The Three Flavors of Adobe Acrobat:
A Litigation Perspective

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Introduction

Adobe Systems offers three versions of its ubiquitous Acrobat Software: the free Reader, the $299 per license Standard version and the $449 per license Professional version.

Which version or combination of versions is right for your organization? If you're a litigator or litigation paralegal, the following article should help you decide. It summarizes the key features for trial team members found in each Acrobat flavor.

Adobe Reader

Adobe Systems has distributed over 500 million copies of the free Reader version of Acrobat as part of its successful effort to make the PDF format the de facto standard for electronic documents.

Once you've read about the features of Acrobat Standard and Professional below, it's likely you'll want to purchase one of these versions for selected individuals at your organization. However, the free Reader may be a fine solution for many users — in particular those who won't need to create or modify PDFs.

Here are the features of Reader that should be of greatest interest to trial team members:

Viewing & Printing

As its name suggests, Adobe Reader lets you view and print PDFs others have created.

All versions of Acrobat, including Reader, offer sophisticated printing options with which you may be unfamiliar. One example: Acrobat makes it easy to print multiple document pages on a single sheet of paper, similar to the condensed printing option offered by electronic transcript programs. To print two or more document pages per printed page, set the Page Scaling option on Acrobat's Print dialog box to Multiple Pages Per Sheet.

Searching

Searching is an Acrobat feature that's critical for trial teams and available in all versions, including Reader. Use Acrobat's Search feature to hunt through a single PDF or an entire collection of PDFs to locate all instances where a word or phrase appears. You'll find the Search option on Acrobat's View menu.

Please note that when paper documents are scanned to create PDFs, Optical Character Recognition (OCR) must be performed to add text to the PDFs, thereby making them searchable.

Full Screen Mode

All versions of Acrobat, including Reader, offer a Full Screen mode that transforms Acrobat into a simple presentation tool.

You'll find the Full Screen option on Acrobat's View menu. Once a PDF is displayed in Full Screen mode, the arrow keys on your keyboard can be used to navigate through document pages. When you're done presenting, press the ESC button to exit Full Screen mode.

Plug-In Support

Part of what has made Acrobat so successful is its support for "Plug-Ins" — product extensions developed by companies other than Adobe Systems. Plug-Ins are available for Bates numbering, redacting and other common litigation tasks.

Some Plug-Ins require a Standard or Professional version of Acrobat as the actions the Plug-ins perform modify PDFs. However, there are also many Plug-Ins that don't modify PDFs and can be used with the free Adobe Reader.

I apologize for this self-serving example of a Plug-In for Reader, but it's one with which I'm very familiar. CaseSoft's "Send to CaseMap" Plug-In for Acrobat works with all versions of Acrobat, including Reader. This Plug-in lets you cull critical passages from PDFs to instantly create new facts in our CaseMap case analysis program. One click on the fact in CaseMap reopens the PDF and takes you back to the page from which the fact was sent.

Acrobat Standard

Here are the six features in the Standard version of Acrobat that should be of greatest interest to litigators and litigation paralegals:

PDF Creation & Modification

The primary feature that makes Acrobat Standard worth $299 is its ability to create and modify PDFs in addition to viewing, printing, and searching them.

Optical Character Recognition

Acrobat Standard can perform Optical Character Recognition (OCR) on PDF files that contain images, but not text. Once OCR text has been added to the PDF, it can be searched for any word or phrase.

You'll find the Recognize Text Using OCR option on Acrobat's Document menu.

Commenting

Acrobat Standard makes it easy to add annotations to PDF documents using highlighters, sticky notes, callouts and a number of other commenting options.

You'll find mark up tools and also a special help topic titled "How to Comment & Mark Up" on Acrobat's Comments menu.

Did you know that Acrobat offers easy ways to review the comments associated with a PDF? Select the Show Comments List option on Acrobat's Comments menu to display a summary of the mark ups in a PDF. Select the Print with Comment Summary option on Acrobat's Comments menu to use one of four different methods for printing comments, e.g., Document and Comments with Connector Lines on Single Pages.

PDFing of Email

Beginning with Acrobat 7, the Standard version makes it a cinch to create PDFs of email in Microsoft Outlook. One click can PDF an entire Outlook folder containing thousands of emails.

When you PDF email, all attachments and links can be embedded in the PDF Acrobat creates. The resulting PDF automatically organizes emails by message dates, by authors' names and by subject. Bookmarks are created that make it easy to jump to an email of interest. What a great way to review email before producing it during discovery!

Web Capture

Acrobat Standard makes it easy to PDF web pages and even entire web sites – a very handy feature given the transient nature of web content.

When Acrobat Standard is installed, an Adobe PDF toolbar is added to your copy of Internet Explorer.

The Organizer

A final important tool in Acrobat Standard is the Organizer — a feature that was first introduced in Acrobat 7. The Organizer provides flexible ways of viewing the PDFs on your system. For example, the Organizer lets you view PDFs arranged by history — one click displays the PDFs you opened today, yesterday, in the last week, in the past two weeks, in the last 30 days or even in the past year.

You'll find the Organizer on Acrobat's File menu.

Acrobat Professional

Acrobat Professional offers the same features as the Standard version, plus many more. Of the numerous features unique to Acrobat Professional, the following three are particularly useful for trial team members and may well justify spending the extra $150 for a Professional license:

Batch Operations

Acrobat Professional supports batch processes, for example, batch printing and batch OCRing.

Batch OCRing is particularly handy when you receive a large number of PDFs that contain the images of discovery documents, but not the associated text. Acrobat Professional can OCR an entire folder of such PDFs in a single operation.

Indexing

Acrobat Professional can be used to create an index of the text in PDFs. Indexing PDFs dramatically enhances the speed of searches for words and phrases within them.

Without an index, searching across hundreds or thousands of PDF files can be quite slow. With an index, search results are virtually instantaneous.

Enabling Commenting by Users of Reader

A feature of Acrobat Professional, which first became available with Acrobat 7, is the ability to enable commenting by users of the free Adobe Reader.

Normally, Reader users cannot add comments to PDFs or participate in the document review process in any meaningful way. However, Acrobat Professional can be used to create PDFs that will activate commenting capabilities for users of Reader.

Learning More About Acrobat

Let me conclude by offering two ways to learn more about how Adobe Acrobat can be used to enhance your litigation practice:

We offer a series of no-charge online Acrobat tutorials at the CaseSoft Webinar Center. "Introduction to PDFs," "Acrobat 101," "Acrobat 201" and other Acrobat-related sessions are available 24/7 at www.casesoft.com/webinar.htm.

My white paper entitled "The Bell Curve and Document Indexing/Imaging" discusses the types of cases for which Acrobat is an appropriate document-imaging solution. Full disclosure: This article also describes how our CaseMap case analysis tool can be used to create a document index based on PDFs.

Nine case analysis white papers, including "The Bell Curve and Document Indexing/Imaging," are available for free at www.casesoft.com/articles.htm.

Thank you for reading "The Three Flavors of Adobe Acrobat." I'd appreciate any and all feedback on this article. Please write me at gkrehel@casesoft.com.

About the Author

Greg Krehel is CEO of CaseSoft. CaseSoft develops five software tools for trial teams, including CaseMap, its flagship case analysis product. CaseMap features tight integration with Adobe Acrobat and over 15 other litigation support tools. Additional information and full-featured trial versions are available at www.casesoft.com.

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