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Demystifying Aspect Ratios

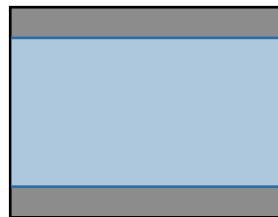
16:9 vs 4:3

The Aspect ratio of an image is its displayed width divided by its height (usually expressed $x:y$). Standard definition TV images are 4:3 whereas film images are at least 16:9. 16:9 has been adopted by the FCC and video production industry as the ratio standard for high-definition displays. In other words, 4:3 is going the way of the dodo.



SOURCE SCALING TECHNIQUES

Letterboxing occurs when a 16:9 source is properly scaled to fit a 4:3 display. None of the original full frame is discarded. Pillarboxing occurs when a 4:3 source is properly scaled to fit a 16:9 display. It is not stretched or distorted to fill the entire display.



LETTERBOXING



PILLARBOXING

QUESTIONS TO ASK

Do I know why I am either 4:3 or 16:9?

If I am 4:3, do I have a clear upgrade path?

Is what I buy today useable in 5 years?

WHAT REALLY MATTERS?

Intentionality matters. 16:9 is a long term solution but may not be for your space today due to financial, content, or architectural constraints.

Your aspect ratio decisions should be dictated by your strategic 5 year plan.