blink

By [Heidi Adkisson](#)

Many sites are going wider, but should yours? There are several issues to consider before making the switch.

Recently, *several well-known news* sites ([cnn.com](#), [espn.com](#), [cnet.com](#), [nytimes.com](#)) have increased their page widths to 1024 pixels (more accurately 984, accounting for browser chrome). This naturally leads to the question: Should we increase the base resolution of our pages to 1024 or stick with 800?

There are a number of factors that seem to recommend going wider. [Users' screen resolutions](#) have been pushing up—and it's almost impossible to buy a new computer system today with an 800 by 600 monitor. Greater width allows for more information on the page and in theory less vertical scrolling for users. From a business perspective, the extra page real estate provides additional space for both content and advertisements.

But, before making the switch, there are a few issues to consider.

First, it's important to understand the difference between monitor resolution and browser viewport size. Data show that users are not filling up their large monitors with a single, maximized window—instead they are using two or more smaller-sized windows. This has long been true for Mac users, but also now holds for Windows users since applications no longer open by default in full-screen mode. So, if you are considering going wider, you may want to gather data on the viewport size used by your site's visitors.

Second, it's important to understand the page layout implications. Particularly for content-heavy sites, beware of creating line lengths that are too long, which will decrease the readability of your text. A line length of 65 to 75 characters per line [has been shown](#) to be both preferred by users and provide maximum readability.

A fluid layout, in theory, gives you the best of both worlds. But particularly with content-heavy sites, the fluidity can morph the layout in ways that impact readability (creating columns that are either too narrow or too wide).

Finally, consider that more is not necessarily better. Whereas content density may be desirable in a news site, in an e-commerce site a less dense presentation, particularly for product information, may be more effective.

Like many design decisions, the answer on which base resolution to choose is "it depends." It depends on your users, the content you are presenting, and ultimately what you are trying to accomplish with your site.