Preparing images for Web Pages using Paintshop Pro

Plexus Media Ltd - 'How to..' documents [v1 8th January 2004]

When preparing images for web pages, you must balance speed of downloading from the internet against the quality of image carefully to get something that the end user will be happy to view. How many times have you waited for a large, slow image to load on a web page only to be disappointed by its poor visual quality?

Governing factors

The governing factors in preparing an image for your web site are ...

• the 'pixel' dimensions of the finished image (a pixel is one tiny square dot on your screen). Try to make your images the correct dimensions for your page. If it is too large, then it can extend beyond the edge of the browser window forcing the viewer to scroll sideways - a definite no-no. It can also mean that the user is having to wait too long for it to download.

• compression format of the finished image - GIF or JPEG? Choose the correct compression format for the type of image you want for your site.

Data vs Size

When people talk about the size of web images they are generally referring to the final 'data' size of the file - i.e. 50k, 140k, etc, rather than the actual dimensions of the image (i.e. 200 pixels x 175 pixels). By making the final image the right dimensions, and compressing it's data size using the correct format, you should be able to make your site look good, and have it load quickly over the internet onto your users computer screens.

JPEG or GIF format?

Images on the web must be compressed in the correct format to allow them to travel through the internet quickly. JPEG and GIF formats are the most common ones.

GIF format - generally used for images with large areas of flat colours such as logos, clip art and graphic text. When you save the GIF file, you are given the option of reducing the number of colours used to compress it further. The maximum is 256 colours, but you can choose 128, 64, 32, 16, 8, 4 or even 2 colours if this helps to make the final image a smaller data file. The GIF format also allows you to specify that a single colour within the image will be transparent so that you can get it to blend in against the page background colour.

JPEG format - this is generally the best format when compressing photographs or other images which have gradations of tone and colour. When 'saving as' a JPEG file, you can choose different levels of compression. The more you compress the file, the smaller it is but the poorer the quality. Software such as Photoshop and Paintshop Pro give you the option to preview your image as you choose a compression level. This allows you to see the results of the compression, and choose the level which balances the best quality with the smallest data size.

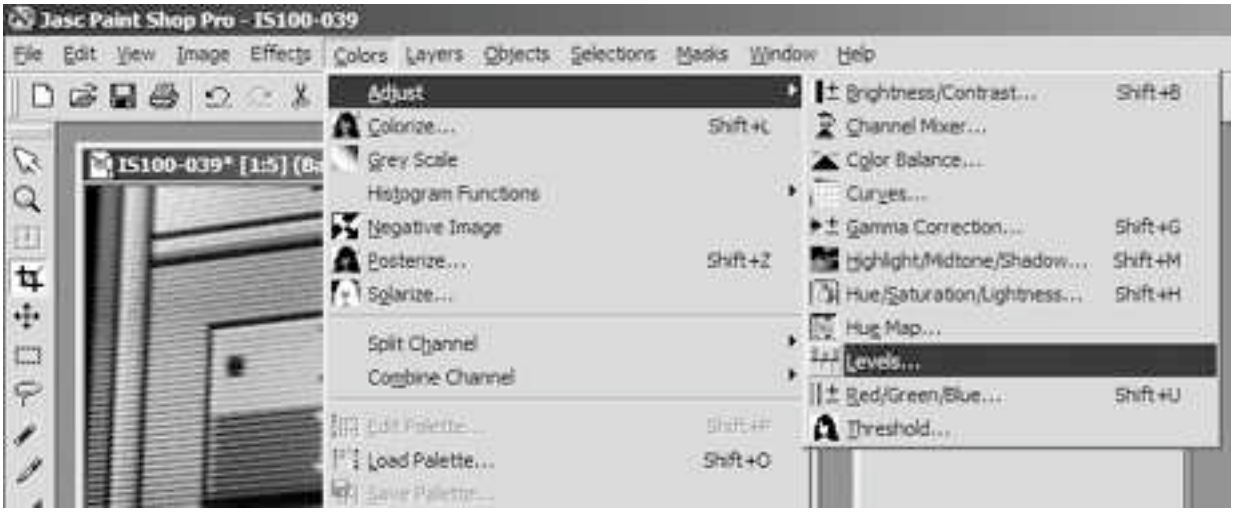
Step-by-step instructions in preparing 'web-ready' images:

These assume that you have already scanned the picture or slide, or are using an image from a digital camera. Remember, you must start with a larger image than you need to get the best results. As a guide, scan a standard sized 6" x 4" photo at around 200dpi or more.

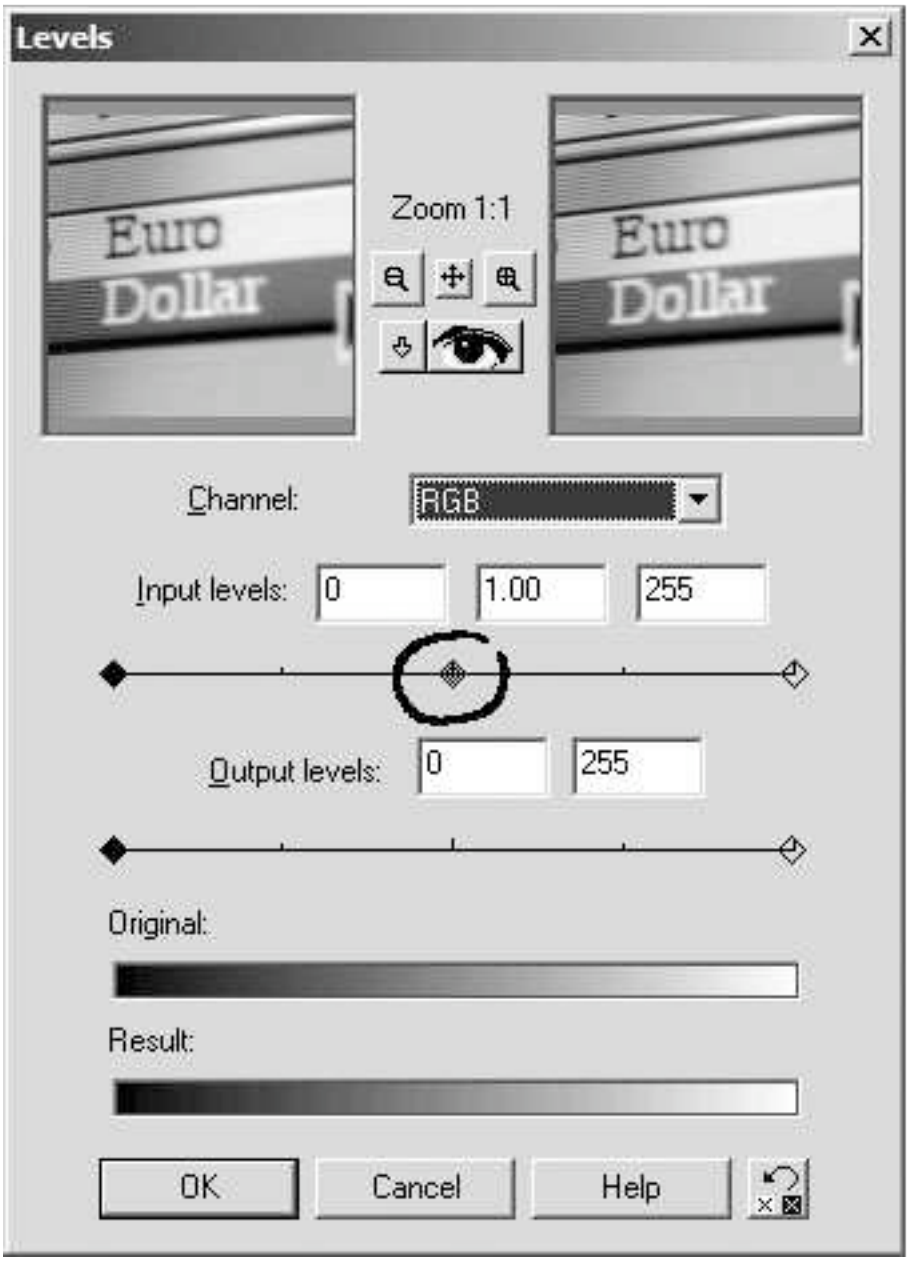
PAINTSHOP PRO 7 *(very similar process for other versions)*

1) Open your image in Paintshop Pro

2) Adjust the picture to your taste - you may want to try using Colors/Adjust/ Levels in the top menubar to adjust the light and shade of the picture. [Make any changes you need to the image ***before*** you do anything else. This allows your software to use all of the information in the file and make subtle changes. If you make the image smaller, then make changes, the results will be more crude.]



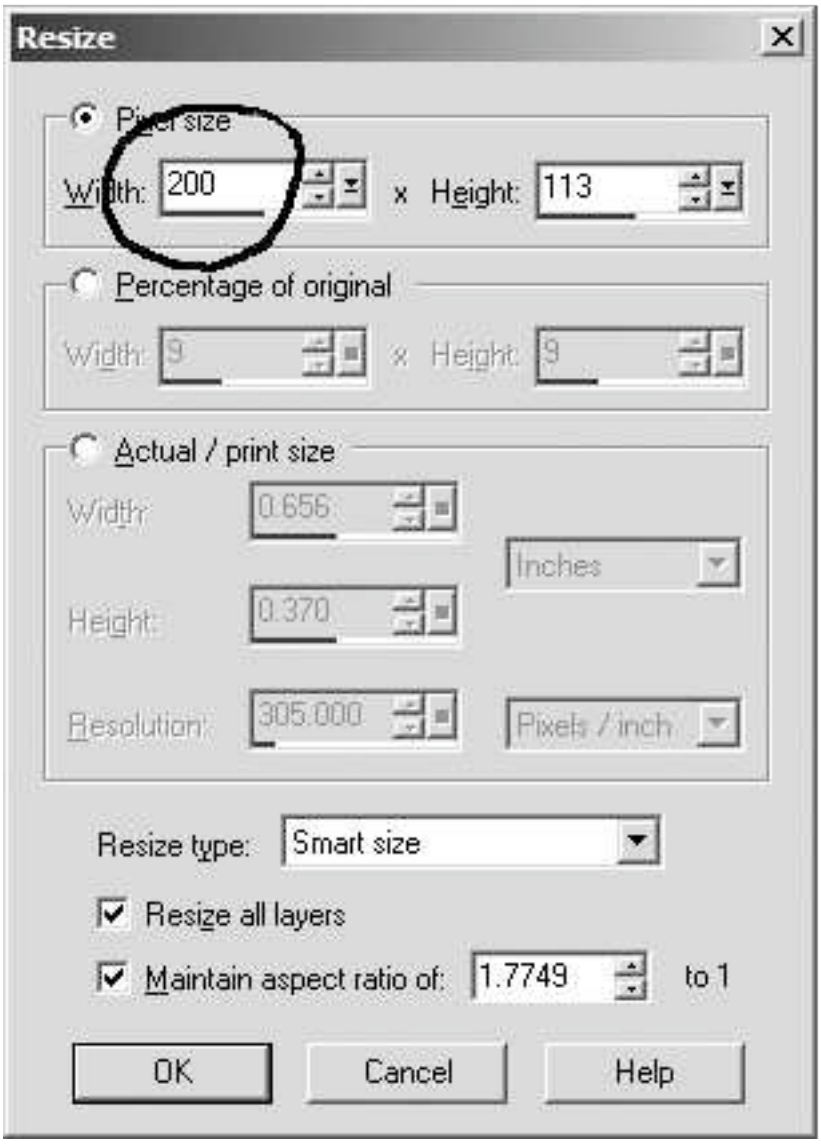
Once the Levels box opens, try experimenting by sliding the mid-point on the top slider left and right and watch as your image changes in the preview pane. Click 'OK' to accept the changes, or 'Cancel' to close the panel without making changes to the image.



3) Using the Crop Tool (fourth down on left toolbar), crop the image to the shape (rectangular or square) that you wish by dragging the crop tool over the image. Remember that it is to be viewed on a small screen so try to crop to highlight the best part of the image. Click on 'Crop Image' in the Tool Options palette to confirm the crop.

4) Resize the image for the web page. Scale the image to the pixel dimensions that you want. Typically, few web page images need to be wider than about 600 pixels maximum. By cutting a large picture down to a smaller finished size, you help to reduce download times for your site visitors.

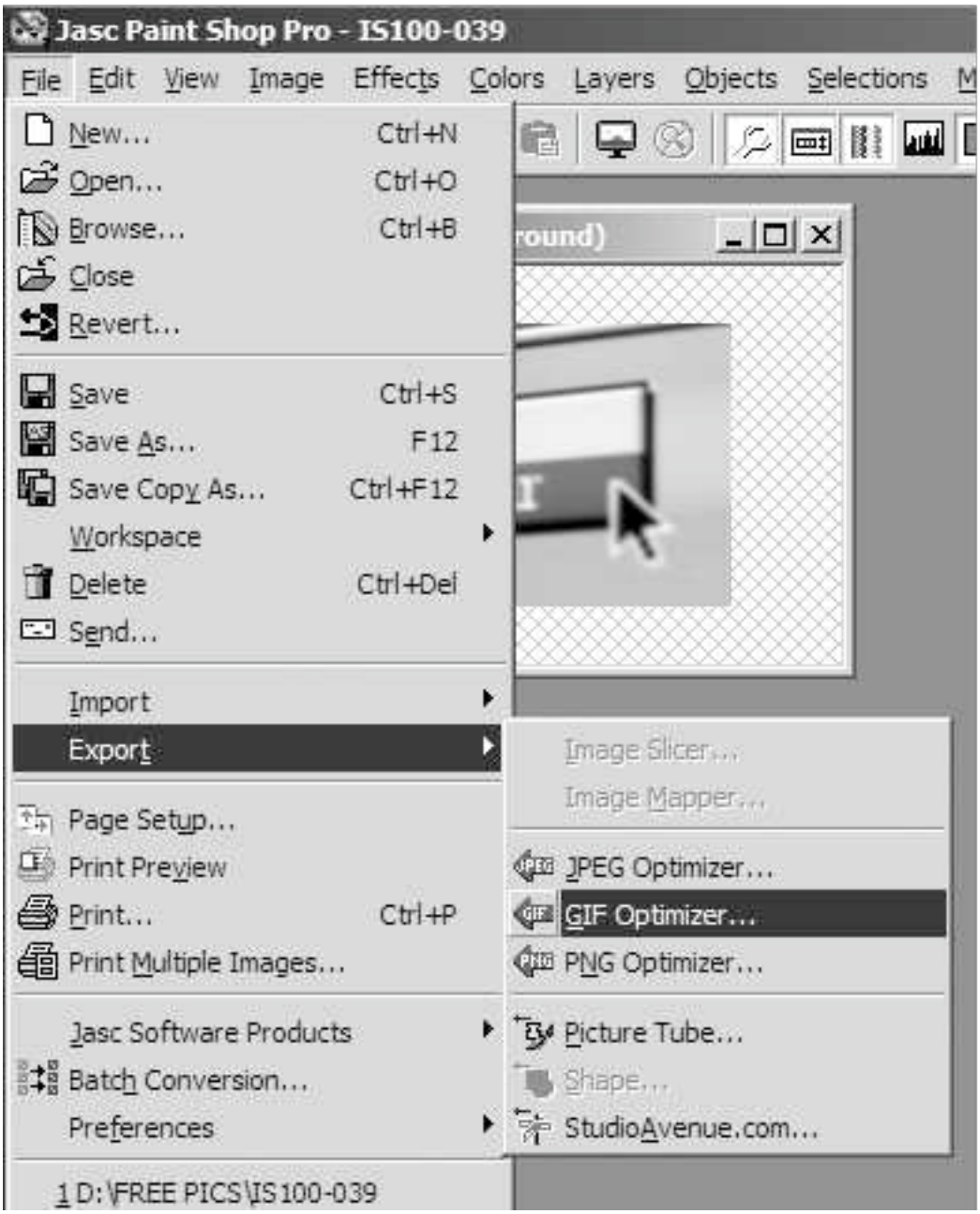
• Go to Image/Resize menu
• Make sure that both the Resize all layers and Maintain Aspect Ratio check boxes are ticked.
• Type the size you need into the Pixel Dimensions Width or Height fields, and click OK.



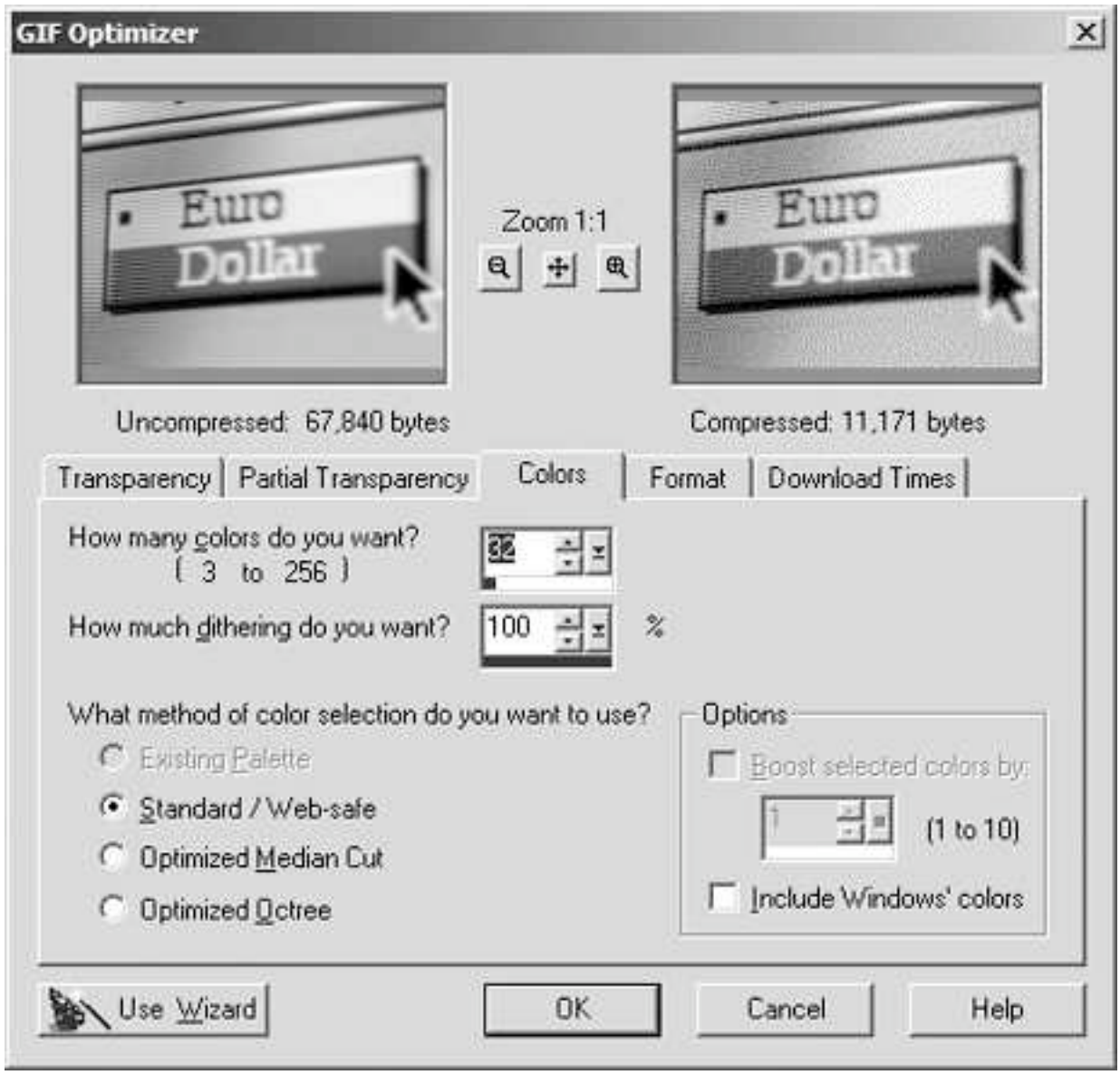
5) If you are happy with the appearance of the final image, go to the File/Export menu to choose to save the image as a GIF or JPEG file.

If you want to save the image as a GIF file ...

1) go to File/Export/ GIF Optimizer menu. The 'GIF Optimizer' panel will open.



• In the 'How many colors do you want' field type a suitable value (or use the arrows) and watch to see how your image will look in the preview pane compared to the original. Below the preview window you will see the final file data size of the image at the colour settings you have chosen.

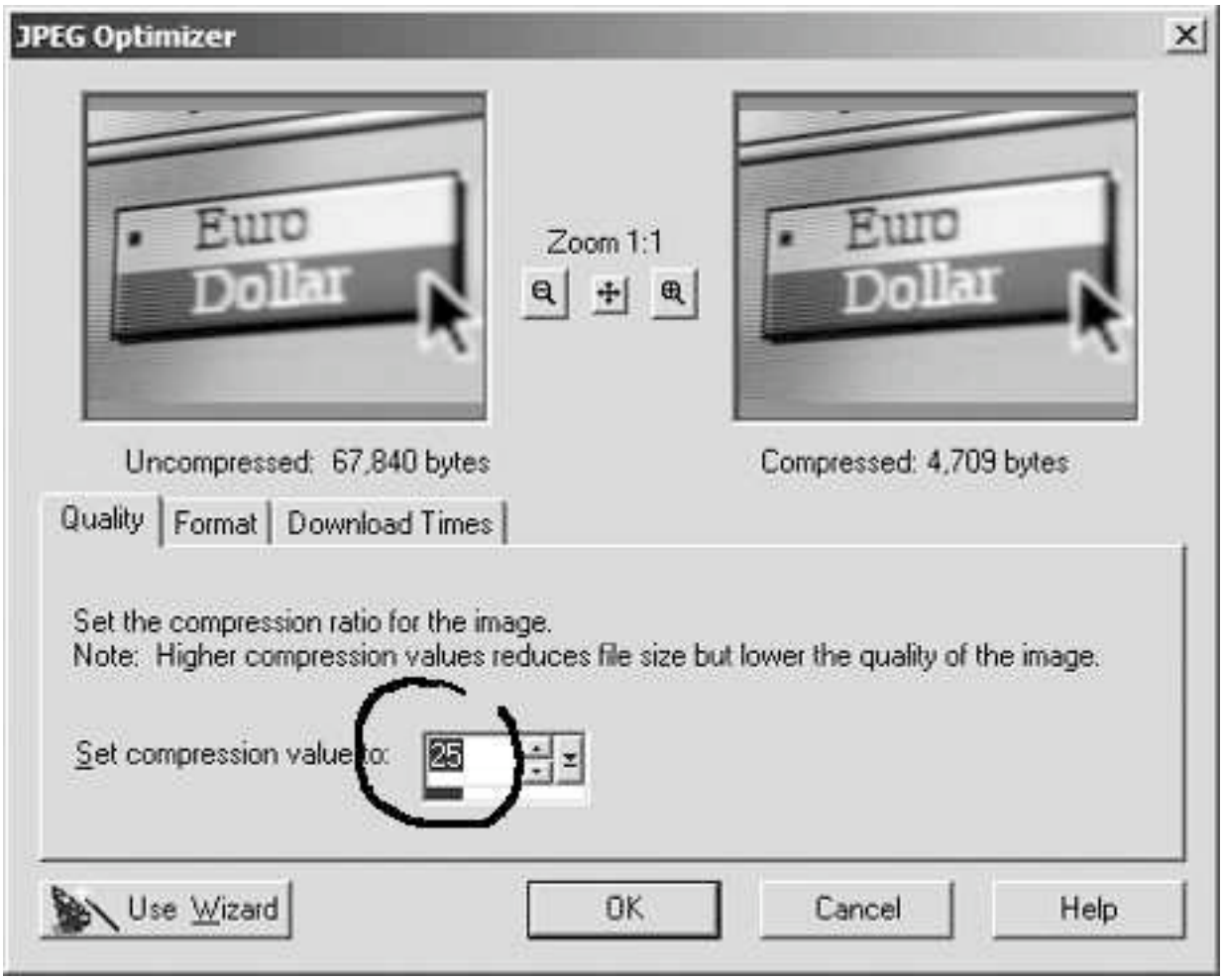


• Once you have chosen the fewest colours that look best, click on the 'OK' button to select a location on your computers hard drive where the final image file will be created.

If you want to save the image as a JPEG file ...

1) go to File/Export/ JPEG Optimizer menu. The JPEG Optimizer panel will open.

• in the 'Set compression value' field type a compression % value, or click and hold on the arrow to use the compression slider
• as you select different quality settings, you can preview the effect in the preview window. As a guide, you should be able to set the compression to around 60% for most photographs. However, if the graphic includes text, then it's better to go for a lower compression setting of 30-40%.
• click on the 'Format' tab to specify that the final JPEG will be 'progressive' as this helps to improve the the appearance of the image as it loads on the final web page.
• Once you are happy with how the preview looks, click on the 'OK' button to select a location on your computers hard drive where the final image file will be created.



You are now ready to ‘upload’ your new image to your site using the image upload facility built into your site, or by using dedicated File Transfer Protocol (FTP) software such as Fetch or Transmit for the Mac, or WS-FTP on a PC.