



## Adobe's Acrobat 3.0: Interchangeable Digital Document Made Simple and Cheap

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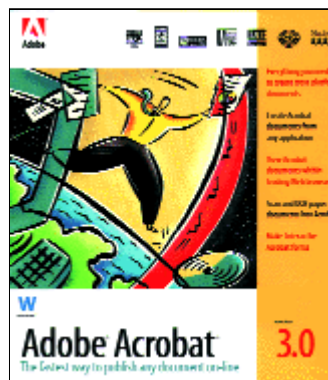
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The interchangeable digital document seems such a simple idea. The basic concept allows printing to a digital format from any application, so any user--whether he or she has the original application or not--can view the files as if they are the original printed version. Moreover, spreadsheets, word-processed documents, and other presentations can be combined into an integrated digital document. Text can be searched and cut and pasted into other documents, or hypertext navigation links can be created within and between digital documents.

With an eye on the simple idea of interchangeability, Adobe introduced Acrobat, with its native Portable Document Format (PDF), to offer digital documents cross-platform compatibility and compression. But as tantalizingly simple as the interchangeable digital document sounded, there were many shortcomings to this new breed of documents, not only in ability but in cost. Everyone had to use the same viewer, unless it was embedded in the document, and Adobe's viewer--Acrobat Reader--never was embedded: originally, anyone wanting to view an Acrobat document had to pay nearly \$50 for Reader. And Reader didn't offer the ability to produce digital documents; for that you had to shell out another \$200 for Adobe Acrobat Exchange. Yet another product, called Acrobat Distiller, could be purchased to convert batches of PostScript files into Adobe's PDF. And full-text searching was unavailable, inserting multimedia objects into digital documents was limited, and converting reams of paper documents to PDF was nigh impossible.

To rectify the problem of full-text searching, Adobe added a full-text client, called Search, and indexer, called Catalog, both licensed from Verity. The street price for Search was about \$600, with Catalog priced separately. CD-ROM publishers were allowed to use each purchased copy of Search for only one CD-ROM title, and CD-ROM users were warned not to use it for anything but that title. Later, Adobe added a scanner product called Capture, a paper-to-PDF conversion application which retailed for around \$2000.

Add up all the costs and you could easily spend thousands of dollars on this simple concept of the interchangeable digital document. But the market didn't want to pay such an extravagant price for such a simple concept, and Adobe went back to the drawing boards. The result, Acrobat 3.0, ships for a modest



### Adobe Acrobat 3.0

**Synopsis:** Adobe's version 3.0 of Acrobat combines the original program and former additional cost plug-ins, including Search, Catalog, and Capture, into a complete interchangeable digital document package for under \$300. The new version offers minor editing directly to Portable Document Format (PDF) files, a forms creation tool, and a robust search subsystem from Verity.

**Price:** Acrobat 3.0, \$295; upgrade prices range from free to \$59

#### Minimum Requirements:

Windows NT: 386 or faster, 24MB RAM  
 Windows 95 or 3.1: 386 or faster, 16MB RAM  
 Macintosh 680: System 7.0, 6MB RAM  
 Power Macintosh: System 7.0, 16MB RAM

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\$295 and builds that simple concept into a powerful document management tool. At this price, version 3.0 adds to the bargain several programs previously sold--and priced--separately, including updated document readers and conversion tools, and welcome new editing capabilities.

## THE ACROBAT 3.0 THREE-RING CIRCUS

Acrobat 3.0 is available in Macintosh, Windows, or Unix versions. The integrated set of 3.0 products comes on two CD-ROMs or optional diskettes, and includes several major updated and new features.

Among the updated features is the PDF viewer, Acrobat Reader, which now includes the full-text search client; WebLink, which links to Web site URLs; and a QuickTime player. The Acrobat PDFWriter is a printer driver for the quick production of PDF versions of simple business documents from any application's print command. The newest Acrobat Catalog is a full-text server which produces full-text indices of PDF document collections.

Another feature now included is Acrobat Distiller, the utility for converting one or more PostScript files to PDF. Distiller guarantees visually faithful renditions of what would be the printed originals, and allows the user control over font-embedding and compression schemes for graphics, which lets you balance file size against visual fidelity. Distiller comes with a companion called Distiller Assistant which will also let you monitor directories or folders for the arrival of new PostScript files. Distiller Assistant automatically creates PDF renditions as new files appear.

Acrobat Exchange is essentially Acrobat Reader plus the ability to annotate and make minor edits in PDF files and to create PDF forms, and it also lets you password-protect PDF files, create links, bookmarks, and page thumbnails, and embed movies and sound. Adobe has also embedded part of its Capture scanner product, a sort of Capture Lite, into Exchange. Using Acrobat Scan with a desktop scanner, you can convert paper documents to PDF Image-Only files. These files can then be converted to PDF using Exchange's optical character recognition (OCR) utility. The full version of Capture was slated for release in early 1997.

## MINOR EDIT, MAJOR DIFFERENCE

The biggest conceptual difference between 3.0 and earlier versions is the ability to make minor edits to Acrobat PDF files. Allowable edit changes within Exchange include character position, justification, color, font, and point size which makes it easier to correct small mistakes that you would otherwise have to return to the native application to do. You can also use Exchange's security feature to protect any PDF file from changes. Another feature is the ability to produce a new style of PDF which has the original scanned image and text hidden in a separate layer, which provides excellent archival storage while preserving the ability to find information in the file.

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The "dynamic document" goes beyond small edits, however, and a truly interactive electronic document can be created through Acrobat Exchange by building buttons and regions in your PDF file. These can perform a variety of multimedia operations, such as playing sound, and QuickTime or AVI movies, or executing a menu item. You can create links to other PDF files open in the same window, which eliminates the stacking of multiple windows in the user's display.

Acrobat is already becoming a *de facto* World Wide Web standard, and Adobe has capitalized on its online presence by agreements with the two leading browser vendors. You can now view PDF documents directly within Netscape Navigator 3.0 and Internet Explorer 3.0. Moreover, PDF can now be tailored for Web delivery. With progressive rendering, text fonts and images are displayed first, followed by links, then

images, so users can view PDF files on the Web immediately without waiting for the entire document to download. And documents, like the Web itself, can have links from your local storage to any URL. PDF documents can be embedded into HTML documents, and some Web search tools index PDF documents so that hits are highlighted within browsers.

Forms creation is also a new and powerful feature in Acrobat 3.0. After creating a form such as a table in an application such as a word processor or form tool, you can define field zones that will be active in PDF renditions. You can select appearance and other attributes for each field in the form, and you can specify forms data to be received from a host. This makes it possible to update a form and its appearance without having to resend the entire form. PDF forms are smarter and more efficient than corresponding HTML versions; for instance, your form fields can submit only the data, reducing file transmission time.

## SEARCH WARRANTS VERITY SYSTEM

The Verity Inc. search subsystem is still the most powerful and perhaps under-used feature of Acrobat. Index creation is quick and easy, with more than 2,000 pages indexed on a Zip drive in under five minutes on a 200MHz Pentium.

To search a collection, you must select its collection index, and if you've built collection indices by subject area, you can optionally search several indices at a time. With full Boolean and Verity search extensions there are many ways to find whatever is needed.

A built-in thesaurus in the search application lets you find synonyms, a "sounds like" function provides homonym searching, and word-stemming and case-matching round out the options. You can also search across PDF documents for attribute matches using PDF built-in attribute fields, such as "Subject," or combine these with full-text document searches. The ability to save results of Web searches for offline perusal is another use of Search and Acrobat which alone makes the product worth its purchase price.

## IMAGINING ACROBAT 4: WHAT MORE COULD YOU ASK FOR?

Adobe Acrobat 3.0 leaves little to mention on the next-version wish list, but there are some luxuries that can be integrated into subsequent suites, which are currently only available as plug-ins at a slight extra cost. It would be nice if the search system would allow you to save and even combine your favorite search queries. Although you can cut and paste queries you may have typed into another Windows application, you cannot save queries you've modified or created from scratch in the Search panel. And it would also be nice if the search system would permit users to index heterogeneous collections of binary formats, such as Word, WordPerfect, and ASCII, in addition to PDF.

Users could also benefit from the ability to search for numerics in form fields as numbers, applying arithmetic operators such as greater than or less than. Currently all searches in Search are confined to characters, numbers, and combinations of the two. Separate search products from Verity and Softscape are available to perform all these luxuries, with prices as low as \$79. Still, if you want the full power of a Verity search system that used to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, you'll only have to spend less than one hundred dollars over the base price of Acrobat.

Given how much Adobe has packed into version 3.0, who knows what future versions may bring. Now that the simple basics of interchangeable digital documentation are cheap and easy to use, maybe even a luxury like extended searching will be available in the future.

### Companies Mentioned in This Article

#### Softscape, Inc.

4 Minot Avenue, Acton, MA 01720, 508/266-1921; Fax 508/266-0476; <http://www.softscape.com>

#### Verity, Inc.

894 Ross Drive, Sunnyvale, CA 94089; 408/541-1500; Fax 408/541-1600; <http://www.verity.com>

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