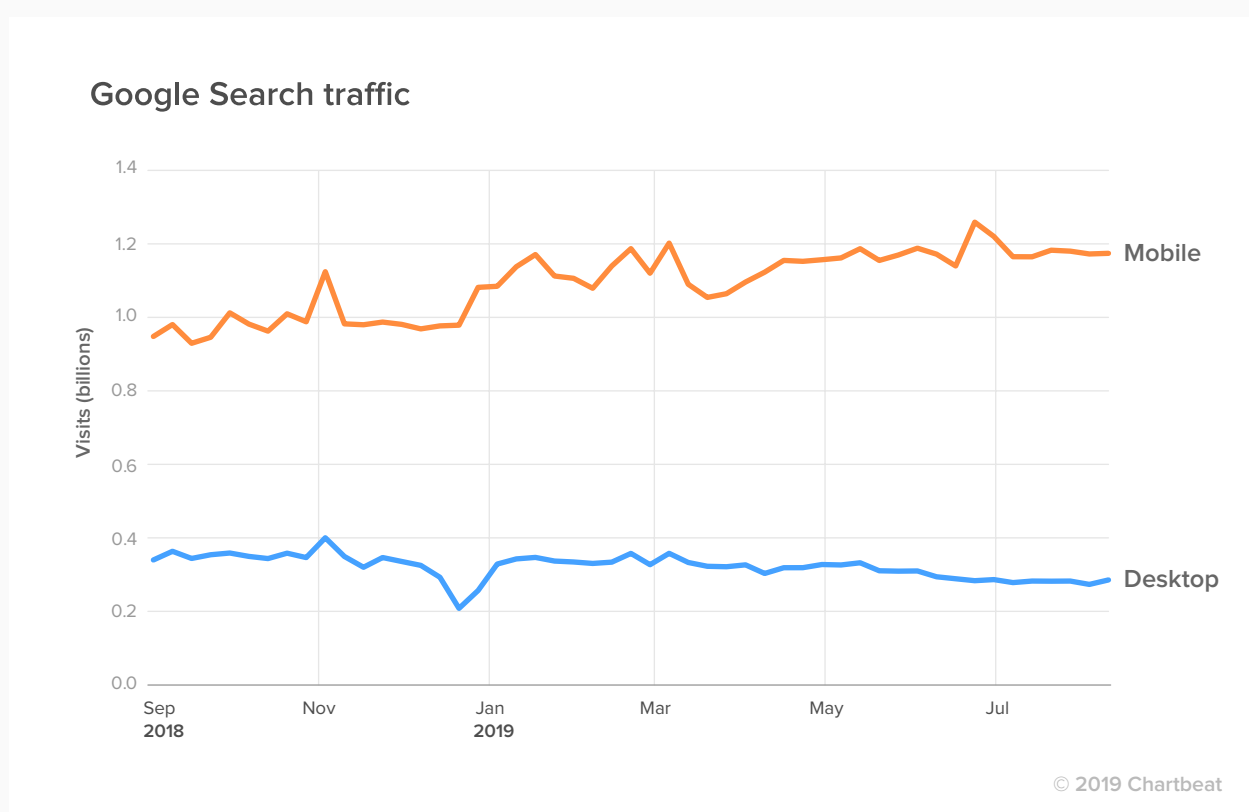


3 Google and its related entities are still driving referrals

Unsurprisingly, Google continues to dominate the referral ecosystem. The search engine’s referral traffic grew another 10% to 15% in the past year.

By device, much of the growth is on mobile. Conversely, desktop traffic from Google is down about 10%, in line with the overall desktop decline we outlined above.

Put another way, search traffic is now almost 80% mobile. Google Search is by far the largest source of external traffic to publisher sites, sending over twice the traffic of the next-largest traffic source. Not to mention, it’s also by far the largest source of traffic on mobile. Therefore, it’s imperative to keep pace with the referrer’s algorithm and aggregation updates, as we outline below.



4 Address the emerging aggregators

Aggregators have grown to be some of the largest sources of audience referrals on the web. For instance, [Asia-based apps TopBuzz](#) and [SmartNews](#) grew more than 100% this year. Similarly, the Google-driven aggregators [Google News](#) and [Chrome Suggestions](#) each grew more than 50%.

To put this into perspective: both TopBuzz and SmartNews now send as much traffic as Yahoo. Flipboard is referring as much traffic as Twitter. And as you may expect, both Chrome Suggestions and Google News have now outgrown Twitter.

Consumer demand for news from apps remains high. The growing news app cohort should remain a key consideration for content distribution strategies moving forward.

| YOY GROWTH | |
|---------------------------|------|
| TopBuzz | 158% |
| SmartNews | 129% |
| Google Chrome Suggestions | 91% |
| Google News | 50% |
| Flipboard | -3% |

Growth from Aggregators Q1-Q3 2019

| REFERRER | PAGEVIEWS |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 Google Search | 67.6B |
| 2 Facebook | 30.2B |
| 3 Google Chrome Suggestions | 4.2B |
| 4 Google News | 3.2B |
| 5 Twitter | 2.5B |
| 6 Flipboard | 1.3B |
| 7 Bing | 1B |
| 8 Outbrain | 925M |
| 9 Yahoo Search | 573M |
| 10 Upday News | 473M |
| 11 SmartNews | 472M |
| 12 TopBuzz | 396M |

5 Mobile engagement rise puts onus on UX improvements

Mobile technology has shifted engagement patterns as well. On mobile homepages, the average visitor spends 40% more time actively engaging than their desktop counterpart and are 20% more likely to click.

The role reversal doesn’t end there — mobile homepage visitors scroll to 25% of the page, compared to 34% for desktop. When you think about limited mobile real estate, that’s a fairly significant figure.

Mobile devices can’t simply be seen as smaller desktop experiences. Their use case and accessibility over desktop can open the door to experimentation around user experience optimizations.

| | DESKTOP | MOBILE |
|-------------------|---------|--------|
| Avg. Scroll Depth | 34% | 25% |
| Avg. Engaged Time | 16s | 22s |
| Avg. CTR | 56% | 67% |

Decoding the Mobile Data

Whether it’s your homepage or articles, our research shows that mobile optimizations need to be prioritized.

⚡ Gateways to content matter. The ways people access content today has fundamentally changed. While it’s crucial to have a multi-channel strategy that accounts for email, search, and social behaviors, our data shows that device-based optimizations are just as important.

⚡ Get used to a dominant Google landscape. It’s vital to keep an eye on Google when determining short-term tactics or long-term strategies for your organic and paid channels. Even if you can’t control the impact of algorithm or aggregator changes, your SEO efforts are still worth it, particularly on mobile.

⚡ Use cautious optimizations. There’s a cautionary tale in betting too heavily on one optimization. We’ve seen the impact on publishers tying their revenue goals to Facebook, for instance. While search is undoubtedly rising, diversification is key to mitigating the risk of relying too heavily on any single source.