

Pictures for Web Design: Some Considerations

GIF vs. JPEG: What's the difference?

When designing for the web, note that browsers support graphics in JPEG and GIF format. Both GIF and JPEG are compressed formats of image files. Images can be in other file formats, such as PNG or SWF, but they may require plug-ins or may only be supported by recent versions of web browsers.

There are basically two types of compression methods: **lossy** and **lossless**. **Lossy** compression creates smaller files by discarding some information about the original image. It removes details and color changes it deems too small for the human eye to differentiate. **Lossless** compression, on the other hand, never discards any information about the original file.

GIF - Graphics Interchange Format

GIF format utilizes **lossless** compression and is best for line art, cartoons, hard-edged logos, black and white artwork and images with large areas of solid color because it only supports 256 colors.

Advantages:

- Transparent backgrounds
- Animation
- Interlaced GIFs (fade in)
- Better compression of images with few colors compared to JPEG

JPEG - Joint Photographic Expert Group

JPEG format utilizes **lossy** compression and is best for real life pictures, such as photographs, because it can support up to 16 million colors. JPEG handles only still images.

Advantages:

- Greater degree of compression than GIFs for multiple-colored images

What about PNG (Portable Network Graphics) format?

The PNG format utilizes **lossless** compression and is probably going to become the most widely used format of the future. It incorporates all the latest image technologies and is free of licensing restrictions. PNG offers better compression than GIF as well as color depth options, progressive display and platform independent gamma correction, and supports more than 6 million colors—all features not available in GIF.

However, only recent versions of browsers support PNG. And currently, PNGs cannot be animated.

Web Sites for Graphics Optimization:

<http://www.digfrontiers.com/crunchers.html>

FREE optimization of your graphics.

<http://www.optiview.com>

Test your web site's download time with their free Quick Scan.

<http://www.webopt.com/>

Download a free 30-day trial version of WebGraphics Optimizer.