



Pixel Perfect?

When designing for the mobile web, many people feel that their site has to be pixel perfect in order to achieve the highest customer satisfaction. However, this can be a common misconception, and developing pages for mobile can be far simpler than first thought.

The problem with the screens on mobile phones, is that the real estate to be used for promoting and displaying content is wildly varied across all devices.

The main issues with screen resolutions when designing mobile web sites are:

1. Horizontal Scroll with images that are too large
2. Images are too small for the device's screen resolution
3. Image gets re-scaled by browser and causes pixelation and blurring
4. Large download size (High Data costs)
5. Images are cut short as no horizontal scroll is available on device, causing probable loss of branding and corporate identity
6. Tables specified in pixels are too wide for screen

As you can see, the majority of the issues that arise are image related.

Many developers that come from a Web background would attempt to use percentages to define the size of the images in order to automatically adjust to the devices display width. However, this is bad practice, not only do many devices not support image percentage widths, but also, non optimised content can mean large download sizes and unpredictable rendering on the small screen.

The best approach to resolve the pixel perfect issue is through careful design, and planning on the layout of the pages.

Images should be designed so that the background of the image can be merged into a background colour of a div or table row. This will give the effect that the image is filling the entire screen. If the image does not follow this principle, the image will stand out from the rest, or white space will be present around it, giving the effect of wasted space.

Always consider scrollbars when considering widths of screens, as this often eats a hefty chunk (sometimes up to 10-20px) of the available width. Some devices allow rendering right up to both edges of the screen when the CSS style "margin: 0px" is set, but others will always leave a gap where the vertical scroll bar can appear, giving the illusion of an incorrectly sized site, so sometimes a little vertical scroll is good.

As device resolutions vary wildly across the board, the best approach to address them is to split them into categories by screen resolution. Then to supply a GIF, JPG or PNG for the images on your site that meets the requirements of that category. Depending on how much resource you wish to spend on

fine tuning your site, defines how granular your categories will be.

My current recommendations are:

- 96-128
- 129-160
- 161-220
- 220+

Always creating an image that fits the lower boundary.

If you would like further advice, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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I am always looking to receive comments and criticism.