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GET TECHNOLOGY RIGHT

APPLICATIONS

Acrobat Updates Put a Shine on PDFs

Adobe's Acrobat 6.0 and Acrobat Elements give enterprises a full range of tools for document portability

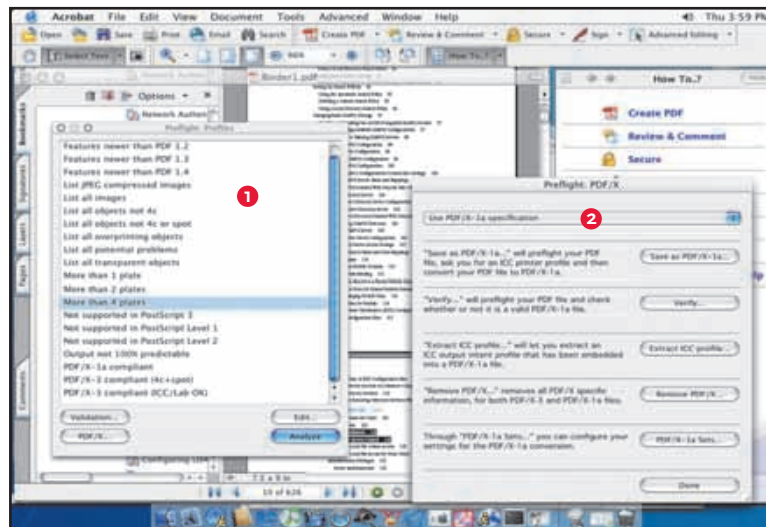
REMEMBER WHEN it seemed that paper would go the way of typewriter ribbons in the workplace? That vision never quite materialized — people remain wedded to hard copy.

Even so, documents are almost always created on computers, whether through a manual editing process or by way of an application running with little or no human intervention. Documents are the lifeblood of the enterprise, so maintaining their look and feel regardless of the platforms on which they are created or viewed is vital.

The paperless office is still a dream, but the Adobe PDF has become the gold standard for electronic documents. Microsoft Word is a ubiquitous editing tool, but the best way to ensure that a Word document looks the same on every platform is to turn it into a PDF.

The latest versions of Adobe's Acrobat product family represent the best way to transform documents that rely on an individual system's configuration into truly device-independent entities. Changes from the last Acrobat revision are striking, even at first glance: The free viewer software is now simply Adobe Reader 6.0, and the user interface for the entire lineup has a fresh new look.

Although the Acrobat editing tools remain stratified by features into Standard and Professional versions, Adobe has wisely added an enterprise-focused hatchling to the brood. This new kid on the block, Acrobat



Acrobat 6.0 Professional gives prepress professionals a first-class set of tools (1) for verifying the integrity of data files, including support for the new PDF/X (2) standard for data interchange.

Elements 1.0, is a stand-alone application for Windows systems that converts documents to PDF structures but does not have the editing features of the Acrobat 6.0 versions. It shipped a few weeks ahead of Acrobat 6.0 and is only licensed in bulk with a 1,000-seat minimum.

Elements is designed for enterprises with thousands of end-users who don't require the full-blown capabilities of Acrobat, but do need the ability to save their documents as PDF files. It is exceptionally useful for converting libraries of electronic documents, thanks to its drag-and-drop and batch-processing features.

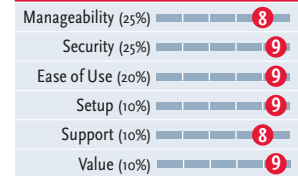
Included with Elements is the AEIT (Adobe Enterprise Installation Tool), which allows administrators to modify the .INI file used by the Elements installer. AEIT can preload company information and the all-important license number and, if desired, lock down the Elements' features to simplify the software distribution process. Elements also allows document creators to preview the PDF versions, requiring either Acrobat Reader 5.x — which can be installed at the same time as Elements — or Adobe Reader 6.0, which must be installed separately.

Whether an end-user requires the full feature set of Acrobat 6.0

Acrobat 6.0 Professional

Adobe Systems adobe.com

EXCELLENT 8.7



COST: \$449 (estimated street price)

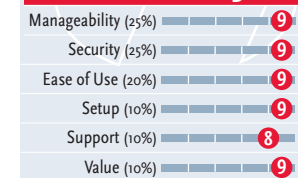
PLATFORM: Windows NT/2000/XP, Mac OS X 10.2.2 or later.

BOTTOM LINE: Both the Mac and the Windows versions of Professional are easy to use, making it the tool of choice for creating documents to be viewed on a wide variety of platforms. Outstanding support for prepress functions allows cost-conscious enterprises to reduce production costs without compromising the document review cycle.

Acrobat Elements 1.0

Adobe Systems adobe.com

EXCELLENT 8.9



COST: \$28 per seat, 1,000-seat minimum

PLATFORM: Windows 98SE/Me/NT/2000/XP

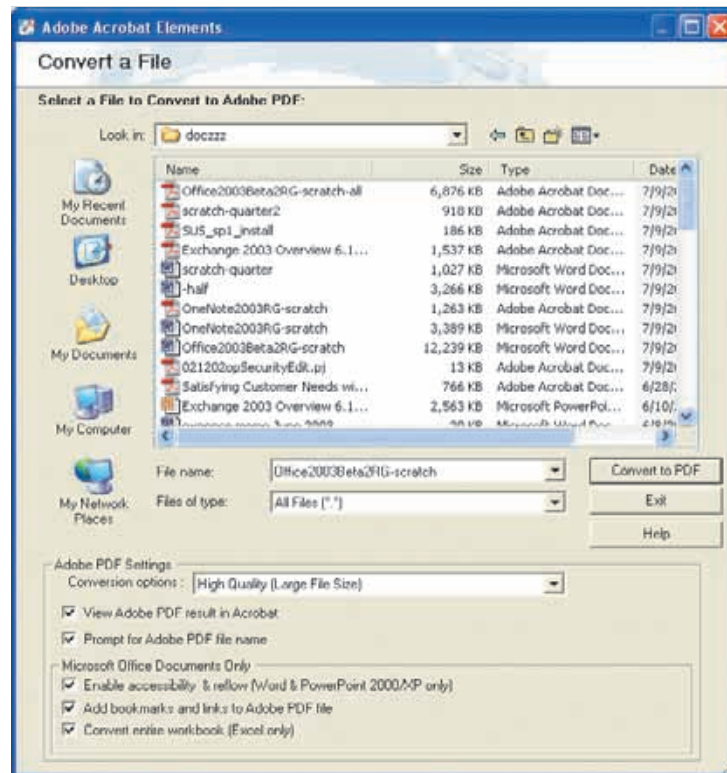
BOTTOM LINE: Acrobat Elements 1.0 provides a cost-effective way for enterprises to widely distribute tools for converting documents from application-centered formats to the ubiquitous and device-independent PDF structure. For organizations with the 1,000-plus users required for a minimum license, the per-seat price is one-tenth that of the Acrobat 6.0 Standard edition.

Professional or the basic features found in Acrobat 6.0 Standard depends on how he or she will create PDF files. As with Elements, both versions support one-button PDF creation from within the basic Microsoft Office applications. Both versions of Acrobat 6.0 support digital signatures and the ability to encrypt and password-protect sensitive documents; on Windows systems, both can combine content created in a range of applications into a single PDF.

Plus, the Standard and Professional versions include commenting and reviewing tools, which come in handy when more than one person works on the same project.

The Professional version of Acrobat 6.0 builds on the Standard edition by allowing users to create electronic forms and adding one-button PDF creation to high-end Windows applications such as AutoCAD, Microsoft Project, and Visio. Professional also improves the tools for working with large-format documents and for preflighting intricate print jobs. The alterations include the ability to view color separations and transparency flattening, as well as new support for verifying PDF/X standard compliance for prepress data interchange.

Although the convenience of being able to convert a document to a PDF with a single click can't be underestimated, it is possible to



Acrobat Elements 1.0 includes a set of tools for converting application-centered documents into ones that can be read on a variety of platforms, regardless of complexity.

perform a conversion inside any application that prints thanks to Acrobat's use of a printer-emulation driver. This is more complicated than the one-button method and can increase the number of help desk calls, but it provides an out for shops that don't have a 100-percent Microsoft environment. Mac Office users

have a one-button conversion option that behaves similarly to Office 97/2000/XP/2003.

The listed requirements for both the Professional and Standard versions of Acrobat 6.0 are modest regardless of operating system — 64MB of RAM is the minimum; 128MB is recommended. Perhaps Adobe is too forgiving

here, as 256MB is now a standard configuration for new desktop systems. The more RAM, the happier one will be.

Both Acrobat 6.0 Professional and Acrobat Elements handled the most complex documents available from the InfoWorld Test Center's library without major problems. One system in the test environment did have problems digesting an exceptionally graphics-heavy and highly-formatted Word file, but the symptoms could not be replicated on other machines with identical physical specifications and OS configurations. Acrobat Elements processed the same file with nary a burp, so I'm inclined to blame the mishap on the fact that the problem machine is the least clean of the Test Center's desktops.

Otherwise, Acrobat 6.0 Professional is a joy to use, and its range of PDF creation and processing options will satisfy even the most demanding customer — as long as he or she is working on a Windows system. Macintosh users will find that some of the more useful features, especially in the area of document assembly, aren't available — which can be a hurdle. But for users with limited feature requirements, Acrobat Elements provides a simple, effective way for enterprises to give thousands of users the means to create PDF documents without breaking the bank.

— P.J. Connolly