

Preparing your images

We've seen why images are important, for your users and for SEO. We've also discussed why it's important to optimize your images. In this lesson, we'll tell you all about how you should do this. We'll first explain how to find and select the right image. Then, we'll discuss how you should prepare your image file.

Finding and selecting the right image

If you want to use images on your site, the first thing you need to do is to find and select the right image. Here, there's one important thing to consider: it's always better to use original images.

Original images

When looking at a company's customer service page, you might have come across photos of people wearing a headset who vaguely look like someone who could be working there but does not.



Image 1: Stock photo

As you might have guessed, it's much better to use photos of your actual team. You should go for authenticity: people want to see who actually works at your company.

This goes for other images on your site as well. It is always better to use original images – so, photos or images you’ve taken or illustrations you’ve drawn yourself – than stock photos.

Furthermore, it’s incredibly important to select an image that is relevant to the subject of your article or page. The image should reflect the topic of your post, or it should illustrate what you’re trying to say in your article. Don’t choose a random photo just to get a green bullet in Yoast SEO for adding an image. You should make sure the image is as relevant to the text as the text is to the image. There’s a simple SEO reason for this: an image with related text ranks better for the keyphrase it’s optimized for.

Other ways to find unique images

If you don’t have any images of your own that you can use, there are other ways to find unique images and still avoid very generic stock photos. But be aware that, unless you pay, you must either credit the author of the image or use photos with a license. For example, you could use one of these sites:

- **Flickr.com**

[Flickr](#) is a nice image source, as you can use Creative Commons images. If you decide to use a photo from flickr.com, don’t forget to attribute the original photographer.

- **Unsplash.com**

[Unsplash](#) is also a great site for finding unique, high-resolution images you can use for free. The website is easy to navigate and the licensing is clear. All photos published on Unsplash are free for commercial and non-commercial use.

- **Pixabay.com**

[Pixabay](#) has both paid and free images. A lot of images here do not require crediting the photographer. If you don’t have to credit and you can alter the image, you’ll find that the image is released under Creative Commons.

- **Foter.com**

[Foter](#) claims there are over 335 million free stock photos on its site. Each and every photo will display the license under which it's listed. Some photos require credit to the photographer, some photos may not be altered and some may not be modified.

If you go for one of these options, always make sure to steer clear of the obvious stock photos. Try to pick the ones that look a bit more genuine.

Obvious alternatives for photos could also be illustrations, which is what we use, or graphs. An honorable mention should go to animated GIFs, as they are incredibly popular these days. But even though they are popular, don't go overboard. GIFs make your post harder to read, as the movement of the image distracts your readers' attention. They can also slow down your page.



Image 2: An illustration for [yoast.com](#)

Preparing your image file

Once you've found the right image – whether it's a photo, illustration, or chart – the next step is to optimize it for use on your website. There are a number of things you need to think about:

1. Choose the right file name

First of all, you need to choose the right file name. Note that we're talking about the image file name here, not the image title you add in your content management system, like WordPress. You change the image file name on your computer before you upload it to your site.

Google uses the file name to determine what an image is about. That's why you should use your focus keyword in the image file name. It's simple: if your image shows a grey cat with a party hat licking its nose, the file name shouldn't be *DSC5592.jpg*, but *grey-cat-with-party-hat-licking-nose.jpg*.

Note that you should always start your file name with your main keyword. In this example, the main keyword would be 'grey cat', as that is the main subject of the photo. That's why 'grey cat' is at the beginning of the file name.



Image 3: A grey cat with a party hat licking its nose

2. Choose the right format

For images, *the* right format doesn't exist; it depends on the kind of image. In short, we recommend to:

- choose **JPEG** for larger photos or illustrations: it will give you good results in terms of colors and clarity with a relatively small file size;
- use **PNG** if you want to preserve background transparency;
- or, use **WebP** instead of JPEG and PNG, which will produce high-quality results with smaller file sizes (you can use tools like [Squoosh](#) to convert your image into WebP);
- use **SVG** for logos and icons: with help of CSS or JavaScript you can manage images in SVG format, for instance, resize them without loss of quality.

If you know a large part of your audience uses specific browsers or devices, you can check whether your preferred format is supported by those browsers on [CanIuse.com](#).

3. Scale your images

Loading times are extremely important for UX and SEO. The faster the site, the easier it is to visit and index a page. Images can have a big impact on loading times. This is especially true when you upload a huge image and then display it really small – for example, a 2500 x 1500 pixels image displayed at 250 x 150 pixels size – as the entire image still has to be loaded. So, you should resize the image to how you want it displayed.

WordPress helps by automatically providing the image in multiple sizes after upload. Unfortunately, that doesn't mean the file size is optimized as well, that's just the image display size.

4. Reduce file size

The next step in optimizing your images should be to make sure that scaled image is compressed so it is served in the smallest file size possible. To accomplish this, you could just export the image and

experiment with quality percentages, but we prefer to use 100% quality images, especially given the popularity of retina and similar screens.

A better way to reduce the size of images is by removing the Exif data. Examples of Exif data are data and time information, camera settings, a thumbnail, and copyright information. We recommend using tools like [ImageOptim](#), or websites like [JPEGmini](#), [jpeg.io](#) or [Kraken.io](#).

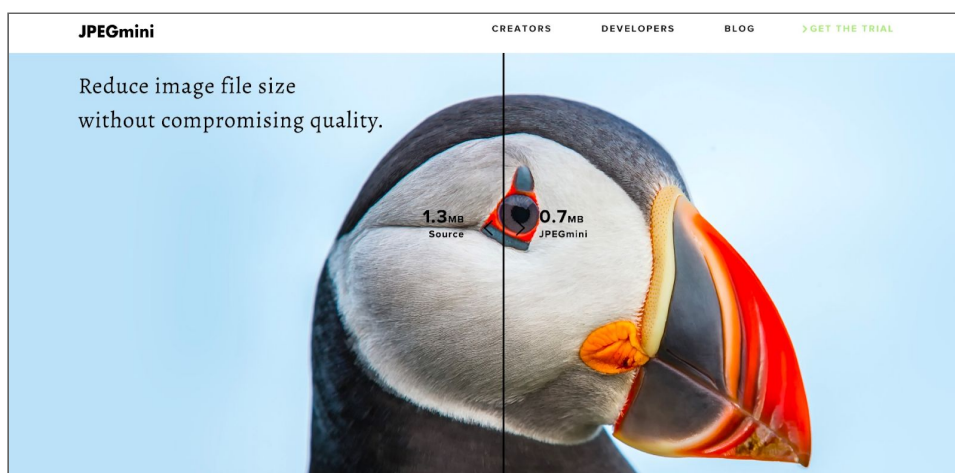


Image 4: Tools like JPEGmini can drastically reduce image file sizes

5. Use responsive images

Finally, you should always use responsive images. This means you serve a different image per screen width. For example, with responsive images, you serve a small image to visitors using a mobile device, while for the same article, you serve a larger image to visitors using a larger screen desktop. This is especially useful for mobile devices, and since mobile SEO is becoming increasingly important – remember, Google has started with mobile-first indexing – this one is essential for SEO as well.

If you're using WordPress, this is automatically done for you. This functionality was added by default from version 4.4.

Conclusion

So, what are the key takeaways from this lesson? First of all, you should make sure to choose the right image. It's best to use photos you've taken yourself, which are relevant to the subject of your article. Secondly, you should prepare your image files for use on your website. There are five main things you should do: you should choose the right file name, choose the right format, you should scale the image, reduce the file size, and you should use responsive images.