Chapter 6

How Can I Use Images and Media?

We have finished our tour of applying CSS to your website design, and you probably have something that looks half decent. The only problem is that we have not covered one vital element of design that gives your website a bit more depth and texture (more than a bunch of colors, anyway). What have we not yet added? Images and multimedia of course! Having images in your design can give your website a lot more visual zest, and it can also help make your design look less boxy and bland. Having images is a vital component of the web, whether you choose to use textures, tiles, background images (huge ones that cover the whole page or small ones that fit into a box), or even if you want a logo or some illustrations to accompany your text (maybe just a slideshow of pictures you took with a camera). Whether you want to create an image to make your design look unique or create a video or audio presentation, this chapter will provide an overview of the essentials.

In this chapter, we’re going to cover the following topics:

- Creating and using images within your sites design
- The image and multimedia generation languages available
- The audio and video formats you can use on your website

Pushing Pixels

Working with images and multimedia is one element of web design that really stumps a lot of people. Generally, a huge proportion of individuals are really good at producing solid code (you may be one of them now that you know the basics of HTML and CSS), but producing images is usually reserved for those with the rare gift of graphic creation. I happen to be among the crowd of people with the same level of graphics-creation ability as a 6-year-old with a
pack of crayons, but (just like I keep telling myself and am telling you now), do not worry if you find yourself unable to produce the images you need for your website. While those of you lucky enough to be good at making images will find this chapter pretty basic (and you may want to refer to other books for more advanced image creation), this section of the chapter explains how the rest of us, who have no or limited graphical abilities, can make our websites rich in multimedia and images without sacrificing our design to the great gods of the pixel.

**Online Formats**

Generally, visual media on the Web fall into three kinds of formats: images (which, of course, are great for supplementing the style and can be used either within the structure or used as backgrounds for style), audio (which is great for all you podcasting fans or for talking about something awesome you saw this week on the web), and video (handy for creating your own miniature TV station and broadcast pictures of your cat live via webcam). Because images, audio, and video all have various formats in use on the web, I am going to take a bit of time explaining the various choices and the general differences among them so, you can choose the format that best suits your needs. Keep in mind that you may end up using a mixture of formats for different tasks.

**Image formats**

Of the hundreds, or possibly thousands, of existing image formats, we will focus here on the three most commonly on use on the web. The image formats we’re looking at are GIF (Graphics Interchange Format), JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group), and PNG (Portable Network Graphics), and these are shown in Figure 6–1. All of these formats have native support within browsers. Because each of the three formats has its own unique pros and cons and is better at certain tasks than others, we’ll take a look at when you should use each one, and you can decide exactly what will suit your needs best for each image you need to include.

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**NotED**

Other formats such as APNG, BMP, JNG, JPEG-2000, MNG, TIFF WBMP, and XBM have seen varied support among browsers. However, due to inconsistencies, it is advised that you do not use them unless you have no other choice, as you will find some browsers unable to display them.