



How to design and launch your utility's mobile app

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Key takeaways

- Utility mobile apps outperform utility websites in overall customer satisfaction.
- When using their utility's mobile app, customers most want to view a summary of their account information, report or check the status of a power outage or gas leak, and view their payment history.
- Test your mobile app before releasing it to customers, promote it to increase adoption, and update it regularly to avoid negative customer experiences.

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A utility mobile app helps customers connect with you and reinforces (or creates) the feeling that you care about your customers. But less than half of the utilities measured in J.D. Power's 2020 [Utility Digital Experience Study](#) currently offer one. Learn why you need a mobile app, what it should do, and how to launch it to see the greatest return on your investment.

Why you need a mobile app

Laura Gousha, vice president of engagement at Mindgrub, a technology consulting firm that created Exelon

Corp.'s award-winning suite of mobile apps, wrote an article to explain [Why Every Utility Needs a Mobile Application](#). According to Gousha, mobile apps are the most effective channel for driving satisfaction among utility customers because they:

- Improve customer experience by allowing for a more-personalized experience
- Boost awareness of self-service offerings
- Make transactions easy by using mobile pay abilities and making billing information readily available
- Reduce contact center costs by offering on-demand communication and the ability to report or check the status of outages or emergencies

Developing a responsive website is a great step toward setting up a mobile presence, but it isn't enough. Utility mobile apps outperform utility websites in overall customer satisfaction, according to the J.D. Power press release [Utilities Struggle to Find Right Digital Self-Service Formula, J.D. Power Finds](#). Jon Sundberg, senior digital manager at J.D. Power, states:

Customer expectations for a seamless self-service web experience have grown rapidly, driven by digital leaders in the credit card, banking, and insurance industries, but utilities have not kept pace. The one digital self-service channel showing some promise in the utility sector—the mobile app—is performing significantly better, but many utilities have not yet created such an app.

Some of the advantages of a mobile app over a responsive website include:

- Push notifications
- The ability to operate off-line
- More authentication options such as biometrics
- Better use of screen space
- More customization options
- Better overall speed and performance

If you aren't ready to make the investment to build a mobile app, check out our report [Why you should have a mobile app and how to develop it without breaking the bank](#). In it, we offer ideas for less-expensive ways to grow your mobile presence.

If you are ready to invest in a mobile app, you'll need to decide how to develop it. Typically, the utility, a parent or holding company, or an external third party develops utility mobile apps. The E Source [Digital Metrics Survey](#) includes information on the vendors and resources utilities use to build mobile apps.

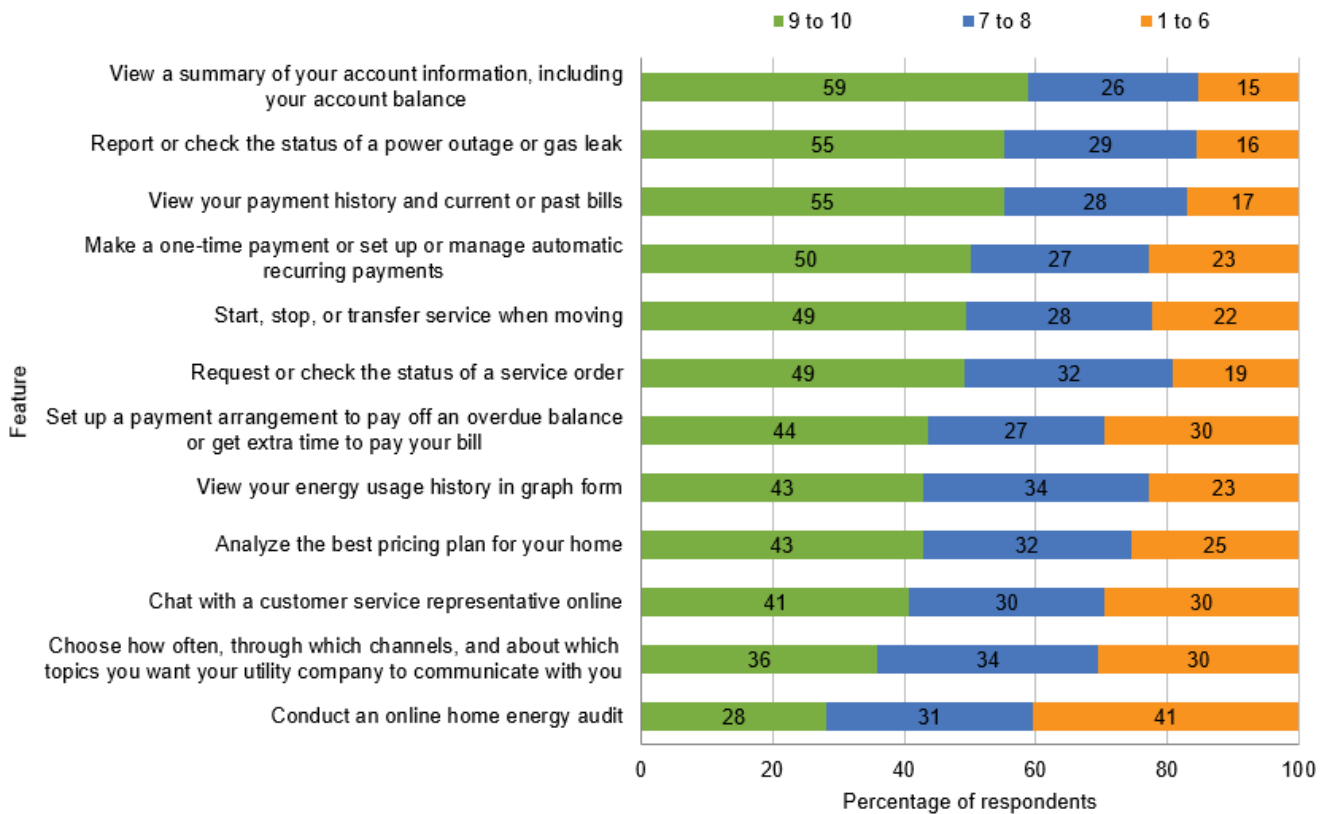
What features to include in your mobile app

Your mobile app should help customers complete tasks, find important information, and interact with you. According to data from the 2019 E Source [Residential Utility Customer Survey](#), the top six features customers want to interact with on their utility’s website or mobile app are (figure 1):

- View a summary of their account information, including account balance
- Report or check the status of a power outage or gas leak
- View their payment history, including current and past bills
- Make a one-time payment or set up or manage automatic reoccurring payments
- Start, stop, or transfer service when moving
- Request or check the status of a service order

Figure 1: Features customers want on their utility’s website or mobile app

Customers rate viewing a summary of their account information, reporting or checking the status of a power outage or gas leak, and viewing their payment history as the most important tasks they expect to complete on their utility’s website or mobile app when using their phone or a tablet.



Base: Residential utility customers who use a mobile phone or tablet to access the internet (n = 1,668). **Question S3_6:** On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means not at all important and 10 means extremely important, how important is it to you to be able to do the following on your energy provider’s website or mobile app when using your mobile phone or tablet device? © E Source (2019 Residential Utility Customer Survey)

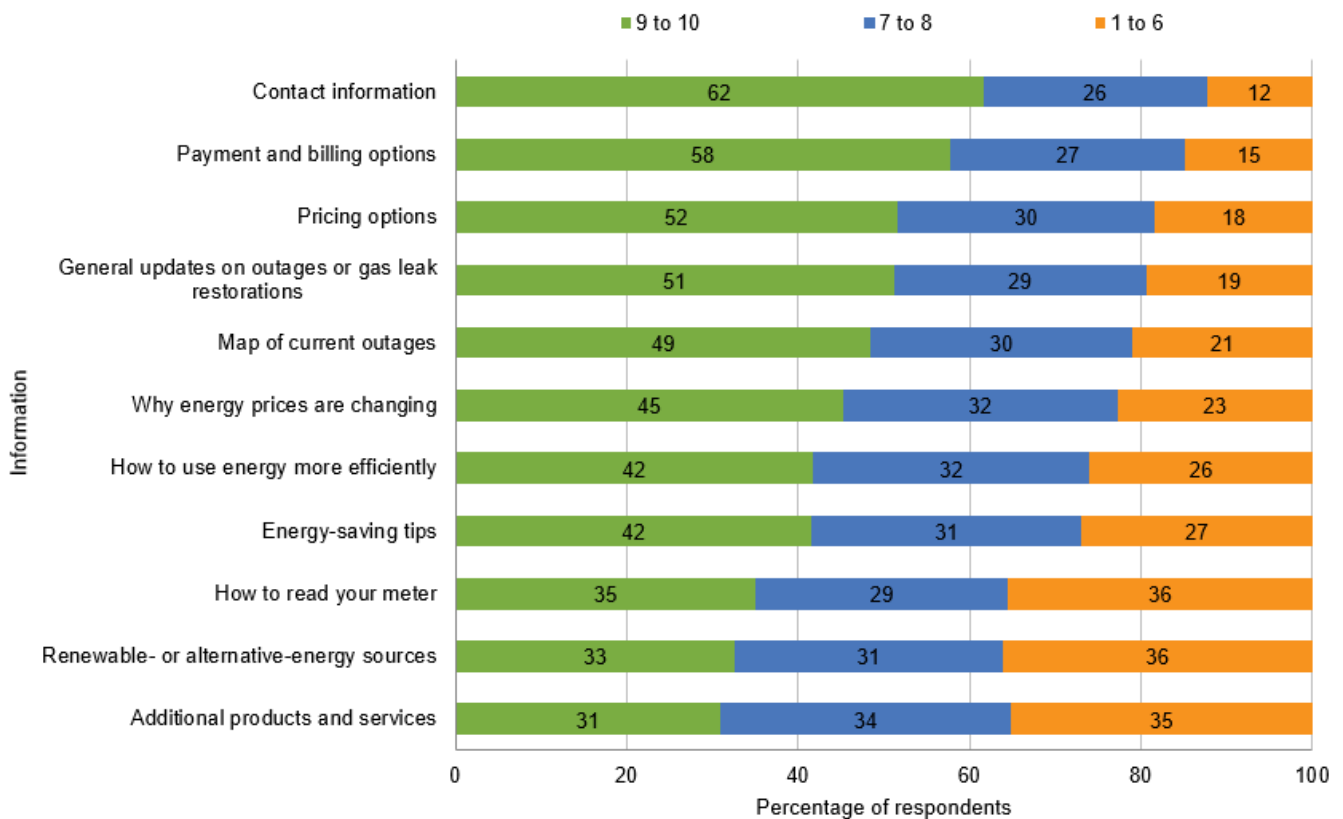
The three most important pieces of information customers want to find on their utility’s website or mobile app

are (figure 2):

- Utility contact information
- Payment and billing options
- Pricing options

Figure 2: Information customers want to find on their utility’s website or mobile app

Most customers want to find their utility’s contact information on its website or mobile app when using their phone or a tablet. They also want to find payment and billing options and pricing options.



Base: Residential utility customers who use a mobile phone or tablet to access the internet (n = 1,668). **Question S3_6:** On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means not at all important and 10 means extremely important, how important is it to you to be able to find the following types of information on your energy provider’s website or mobile app when using your mobile phone or tablet device? © E Source (2019 Residential Utility Customer Survey)

Learn more about E Source’s residential insights tools

The [E Source US Residential Customer Insights Center](#) is an online analysis tool that compiles data from the Claritas Energy Behavior Track annual online survey of about 32,000 residential customers in the US (conducted in partnership with E Source). The tool compiles data from the survey and then layers it with demographic information (such as gender and age) and household characteristics (such as size of home).

It allows utilities to gather information about their residential customers' energy-usage behaviors and attitudes around energy consumption.

The [E Source Canadian Residential Customer Insights Center](#) compiles data from the E Source Canadian Residential Customer Insights Survey, which we designed to better understand residential customers' attitudes and behaviors around energy and energy-related technologies. We conducted the 2019 study online with 3,100 customers.

Both tools are available to members of the [E Source Residential Marketing Service](#).

Using data from the E Source [US Residential Customer Insights Center](#) and the E Source [Canadian Residential Customer Insights Center](#), we found the top interactions customers want from their utility's mobile app (**figure 3**).

For US customers, that includes:

- Making a payment
- Scheduling or checking the status of a service request
- Submitting a service request

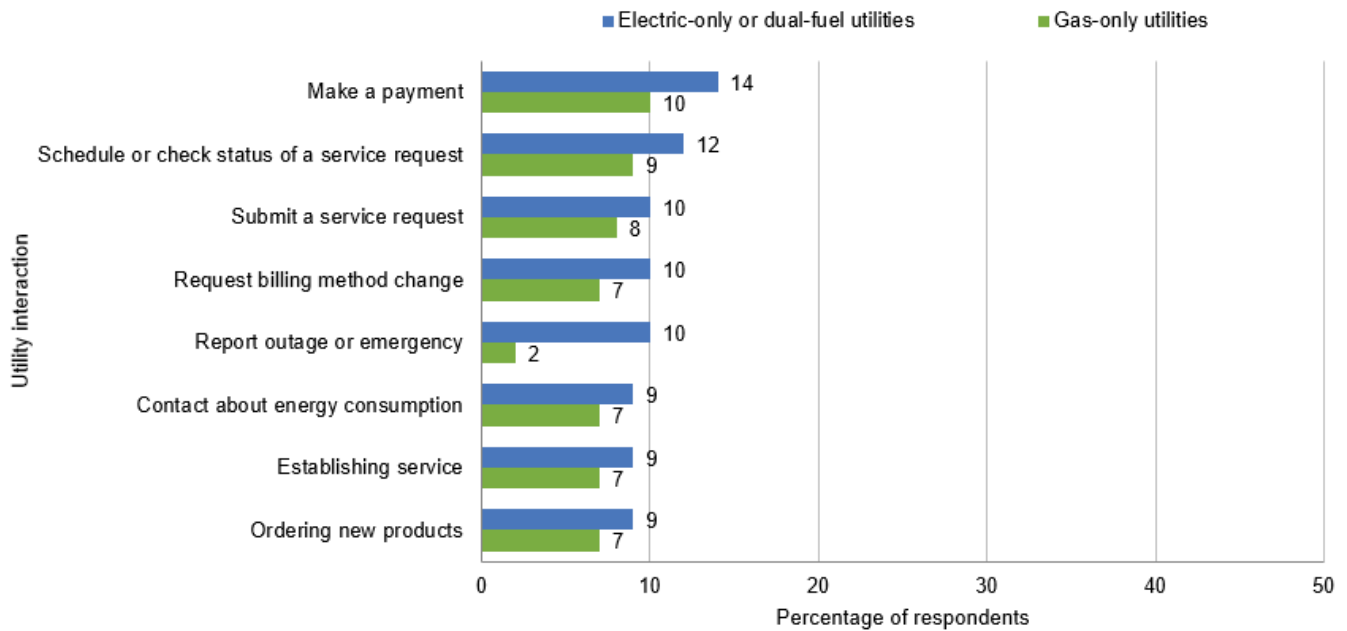
For Canadian customers, that includes:

- Reporting an outage or emergency
- Receiving outage or emergency communications
- Making a payment

Figure 3: The interactions customers want to have with their utility via a mobile app

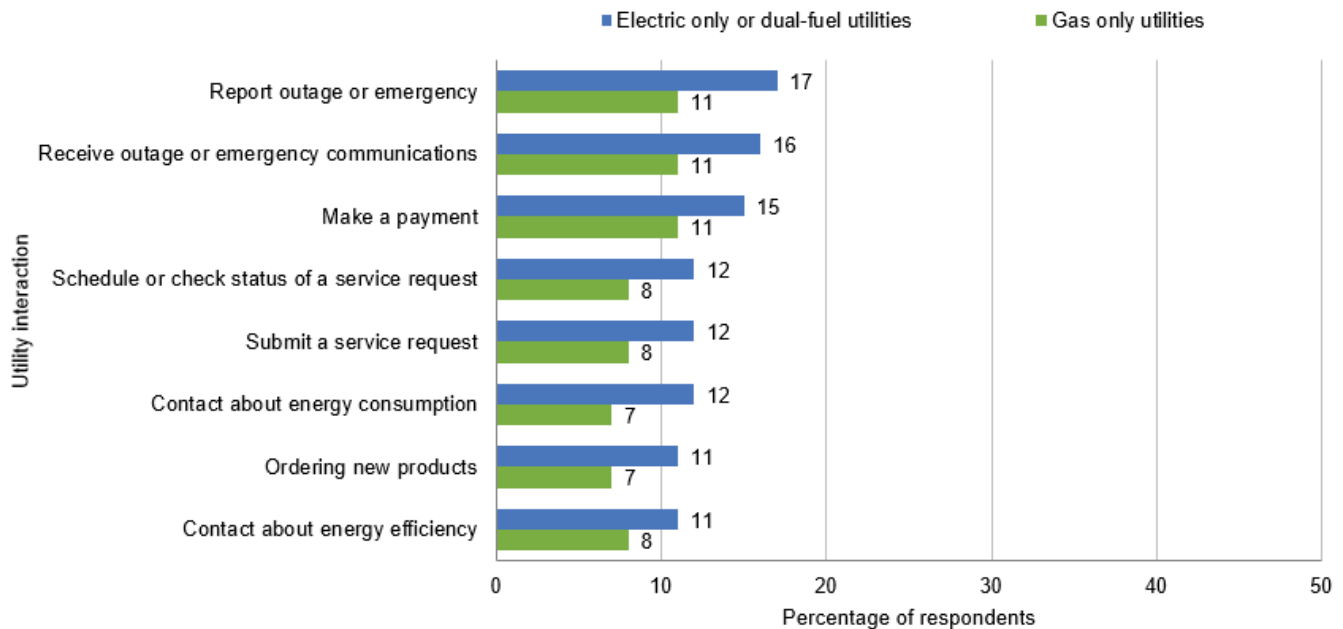
US customers are most interested in making a payment and scheduling or checking the status of a service request on their utility's mobile app (A). Canadian customers are most interested in reporting an outage or emergency, receiving outage or emergency communications, and making a payment on their utility's mobile app (B).

A. US utility customers



Base: Residential electric-only or dual-fuel utility customers (n = 30,725); residential gas-only utility customers (n = 10,057). **Question A8, A17:** Which ways would you prefer your electricity or natural gas provider contact you about the above interactions? (Select all that apply) [Filtered] **A9, A18:** Which ways would you prefer to contact your electricity or natural gas provider for the above interactions? (Select all that apply) [Filtered] **Notes:** Percentages shown in the charts reflect weighted data; sample sizes (n) are based on unweighted data. Only the top eight interactions are shown. © E Source (US Residential Customer Insights Center)

B. Canadian utility customers



Base: Residential electric-only or dual-fuel utility customers (n = 2,865); residential gas-only utility customers (n = 1,079). **Question S2_22, S2_42:** How would you prefer that your electricity or natural gas provider contact you regarding the following? **S2_23, S2_43:** How would you prefer to contact your electricity or natural gas provider regarding the following? **S2_24, S2_44:** How would you prefer that your electricity or natural gas provider contact you regarding a power outage, service disruption, or emergency? **S2_25, S2_45:** How would you prefer to contact your electricity or natural gas provider regarding a power outage, service disruption, or emergency? **Notes:** Percentages shown in the charts reflect weighted data; sample sizes (n) are based on unweighted data. Only the top eight interactions are shown. © E Source (Canadian Residential Customer Insights Center)

How to launch your mobile app

Launching your mobile app the right way is just as important as building it correctly. The three crucial elements of a successful mobile app launch are:

- Testing—to make sure it's ready for customers before making it public
- Promoting—to boost customer adoption
- Updating it consistently—to avoid negative customer experiences

Duke Energy is an excellent example of a utility with a successful mobile app launch. Before making its app public, Duke Energy tested it with employees, who were also customers, to ensure a positive customer experience once released.

Learn more about E Source Energy AdVision

[Energy AdVision](#) is our database of thousands of examples of utility marketing and advertising campaigns. We populate this database with ads we receive from our annual [E Source Utility Ad Awards Contest](#). This tool is available to members of the:

- E Source [Residential Marketing Service](#)
- E Source [Business Marketing Service](#)
- E Source [Corporate Communications Service](#)

In July 2019, the utility launched an omnichannel marketing campaign to promote the mobile app as it became available to residential customers (**figure 4**). The campaign highlighted the app's key features:

- View and pay your bill
- Monitor energy usage over time
- Report and track outages

You can find more information about Duke Energy's marketing campaign in the E Source [Energy AdVision](#) database.

Figure 4: Duke Energy's mobile app marketing campaign

Duke Energy used branded emails, banner ads, and social media ads to promote specific functions of its mobile app.

[Download](#)duke_energy_mobile_app_campaign.pdf

Duke Energy's developers worked throughout the launch to add products, design updates, and new front- and

back-end functionality to improve the customer experience. The marketing campaign was successful, resulting in over 790,000 mobile app downloads by the end of 2019, passing its goal of 414,000 downloads. As of March 6, 2020, Duke Energy's mobile app had been downloaded over 900,000 times.

If you need mobile app promotion ideas, Mallory Sprinkle, marketing coordinator at Mindgrub, shares [44 Ways to Promote Your New Mobile Application](#). Strategies from the article include:

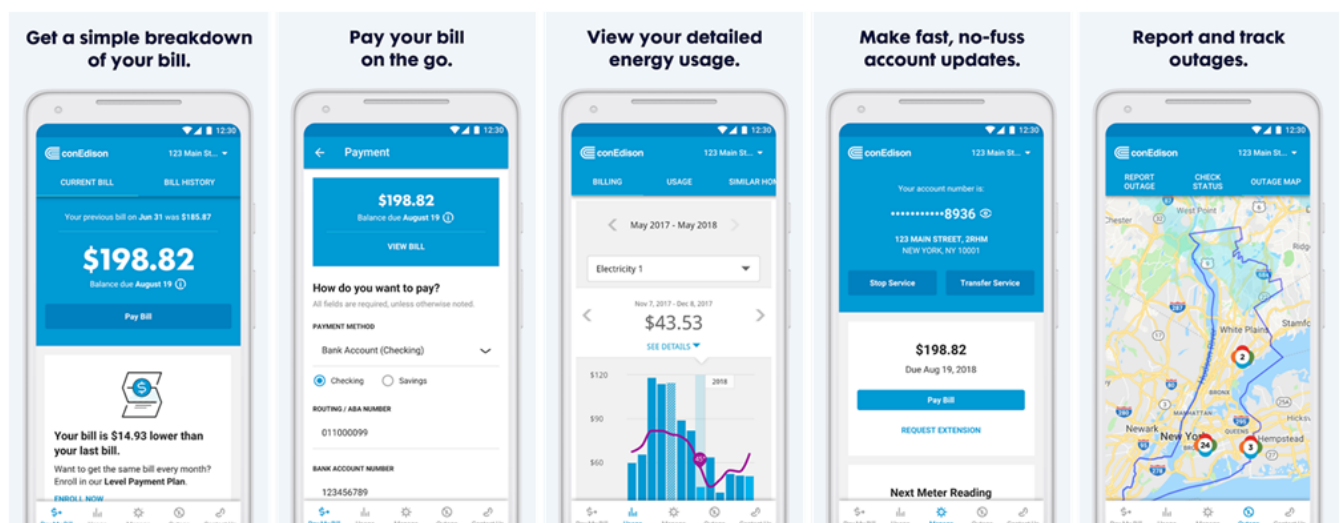
- Optimizing the listing on the app store by adding keywords, a strong description, and high-quality screenshots
- Publishing a press release describing what makes your app newsworthy
- Submitting your app to sites that review mobile apps
- Applying for awards
- Offering a discount or coupon for purchases made in the app
- Promoting on your website, social media, and email newsletter

An example of an effective utility mobile app

We ranked 122 utility apps by average customer reviews found in the Apple App Store (for iOS devices) and Google Play (for Android devices). Con Edison's mobile app received the best average reviews in both Apple's and Google's app stores (**figure 5**). Customers often mention the ease and speed of the bill-pay experience in reviews.

Figure 5: Con Edison's top-ranked mobile app

Con Edison customers can get a breakdown of their bill, view detailed energy usage, update their account, and report and track outages in the mobile app.



Source: Google Play (Con Edison)

Learn more about mobile apps

Our [2022 utility mobile apps industry scan](#) and our [2019 utility mobile apps industry scan](#) include utility app ratings, functionality, and development advice.

[How are utilities using app gamification to engage customers?](#) features examples of three utilities that gamify their mobile apps.

[What are some tips for designing a digital-friendly prepay billing program?](#) examines SRP's prepay program, which is available on its mobile app.

[How to improve the mobile web user experience](#) offers strategies to make your website more mobile responsive.