

Business & Careers

Out with wet ink, in with Acrobat DC



Luigi Benetton
Hi-Tech

Hiding at the back of the room during an April seminar, I checked e-mail on my iPad. A prospective client had sent me an NDA to sign and date. I opened this Word document using Adobe's recently released Acrobat Document Cloud (DC), converted it to a PDF, signed and dated it using a stylus and the companion Fill & Sign app, and sent it back. Elapsed time: three minutes.

Mike Dillon will chuckle when he reads this.

"This is my fourth stint as general counsel of a company," says the senior vice-president at Adobe Systems Inc. "At every other place I've worked, I used to get stacks of papers every week that I would sign using wet ink. In the first three months of this year, I've signed one 'wet ink' document at Adobe."

DC mobile apps most readily show Adobe's vision of enhancing document workflows. For instance, people photograph documents using mobile devices to create digital copies. Those copies often suffer from uneven lighting, slanted perspective, even the wrong orientation, so the company poured some Photoshop know-how into DC to help people turn those photos into usable PDFs. Enhancement technology includes automatic text improvement, background noise

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Mike Dillon
Adobe Systems Inc.

and shadow removal, and the ability to "straighten" documents and fix perspectives.

Chris French, senior product manager, Acrobat solutions for Adobe, adds that the Photoshop magic extends to DC's enhanced OCR capabilities. The edit tool examines visual representations of the fonts "and it creates glyphs of all the fonts on the page so that if I change some content, the changes look similar to other fonts on the page," French says. Those glyphs match the imperfections of scanned fonts so the changes don't look obvious, and editors aren't obliged to dig up the original to make edits. (French is quick to tout security measures people can add to PDFs to prevent such changes.)

As with many other software packages, people can customize DC's interface to show the tools they use most often. Adobe takes this design-your-own-workspace tactic fur-

ther by enabling people to choose their preferred tools from an "app store" interface equipped with a search tool, and preserving the chosen tool set across all devices on which people work with Acrobat

This second convenience is part of MobileLink, Adobe's method of synchronizing a DC licensee's workspace across devices. The simple, attractive design works well on laptop, tablet and mobile phone screens, and the consistency makes it easy to switch from one screen to another.

In addition to keeping tool sets consistent from computer to tablet to phone, MobileLink loads recently-accessed documents, documents left open at the spot where users stop working on them, licensee signatures, and strings of text previously used to complete forms

Acrobat DC recognizes fields based on nearby labels (e.g. "name," "date," "address," "signature"). Once Acrobat scans a document, it guesses at the contents of fields it finds based on labels located nearby, and automatically fills them in. Users can correct Adobe's guesses when necessary.

When document workflows involve several

people (for annotations, review, signatures and so forth), DC gives document owners the ability to e-mail links to documents stored in the cloud. Those links replace e-mail attachments, and the documents appear in web browsers where parties can sign or annotate as needed. (Cue sighs of relief from e-discovery experts coast to coast.) Recipients can also use the free Adobe Reader software to sign and annotate PDFs.

Document owners can use DC to route PDFs to various people and track the document's progress so they can respond more quickly to workflow bottlenecks when required.

"Many lawyers are still reluctant to accept anything but a wet ink signature," Dillon notes. "I like to point out that a wet signature can be faked. With this new technology, there's more evidence of a signature being authentic. You know when something was sent to somebody, you know when it was opened, you know when it was returned, you know when they applied an e-signature."

Document Cloud connects to Adobe's Marketing Cloud and Creative Cloud. It also

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Business & Careers

Process: Be open, honest with internal candidate

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company evolves over time and the bar is raised on performance," he says. "The growth of the company has essentially outgrown people in the company. That's why you would go external." He did stress, though, that it's important internal and external candidates are put under the same scrutiny in the hiring process.

Of course, there are dangers with turning too often to external hires. A firm risks demoralizing the workforce and being saddled with a high turnover rate, says Croucher.

"It's a pretty delicate balance," says Abbott, whose firm tries to start with an articling student or a summer student who can rise through the ranks and is "trained the way we want them."

It's also important to guard against creating an expectation of an internal promotion, says Abbott. You don't want lawyers to simply think if they put in a certain amount

of time, they're guaranteed to make partner. "They've got to work for it," he says, like the lawyer at his firm who leaped ahead of two colleagues because of diligent toil.

If a company does decide to go with an external hire, firms would be wise to have specific conversations with internal candidates who lost out on the job so they might understand the reasons why.

"I think the worst thing a company can do is not be transparent," said Rodney. Don't pay lip service with empty justifications like the firm needed someone to remain in their existing role, or couldn't backfill, he warns.

"What a firm needs to do to sustain morale is explain in objective terms why a person from the outside was elected over a person inside," he says.

And then lay out a plan that will help the employee grow and develop so that next time, he or she will be well positioned to earn the promotion.

Adobe: Desktop version offers more than mobile

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ships with a connector for Microsoft SharePoint. Adobe plans to release other connectors as well as an application programming interface (API) that developers can use to connect DC to their systems.

Many DC features integrate the desktop-based Acrobat with cloud computing which, in legal circles, causes concern. Productivity enhancements aside, Canadian lawyers might not look past the U.S.-based servers that host Document Cloud.

French wants to reassure Canadian attorneys that Adobe is aware of their cloud computing concerns. "We hope to have data centres in other countries online before the end of the year," he says. He doesn't yet know which regions will get servers first.

"We have two other very large cloud service businesses and we face the same constraints with those," Dillon says, adding that dealing with those constraints is part of the company's "natural road map."

The mobile DC tools live up to expectations, though they are limited compared to the desktop. Tasks like enhancing scans, for instance, can only be done on the desktop. The desktop is also the only place where a licensee can set the tool set.

I used the desktop app to embed a video in an existing PDF. Playback happens on my Mac but all I got on the iPad and iPhone versions of Acrobat was an image of the video—no playback. Adobe experts explained that DC relies on media players installed on devices used to access PDFs. It's a puzzling oversight given how amazingly consistent Adobe made the desktop and mobile Acrobat experiences.

Adobe offers DC Standard and Pro as single "perpetual" licences that authorize the software on two devices. To get either on an unlimited number of devices, users can opt for the cloud subscription service. The subscription service also enables more features than the perpetual licence.

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