

Preparing images for Web Pages using Photoshop Elements

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.

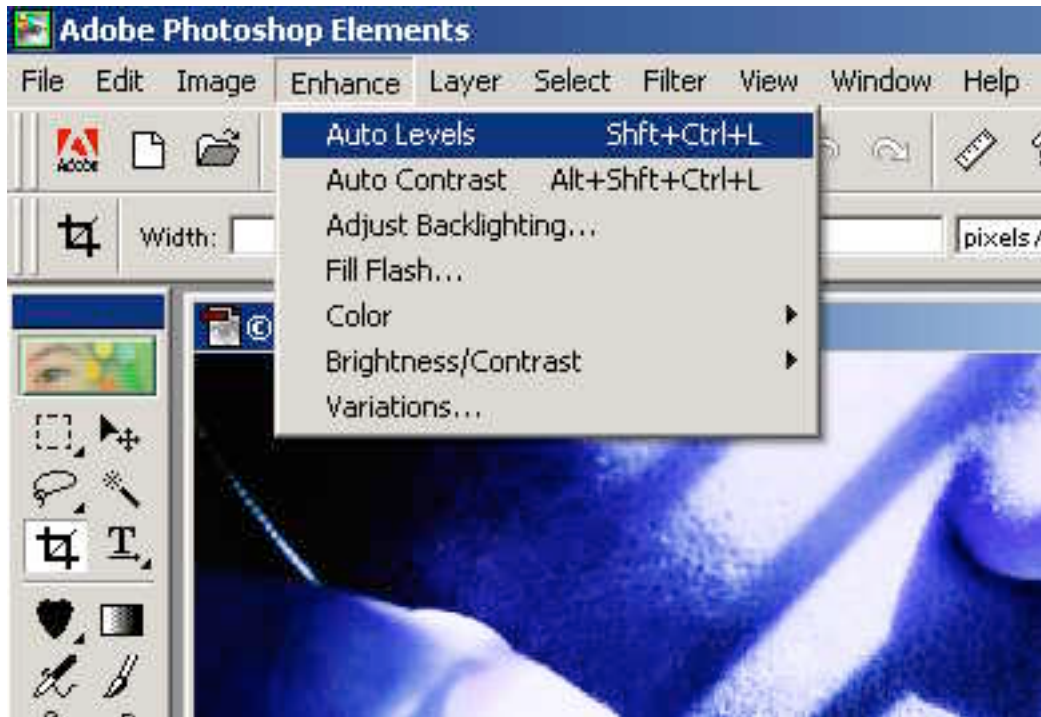
Step-by-step instructions in preparing 'web-ready' images:

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.

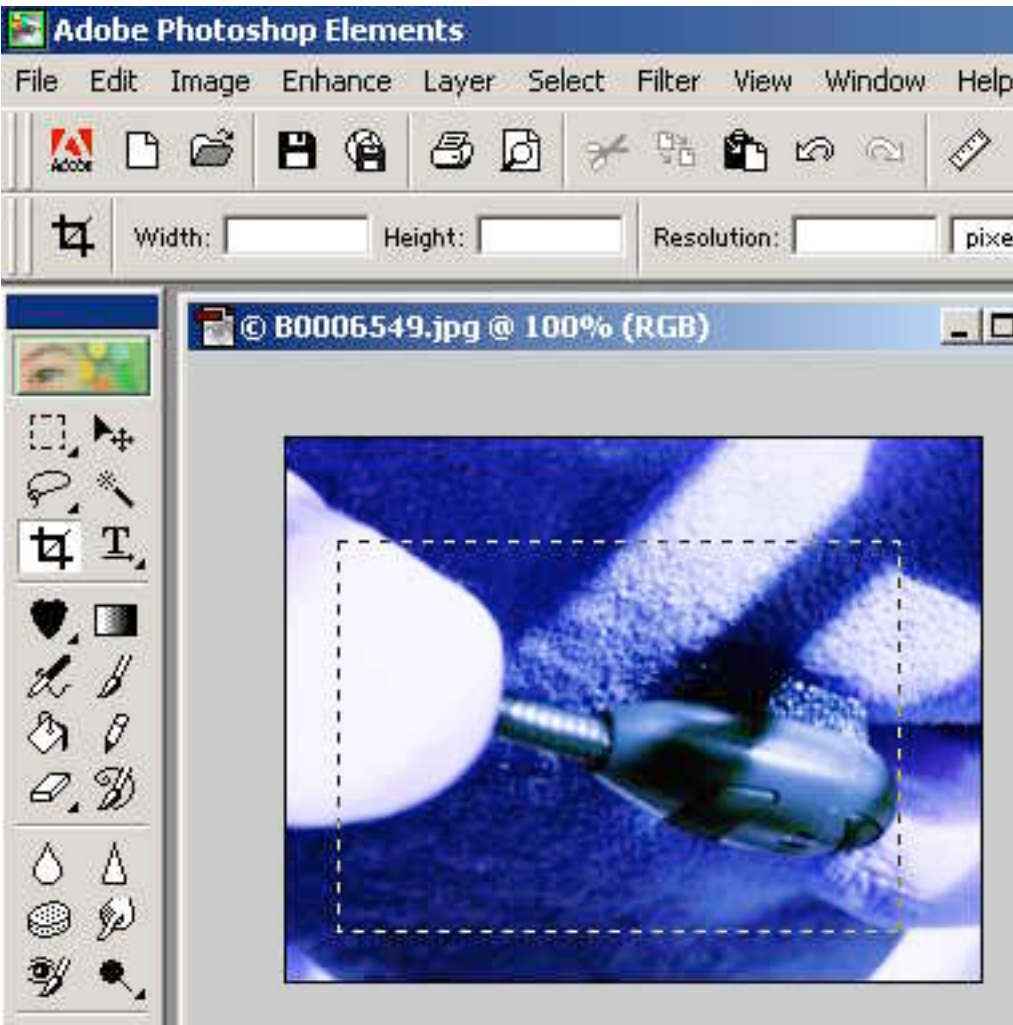
PHOTOSHOP ELEMENTS - Mac/PC

1) Open your image in Photoshop Elements

2) Adjust the picture to your taste - you may want to try using the Enhance/Auto Levels menu 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.]

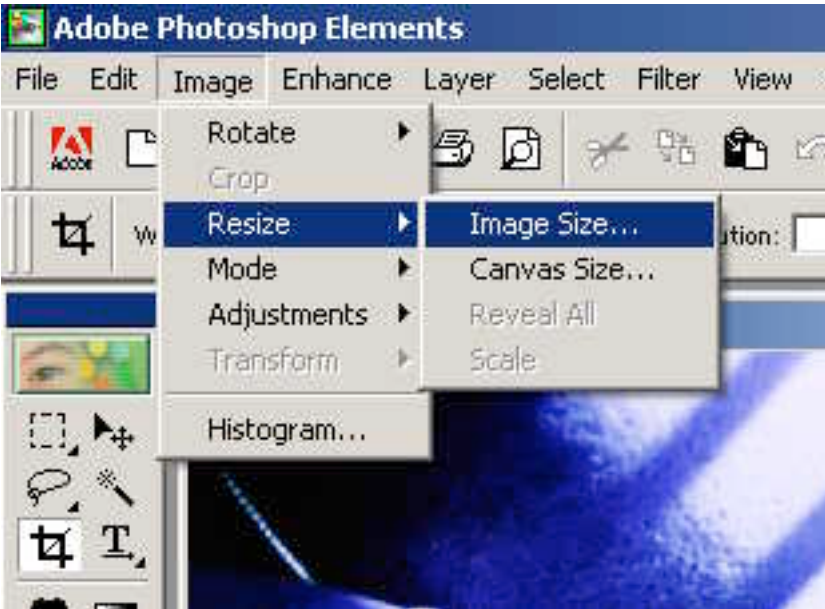


3) Using the Crop Tool (third down on left column of the tool palette), click and drag across the image to crop to the shape (rectangular or square) that you wish, remembering that it is to be viewed on a small screen so try to crop to highlight the best part of the image. Double click within the crop zone, or press your keyboard 'enter' key to confirm the crop.

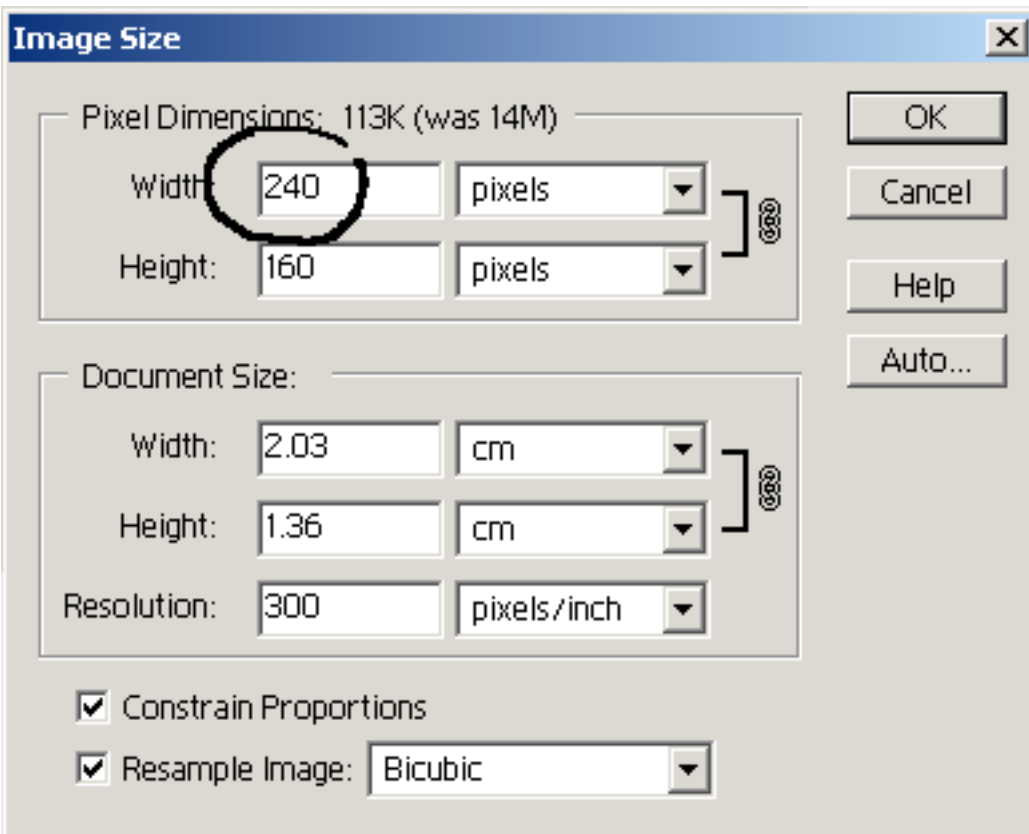


4) Resize the image for the web page. Scale the image to the pixel dimensions that you want. Typically, few web page images need to be wider than about 600 pixels maximum. By cutting a large picture down to a smaller finished size, you help to reduce download times for your site visitors.

- Select the Image/Resize/Image Size menu



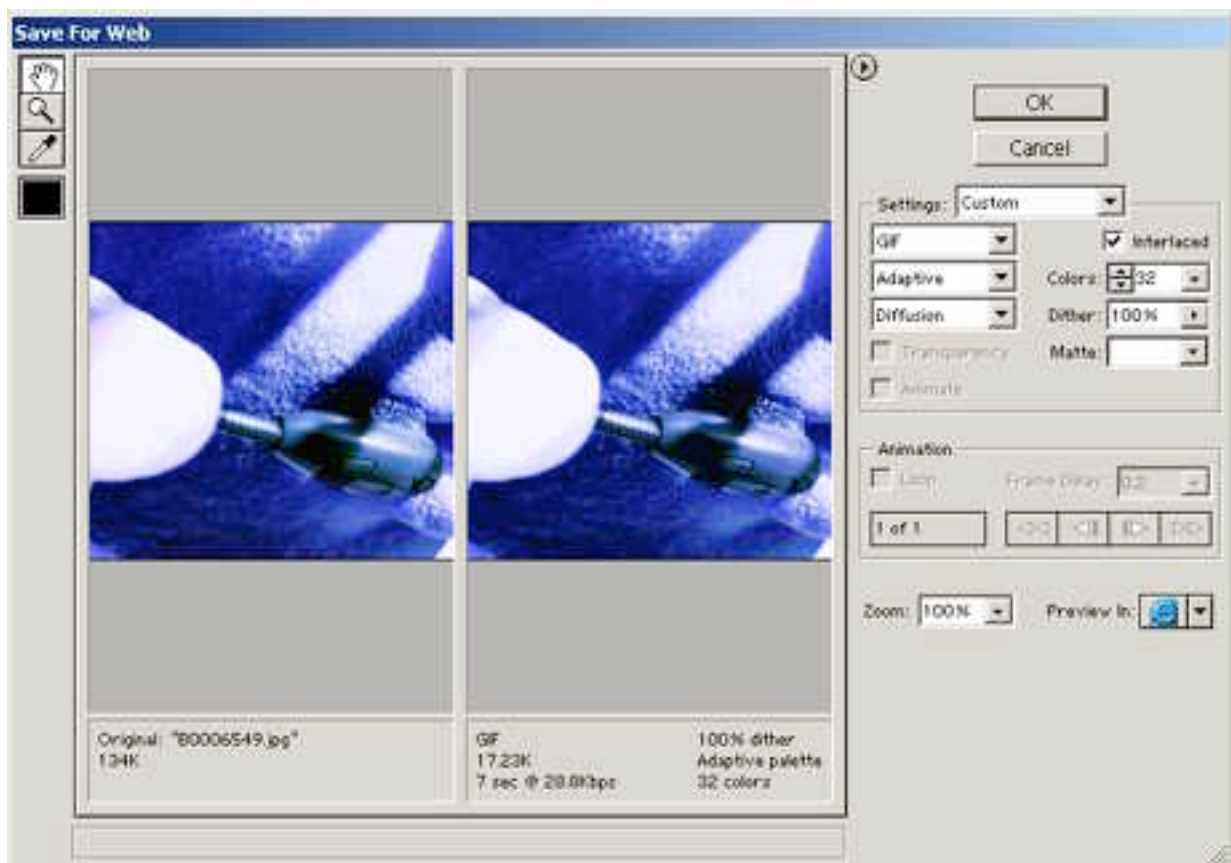
- Make sure that both the Constrain Proportions and Resample Image check boxes are ticked.
- Type the size you need into the Pixel Dimensions Width or Height fields, and click OK



5) If you are happy with the appearance of the final image, go to the File/Save for Web menu. A popup window will appear offering you choices for the file format and compression of the final image, as well as preview windows so that you can see before/after versions of the image to help you achieve the best result.

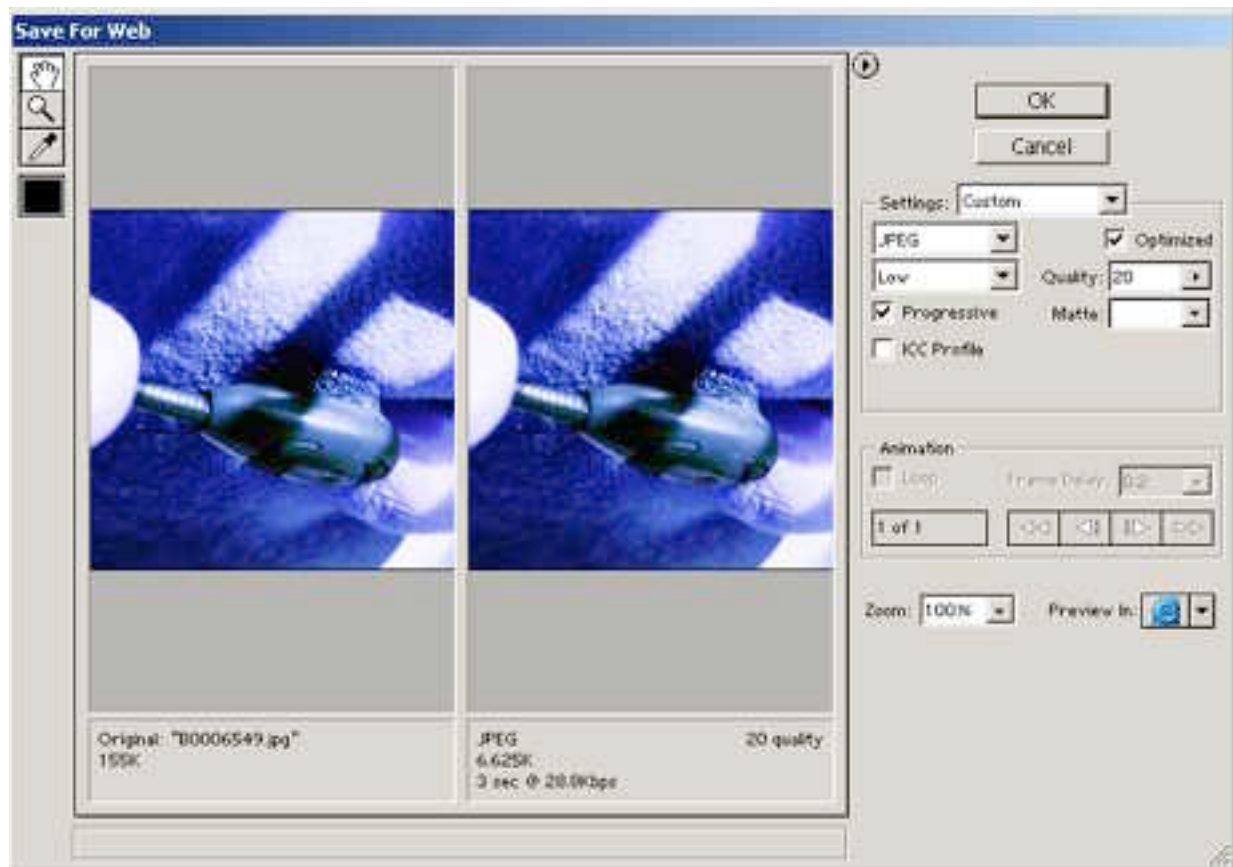
If you want to save the image as a GIF file ...

- in the 'Settings' panel to the right of the image preview, select GIF from the top left drop down
- select 'adaptive' in the second drop down
- select 'no dither' in the third drop-down
- tick the 'Interlaced' box as this helps to speed up image download
- choose the number of colours to be used in the final image (remember that the fewer the colours the smaller the final data size of the image, and the faster it will load). As you choose a number of colours from the drop-down you can see how this affects the final image in the preview window.
- 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 ...

- in the first drop-down in the 'Settings' panel select JPEG
- tick the 'Progressive' check box as this ensures the image will load quickly
- in the 'Quality' field type a % 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 this to 25%-35%. However, if the graphic includes text, then it's better to go for a higher setting of 45%-55%
- 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.