

Software Review: Acrobat 5.0 for Windows by Al Geia

Product Information

Adobe® Acrobat® 5.0 is a product of Adobe Systems Incorporated. Its retail price is \$249. Street prices as low as \$200 were seen soon after this version was released, however, a recent search using MySimon.com gave a lowest price of \$207.95 at buy.com.

The *Getting Started* manual states that the Adobe Acrobat 5.0 application is the essential tool for universal document exchange. The manual goes on to state that with Acrobat, you can convert virtually any document from any application to the compact, searchable Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF). Documents in Adobe PDF are said to preserve the exact look and content of the originals, complete with fonts and graphics. These PDF documents can be printed, distributed by e-mail, and shared and stored on the Web, an intranet, a file system, or a CD-ROM for other users to view on Microsoft Windows®, Mac® OS, and UNIX® platforms. Plus, collaboration is easy because you and others can add comments, approve documents with digital signatures, and more, all within a Web browser.

Introduction

Almost everyone who uses the Internet is familiar with using the free Acrobat Reader to read and print downloaded .PDF files. The exact look and content feature enables one to download and print a fileable 1040 tax form from the IRS site, for example. Acrobat files are compact, load quickly, and can be searched effectively and with good speed. Such competent performance, together with the Reader being free and so readily accessible, has undoubtedly contributed much to its popularity. This Acrobat feature that enables the creation of documents anyone can open, read and print is of principal interest to the Reviewer. Features that enable effective Workgroup production of documents, such as reviews, comments and approvals, will not be addressed in any detail in this review.

The Reviewer's interest in Acrobat stems from his current activity of producing archives of professional, family and personal materials that can be stored compactly, located and searched, retrieved effectively, and be shared with others. Of course, this mainly involves scanning. The Reviewer's scanner program is PaperPort Deluxe6.0, whose standard version was included with Visioneer scanners. Like Acrobat, PaperPort offers a free viewer that can be used to view and print its .MAX files. These .MAX files, like .PDF files, are highly compressed for efficient storage and transmission. The Reviewer has found PaperPort to be a generally wonderful program for his needs, unfortunately, .MAX files have some critical limitations for someone interested in sharing data with others:

- The vast majority of computer users don't have the free reader installed.
- E-mail services often strip these "suspicious" .MAX files from the message.
- A printer link to a MAX to .PDF conversion utility (Acrobat PDFwriter V3) had been installed in PaperPort. Printing to PDFwriter would only create the

first page of a multi-page document. To send someone a 22-page document required sending 22 separate files – not a convenience for the sender or reader.

- PaperPort .MAX file is graphical only, so that text cannot be directly copied from the file content.

Use of a full version of Acrobat was expected to resolve these problems.

Acrobat V4.0 was reviewed by Chuck Reisz in the June 2001 issue of the *PPCUG Gazette*. Much of the information given in that article also applies to V 5.0. So I will highlight differences as well as relate information on my particular application experiences.

Requirements

The Adobe Acrobat 5.0 application is available for Microsoft Windows, Mac OS, and UNIX. The Windows version reviewed is applicable to versions of Windows 95 (OSR 2.0), 98, ME, NT 4.0 (with Service Pack 5 or 6), 2000 and XP. A Pentium class processor, 32 MB of RAM (a minimum of 64 MB is recommended), 120 MB hard-disk space and a CD-ROM drive are the minimum requirements.

Installation

The review copy of Acrobat 5.0 was installed on a 400 MHz Pentium II PC, with 256 MB RAM installed and 831 MB of available hard-disk space. The operating system is Windows 98 (2nd Ed). Installation required less than 10 minutes, with a typical installation selected. Norton system doctor indicated that close to the specified 120 MB of hard-disk space was used, but later checks showed that all but about 40 MB of this was recovered after rebooting. The PC locked up after the initial reboot, but rebooting a second time cleared the problem. No further hang-ups have been noted as a result of Acrobat installation.

The installation placed Acrobat PDF application and Acrobat Distiller toolbar tabs in Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint windows. An Acrobat Distiller Printer was also installed in addition to the V3 Acrobat PDFwriter. The Acrobat Reader, V3, present before installation of Acrobat 5.0, was not replaced by the V5.0 Typical Installation. Icons for both Adobe Acrobat 5.0 and the Acrobat Distiller were placed on the PC Desktop.

Features

The most important feature is that the .PDF files created by the Acrobat 5.0 application can be opened by anyone with the free Acrobat Reader installed, and that's most every one. Acrobat files opened with the Reader look like the original (except, see the next section), and sections of text and graphics can be copied for pasting into other documents. Version 5.0 enhances workgroup features over those of previous versions, including the capability for capturing all reviewer comments in one file. Enhanced security features include 128-bit encryption. Acrobat files can be "repurposed," allowing them to be exported as "Rich Text Format" files, that can be imported into Microsoft Word and most other word processors with much of the original formatting preserved. For Microsoft

Word only, as in the case of V4.0, conversion to .PDF can be accomplished by clicking on the Acrobat button installed in the toolbar.

User comments found on-line lament (some heatedly) the elimination of the Capture feature said to exist in earlier versions of Acrobat. Apparently this feature would scan in and convert written material to editable text. Help indicates that you must now scan directly into Acrobat, then use an Adobe on-line service to convert the scanned image to text. There is a fee if the more than a few pages are converted during a given month. It is understood that Capture is also available as a separate, expensive program. The on-line service was not evaluated.

Application Experiences

The Reviewer will relate his experiences with using Acrobat in three cases:

- Using Reader with a large handbook on a CD
- Converting a 103 page Microsoft Word report to PDF, using the Acrobat Distiller application
- Converting single-page and multi-page PaperPort .MAX files (from scanned graphics and text) to Acrobat .PDF file format

Only one minor problem occurred in the above experiences.

The Reviewer occasionally consults for his former employer, and has been provided a CD copy of a Satellite Engineers Handbook that he co-authored (in Microsoft Word 97). The company's technical publications department produced the document in Acrobat format, using Acrobat Distiller 3.0 from the Power Macintosh. The resulting document consists of three large handbook volumes totaling over 1000 pages, plus two equally-large volumes of mechanical and electrical drawings, most of which are high definition copies of roll (J size) prints. A bookmark pane was created from the detailed Tables of Contents and lists of tables and illustrations. Clicking on any line of the lines of these (in the Bookmarks pane) takes you almost immediately to the start of the selected paragraph, table or figure. In creating the above-mentioned 103 page report, the writer copied some of the handbook text and figures, which were then successfully pasted into the Word document. This was a very satisfying experience (using the Version 3.0 of the Acrobat Reader that was installed on the Reviewer's PC at the time of this work – the same results are evident in using Acrobat 5.0).

The 103 page Word report was converted to an Acrobat Document, using Acrobat Distiller. After a few minutes, the text and graphics document was converted to a .PDF file. The paragraph headings appeared under the Bookmarks tab in a hierarchical format. Clicking on any Bookmark takes you to the appropriate paragraph. The only deviation in appearance from the original Word document occurred in two figures where colored, cross-hatched boxes (flags) were attached to flow-diagram blocks for identification. Instead of vertical, horizontal and 45-degree crosshatched areas, these flags appeared to have a faint Scotch Plaid appearance on my LCD monitor. It was not possible to reliably distinguish the type of crosshatching, which was intended to indicate status of the item of the block diagram to which the flag was attached. In an enlarged view of the flags, it was determined that crosshatching of the proper orientation was present, but the pattern of the

crosshatching had been made very fine. Due to the LCD screen "pixelization" (the fixed pattern of pixel rows and columns on the LCD screen, where some of the fine lines would illuminate one row or column of pixels while others would illuminate two rows or columns) the normal-size display, gave the appearance of a plaid rather than uniform cross-hatch pattern. It was not determined why the cross-hatch pattern size was changed, but it does serve to emphasize that any converted document must be examined critically to insure that the conversion is accurate (or, at least, acceptable).

An advantage of Acrobat was noted in the above two trials. Acrobat files open much more quickly than the original Word file, and navigation is enhanced by both the availability of bookmarks and speed of scrolling through very large documents.

Finally, conversions of multi-page Paperport .MAX files were performed. In the cases tried, conversions used both V5 Distiller and the V3 PDFwriter in conjunction with the PaperPort desktop. The .MAX file (PaperPort) icon was dragged to the Printer Link icon, which opened the printer window. The Distiller or PDF Writer was selected, rather than using the Default Ink-Jet printer. Conversion of a scanned 22-page document in a .MAX file format took about 1-minute using either Distiller or PDFwriter. The .PDF file size was 0.65 MB using Distiller. Although the same process yielded only the first page of the multi-page document using PDFwriter 3.0 before installing Acrobat 5.0, it now yielded all 22-pages (??? The PDFwriter properties window still shows as V3.0, since the V5.0 PDFwriter was not installed in the Typical installation.). The .PDF file created with PDF writer is 0.85MB, so Distiller was the more efficient in file compression. Both approaches produced Acrobat files essentially identical in appearance to the original scanned documents and the .MAX files as viewed in PaperPort (Help indicates that PDFwriter is quicker, but less capable than Distiller).

Several single-page files, including color photos, were converted to Acrobat .PDF files using Distiller. Results were excellent in all cases.

The experience with Acrobat was very positive, and the Reviewer looks forward to using and exploring it further in the future.

Documentation

A 19-page *Getting Started* printed manual and a guide to technical support are included. The primary user's manual is a 287-page Acrobat file. The Contents and Index sections are hot-keyed to the applicable page or paragraph. It seemed reasonably complete and easy to use, although I am no fan of not having hard-copy manuals.

Product Support

Registered purchasers of the full version of Acrobat are entitled to 90-days of technical support. Since the Reviewer does not own the product at the time of review, the product was not registered, and no attempt was made to use this service.