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Working with Images



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“When exporting images from a graphics package, it's essential to pick the most appropriate format and amount of compression. With the vast array of image formats that is available, you will be comforted to know in the world of web, you will generally be working with Jpg and Gif!”



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Choosing formats for images

JPEG

This format is used primarily for images that require smooth colour transitions such as photographs. JPEG supports a whopping millions of colours and even when compression is set to high, very little image detail is lost.

As a rule of thumb, **50 percent** compression is the highest level you should use -- less if the image is particularly important. If the image is still big, change the dimension of the image, it should help.



Jpeg compression with 80% Quality settings

GIF

Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) is in many ways the opposite of JPEG. The Gif format is **lossless**, which means there is no colour degradation when images are compressed.

The drawback of this format is that it can support a maximum of 256 colours rendering it ineffective for photographic images. An example is shown below:



Gif compression with 128 Colours. Notice the banding involved.

PNG

Although Jpg and Gif are the 2 most pre-dominant file formats found online, Portable Network Graphics (PNG) is increasingly popular in the coming years. It enables **full alpha transparency**, enabling all manner of fanciful graphical effects. Unfortunately, Internet Explorer 6 and earlier versions cannot support this format rendering it useless for majority of the PC's.

Web image mistakes to avoid

Often web-designers tend to make mistakes when they start working with images. The next segment identify common mistakes and how to avoid them.

Using Graphics for body text


This causes text to be printed out poorly. The worst thing is that your text cannot be indexed by search engines -- which means the content cannot be searched. Also, if you are going to update the content (which is quite frequent in any web-designing work), you must rework the image and re-export it and upload it. Not forgetting the files-size as compared to a normal HTML text-based site is larger causing a slight delay in transmission speed.

Working from an already downsampled image

You should start from an original scanned image rather than an already downsampled Jpg file. This is because when you resave an already compressed image leads to a further reduction in quality of image.

Using too little contrast

Many web content creators use text that looks pale on a slightly darker background often leading to a lack of contrast thus resulting in difficulty in reading. Though in some cases, it might look stylish, but exercise this design technique with caution. Remember that content is king!

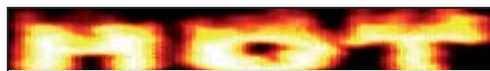


Can you see me?

prime example of content not having a contrasting background

Resizing images using Dreamweaver

If you use Dreamweaver to resize the images, chances are it will become distorted. This is made worse if you don't resize it proportionately (maintaining the width and height ratio). Rework the images in a graphics software like using Fireworks or Photoshop, it helps a lot!



Stretching done within Dreamweaver without maintaining proportions

Balancing quality and file-size

Bandwidth can be a problem for web-sites who has too many web-images. Though it might look more appealing, be aware that there might be users who are still using a dial-up modem. Therefore, it is important to ensure your images are optimised or subjected to some graphics treatment before inserting within Dreamweaver.



Optimisation done within Fireworks.

Notice the reduction in file size on the right panel. The quality looks similiar though