

## Cheaper Ways to Create PDF Documents

Joel P. Bruckenstein | 11-15-02

Adobe Acrobat is a wonderful product. Its core feature is the ability to convert a wide range of file types such as Microsoft Word documents and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets into a portable document format (PDF).

For those of you unfamiliar with PDF, it is an almost universal file format that allows you to preserve a document's formatting, regardless of the program used to create it. It can then be viewed and printed by others, regardless of their computer's operating system, as long as the person receiving the file has Adobe Acrobat Reader (available free from [Adobe](#)).

Adobe Acrobat 5.0, which costs \$249, also allows you to:

- Exchange comments using powerful review tools including sticky notes, a highlighter pen, touch-up tools and more.
- Set up Acrobat with a server to allow multiple reviewers to respond simultaneously online.
- Compile review comments and sort them by author, date, type, or page number, all within your Web browser.
- Approve PDF documents by adding digital signatures.

The functionality of Acrobat can be expanded with additional Adobe products, such as Adobe Acrobat Capture 3.0, which is capable of converting paper documents into searchable PDF files for electronic distribution and archiving.

Based on the feedback I've been receiving lately, some readers think they do not need all of Acrobat's capabilities. Those who have written me value the ability to convert a file to PDF format, so it can be shared with clients or colleagues, but they'd rather not pay for additional features they never use. A few of these enterprising readers have suggested less expensive, alternative programs capable of writing PDF files. Others have written me asking for my suggestions.

According to Kevin Day, of Trumpet, Inc., a technology consulting firm specializing in serving the needs of financial advisors, if all you need is the ability to create PDF files, go with the cheapest product that does the job.

Reader Ira Artman recommends [pdf995](#), which he described as "a rudimentary, but serviceable, PDF writer." If you only have an occasional need to generate a PDF file, and you can tolerate an ad each time you launch the program, pdf995 is as cheap as it gets: It's free. For a very reasonable \$9.95, a registered, ad-free version can be purchased. Pdf995 suite, available for \$19.95, adds functionality such as the ability to automatically attach PDF files to e-mail messages, create bookmarks and links, combine PDF documents, encrypt files, and add digital signatures.

Reader Morris Armstrong recently asked me about [Zeon DocuCom PDF Creator](#). [ScanSoft](#) markets this \$49.95 product, produced by a Taiwanese firm. ScanSoft says that it has tested the product and that it works as promised. The advantage of buying through ScanSoft is that you receive a 60-day money-

back guarantee from an established U.S.-based company.

Based on what we've seen and heard, Zeon DocuCom PDF creator sounds like a reasonable choice. The only minor annoyance Day and I could find is the way the program handles e-mail. If you want to e-mail PDF files you have created, while storing a copy on your hard drive, it's a two-step process: First create and save the file, then launch your e-mail program and attach the file.

**Win2PDF Pro** from Dane Prairie Systems, is Day's top recommendation as an Adobe Acrobat substitute for cost-conscious financial professionals. At \$69, it costs a bit more than the other programs, but it is the most capable of the programs we looked at. In addition to basic PDF creation, it can automatically insert hyperlinks, create and e-mail PDF files in one step, encrypt files, set permissions (for copying, printing, modifying), and create a document summary.

There are many other programs out there that allow you to create, manipulate, and read PDF files. Two good sources of information are **PDF Zone** and **PlanetPDF**.

In summary, if you find yourself regularly creating and manipulating PDF files, Adobe Acrobat is a good investment. Casual users looking for a cheaper, alternative PDF writer should examine their needs and then purchase the least expensive program that provides the features they need.

If sending encrypted files to clients is not an issue, pdf995 might do the trick. Zeon DocuCom PDF Creator appears to be a solid product, and ScanSoft customers are eligible for a 60-day money-back guarantee. Those who often create, encrypt, and e-mail PDF files should opt to Win2PDF.

### **Easy Back-ups to External Hard Drives**

I've never met a computer user who doubts the value of frequent back-ups, yet far too many people confess that they do not back up as often as they should. The reason seems obvious to me: Backing up information is more tedious and time consuming than it should be, so users procrastinate.

Apparently, technology companies are finally getting the message. The latest convert is **Maxtor**, one of the world's largest suppliers of hard-drive storage products. Maxtor's new Personal Storage 5000 series of external hard drives feature Maxtor OneTouch back-up. Simply push a button on the front of the drive, and the Retrospect Backup Express software, included with the drive, backs up your hard-drive partition. The software can also be programmed to back up multiple partitions. Maxtor offers three models, ranging in price from \$229 to \$479.

Some of you may be wondering how these drives compare with the ABSplus drives **I wrote about** in September.

**ABSplus** drives come in two product lines: desktop and portable. The desktop models are roughly comparable in size to the Maxtor drives but are more expensive. The 80 GB model includes a back-up software package that adds a lot of flexibility. With ABSplus, however, you must choose between a USB or a FireWire interface. Maxtor comes with both. Also, Maxtor offers a 250 GB model; ABSplus does not.

Bottom line: If your back-up needs are simple and straightforward, the Maxtor is a better buy. If you value increased flexibility, give serious consideration to ABSplus, particularly the 80 GB model.

If you are constantly on the road with your laptop, and the laptop contains information you can't afford

to lose, purchase an ABSplus portable drive. They are more expensive than desktop models, but they fit in a shirt pocket, weigh only 7 ounces, and include great back-up software.

External hard drives may be an added expense, but their improved automation should save you enough time to justify their cost. More importantly, they are cheap data insurance. Just ask someone who has lost critical files!

### URLs of Links in this Article

pdf995

<http://www.pdf995.com>

Zeon DocuCom PDF Creator

<http://www.zeon.com.tw>

ScanSoft

<http://www.digitalriver.com/v2.0-bin/ecm/s?cuid=15762&uid=iho1bz3bz3rxodqf4>

Win2PDF Pro

<http://www.win2pdf.com>

PDF Zone

<http://www.pdfzone.com>

PlanetPDF

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ABSplus

[http://www.cmsproducts.com/products\\_new.htm](http://www.cmsproducts.com/products_new.htm)

Have a technical or software question? E-mail your questions, comments, and suggestions to Joel. He answers them every month in Advisor Tech Q&A.

Joel Bruckenstein, CFP, is editor of technology. He is co-author of the book *Virtual Office Tools for the High-Margin Practice*.

You can reach Joel at [joel.bruckenstein@morningstar.com](mailto:joel.bruckenstein@morningstar.com).