

Why does my website appear so small?

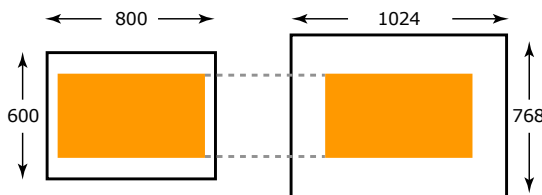
It's a common question, with a long answer. When you are approving your web design, the design may seem small to you. Well, rest assured it doesn't seem small to everyone! To understand why this happens, we must first understand how a user's computer configuration may effect how your website is displayed.

Do all visitors see my website the same way?

No, they don't! Your website visitors use a wide variety of computers, with a wide variety of capabilities, using a wide variety of configurations. The specific element of a computer's configuration that is important to us right now is the monitor resolution.

Resolution is the number of picture elements, or *pixels*, that a monitor can display on its screen. Resolution doesn't have anything to do with the physical size of the monitor, only how much detail the screen displays inside the monitor. The most common resolutions are 800x600 and 1024x768.

Although bigger numbers mean higher resolutions, they also mean that everything displayed in the screen appears smaller! Why? Think of this – a king size bed will appear very large and will fill most of a 10' x 10' bedroom. But if you put the same bed in a 16' x 16' bedroom it will take up less of the available room and will appear smaller. Similarly, a website designed to fill an 800x600 screen will appear smaller on a higher resolution screen.

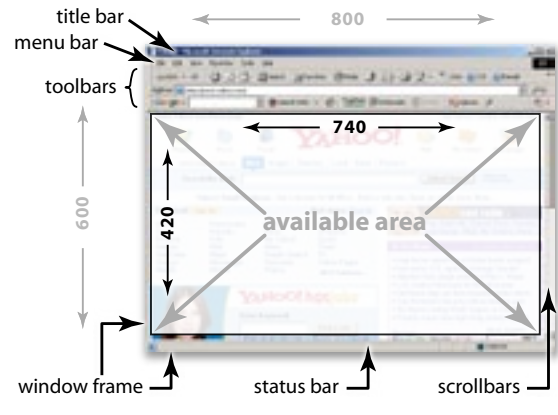
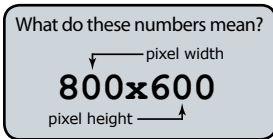


The same box appears larger in an 800x600 screen, and smaller in the 1024x768 screen.

This doesn't mean that a web design should be exactly 800x600! There are other things that a user's computer has to display on the screen in addition to your website.

Your website must be designed small enough to fit into an internet browser (such as Internet Explorer, Netscape, or Firefox) that fits into an 800x600 screen. Users will have as many different configurations for their browsers that they do for their computers, but a good safe size for a web design suitable for an 800x600 screen is 740x420.

Web designs, like resolutions, are measured in pixels, not inches!



A screen shows more than just a webpage. These elements also take up room and will reduce the amount of space a website can use.

What happens if my website is too big?

Browsers use scrollbars to display websites that are too big. Websites that are too long to fit in the screen require vertical scrollbars. If they are too wide, they require a horizontal scrollbar. Some websites require both. Vertical scrollbars are common and do not detract from a users experience. They should only be avoided in Flash websites. Horizontal scrollbars, on the other hand, are rarely seen, and will frustrate the average user. They should be avoided at all times and by all types of websites! ▀

So, what size should my website be?

When designing a website, it is important to create a design that will look appropriate for the largest percentage of users. Because designs that fit into a smaller resolution will also fit into larger resolutions, websites must be designed to fit into the smallest common resolution. Although higher resolutions are becoming more popular, nearly one third of all internet users still use an 800x600 screen.

Internet Usage Statistics, Jan 2005 User Screen Resolution

1024x768	54%
800x600	28%
1280x1024	10%
1152x864	3%
Unknown	2%
1600x1200	0%
640x480	0%

Statistics as of Jan 24, 2005,
taken from 45,749,710 webpage visits.
Statistics reported by TheCounter.com.

Both 15" and 19" sized monitors can display an 800x600 resolution. The only difference is that the pixels themselves are larger in the 19" monitor!