

Flipping over Acrobat

By Carol L. Schlein

Recently, a colleague interested in purchasing training materials that I wrote called with a last-minute emergency. There wasn't time for me to send bound and printed manuals over-night to arrive for the training classes she was conducting. To complicate matters, she didn't want all 60 pages of my manual; she wanted only the first 30 pages. I solved the problem by sending her an e-mail with an Adobe Acrobat version of the 30 pages along with a smaller table of contents and a cover page.

Most people are familiar with Adobe Acrobat Reader, but few know about or use the full-blown version of Adobe Acrobat. If you create a word processor document, its appearance will depend on which fonts you select and the printer. If you send that document to someone with a different word processor or other fonts, the document's appearance is totally different. The Reader program allows you to view documents with a .pdf (portable document format) file extension as they originally were prepared — fonts and all.

Another benefit of the Adobe for-mat is that the file size, especially for documents containing graphics, is smaller than the comparable word processing version or popular graphic formats such as .jpg or .tif. The other advantage of documents in .pdf format is they can only be viewed; they can-not be altered. This makes it ideal for sending documents to clients or adversaries to review, since you control the editing.

The Adobe Reader program is free and often is included with many popular software programs. As a result, many courts, including most of the U.S. District and U.S. Bankruptcy courts, have chosen Adobe as their preferred style to receive electronic filings.

To obtain a copy of Adobe Acrobat Reader, log on to adobe.com and choose the Reader download option. This will put a setup file on your hard drive enabling you to install the pro-gram. Then, when you receive a document in .pdf format, whether an e-mail attachment, on a disk or from a colleague, you can double-click on the file name while in Windows Explorer and the file will open in Adobe Acro-bat Reader.

Tools

The Reader program includes a number of tools for working with a document in .pdf format. You can view it, zoom in or out, view thumb-nails (graphic representations of each page), print it, search for words or phrases, jump to specific pages, or use linked bookmarks to navigate to specific sections of large documents.

Corel Corp. has licensed the Adobe technology in its 2000 and 2002 suites (WordPerfect 9 and 10) and includes the ability to publish a WordPerfect document in the .pdf format without additional software. Law firms using WordPerfect (and there still are many) can prepare briefs and convert them to .pdf for e-filing. When a document is open on the screen, choose File/Publish to .pdf, and choose the name and location for the .pdf version of the document. You can e-mail that to the court, a client or someone who must see the document with its original formatting but who you don't want to make direct edits.

Adobe Corp. would have been out of business years ago if one of its main products was free to all comers. How-ever, the Reader program is a small subset of the Adobe Acrobat program. Adobe Acrobat version 5 actually includes the Reader along with several other tools that together allow creation of documents in Adobe format and control how they can be edited or manipulated to manage collaborations. When combined with a scanner, the Adobe Acrobat software is a major step toward a paperless office. Once Adobe software is installed and a scanner attached to the computer, you can use it to scan documents directly into Adobe format. They will be smaller than

comparable .tif documents.

The full program has many tools that allow you to work with and manipulate documents in .pdf format. With version 5, documents can be converted into .pdf merely by opening them with Acrobat. If your firm uses the Microsoft Office suite, installing Adobe Acrobat will add an option to your File menu to Create Adobe .pdf. This isn't necessary for WordPerfect users because Corel already has licensed some Acrobat tools from Adobe so those using versions 9 and 10 have the option to publish a document into .pdf format without purchasing the full Adobe Acrobat program. However, even for Corel advocates, there are a number of advantages to owning the complete program, which retails for \$249.

Scanning

With Adobe Acrobat 5.0, documents can be scanned directly into .pdf format. Instead of using the scanner's software, you can use Acrobat and choose File/Import/Scan. If you're sending documents by e-mail, you can include a digital signature or require the recipient to supply a password to open it. This would limit someone else who has Acrobat from tampering with your file. Within Acrobat's security options, you can restrict recipients from printing your document, making changes, extracting some text, or adding or changing comments or forms.

Acrobat 5.0 also has tools for working on and off the Internet. Among these are a variety of shapes, pencils and highlighters. These can draw a circle around text and mark a document to call attention to a section of text. For example, you can convert web pages into .pdf documents or make documents accessible to a group of people in their web browser. While discussing the document, it can be marked or highlighted, making it easier for the group to agree on the final version. It's easy to add comments to an Acrobat document.

The document can either reside on your firm's server or can be made accessible through your website or one of the collaboration web services like gotomypc.com or webex.com, which allows a group to access the same screens simultaneously. The program also includes the ability to manage and review comments from a group of contributors. Having assisted in the editing of many books for the American Bar Association where authors contributed by e-mail, I can only imagine how much more efficiently we could have worked with tools like Adobe Acrobat and the Internet.

Another component of Adobe Acrobat is a built-in form tool. You could take one of your firm's forms and convert it into an online fill-in form. Using the Form Tool, you can add boxes, various buttons or drop-down lists. These fields can be made read-only or required to be filled in so you can guide people through completing the form. There even are tools to assist people completing the form to move easily to the next required field. Creative attorneys have begun to use these tools on their websites to collect information about potential clients. For example, it's easy to conceive an elder law attorney devising a checklist of issues when considering long-term health insurance.

Many practice areas can benefit from using forms on the firm's website for potential clients. Employment lawyers could create forms so clients can complete basic information about their employees rather than requiring the firm's staff to do data entry for preparing EEOC reports. Personal injury lawyers could collect information about potential clients before spending time to evaluate the merits of their case.

With its navigation tools, commonly accessible format and acceptance by the courts, Adobe Acrobat is worth investigating.

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