# Optimizing a Website for the iPhone

By André Hinds

(Note: For the sake of simplicity, I'll be referring to the iPhone throughout this document, even though almost everything that can be accomplished here with the iPhone can also be done with the iPod Touch, except phone and location services. Otherwise, the two devices are equal.)

One of the best things about the iPhone is its ability to let you browse the web as you would do on your computer's browser. Because the iPhone browser is based on the already established Safari browser, it is able to reproduce pages with remarkable accuracy. However, there are some drawbacks to this approach.

Consider the website of the non-profit organization Land Legacy. On a computer browser, it has an attractive, multi-purpose look and feel:

However, when reproduced on the iPhone, the first look at the page must be followed by several moments of pinching and positioning to get it just right.
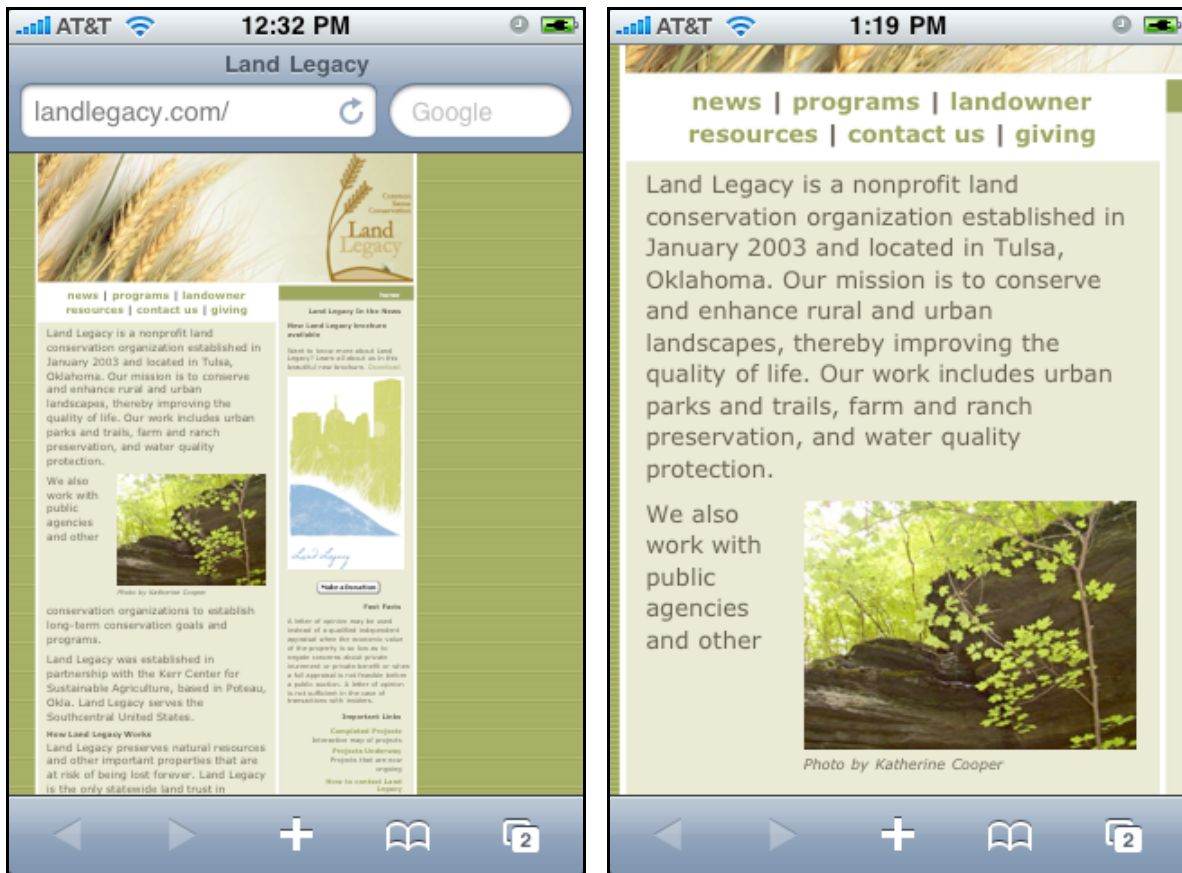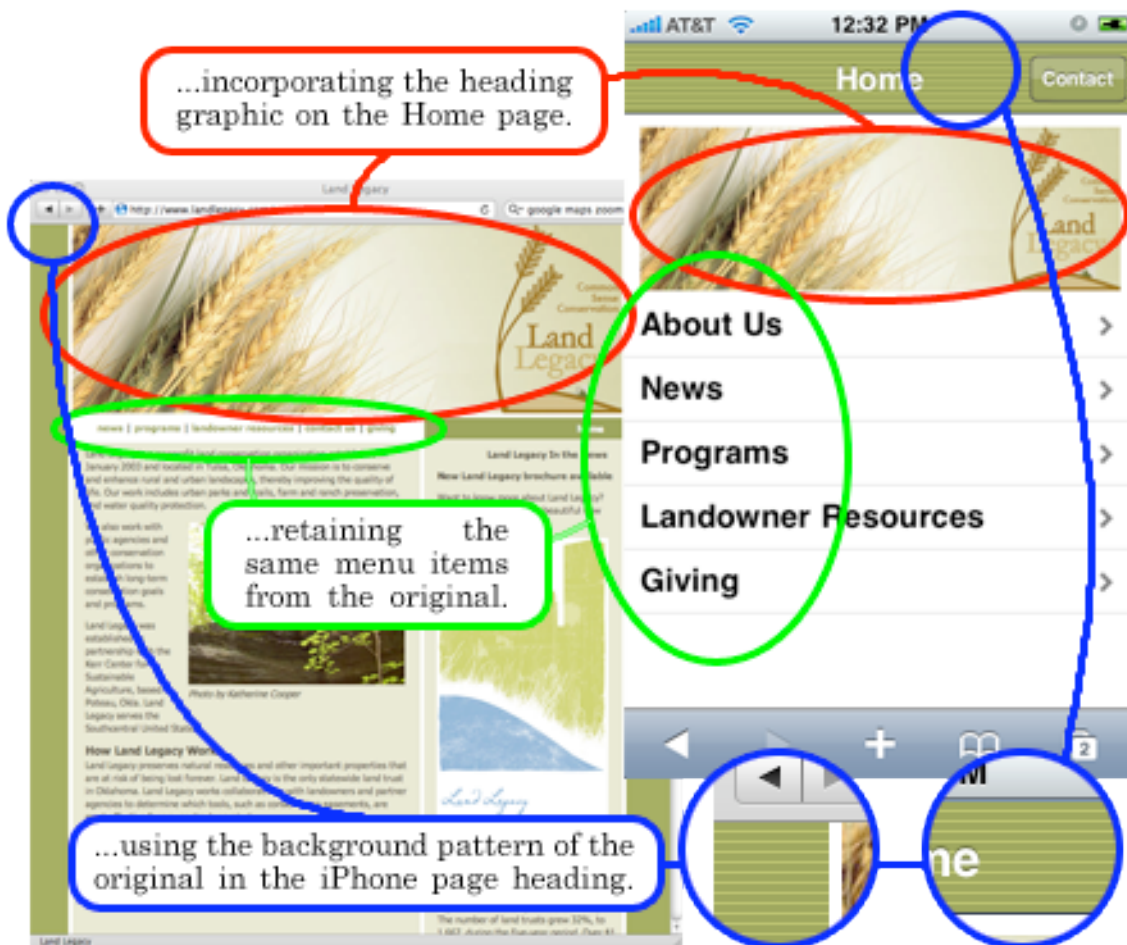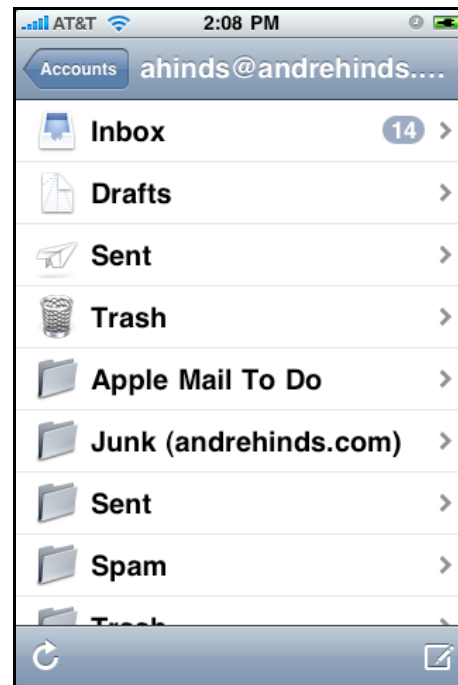

But with a few hours of work with the site, it can be modified in a way that makes it easy to use on the iPhone, complete with a look that is familiar to anyone who has used iPhone apps.
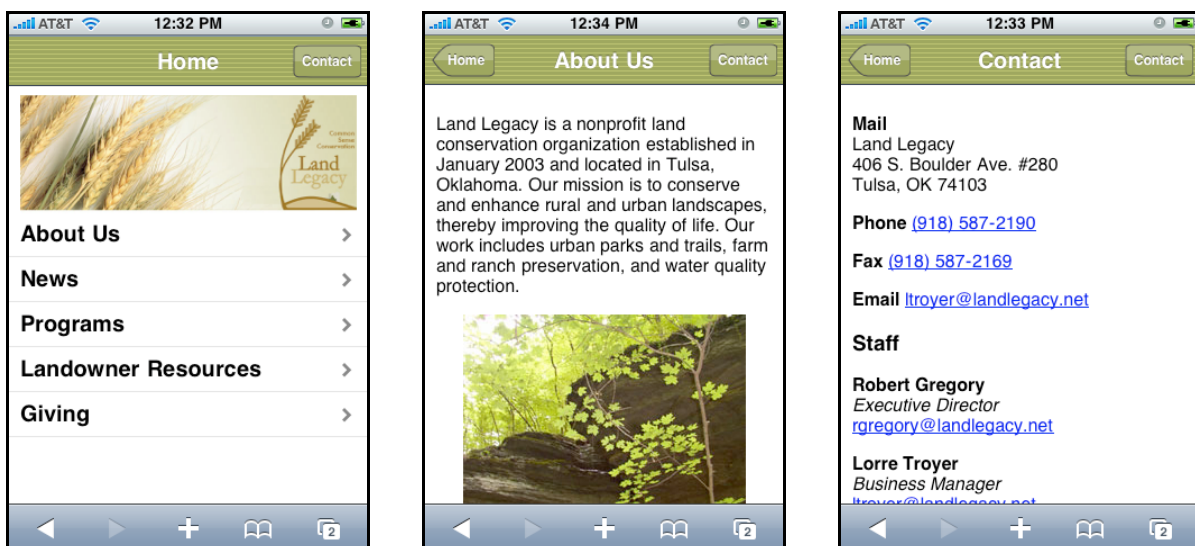
The initial tendency when turning a web page into a mobile web page is to make it as vanilla as possible, such as the typical iPhone app look on the left. But I believe it is important to try to retain the flavor of the original website in order to retain its character.

For example, I was able to do this with the Land Legacy website by incorporating elements of the original, such as...

...incorporating the heading graphic on the Home page.

...retaining the same menu items from the original.

...using the background pattern of the original in the iPhone page heading.

When designing the inside of a converted website, it is best to adhere to a logical structure, which might vary from section to section because of that section's contents.
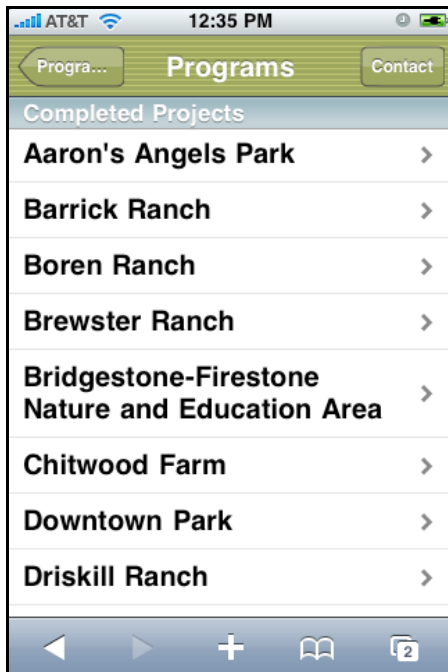
For example, the Programs section is divided between a description of Programs and Projects...
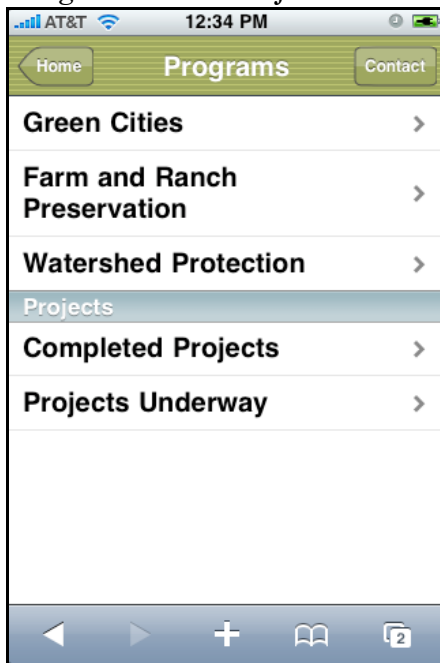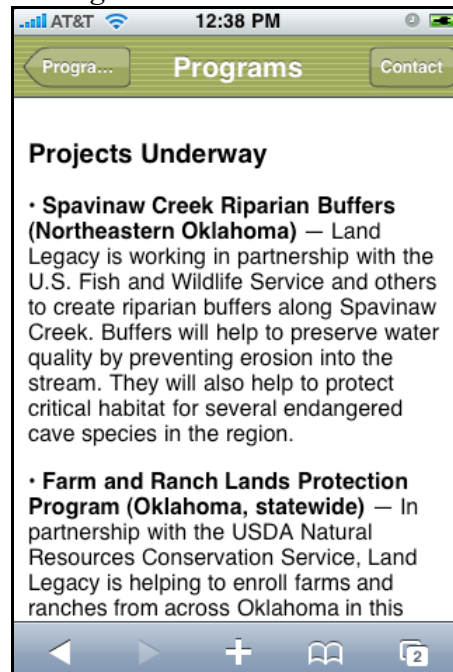

...while the News section is split up by news articles listed in reverse-chronological order...
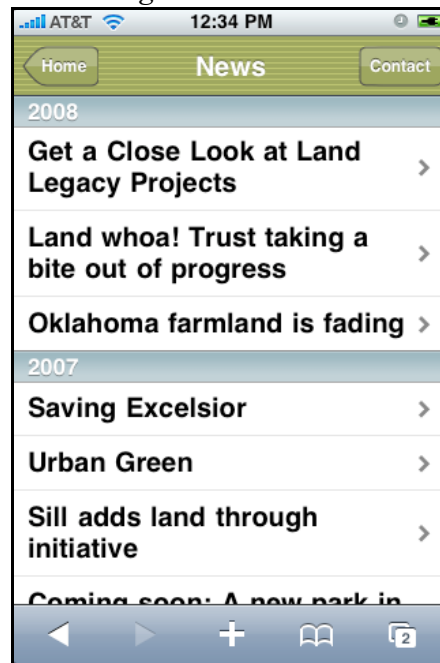
...the Completed Projects page is listed by projects in alphabetical order...


...and the Projects Underway page merely contains a loosely organized listing of current activities.

Elements of the original webpage are incorporated when possible, with consideration taken about the limitations of the iPhone device.

The About Us page, for example, displays the same graphics as the original home page, but doesn't contain any fancy wraparounds as on the original, in order to aid in legibility.
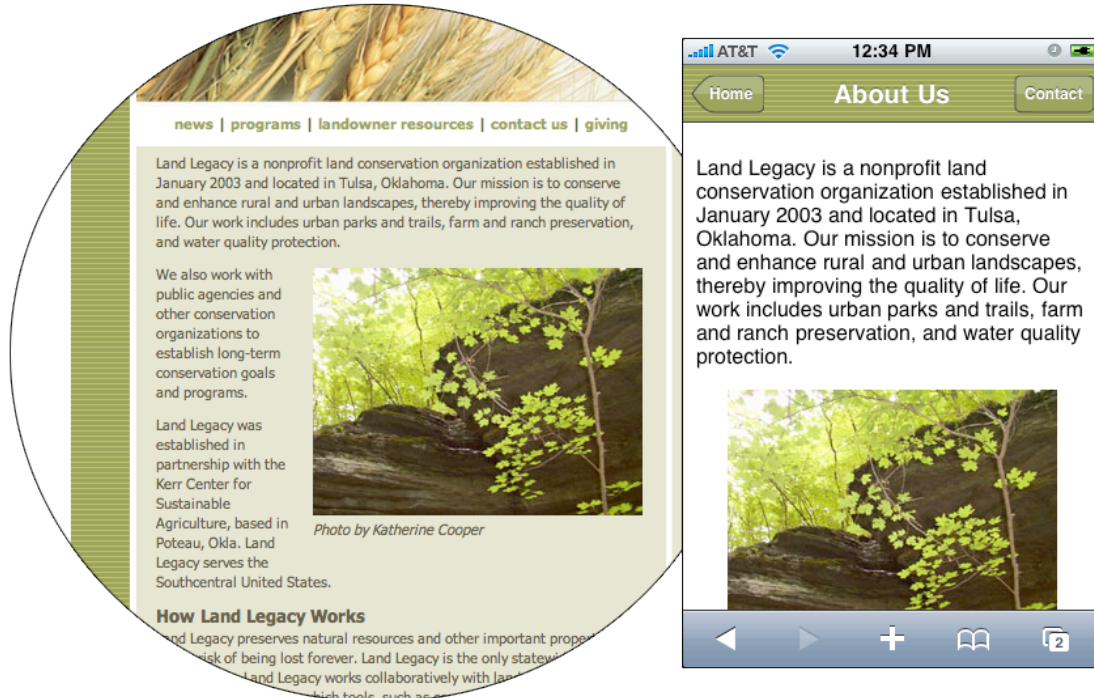
On the original Saving Excelsior page, the graphic was much larger, but is reduced in size on the iPhone version, so the reader is not forced to have to scroll back and forth to see the entire photo.
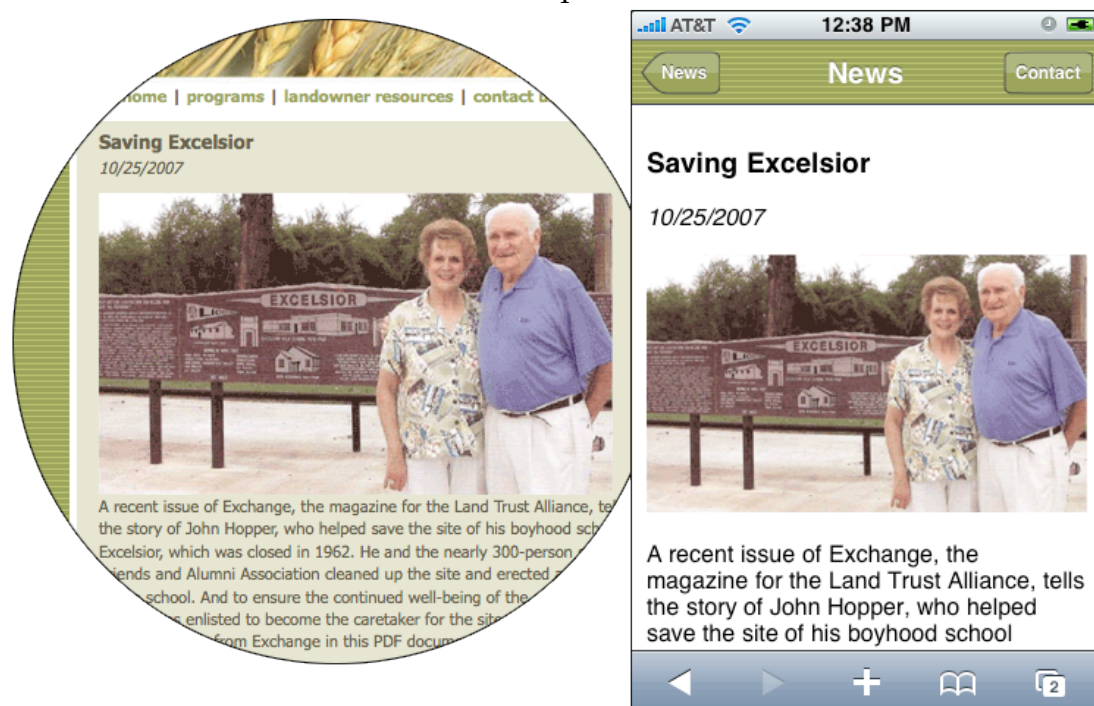
The comprehensive map graphic of Land Legacy's completed projects is simply not possible on the iPhone.
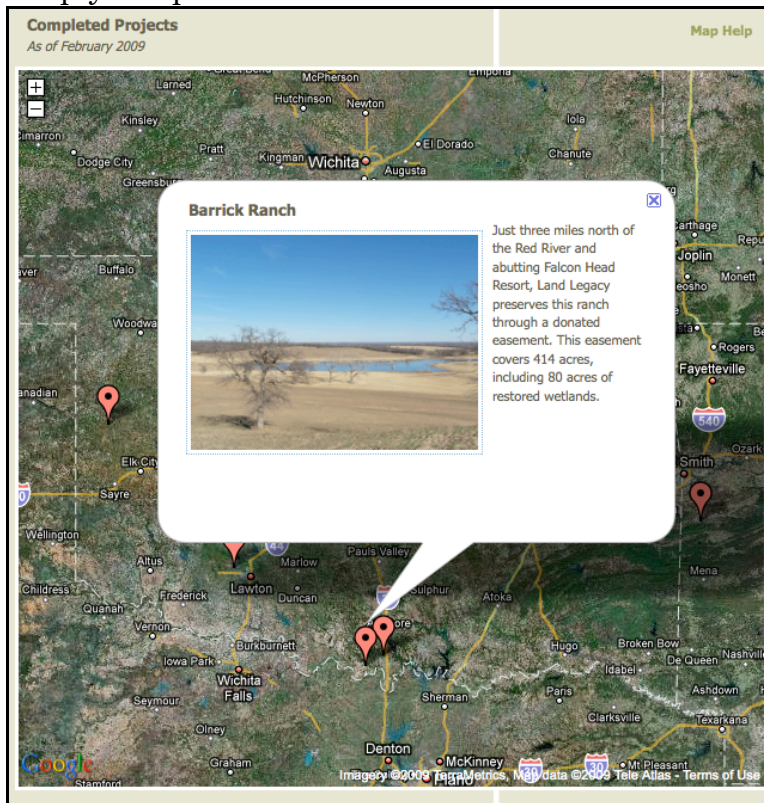
However, the iPhone does allow linking to the Maps app on the phone to display the area in question, and even use the app to get driving directions to the location, if needed.

The Maps application is not the only one that can be easily incorporated into the website links.

The Land Legacy website contains a variety of downloadable forms and brochures in both PDF and Microsoft Word format. These can be easily viewed on the iPhone, simply by clicking the link.
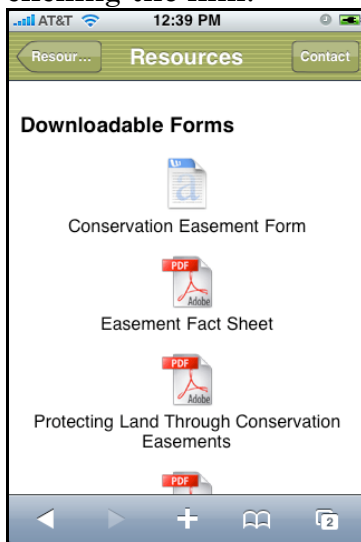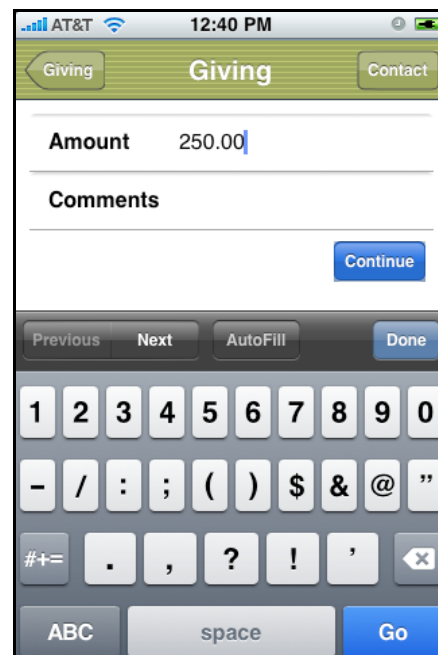
As with the computer browser version of a website, activating the email program to send email is as simple as clicking the link.
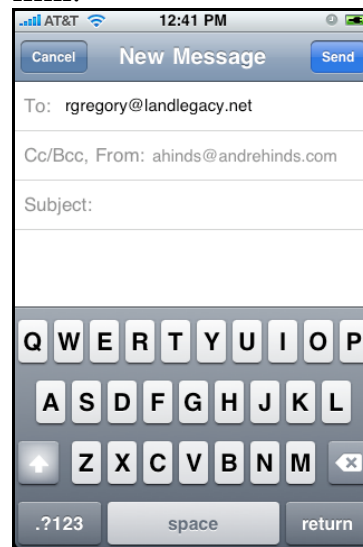
And with the iPhone, calling a phone number on the website is just as simple. Click a phone number and you're instantly connected.
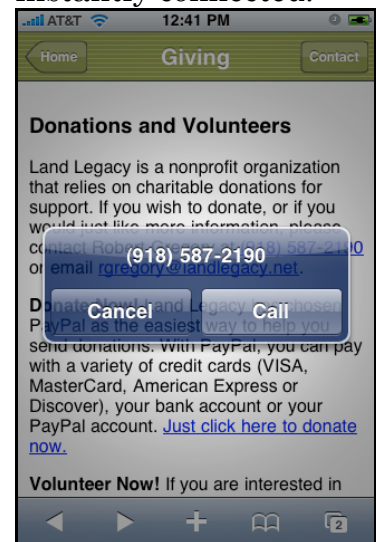

Even giving to the non-profit organization is as easy on the iPhone as it is from the original website.

With some simple adjustments, a website can easily be made to have the same functionality, look and ease of use as any great iPhone app. Additional code can be applied to the original website so that all iPhone users are automatically transferred to the iPhone version of the site, or you can offer a special "Mobile" page that visitors can link to from the original site.

A custom icon can be inserted automatically on the site for those who choose to add the site to their iPhone home page:
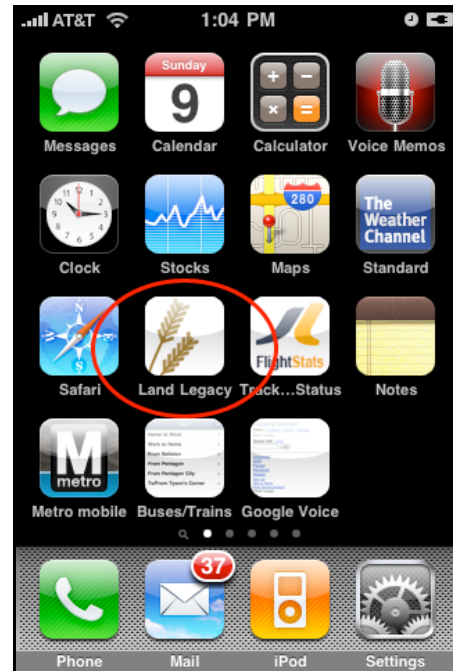
In addition, if the site is driven by a Content Management System, it can be modified to adjust the elements of the page so they can be optimized for the iPhone.

If you're concerned about users of other smartphones that are on their way, a hybrid style of website could be developed that incorporates the design limitations of several handheld devices, including Android, Pre, Blackberry and other devices that may come on the market in the future.