Portable Document Format (PDF)

A Brief History of PDFs

In the Beginning

o John Warnock, founder of Adobe and co-creator of PostScript, early on had a vision of a paperless office.

- This vision even dates back to Xerox PARC and the computer systems that inspired Steve Jobs and his Macintosh project.

- "Imagine being able to send full text and graphics documents (newspapers, magazine articles, technical manuals etc.) over electronic mail distribution networks. These documents could be viewed on any machine and any selected document could be printed locally. This capability would truly change the way information is managed." — John Warnock

o Worked to develop a version of PostScript that could be viewed easily on-screen and be portable across computing environments.

o The result was the **Portable Document Format**—aka the PDF.

- PDF is heavily based on PostScript.

- Mac OS X's imaging model (both for on-screen graphics and printing) has deep roots in PDF.

o In-depth history: https://www.prepressure.com/pdf/basics/history

Brief Version History

• 1993	PDF 1.0	Acrobat 1.0
• 1999	PDF 1.3	Acrobat 4.0
• 2001	PDF/X-1a 2001	Acrobat 5.0
	PDF 1.4 (Transparency support introduced)	
• 2003	PDF 1.5	Acrobat 6.0
• 2005	PDF 1.6	Acrobat 7.0
• 2006	PDF 1.7 (is the basis for the ISO 320000 spec)	Acrobat 8.0
• 2008	ISO 320000, Adobe Base Version 1.7 and ExtensionLevel 3	Acrobat 9.0
• 2017	PDF 2.0 (ISO 320000-2)	TBA

Primary Features

Platform-independent
o Can be viewed on any platform that supports the free Adobe Reader.

o Document appears the same across platforms

Self-contained
o All document components are contained in a single file, including fonts, linked graphics and text, and layout information.

o Combines vector, raster, and text into a single document

Viewing PDFs is free

Can be created from almost any application (via the Print dialog box on the Mac, for example).

Is becoming the standard for placement into other applications
   o Many prepress housed have gone to a PDF-based workflow.

Excellent as an archival format—should be viewable for decades to come.

Other Features and Drawbacks

Secondary Features
o Professional version supports editing and extensive preflighting tools.

o Excellent for presentations, including support for full-screen viewing.

o Supports internal bookmarks and external hyperlinks.

o Can be password protected, and set to not be printable and non-editable.

o Supports commenting and annotations using Acrobat Pro DC.

o Support forms and form data submission.

o Includes excellent apps on mobile devices

Drawbacks
o Once in PDF format, can be very difficult to edit.

o Not supported in older applications or workflows.

o Good PDF creation software on Windows.

o Not as flexible as EPS or TIFF files for placement into InDesign.