



LJN's LEGAL TECH Newsletter

Volume XIX, Number 8

November 2001

PRODUCT REVIEW

Adobe Acrobat 5.0: Re-Designed With Lawyers in Mind

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The new version of Adobe Acrobat seems to have been designed with lawyers in mind. I say "seems to" because as I explored the new features of Acrobat 5.0, I found many legal applications for the new upgrades and features. At the same time, the upgrades that I found so valuable to my practice were improvements to features that anyone doing business on the Internet would appreciate.

The key advantage of portable document format (PDF) files has always been that anyone, anywhere can read them from inside a web browser. Since there are free versions of Adobe Acrobat Reader for practically every operating system in use today, PDF files truly platform independent. This means that users running operating systems ranging from Windows to Macintosh to Unix or Linux can view and print PDF files. This also means that a PDF file viewed on an Apple PowerMac G3 will look exactly the same when viewed on an Intel-based PC. No matter what programs a client,

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co-counsel or adversary are running, if you use Acrobat 5.0 they will always be able to read your work product.

Acrobat 5.0 continues to maintain the integrity of a document in PDF format and reproduces it, in electronic form, exactly as it appears in print. All formatting, font choices, graphics and other features are preserved regardless of the software installed on the computer viewing a PDF file, or the operating system that computer runs. Also, because each new version of Acrobat Reader is backward compatible, you should never encounter a PDF file that you can not view on any computer. As long as the viewer has the latest version of the free Adobe Acrobat Reader software installed on his or her computer, the PDF document can be read.

Secure Document Collaboration

E-mail and the Internet have certainly made the practice of law more efficient. The ability to e-mail transactional documents to many counsel around the country for their comments and revisions speeds up the process of closing deals and serves the needs of today's demanding client. At the same time, these new communication tools have added a level of complexity to the drafting process, and created opportunities for abuse that did not exist in the days when we all worked on paper instead of pixels.

Word processing programs like WordPerfect and Word do not provide

the security features lawyers need to protect their work product and still operate efficiently. How many times have you e-mailed a word processing file containing a contract or a stipulation to opposing counsel for their comments, and when you got it back with their changes it was impossible to tell what was altered and what was left untouched? Even when you use the "track changes" or document comparison tools in your word processor, analysis of extensive alterations can be incredibly time consuming.

Also, how confident are you that all the changes have been picked up for every revision? What if several lawyers at the other firm made changes to the document? There is simply no way to tell who changed what once you get it back, and it could take hours on the phone with the other side until you finally figure out who changed what and why.

Acrobat 5.0 has revolutionized the process of document review and revision by giving lawyers the tools they need to collaborate with other lawyers while at the same time protecting work product. Using the online commenting features of Acrobat 5.0, it is now possible for lawyers working in different places to read and add comments to an Adobe PDF document from within a web browser. Once one lawyer adds his or her comments, everyone collaborating on the documents can review them and comment

further. You can even take a PDF with you and comment on the document "off-line," like while you are traveling on an airplane with your laptop, and then upload your comments when you return to the office so everyone can see them.

Password Protection

When the document is finished and ready for signing, Acrobat 5.0 allows you to prevent others from monkeying with your work product, and PDF files may be made even more permanent than their paper counterparts. Before you e-mail it to the other side, you can password protect the document so that your opposition cannot do anything with it other than print it and sign it, or sign it with a digital signature. In this way, Acrobat 5.0 allows lawyers to maintain the integrity of the original document so that last-minute "sneaky changes" cannot be made.

This feature is particularly valuable in the common scenario where opposing parties are making joint submissions in litigation, or revising extensive contracts or disclosure documents. In these situations, you can prevent opposing counsel from changing documents in a variety of ways.

For example, using Acrobat 5.0's security features, you can choose whether to allow the other side to cut and paste language from your document elsewhere. You can even "lock down" a file using 128-bit encryption, the highest level of protection currently available, so that your opposition can't print your document, protecting your work product from those who would try to get around the cut and paste restriction by printing the document out and then scanning it.

If the document is going to be used for many transactions, like a form contract, for instance, you can create a secure version that will only allow others to fill in form fields like name, address, company name, etc., and then print out the document or digitally

sign it. PDF files can be signed with a digital signature to verify authenticity. This means that you and your clients can use Acrobat 5.0 to take advantage of state and federal laws like the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act (UETA) and the Gramm-Leach-Bliley (GLB) Act that make digital signatures legally binding.

Document Conversion in PDF

Sometimes I want others to be able to make changes to my documents, and sometimes I want to make changes to theirs. If the drafter wants the other side to make whatever changes they want, Adobe Acrobat 5.0 allows you to "repurpose" a PDF file by exporting it to Rich Text Format (.rtf) for editing in a word processor. For the first time, the entire contents of documents submitted by clients can be extracted for use elsewhere. Also, if the other side has not secured a PDF to prevent conversion, it is a simple process to export the document to an .rtf file, revise it and then use it for whatever purpose you want, including conversion back to PDF. Acrobat 5.0 also lets you extract images from PDF documents, a feature that comes in handy if you need to take a chart or graphic embedded in a PDF and use it elsewhere.

E-Filing Simplified

There are many benefits to using the new Acrobat 5.0 for electronic filing. First off, the new version is simpler and faster to use. If you use Microsoft Word, when you install Acrobat 5.0 the program automatically creates two icons on the Word toolbar, one of which allows you to create and e-mail a PDF document with just one click.

Categorizing and searching PDF documents has been improved with Acrobat 5.0 since the program now supports embedding XML data in a PDF file. This means you can add metadata like keywords to a document so it can be easily identified by the

clerk's office and routed to the right place. XML support also means that it will be easy for courts and attorneys to find the electronic documents they are looking for when searching through court records.

Interactive Navigational Tools

Acrobat 5.0 continues to offer the ability to create the interactive navigational tools that judges and clerks love—like bookmarks, hyperlinks and thumbnails—and these features have been significantly improved. Acrobat 5.0 now creates thumbnails automatically. Bookmarks can be enhanced with colors, bold and italics. Hyperlinks are preserved when converting HTML documents to PDF. As any litigator who has read an interactive brief knows, the liberal use of hyperlinks and bookmarks turns a static document into an interactive advocacy tool. With Acrobat 5.0, dynamic documents are easier and faster to produce than ever before.

New Marketing Push

Coinciding with the release of this new version, Adobe is for the first time marketing directly to lawyers through full-page ads in national legal publications, and a separate section of the Adobe web site devoted to e-filing. The site, located at www.adobe.com/efile, offers tools, tips and online training to help you learn Acrobat and apply its features to your practice. The site also details the new electronic filing requirements being adopted in the federal courts and a number of state courts around the country, and provides assistance to lawyers learning to e-file with Acrobat.

Did Adobe specifically set out to improve Acrobat for lawyers, or was this merely a happy accident? Either way, Adobe Acrobat 5.0 offers lawyers a better way to collaborate on, secure and verify documents.

