The Web Page

▶ *by **Angie Denton,** director of Web marketing*

What's in a name?

Receiving an e-mail with an attachment or going to a Web site and downloading a file and then not being able to open it is a frustrating experience. Many of these problems can be avoided by properly naming files.

File descriptions

A file name extension is an optional addition to a file name in a suffix format, such as ".xxx." For example: "picture.jpg" or "filename.exe."

The file name extension allows a file's format to be described as part of its name so users can quickly understand the type of file it is without having to "open" it or try to use it. The file name extension also helps an application program recognize whether a file is a type that it can read. For example, a graphics program such as Adobe® Photoshop® cannot open a .txt (text) file because it has not been programmed to read it.

There are registered viewers for different file types. This is the default application program that will automatically start and open the file when you click on it. When a software program is being installed, the program may make itself the registered viewer of certain file types. Even though a program is not the registered viewer, it can still open certain files. But the file must be manually opened by first starting the program and then selecting the "open" option or by dragging and dropping the file on the program icon.

In some instances, when you try to open a file, you get a window that asks what program to use to open it. This happens because there is no file association. Not having a file association just means that the file doesn't have an extension, you don't have a program registered to open a file, or you may not have a program that is capable of opening that type of file.

Accompanying this article is a list of common file extensions to help you determine if you have a program that can open the file. Remember, system files are not intended to be opened by the end user.

If you receive a file from someone, and you are not sure what it is, do not open it. It may be a virus. Contact the sender to see if he or she intended to send you the file. *If in doubt, don't open a file.*

Most of the files you will receive are text, graphic, audio or video files. The files can also be broken into one of two types, American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) format and binary (bin) format. ASCII files are text files you can view with a DOS Editor or any word processor. Binary files contain non-ASCII characters. If you display a binary file on your screen, you will see a lot of strange symbols and characters.

File naming

In many cases, when naming a file to use

Common Web-related file formats and their extensions

Plain text (ASCII) files

.html or .htm: Hypertext markup language (HTML) is the language in which Web documents are authored. This file type requires a Web browser, such as Netscape Navigator or Internet Explorer, for viewing.

.txt: These are text (txt) files that can be viewed with a word processor like Microsoft Word or a simple text editor like Simple Text or BBEdit for the Mac. For the PC, you can use Notepad, which comes with the Windows operating system.

Formatted documents

.doc: Although you may occasionally come across files with this extension that are not text documents, usually they are documents that were created using Microsoft Word or WordPerfect for Windows.

.pdf: Portable document format (PDF) is a proprietary format developed by Adobe Systems Inc. that allows formatted documents (including brochures or other documents containing artwork) to be transferred over the Internet so they look the same on any computer. This file type requires Adobe Acrobat Reader to view files. It can be downloaded from the Adobe Web site.

Compressed and encoded files

.bin: This is a binary (bin) file and requires Stuffit Expander for the Mac.

.exe: This extension identifies a DOS or Windows program or a self-extracting file. If this is an executable (self-extracting) file, then it can usually be launched by double clicking on the icon on your desktop. This is the only way to tell if it is an executable file.

.hqx: A file with the .hqx extension is a Macintosh binary file that has been converted into ASCII text so it can be safely sent over the Internet. You can use Stuffit Expander to decode on the Mac or BinHex4 (binhex4.bin) to create and extract Binhex4 files. Use BinHex13 (binhex13.zip) on a Windows machine to un-binhex it.

.sit: This extension identifies a Macintosh file that has been compressed using a program called Stuffit. To unstuff a file with an .SIT extension, you need a program called Stuffit Deluxe or you can use Stuffit Expander for the Mac or for Windows. All three versions can decompress other file formats as well.

.sea: A Macintosh self-extracting application (SEA) file has this extension. An archive file is usually a collection of files that have been combined into one to make it easy to download. Because the archive is self-extracting, you don't need any special application or utility to launch it. You simply click on the icon from the Macintosh desktop, and it decompresses and unbundles the files.

.zip: This indicates a common compression standard for DOS and Windows that uses a DOS utility called PKZIP. These files can be decompressed on the PC with WinZIP. You can get copies for Windows 3.1 and Windows 95/98/2000. You can also use Stuffit Expander for Mac or Windows.

Graphics files

.gif: The most common graphics file format on the Internet (still or animated), it stands for graphics interchange format (GIF). Most Web browsers have a built-in GIF viewer you can use to view .gif files.

on your own desktop, you do not have to add the file extension (.xxx). Your computer will automatically know what program to use to open the file. However, it is a good habit to add the extension when naming files. If you plan on e-mailing the file to someone or posting it to your Web site, other computers may not recognize the file without the extension.

There are certain characters that you should refrain from using when naming files (see list). Also try to keep your file names lowercase, as UNIX is case-sensitive.

I hope these hints will help you the next time you receive a file that you can't open. Remember to be careful opening a file you are not sure what it is for, because a file with a virus can cause a lot of headaches.

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Editor's note: *Look for real-time coverage of the Western National Angus Futurity in Reno, Nev., April 20-22 at* www.angusjournal.com/reno. *Also, visit* www.angusjournal.com/nationalconference *for highlights of the 2002 National Angus Conference April 24 in Sacramento, Calif. Posted to the site will be downloadable archives of the speeches presented.*

File-naming no-nos

► **Do NOT use any of the following characters in your filenames:**

`	accent mark	|	vertical mark
{	left brace	‹	less than
}	right brace	;	semicolon
'	apostrophe	›	greater than
"	quotation mark	*	asterisk
[	left bracket	&	ampersand
/	forward slash	?	question mark
]	right bracket	(	left parenthesis
\	back slash	)	right parenthesis

► **Characters that may be used, but are better avoided:**
In some cases, your file transfer protocol (FTP) program will rename your file if you use these characters, but it is better not to depend on this feature.

,	comma	!	exclamation mark
@	at mark	^	caret
#	pound sign	$	dollar sign
:	colon	%	percent sign

► **The following characters may be used, but not as the first letter in your file name:**

+	plus	-	hyphen	~	tilde

.jpg/.jpeg/.jfif : A popular compression standard used for photos and still images, joint photographic experts group (JPEG) files can be viewed on any platform as long as you have a JPEG viewer. You can view JPEG files with most Web browsers. JFIF stands for JPEG file interchange format.

.tiff: Tagged image file format (TIFF) images are very large and are of high resolution. They and all of the above graphics formats can be readily viewed, created, or manipulated with one or more commercially available graphics software programs like Photoshop or DeBabelizer for the Mac, and Photostyler or Photoshop for Windows.

Sound files

.au/uLaw/MuLaw: This is the most common sound format found on the Web. Macintosh systems need Sound App to play this type of file; PCs can use Waveform Hold and Modify, which provides support for a variety of formats, conversion between them, and file editing functions.

.aiff: Amiga image file format (AIFF) is another common sound format found on the Web. Although it is a Macintosh format, it can be used on other platforms as well. It requires the same programs as .au to play.

.mp3: The most popular file format on the Web for distributing CD-quality music is moving picture experts group-1, audio layer-3 (MP3). A 1 Mb file is equal to about one minute of music. This type of file requires an MP3 player, which is available for both Macintosh and Windows.

.ra: This proprietary streaming audio format is called RealAudio (ra). Developed by RealNetworks, RealAudio allows you to play sound files in real-time. This type of file requires the RealPlayer, available for both Macintosh and Windows.

.wav: Waveform (wav) is the native sound format for Windows. On the Macintosh, you can use Sound App to play .wav files. For the PC, use waveform Hold and Modify or Goldwave to play these files. There's also a good program called Win Play! that will play it, as well as other popular formats.

Video files

.avi: Audio visual interleaved (AVI) files are standard video format for Windows. These files need an AVI Video for Windows player or the Windows Media Player from Microsoft.

.mov/.movie: The common format for QuickTime movies, this is the Macintosh native movie platform. You can use a number of applications to play .mov files, including Sparkle or MoviePlayer on the Macintosh, and QuickTime for Windows.

.mpg/mpeg: This is a standard format for "movies" on the Internet, using the moving picture experts group (MPEG) compression scheme. On the Macintosh, use Sparkle to play .mpg files or to convert them to QuickTime movies. There are a variety of MPEG Players for Windows and an MPEG file transfer protocol (FTP) site that has a large collection of MPEG player resources for all platforms.

.qt: This is another extension that denotes a QuickTime movie. Use the latest version of Quicktime for the Mac.

.ram: Another popular format from RealNetworks for streaming video is RealAudio metafile (RAM). To view these files, you need the RealPlayer, which can be downloaded from *www.real.com*.