Tell People about a Media Object Before They Download It

BIG DOWNLOAD
(8 MINUTES)

Let the user decide whether to wait for the download or pass

You've probably had it happen. You click a link, and suddenly you enter download hell. A dialog box shows you that you have 10 minutes to wait, no, 13 minutes, no 45, and so on. Slow downloads make people feel trapped.

So let them decide ahead of time whether to turn their computer over to your download. To make that decision, they must ponder their expectations about the value of the content, its relevance to their needs, and the possible complexity of the process of downloading, uncompressing, launching, and eventually reading or printing. Be straight with users, letting them know what they are about to get into.

Include the file size, the media type, and a description of the subject matter. (IBM, 1999)

Good manners are made up of petty sacrifices.

—**Ralph Waldo Emerson,**
Letters and Social Aims

Warn people before—and during—downloads

Attention may wander during delays as brief as one second. Delays of more than 10 seconds will almost certainly lead to attention loss. (Microsoft, 2000)

If you can get a programmer to help you, provide a status indicator showing how much longer the download will take.

EXAMPLES

Before

Find out more about our <u>business process</u>.

Before

Plutonium <u>recovery</u>.

After

<u>Business Process White Paper</u>. (2.5 MB PDF file, 38 minutes at 56K, requires Acrobat Reader 4.0 or later)

After:

<u>Diagram of the hydride/dehydride process for plutonium recycling</u>. (8 MB PhotoShop image in BMP format, takes 2 hours to download at 56K, requires paint program to display).

AUDIENCE FIT

If visitors want this...	How well does this guideline apply?
TO HAVE FUN	Nothing ruins the fun like an eternal download.
TO LEARN	Interrupting a lesson for a half-hour download is a sure way to lose your students.
TO ACT	Unless your only goal is to get people to download your white paper, warn people up front; then they can download later, if necessary, rather than starting the download and then canceling it altogether.
TO BE AWARE	Show you're aware of their feelings and schedule.
TO GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE	Giving this kind of information is a simple courtesy.

See: IBM (1999), Microsoft (2000), Nielsen (1999f), W3C (1999).

For your review only.

Excerpt from *Hot Text: Web Writing that Works*.
(New Riders).