
ACROBAT FOR WINDOWS 2.0

An Overview

©1995 by *Jim Plumb*

From the makers of Postscript, comes **ACROBAT**, the product name given to the collection of Adobe applications that create and handle the Portable Document Format (PDF) files. PDF files are the next evolutionary step after Postscript and the first solid and sustained attempt at platform independent electronic documentation. The major problem with Postscript is that most people need a Postscript printer to view the file. The Portable Document Format could bring electronic documents to everyone on-line. To that end, Adobe is hyping **ACROBAT**, using the now old and tired expression - -the paperless office solution!

In truth, **ACROBAT** could well be the key ingredient to the paperless office. However, it's far more complex than that. We must first take a general look at the concept of PDF. PDF is a Postscript-based file format for representing documents, simple or complex, in a platform independent manner. The PDF file uses the Postscript language to describe not only the visual aspects of a document, but also additional document elements such as annotations, hypertext links, thumbnail views, and outlines. A product called the **ACROBAT READER** is available gratis for DOS, Windows, Mac and Unix platforms. It is used to view, navigate or print the PDF file quite independent of the creative application or platform. Any traditional document prepared using these tools can quickly produce electronic reports, newspapers, etc.
to be freely distributed to Macs, PCs, and Unix boxes.

Adobe's target audience is almost universal and includes the general office user, the desktop publisher, the global newspaper conglomerate and anyone who can read and use a computer . Hence the Reader product is being distributed free of charge on Compuserve (GO **ACROBAT**), Adobe's BBS (1-206-623-6984), ftp site (ftp.adobe.com), World Wide Web site (www.ftp.com) and will be popping up on a local electronic services near you. Additionally Adobe will send out a disk for a nominal price. The potential impact for on-line publishing is almost mind boggling!

PDF files are normally created from Postscript files using the Distiller product. Distiller is a Postscript Level 2 interpreter that outputs PDF files instead of a raster image for a printer. Through a combination of data compression and efficient font handling, the resulting PDF file is much smaller than the original postscript file -- often a tenth of the original size!

My first introduction to **ACROBAT** was when a co-worker showed me a PDF version of a document I had been working on. The original two megabyte postscript file (two colors, graphics, at least four font families, about thirty pages; created from a Unix-based composition program) was now much smaller. I viewed the PDF file on a Mac and started navigating through it with thumbnails and hypertext links, zooming in and out, and printing selected pages. It was the same color, used the right fonts, and the graphics were the exactly same, - but it didn't seem possible !

Compatibility

When I finally got my hands on the new **ACROBAT v. 2.0** products I gave them a workout in our heavy-duty composition department. We have every word-processing - typesetting product know to man - or just about. I've successfully distilled postscript from: Word Perfect, MS-Word, Quark XPress, Pagemaker, Framemaker, Ventura, Interleaf, and Xyvision. It didn't matter the version or platform. The only trouble I have ever had was with Quark. After I adjusted some options, we were off and running . I then tried printing all these files. The PDF files printed out the exactly as though they were being printed from the original application. One tricky problem that **ACROBAT** must deal with is fonts. That problem, more precisely, is how to view or print a document without the original fonts. The Postscript solution is to substitute Courier for non-resident fonts. The **ACROBAT** solution is to use Adobe Type Manager (the new version is included) to substitute a similar looking serif or sans serif font based on a set of serif and sans serif masters which Adobe includes with **ACROBAT**.

Another way to create a PDF file is using the PDFWriter. **ACROBAT** installs it as a Windows printer or a Mac *chooser* item. PDFWriter permits you to go straight from desktop application to PDF by passing the postscript file to the distiller . I would recommend using PDFWriter for text-only files because some desktop applications hand off low-resolution bitmaps of eps graphics. When viewing these kinds of PDFWriter graphics, there is some distortion. PDFWriter would be useful for producing early drafts, email, text files. I also noticed increased screen-draw times on PDF documents created with the PDFWriter. However, the PDFWriter is your only option if you don't have the distiller product.

What can you do with all these PDF files? There are several options! First, one must make the document easily navigable. One uses the Exchange product to add hypertext, bookmarks, outlines and internal and external links, thumbnails, notes and article threads. One thing I wished for was a way to highlight and add color to text links. You can make a visible box around the text but I prefer color. Exchange also gives you a useful level of page manipulation. One can crop pages to desired dimensions, rotate to desired orientation, insert additional pages, delete pages, replace pages and extract pages to make new PDF files.

Included in the **ACROBAT for Workgroups** package is the Catalog product for Windows only to be used to create indexes (technically, word databases) of one or more PDF files. **ACROBAT Exchange** uses its search function to find specific information in multiple PDF files, locally or distributed over a network. I had setup several directories with over fifty PDF documents. I created an index and used *Search* for a *Boolean* query, namely "show me all your documents containing the word blah AND blah blah." Within ten seconds I had a list of documents on the screen. I clicked on the first one and it opened up with the hits highlighted. Press a button and you are taken directly to the next hit which could have been on the next page or the next document on the list. **Catalog** is a powerful tool for any researcher and those with massive quantities of PDF files.

Products in version 2.0 line:

Reader: tool for viewing, navigating and printing PDF files.

Exchange: view and print PDF files as well as annotate, build navigational links into and security controls for PDF files. Allows custom plug-ins.

Catalog: (Windows only) creates full-text on-line indexes for collections of PDF files on local or network drives.

Distiller: converts Postscript language files into PDF files.

PDFWriter: print driver; print directly from application to PDF.

Hardware Requirements:

Windows: 386-DX plus; 4 megs ram; 486 recommended, 8 megs for Distiller.

Installation:

At least three meg of disk space is **required** for the *temp* directory . Although I had no problems with the installation, when I tried installing the software for testing purposes to a computer with only two meg of ram, the result was some unintelligible error message about "0003". Expect to get a "0003" error message if your *temp* is on a ram drive with less than 3 megs of ram. The Reader and Exchange will also insist upon installing new versions of Adobe Type Manager which are required.

Documentation:

Printed documentation is scarce. Included with **ACROBAT Pro** is a getting started book and a quick reference card. There is of course plenty of on-line help. Each of the **ACROBAT** components contains a complete on-line guide in PDF format. You can also use download technical notes from the Adobe BBS or CompuServe for additional help.

Tech Support:

I didn't need to use tech support often - for which I'm grateful! Technical services tend to be inconsistent. Sometimes I've gotten help immediately while at other times

I've been on hold so long, at my own expense, that I just gave up . Hopefully support services will improve with the Adobe/Aldus merger.

There are several support options.

Free support: an automated support line, a fax request line for technical bulletins and helpful info on all Adobe products, Adobe BBS and Adobe's CompuServe forum.

Pay for support options: A 900 number at \$2 per minute and a support credit system, You get one support credit free with every Adobe product you buy. Additional credits cost \$25. If the subject of your call turns out to be a bug, the credit is given back.

I found the best form of tech support, of the ones I tried, to be a combination of the fax support line and the **ACROBAT** forum on Compuserve (**GO ACROBAT**). Several knowledgeable people who seem to be pretty good at answering most technical queries.

Retail Pricing Info:

ACROBAT Reader 2.0: free from Adobe BBS and ftp site, and, except for connect time from CompuServe. Adobe will mail a disk for \$9.95 or a CD-ROM with all four Readers for \$14.95.

ACROBAT 2.0: contains Exchange, Search, PDFWriter and CD-ROM containing Readers for Mac, Windows, DOS and UNIX platforms (\$195).

ACROBAT 2.0 Pro: same as above plus Distiller (\$595).

ACROBAT 2.0 for Workgroups: same as **ACROBAT Pro**, plus Catalog and includes 10 licenses for **ACROBAT 2.0** on either Windows or Mac platform (\$1,595).

The CD-ROM includes bonus PDF files: the complete works of Shakespeare, U.S. historical documents, and many good examples of commercial uses of **ACROBAT**.

Upgrade prices are available from Adobe. They can be reached at 1-800-87ADOBE.

Conclusion:

Even though I really haven't touched upon the commercial or advanced uses of **ACROBAT**, I can recommend that anyone involved with the production or distribution of electronic or printed documents should seriously consider using Acrobat. The best way to look at the product is to download a Reader and look at some of the readily available Adobe sample PDF files. Individuals and corporations are also producing documents using Acrobat and those PDF files somehow find their way into the on-line world. I really don't believe the futuristic predictions of a completely paperless office. If I'm proved wrong, Adobe System's Acrobat for Windows has played a large role in showing me up as a seer with a cracked crystal ball.

Jim is a typesetter. He is currently system manager of composition/pre-press departments at a financial printer. He is running Suns, PCs, Macs, PowerPCs and has set up typesetting systems on everything from PC-XTs to IBM mainframes. He is threatening to ramp up to the Internet by year end! His career goal: To know everything there is to know about unix. Is it possible