

POSTING PICTURES ON THE FORUM

By Ross Collord

Lots of people have problems understanding the processes to get their pictures on the forum and into albums. It's really pretty simple as long as you understand the "rules" and a little about digital pictures.

Attaching a Photo File to a Message Board Message

Whether creating a new discussion or replying to an existing message, the procedure for attaching a picture is about the same. Note: this is not *inserting* a picture, this is *attaching* a *picture file*.

The first and maybe most obvious thing required is to have the picture file in a format and size that is suitable for posting. Some cameras save their pictures in proprietary formats that only people with the camera's software can open. (Ex: filename.kdc, a Kodak Digital Camera format) That won't work for everyone else. Acceptable formats are:

- filename.jpg
- filename.bmp
- filename.tiff
- filename.pcx

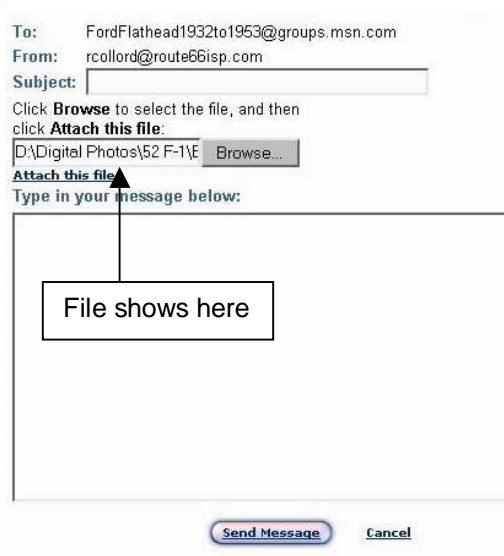
All of the above filetypes can be opened by the standard Microsoft Paint program or by the Wang Digital Imaging software that comes with a standard Windows load.

All of the above are also "full quality" images, except for the JPG filetype. (See "Reducing Picture File Size" below) This means they are large files. Scanners are frequently set to save files as TIFF files by default; this can be changed in most scanner programs to BMP's (Windows Bit-Map files) or JPG's (JPEG compressed images) at the time you Save the image you scanned.

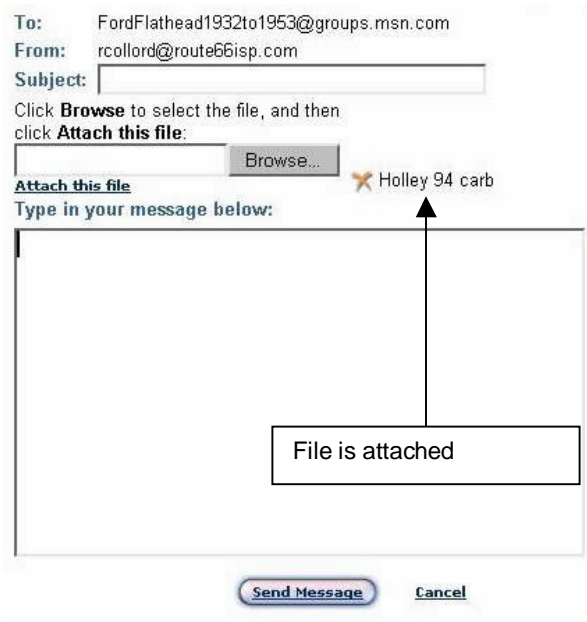
Images have to be less than 500 kilobytes (KB) to post them; MSN will reject files bigger than this but won't tell you that it did. A 500 KB file is too big to load quickly anyway.

You have to know where the image is on your hard drive. (not always obvious)

So, now you're ready! In the dialog box for either a New Discussion or a Reply, there is a "Browse..." button (see below)



Click on Browse, at which time a dialog pops up showing your hard drives (and CD drives). Go to the location where your picture is, and select it. The file will now show in the box to the left of the Browse button. ***You're not done yet!!*** Now you need to click the Attach This File bar just below it. After you do, you'll see activity in the little "computer screens" at the far bottom right of your screen, as the file is copied to MSN. When the file has been successfully copied to MSN, you will see it listed to the right of the Browse button with an "X" next to it:



The "X" is to delete the picture you attached, without losing anything you've written in the message box.

After your picture is attached, and showing as Attached, and you've written whatever you wanted, click on Send Message at the bottom.

If you want to add multiple pictures, you simply repeat the Browse – Attach procedure for each picture.

Reducing Picture File Size

Digital images, whether from a scanned image of a film image, or directly from a digital camera, are measured in pixels. A pixel is a dot with certain color characteristics. Depending on the software and source used to create the picture, the pixel can be any of 24 million colors, or simply either black or white. That's important to know because the human eye can't really distinguish those kind of subtleties unless you are looking at a very detailed picture and one that is blown up fairly large (like 8-1/2 x 11 or more). To capture all those 24 million colors in computer code requires that a lot of information be stored about each pixel. That translates to a large file size. A modern digital camera that is 2 Mega-Pixels per image stores files that are 1600 pixels wide by 1200 pixels tall, and results in a file size of about 5 megabytes if all the information the camera gathers is retained. That would take about 20 minutes to open across the internet, using a fast dial-up connection! Not very useful...

So some smart guys figured out, if the human eye can't distinguish all these different shades of colors, why not reduce the number of shades? By saying that every color 5 shades either side of Color X, is really Color X, you can reduce the total number of colors by a factor of ten. The beauty of this approach is that no one can tell the difference! This is the heart of the JPEG process. By compressing the number of colors, the file sizes are dramatically reduced without really noticeable loss of quality. Almost all photo editing software that comes with either scanners or cameras has the ability to save the pictures (think of it as converting them) to a JPEG file.

To do this, open your picture. Go to File, Save As... and click on the File Type menu at the bottom of the dialog box. You will see "*.jpg" or "JPEG Compressed Image" or similar. Select that. A new menu bar will probably be added to the dialog box; it is sometimes called "Quality" or "Compression" or something similar. This is usually a slide-bar or a percentage, or something like "Low – Medium-High". For internet use, 60% quality, or Medium quality, is just fine. Now type in a NEW name for the file. Hit Enter. That's all there is to it. You will still have your original high-quality file under the old name, and a new, compressed file under the new name.

Now go to Windows Explorer. Look in the directory where the pictures reside. Look at the File Size shown for the original and the new picture. The original may be 1.5 MB; the new one will be around 75 – 100 KB – one-tenth the size! Open the pictures using your software, and look at them side-by-side; can you see any real difference? Probably not. The real difference is, one takes 20 minutes to open across the internet, the other takes 20 – 30 seconds.

Picture Re-Sizing

How this is done varies a lot with your software. Most software has this function under "Edit" at the top of the screen. Usually it will have "Image Size" there. Or

maybe it has a top-level menu item called “Image” with resize under that. If in doubt, go to Help and find Resizing in the index.

Most computer screens are set to either 1028 or 800 pixels wide. It follows that any picture that is more than that width is not going to fit on a screen, the viewer will have to scroll to one side or the other to see the whole picture. Any improvement in quality that comes with a size more than about 800 pixels wide is lost if the viewer can’t see it all at once – seeing a 32 Ford with Arduin heads in its entirety is much better than seeing the front half –OR- the back half, but not both. So pictures should be re-sized to make them at most 800 pixels wide. There will be a check-box on the resizing window to “resize proportionately” or “maintain aspect ratio” – by all means click that box or your picture will be mighty funny looking! By changing the larger of the two dimensions to 800, the smaller dimension will be changed to the proper size automatically.

Reducing the size of the picture also reduces the file size, because the software is doing a little “JPEG’ing” to accomplish that size reduction; it has to get rid of something, so it “blends” adjacent pixels into an average value. Again, the human eye can’t see this unless you look really closely at a very crisp edge or something similar.

Scanning in pictures

If you don’t have a digital camera you can scan your pictures to get a digital image. Unfortunately, this results in HUGE images unless you use the right settings. Some good settings to use are: 150 – 200 lines per inch; no filtering; 24-bit color. You can always scan in at a higher quality and reduce for posting as described above.

Many scanners won’t save directly as JPG images; so save as a BMP and use your photo software to convert to a JPG.