

Applications for .pdf-formatted Files

The .pdf format offers a way to combine all the fonts, illustrations, layout, and stories that are part of a document into one relatively small file (smaller than all its components). The format has the added benefit of being nearly unchangeable, so your content is protected when you pass the file to someone else.

Not least of all, .pdf is a cross-platform format—the originator's computer (Windows, Mac, or what have you) is invisible to the reader. To read .pdf-formatted files requires only a small program that is available free from the Adobe Systems Web site (1), www.adobe.com/prodindex/acrobat.

Not everyone is as enthusiastic about this format as I am, but let me tell you about some of the applications in my editorial office.

A Story to Tell

Less than a year ago, we wrote and published a brochure about our department. We paid \$5000 to print 2000 copies, which we expected to last us 2 years. Because the work was already done, of course, we couldn't resist showing it on the Web. Each section was presented under its own heading in conventional fashion. In addition, we put the entire collection of over 50 MB in layout and graphics files (not to mention fonts) into a 3-MB file in the .pdf format. It was a "Why not?" decision.

About 6 months later, the Webmaster called to say that our 3-MB file had been downloaded 1700 times in the first 4 months of its Web life. Not a bad return on our money, huh? The site turned out to be as convenient for those interested in our department as it was for us to create it.

What Else?

How much do you spend in time and money by mailing proofs to your contributors? An alternative is to post their articles in .pdf format on your Web site or send them the files as e-mail attachments. A contributor can easily print out a file, make changes, and fax the pages back to you.

Or you may wish to share your creation with others but be reasonably assured that it won't be altered and redistributed. The .pdf format is again a solution.

.pdf Warts and Solutions on the Horizon

Most printers can't print from .pdf-formatted files yet, although they are trying to find a way. For example, Scitex and Agfa have introduced methods of integrating files in the .pdf format into their digital prepress systems.

Contributors and others cannot now just make their changes on a file itself. Acrobat 4.0, however, promises to include a number of new features: closer integration with Microsoft Office, enhanced document security, and verification facilities such as digital signatures.

New Sites for Browsers

Elsevier Science has a new BIOTech Web site, a no-charge gateway to a bibliographic database of biotechnology articles as well as the company's own scientific publications (2). The owners hope to use their site to keep their visitors informed about publishing initiatives in biotechnology throughout their organization. The site designer went a little crazy with the Java options, but you may enjoy the site once you figure out how

to navigate it.

The Medical Library Association is offering 2 Web-based self-study courses that provide CE contact hours. "Developing a Confident Path", first given in 1997, will be repeated for the third time in the spring of 1999 (3).

"Internet Navigator", a course designed by Nancy Lombardo at the University of Utah-Salt Lake City, offers 10 MLA CE contact hours. At the clearinghouse site (4), do a general subject search for self-study courses. And the forms are available for download in, of course, .pdf format. Interested?

Let's chat: sedwards@ulna.bwh.harvard.edu

Sally Edwards manages the Publications Group in the Department of Radiology at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

References

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2. Elsevier Science BIOTech. www.elsevier.com/locate/biotech (accessed 28 February 1999).
3. Developing a confident path: finding information related to the history of medicine. www.mlanet.org/education/career.html (accessed 28 February 1999).
4. Internet Navigator. www.mlanet.org/education/cech/index.html (accessed 28 February 1999).