

Hints for Scanning Your Photographs for the Web

by

Peter G. Engeldrum

pge@imcotek.com

April, 2003

Pixels per inch or dots per inch.

Pixels per inch or dots per inch are the number of picture elements per inch. These two terms are also called the *resolution* of a device like a digital camera. Pixels per inch usually refers to an image, while dots per inch refers to a computer printer.

When scanning images that you would like to print on a computer printer, or to send to an on-line photofinisher for photographic prints, the number of pixels per inch is an important measure of the quality of the image. For printing purposes, you should scan images at 300 pixels per inch (*ppi*).

For images on the Web, the critical number is not the pixels per inch, but the actual number of pixels horizontally and vertically. The ppi plays no practical role in Web images. To give you an idea of the numbers, the smallest computer screen, in terms of pixels is 640 pixels horizontally and 480 pixels vertically—640x480. The next step up is about 800x600 pixels. You can go up to 1280x1024 pixels, and higher, but you need a fairly large screen, about 21 inches, to effectively see that number of pixels. Using a physically small screen at such high number of pixels results in an unreadable screen.

With these numbers in mind, we recommend that you scan your images so that the ***longest dimension is 480 pixels***. For images with a landscape orientation, the horizontal number of pixels should be about 480 pixels. The same idea applies to portrait orientation, where here the longest dimension is vertical—480 pixels. The reason for this “magic number” is that if the image is larger than 480 pixels, the person viewing your images on the Web site will have to continually scroll to see the complete image. Also, a larger number of pixels will make the file larger and take longer to download.

File Formats

Deciding what file format to save the scanned image in can be confusing. Although your scanning software may offer you a lot of options, only two file formats are supported by most Internet Browsers (Netscape and Internet Explorer). These two formats are JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) and GIF. For photographs of general artwork save the file in JPEG format. For line art it is usually best to save the image in GIF format.

There may be an image quality choice when you save the file. We recommend that you save it with the ***highest quality***! This may make the file size a little larger than it needs to be, but we will adjust it before we post it to your web site.