

EFS Enablement (Part 3) - Why PDF is the Standard Format for E- Filing

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WHAT IS A PDF FILE?

Part 3 of our EFS Enablement Series explains why the Judiciary has chosen the PDF format as the standard for electronic filing of case documents. Additionally, now that all EFS-enabled Law Firms have invested in the Adobe Acrobat software, we would like to show you how else you can use it for your law practice.

To begin, an introduction to PDF format and Adobe Acrobat is in order as we frequently encounter bewilderment from lawyers when told that they must purchase the Acrobat software - "Isn't it given away for free?", they ask.

PDF stands for Portable Document Format and its everywhere. Whether you are downloading a case report from the Legal Workbench, a practice circular from the Law Society website, or online government forms, it is quite likely to be in PDF files. To read the information contained in a PDF file, you use the Acrobat Reader software - a free programme that is easily downloaded from the Adobe website. For this reason, the ubiquitous Adobe® Acrobat® Reader can be found installed in nearly every personal and office computer. However to create your own PDF files requires the use of the Adobe Acrobat software, now in Version5.0.

PDF has become widely accepted as the dominant file format for document exchange. Increasingly too, PDF files have emerged as the standard for the electronic filing of court documents in the US, Canada and Europe. The primary reasons for this is the fact that a PDF document maintains its integrity from one platform to another, that it can be made identical from electronic to paper, and that PDF is protectable, verifiable, and searchable.

PDF BENEFITS

- 1. Exact Fidelity with Paper Documents** PDF maintains the integrity of a document and reproduces it, in electronic form, exactly as it appears in print. All formatting, font choices, graphics and other features are preserved, regardless of the software installed on the computer viewing a PDF file, or the operating system that computer runs. Exact fidelity facilitates collaboration among partners and between yourself and your client who are working with the same documents in different locations. This feature is also useful for statutory or government forms and contracts that need to adhere to the strict format requirements set down by the regulatory agencies.
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viewer has the free Adobe® Acrobat® Reader software installed on their computer, the PDF document can be viewed and printed in the exact way it was originally produced.

3. Control Over Alterations

Another valuable attribute of the PDF format, and one that is especially important for e-filing, is that PDF files may be made as permanent (if not more so) as their paper counterparts. PDF files can be secured using passwords so that they cannot be altered after they leave the hands of the author. The creator of a PDF document can even prevent a reader of that document from copying and pasting text from that document into other programs.

4. Authenticity

PDF files can also be signed with a digital signature to verify authenticity. Obviously, the court and counsel need to rely on a document as authentic. Using PDF, along with a digital signature and password protection, ensures not only that your document will reach its intended reader without unauthorized changes along the way, but also that the reader can verify that you were the author of that document.

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