

*Ed. Note: "Pearls" is a new section that will appear in these pages from time to time. It will be ITAL's own version of the "Top Technology Trends" topic begun by Pat Ensor. These Pearls might be gleaned*

*from a variety of places, but most often will come from discussion lists on the Net.*

*Our first pearl, from Thomas Dowling appeared on Web4Lib on August 19, 1999 under the subject "Pixel sizes for web*

*pages." He is responding to a query that asked if Web site developers should assume the standard monitor resolution is 640x480 pixels, or something else.*

From: Thomas Dowling <tdowling@ohiolink.edu>  
To: Multiple recipients of list <web4lib@sunsite.berkeley.edu>  
Sent: Thu, 19 Aug 1999 06:07:08 -0700 (PDT)  
Subject: [WEB4LIB] Pixel sizes for web pages

You may want to consult the Web4Lib archive for comments from the last few merry go-rounds on this topic.

Monitor size in inches is different from monitor size in pixels, which is different from window size in pixels, which is different from the rendered size of a browser's default font. Not only are these four measurements different, they operate almost wholly independently of each other. So a statement like "I have trouble reading text at 600x800" puts the blame in the wrong place.

HTML inherently has no sense of screen or window dimensions. Many Web designers will argue that the only aspects to a page with fixed pixel dimensions should be inline images; such designers typically restrain their use of images so that no single image or horizontal chain of images is wider than, say, 550px (with obvious exceptions for sites like image archives where the main purpose of a page is to display a larger image). Outside of images, find ways to express measurements relative to window size (percentages) or relative to text size (ems).

Users detest horizontal scrolling.

In my experience, users with higher screen resolutions and/or larger monitors are less likely to run any application full screen; average window size on a 1280x1024 19" or 21" monitor is very likely to be less than 800px wide. (The browser window I currently have open is 587px wide and 737px high.)

I applaud your decision to support Web access for the visually impaired. Since that entails much, much more than monitor resolution, I trust the people actually writing your pages are familiar with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines.

It is actually possible to design web sites that are equally usable, even equally beautiful, under a wide range of viewing conditions. Failing to accomplish that completely is understandable; failing to identify it as a goal is not.

My recommendations to your committee would be A) find a starting point that isn't tied up in presentational nitpicking; B) find a design that looks attractive anywhere from 550 to 1550 pixels wide; C) crank up both your workstations' resolution and font size; and D) continue to run your browsers in windows that are approximately 600 to 640 pixels wide.

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