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AVIF or WebP: which image format to use, and what to do for old browsers

Speed, Cache & CDN

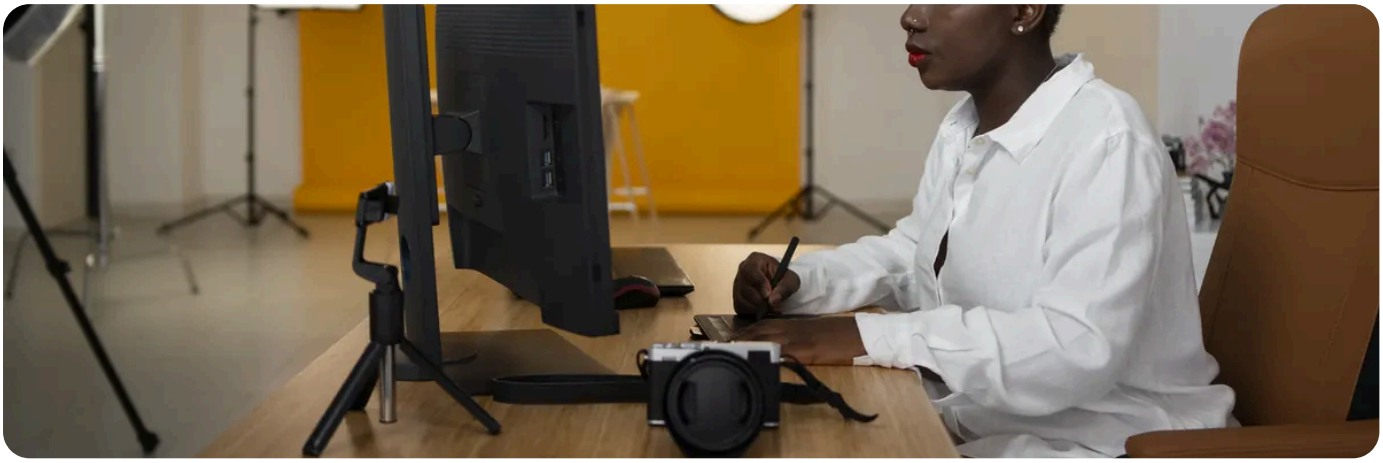
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AVIF or WebP: which image format to use, and what to do for old browsers

Speed, Cache & CDN Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



For most sites, WebP is enough and it is the easier one. AVIF often gives even smaller files on photographs, but it takes longer to produce and not every tool accepts it. The practical rule: use WebP as the main format; if you want to go further, add AVIF **with a fallback** for anyone who cannot show it.

The steps for moving from JPEG to WebP are already in **image optimisation and WebP**. This article is the comparison, and what to do when AVIF comes into the conversation.

The formats side by side

Format	Good for	Worth knowing
JPEG	Photographs, universal compatibility.	Larger files. No transparency.
WebP	Photographs and graphics, with or without transparency.	Shown by current browsers. Some e-mail programs do not show it.
AVIF	Photographs, where it often gives the smallest file. Supports transparency.	Slower to produce. Not every tool or program opens it. Very old browsers do not show it.
SVG	Logos and icons.	Vector drawing: sharp at any size and almost weightless.

Giving AVIF a fallback

The `<picture>` element lets the browser pick the first format it can show. If it knows none of them, it falls back to the plain image:

```
<picture>
<source srcset="photo.avif" type="image/avif">
<source srcset="photo.webp" type="image/webp">
```

```
<img src="photo.jpg" width="800" height="600" alt="Describe the image">
</picture>
```

The width and height numbers are only an example. Always declare the real ones, so the page does not jump (see **CLS**). On WordPress you do not have to write this by hand: an optimisation plugin that converts and serves both versions handles the `<picture>` or the address swap for you.

Producing and confirming

1. **Convert from the original**, never from an already compressed copy. Squoosh (in the browser) lets you compare the result before downloading and pick AVIF or WebP. On the command line, on a computer of your own, there are `cwebp` (WebP) and `avifenc` (AVIF).

2. **Upload both files** to the site, or let the plugin generate them.

3. **Confirm what the server delivers.** In the browser, F12, **Network** tab, "Img" filter: the image's content type should say `image/avif` or `image/webp`. If it says `image/jpeg`, the page is still using the old one.

4. **Compare the page's total weight** before and after. If it did not drop, the format was not the problem: see **LCP**.

Converting is not the same as serving.
If the theme writes the `.jpg` address straight into the page, the new file is never used. And AVIF generated in bulk during the same request that loads the page can take a lot of processor on the server: convert once, in advance.

Do not swap for the sake of swapping.
Before thinking about AVIF, check that the images are the *right size*. A huge image in AVIF is still huge. Dimensions first, compression second, format last.

NEED A HAND?

Converted your images and the page did not get lighter? Send us the address and we will tell you what the server is delivering.

Open a support ticket →

SEE ALSO

- Image optimisation and WebP
- Lazy loading images and videos
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