

BUSINESS & CAREERS

Adobe Acrobat tips for lawyers

If people who share documents recognize Adobe Acrobat for anything, it's the ability to preserve the look of their documents across different computers by converting them into portable document format (PDF) files.

Since the early 1990s, when Acrobat debuted, the PDF format has become so important that other companies have created and distributed their own PDF readers and creators. Apple Inc. went so far as to embed PDF creation in the Print dialog of any software that allows printing on the Mac and enable PDF viewing and annotation via its Preview software.

To keep ahead of the pack, Adobe continues to improve the software that started it all. This fall, Adobe unveils its latest offering, Acrobat X.

The first thing you'll notice when you open a PDF in Acrobat X is a simplified interface consisting of: a basic toolbar up top; four icons to the left of the document; and three "pane" options to the right: Tools, Comment and Share.

(Whether you like the look or not is your opinion, but Adobe claims they redesigned what you see using results from their user experience program. People can opt in to this program when they first install Acrobat. If they do, it sends Adobe information on how they actually use the product, which Adobe uses in design.)

Acrobat is a staple in many law offices for several reasons, not the least of which is document redaction, used to hide sensitive information and strip metadata



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from documents.

Adobe now provides redaction tools under the "Protection" tab in the tools pane. Once you redact the obvious, Acrobat asks if you want to find and redact hidden information (metadata, annotations, attachments, form fields, layers, and bookmarks) and quickly sanitize (Adobe's word) the document.

Redactors can now set fill colour and opacity for redaction marks. Marks can be made translucent so they show what's marked for redaction up until the moment of redaction.

Acrobat X can partially redact data that has a similar structure (like social insurance numbers), in the same way that sales receipts omit all but four digits of a credit card number so people can verify that the charge is indeed theirs.

One feature certain to interest anybody engaged in discovery: Acrobat can save documents with search terms highlighted. Texts can be exported to Word or Excel documents, as well as another PDF. The Excel export saves some text around each occurrence to give readers a quick sense of the context.

PDF portfolios can contain files of various types, which means you can share one portfolio instead of multiple

separate documents related to a matter. A wizard reduces the portfolio creation process to three steps and gives creators the ability to apply layouts, themes, colours, headers, even logos, to reflect a firm's brand.

When viewing a portfolio, people see thumbnails of the documents it contains and can preview each document's contents.

If those portfolios, or other documents, grow too large for email, Adobe offers its SendNow service under the "Share" pane. You need to register for the service, but Adobe thoughtfully offers a registration link during your SendNow process. SendNow ships files up to 100 MB in size.

Acrobat lets people access documents from SharePoint servers, a key feature to increasingly document-management-conscious lawyers.

Other features new to Acrobat X might intrigue lawyers. For instance, you can create Actions (similar to Microsoft Office macros), sequences of tasks performed by triggering a given action. Actions semi-automate common tasks with the goal of saving time spent doing said tasks. Acrobat ships with seven premade actions, of which "Archive Paper Documents" and "Publish Sensitive Documents" merit a look. Users can adapt premade actions to their specific needs.

A document comparison tool lets the user check for any differences between two versions of the same PDF. Acrobat creates a list of any differences it finds.

Adobe also beefed up the free Adobe Reader to enable shared reviews, form filling, digital signing and approval of PDFs. It will also connect to SharePoint servers and handle Portfolios and multimedia. Other PDF readers and generators might not be able to do these things so, if in doubt, open PDFs with Acrobat Reader X.

Reader X is available for mobile devices that run Google Android, Windows Phone 7 and BlackBerry Tablet OS. There's no iOS version tailored to Apple

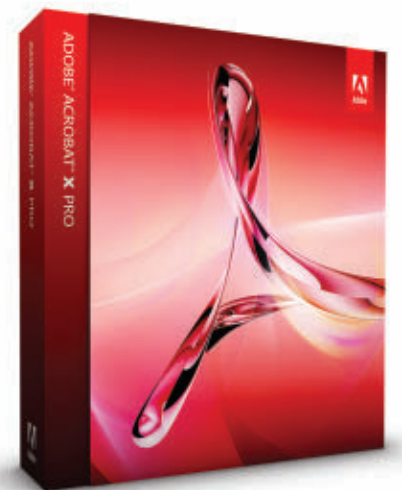


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iPhones, iPads or iPod Touches, perhaps because PDFs can now contain elements that depend on Flash, another Adobe product that Apple does not support in iOS. This isn't a huge limitation, though: iOS-powered devices already read ordinary PDFs.

The popularity of PDFs has caused security headaches ever since hackers figured out how to pack PDFs with malware. That's why the arrival of Reader X will mollify security experts. It will feature a "protected mode" (or "sandbox") to prevent malware rigged into PDFs from wreaking havoc on people's computers.

Adobe released several versions of Acrobat X. There's Standard, then Pro, and then a new Acrobat X Suite (and, of course, the free Reader). Suite starts with Pro and adds a slew of high-end Adobe products like Photoshop® CS5, Presenter 7, Captivate® 5, Media Encoder CS5 and LiveCycle® Designer ES2.

Suite is quite a step up from Pro in terms of both features and price. It might be worthwhile for advanced document creation "technicians" or firms that employ creative specialists, but it would be overkill for many lawyers.

Acrobat X Pro seems to be in the lawyer's sweet spot. Among other things, Pro allows for audio and video insertion, document comparison and Portfolio creation, things that the Standard version lacks. ■

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