

Images: print vs web images?

I often have to explain to clients the difference between images used for print and web. Here is a very high level guide to helping you understand the importance of supplying the right quality imagery for your job. I haven't gone into great detail, so please get in touch if you'd like more information.

What is DPI: This is the number of dots per inch (dpi) within your image. The more dots the higher the quality image with sharper, crisper detail etc (this is also linked to the dimensions of the image). Technically you use 'dpi' when discussing printed output, and 'pixels per inch' (ppi) for digital/web images, but the concepts are so closely related that for the purposes of this fact sheet I will refer to them all as 'dpi'.

Print images: Should be 300dpi (or 150dpi if image dimensions are very large). Also referred to as 'high resolution'.

Web images: Should be 72dpi or 96dpi. Also referred to as 'low resolution'.



An example of a 300dpi image

I have blown this image up for illustrative purposes. If you look at the curved line, it is very smooth, with no distortion or pixelation and good for print.



An example of a 72dpi image

I have blown this image up for illustrative purposes. If you look at the curved line, it is ragged and not good for print, but fine for web once displayed at correct size.

Why do I need 300dpi images for print?

If you are going to the trouble of getting a graphic designer to develop material for you, in order to produce a professional job you should always print using 300dpi imagery (150dpi is acceptable if the dimensions of the image are large enough). You would be disappointed if your job came back looking blurry and pixelated after spending money getting it professionally designed and printed. First impressions count and you only ever have one chance at a first impression.

Why is 72dpi/96dpi OK for web images?

Using a 300dpi image on your website will not look any better than a 72dpi image, therefore, you should keep file sizes to a minimum and use 72dpi images.

Any image you pull from the internet will only ever be 72dpi. There are many stock image websites online and when purchasing an image I would suggest always buying the largest image available. You can always downscale an image and keep the 300dpi high resolution, but you can not upscale an image and retain the resolution, meaning your image will start to pixelate (like the image on the right above), giving you a poor output on print.

File sizes can sometimes give you a steer. Generally speaking, any image that is c.1-600kb will only ever be 72dpi. If you have an image that is over 2mb there is a chance it could be high resolution (300dpi). However, this is not always the case unless you have bought the image online with a 300dpi resolution. The only way to tell is by pulling the image into Photoshop and taking a look.