



PDF INTRODUCTION: The State of Affairs at SRJC as of 2001-12-01

The Institutional Accreditation Self-Study document collection is now part of the SRJC CWIS. The PDFs are indexed and seachable.

In this report, we examine Adobe PDF and its use by Santa Rosa Junior College Departments. PDF is a virtually universal document and graphics file exchange format that can also offer such desirable features as security and interactivity. We believe PDF is ideally suited to SRJC, an organization with a large computer infrastructure that includes many different platforms and applications. (An application is a program designed for office or home use, such as Microsoft Word).

However, while there is some laudable use of PDF at SRJC, we find that the format is underused. We find several reasons for this; one of them is simply a lack of knowledge about Adobe PDF. Therefore, we recommend the creation of an informational Web Site about PDF. Our hope is that the more the staff at SRJC knows about PDF, the more likely they will be to use it

Overview of Adobe PDF

Before we continue, we think it best to give a brief overview of Adobe PDF and state why we believe it is a useful tool for SRJC Departments, Management and staff.

PDF is an acronym for Portable Document Format. Developed in 1991 by Adobe Systems, it “is a universal file format that preserves all the fonts, formatting, graphics, and color of any source document, regardless of the application and platform used to create it. Adobe PDF files are compact and can be shared, viewed, navigated, and printed exactly as intended by anyone with free Adobe Acrobat Reader software” (McKinley, par. 3, [Adobe Acrobat 5.0](#) 8). For example, someone can create a document in Microsoft Word on a PC, convert it to PDF, and send it online to Macintosh user who does not have Word. As long as he or she has Adobe Acrobat Reader, the Mac user can view the file exactly as it was created on the PC.

The process, or workflow, as it is called in PDF literature, is always the same. The user creates a text or graphics file in a program such as Word or PageMaker. Then, using an Adobe application, he or she converts the original file to PDF and transmits it, usually online. The recipient then opens the file in a program designed to read PDF.

Research on the corporate Web site shows that Adobe Systems has two categories of applications for working with PDF files: those used for conversion and editing and those for reading. Acrobat Distiller is the most common conversion program, Acrobat Reader the most common reading program. Adobe also has a suite of programs for converting, editing, and reading PDF files. This is Adobe Acrobat 5.0, sometimes simply called “Acrobat.” The table from Adobe on page 2

summarizes the features of Acrobat 5.0 and Acrobat Reader, the two most common applications.

	Acrobat Reader 5.0	Acrobat 5.0
• View and print Adobe PDF files	✓	✓
• Fill in and submit Adobe PDF forms	✓	✓
• Save Adobe PDF forms on your hard drive		✓
• Apply e-signatures to Adobe PDF forms for approval		✓
• Spell-check Adobe PDF forms		✓
• Secure documents to prevent changes, or add a password		✓
• Easily convert any document to Adobe PDF, including Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Power Point) documents		✓
• Create dynamic, intelligent, interactive Adobe PDF forms		✓
• Create reflowable, tagged Adobe PDF files for viewing with Acrobat Reader for handheld devices		✓
• Add sticky notes and other electronic comments within your Web browser		✓
• Convert Web pages to Adobe PDF files with all links intact for offline viewing		✓

The Adobe Web site gives information on other PDF applications that are not included in Acrobat 5.0. Some other Adobe PDF programs are: Distiller Server and Capture. The first is for network use, the second for print sources. As Adobe increases the uses for PDF, they publish more applications.

As the PlanetPDF Web sites points out, many third-party software companies make plug-ins for Adobe PDF, as well as their own alternative programs for the format. A third-party company is one other than the original manufacturer for a product; in this case, any company outside of Adobe. A plug-in is a small program that enhances an existing, larger application. For example, plug-ins for Acrobat 5.0 can add features to security and color management. Alternative PDF reading and editing programs are among the applications offered by third-party vendors.

Benefits of PDF for Santa Rosa Junior College

Adobe PDF provides a way to exchange text and graphics files from a very wide range of software applications and across many computer platforms. For SRJC Department staff who use a variety of programs and PC's and Mac's this is a great advantage. Even the most obscure, superannuated Mac or PC can at least run Acrobat Reader.

Although originally developed to exchange text and graphics e-documents online, PDF can now work with a variety of media and work environments. The increased variety makes PDF even more desirable in an Academic environment that can also include printing, graphics, and Web sites. It can work with the following:

- Word processing programs.
- Graphics programs.
- HTML files from the Web.
- CD-ROM.
- Paper documents.
- Professional printing.

Up-to-date information is vital to any organization. Using Acrobat 5.0, SRJC staff can create data and information-gathering forms. The recipient fills in the PDF form online and the information can be fed into a database. Acrobat provides security features so that access to forms and information can be controlled.

These are some of the reasons we believe that SRJC would benefit from increased PDF use.

RESEARCH METHODS

We used several types of research of this report. One is research about the use of Adobe PDF at SRJC that comes from our interviews with some staff members at the College. The other is information about Adobe PDF that comes from online sources, books, and actual use of Acrobat 5.0.

Our interviews with SRJC staff reveal both some interesting uses of PDF at the College and some of the reasons why the format is not more widely used. We use online sources to gather information about Adobe PDF itself. We list the more useful Web sites and books in Appendix X.

Finally, we drew on our own experience with Acrobat 5.0. Experience working on PDF files in Acrobat gives a definition to the words and terms of PDF and Adobe Acrobat that no mere reading can supply.

ADOBE PDF AT SANTA ROSA JUNIOR COLLEGE

This section covers the results of our interviews with SRJC staff. First we note some of those who are already using PDF in order to give them recognition and to inspire others to use the format. Then we present some of the reasons why people at SRJC do not use PDF and respond to these objections.

Adobe PDF use at SRJC

In our interviews, we found several people at Santa Rosa Junior College who are already putting the PDF format to good use.

- Dr. Xuan Ho, instructor and program director of Radiation Technology at STJC, uses Word and PDF to distribute documents. Once, he used PDF to send, receive, and annotate course material from a hospitalized student (Ho).
- Courtney Anderson, a teacher in the Department of Chemistry at SRJC, uses PDF to inform the Department Web site, to post his academic calendar and seminar schedule, and to inform his fellows of contract negotiations. Dr. Dennis Fujita assists him in these projects (Anderson).
- Dr. Kerry Campbell-Price, SRJC Manager for Public Information and Community, publishes *Insider*, her weekly staff newsletter, in PDF format (Campbell-Price). (<http://www.santarosa.edu/insider>)
- Maria Gaitan, Academic Affairs Administrative Secretary, uses Acrobat 5.0 to convert the PageMaker documents she creates into PDF. She uploads the converted documents to the SRJC public server where become part of the Campus Wide Information Services. Ken Fiori, the Director of Computing Services, supports her in this task (Gaitan). (<http://www.santarosa.edu>) Institutional Documents.

Peg Saragina, □
 BOT Chair, is □
 using PDF report □
 document □
 templates as part □
 of her WebCT □
 course, □
 Introduction to the □
 Legal Office.

- Julia Bomhoefer is a technical writer for SRJC Computing Services. She uses Acrobat 5.0 and FrameMaker to produce instruction and technical documentation for print and the Web.(Bomhoefer). She is our TechWriter award winner.

Objections to PDF

Unfortunately, PDF is not as widely used at the College as we would wish. In the course of our interviews, we found some of the reasons for this, and we answer these objections in the Response section.

- The Acrobat 5.0 suite of programs is expensive; the street price is \$249 a copy.
- Unless there is a department-level and campus-wide effort to adopt the PDF standard, it makes little sense for an individual staff member to use PDF as a medium of document exchange.
- IT personnel see PDF as just another application to learn and support. They already have more than enough work.
- PDF downloads slowly. Exchanging long documents in the format would cause a bottleneck in parts of the campus network.
- Many consider PDF a “techie” application that is not suited for the use of those who need to transfer documents easily and quickly. Only those who have an extensive understanding of computer technology can learn to use it well.
- Outside of Adobe workshops and expensive private classes, there is no onsite Acrobat training available.
- Adobe Acrobat documentation is confusing. There are many components to Acrobat and often little clear explanation of them in Adobe documentation and in online sources. One result is that some at the JC believe that the ubiquitous Acrobat Reader is the same as Acrobat 5.0.

Since the beginning of the Spring Semester, 2002 interest, use and training has be significantly increased.

RESPONSE

When we examine these reasons for not using Acrobat PDF, we find that most of them are not as daunting as they look at first. We respond to them in the order listed above.

- The cost objection to Acrobat is not valid. While the street price is \$249, any SRJC student or employee can buy the Education version of Acrobat 5.0 for

\$59.95 through the bookstore. This version is exactly the same as the standard. The Education version owner can also register the software with Adobe in order to get technical support and upgrades.

More important to a campus wide implementation of PDF is the price of the site license. It is only \$30. Therefore, the cost to license Acrobat for SRJC is virtually nothing.

Spring 2002
 PDA
 and Adobe Day
 at CIS
 are additional
 exposure
 opportunities for
 PDF and Acrobat

- The objection that there is no Department level effort to use PDF has some merit. Departmental decision-makers certainly have many issues to deal with and e-document exchange may not be the most important.

However, some at the departmental level already encourage the use of PDF. Ken Fiori, Director of Computing Services, supports PDF. Julia Baumhoefer, the technical writer for Computing Services includes Acrobat 5.0 in the workflow to produce online and print documents. Cindi Reese, Chair of the Computer Information Science Department, recognizes the need for PDF and has recently added a class in Adobe Acrobat (Bomhoefer, Reese).

- It is true that IT personnel would have to spend time to learn to support a new software package. However, PDF simplifies their work. Instead of having to solve problems caused by the incompatibility of many different applications and platforms, IT people could support one common exchange application, Adobe PDF.
- Large PDF files can have a long download time for the home user, especially when using a standard telephone line connection to the Internet. The Junior College has an Ethernet based LAN that runs on T1 lines. PDF users at the College should have little problem with download time.
- Adobe Acrobat and its components are no more “techie” or difficult to learn than another Desktop publishing application. The actual conversion of the files to PDF format is completely transparent to the user. And, once the source files are in PDF, the tasks in Acrobat 5.0 that face the user are the same as he or she would deal with in any desktop or word processing application: character and paragraph formatting, placing graphics, and importing files
- The objection that there is no readily available training in Adobe PDF is no longer valid. Starting in the Spring 2002 Semester, SRJC will offer Introduction to Adobe Acrobat, CIS 173.21A. The online Course Outline for this class indicates a comprehensive coverage of Acrobat 5.0 features (Reese).

Many potential PDF users at the College do not need this level of expertise. Acrobat Reader is sufficient for viewing and navigating documents and for filling in forms. Only a few minutes are needed to learn the basics of Reader.

- The statement that the documentation and literature about Adobe PDF can be confusing has some merit. The word “Acrobat” can mean the Acrobat 5.0 suite, or any one of the many Adobe PDF applications. The designation of PDF applications is not set. For example, we find Adobe Acrobat Reader, Acrobat Reader, and Reader used to designate the same program. Acrobat used to be called Exchange, and this term is still sometimes appears in PDF literature. Adobe often comes out with new PDF applications, such as Capture, that we find out about only incidentally in the course of research.

The Adobe System Web site does a reasonable job in presenting its numerous PDF applications. The well-named Adobe Acrobat 5 Bible contains a clear and comprehensive treatment of PDF programs. Using these two sources, a PDF user should be able to sort out the documentation problem.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

We believe that the objections to using PDF are based on a lack of information. If SRJC staff had more knowledge of PDF, they would not make the above objections. If they had enough information, they could make an informed decision. Information about PDF is the key to the growth of the format at SRJC.

Therefore, we want to establish a Web site that will be a portal for PDF information for the Santa Rosa Junior College Staff. It will contain information about PDF and list sources, such as books and Web sites, where staff members can find more information. It will feature work of people at the College who are using PDF. In addition, we would like to feature a newsletter on the site to inform the staff of any changes in the PDF world at large and at Santa Rosa Junior College.