

Acrobatic Catalogs

Recently, I have been playing around with Adobe's incredibly great *Acrobat 3.0* document delivery system. First and foremost, Acrobat is a method of sending precise camera-ready copy to anyone anywhere. Faster and cheaper than grubby old fax. Full text, graphics, and photos. With *all* fonts your choice of (A) surprisingly well approximated, or else (B) perfectly preserved.

Acrobat is a superb way to widely distribute tech notes, reprints, applications info, and end user support. Rapidly delivering "real" documents to your end users.

Acrobat also features convenient on-screen WYSIWYG displays. Easily navigated through *pagemark* hot buttons, one-click indexing, thumbnails, and "post-it" style notes.

Even powerful *multi-document* full text searches.

Acrobat is pretty much computer independent. It works equally well on DOS, Windows, Mac, and UNIX platforms. Permitting the free and unrestricted document interchange between them. Directly or online. While Acrobat clearly works best with PostScript printers and imagesetters, PCL and other printers are supported.

Because of the high quality of the delivered product, Acrobat is rapidly turning into a preferred Internet online standard. Compressed Acrobat files average a mere 10K per page. Thus easily stored and rapidly modemed.

When combined with CD ROM and an effective home binding system, Acrobat gives you a superb solution to *Book-on-demand* publishing. Where hundreds, or even thousands of book-length texts share the same CD.

But what I really like best about Acrobat is that I can take the existing "hard copy" version of my catalog, make a few quick and minor additions to the code, and end up with a superb interactive *on-line* marketing tool!

This *Acrobatic Catalog* route is far simpler and cheaper than using web markup languages. Acrobat files are also ridiculously shorter. And thus are more likely to be saved or reused offline by your potential viewers.

Online Marketing Realities

As in any gold rush, the winners will be those selling panning tools, transportation, and maps. Let's start off with this fundamental mantra of online marketing...

PEOPLE BUY BOOKS, BUT STEAL SOFTWARE.

Thus *any* online product offering will *always* be grossly undervalued. Today, you are *certain* to lose money over *any* aggressive online promotion.

I urge you to prove this to yourself. See Clifford Stoll's *Silicon Snake Oil* for a shattering of Internet myths.

The Internet is vastly smaller than most hype suggests. The overwhelming majority of Internet users have *zero* cash and flat out *do not* buy things. Those few that do have money certainly would not spend it on your products.

As a matter of professional pride.

Yeah, the Internet may *eventually* turn into a powerful marketing and sales tool. But three cultural changes must happen before this occurs: (A) A reliable form of electronic petty cash, (B) A total ban on UNIX, and, of course, (C) An automatic \$1 per minute royalty from any .EDU address.

So, by all means get yourself a high online presence. Just don't expect any positive cash flow for a few years. And do keep all your personal online time and development efforts consistent with a low key, and long term approach.

How Acrobat Works

The key to acrobat is a special text-like document called a PDF file. And short for *Portable Document Format*. An Acrobat 3.0 document uses a new compression scheme for a 3:1 or so storage savings. Images can optionally get compressed with JPEG, FAX, or Run Length encoding.

All the end user has to do is view their PDF online. Or download via disk or modem. Using a *free* Acrobat reader. They can then interactively navigate the file on screen. Or print it to all PostScript and certain non-PostScript printers or imagesetters. Or do global full text searches.

Custom or oddball fonts are dealt with in one of several ways. If the end user already has the needed font in his printer or computer, it gets used. If not, one of a pair of *multiple master* fonts might get substituted. Accurately approximating the "look and feel" of the original. With full justification and character weights exactly preserved.

You also have the option of towing along all needed fonts *internal* to your PDF file. Which can guarantee an exact reproduction. But with significantly larger file sizes.

The full technical details are shown in their *Portable Document Format Reference Manual*. The *pewter* book.

Interactive Features

Acrobat has several features that can greatly enhance your interactive on-screen navigation...

A new *Anti-aliasing* feature makes even small text highly legible. Even on lowres displays.

An *index* optionally pops up on the screen beside your document. As with any index, it can have topics, subtopics,

and sub-subtopics. Clicking on any of these gets you to the exact location on screen where your subject begins. Any location on any page and any degree of magnification can be provided. Up to 800%. For a perfect fit.

The optional *thumbnails* are small pictures that mimic the appearance of a full page. Use these to jump to major figures or to locate specific document areas.

By far your most important navigation aide is the PDF *pagemark*. A pagemark is just a place you can click to go somewhere else. There's two types of pagemarks: *visible* and *invisible*. A visible pagemark is a small rectangle. You might mark some figure three text reference. Clicking on it immediately sends you there. Try it.

Similar pagemarks can play audio, video, or animation. Or generate a form. Or move you to any net url. Such as the *Acrobat Library* of www.tinaja.com

Those invisible pagemarks are often used under icon artwork or for intuitive navigation. Click near the bottom of a screen to see what is below; near the top for above. At the extreme right for the next page, or the extreme left for the previous page. Or click in a marked area of figure three to return to the referencing text.

All of your pages should contain lots of these large hot buttons. Making navigation friendly and intuitive.

Acrobat's *notes* feature lets you add comments when and where you want to. "Post-it" style. These are simply boxes of dialog text. You have your choice of *open* notes that appear in full text immediately. Or of *closed* notes which look like a cartoon balloon. Click on the balloon to get the text. Click text to return to the balloon.

Finally, there is a powerful search engine that lets you find any word anywhere in any document. You can even search over multiple documents. Say to examine a book chapter by chapter. Or run on through two year's worth of reprints to find the exact coverage you are after.

Taken together, these Acrobat features can dramatically improve the ease of onscreen navigation. You definitely should use as many of them as aggressively as possible if end user interactivity and convenience is important.

Getting to and from Acrobat

Your application may automatically generate PDF files for you. If not, nearly any working PostScript code can be converted using the *Acrobat Distiller*. Distilling usually takes several seconds. The *Acrobat Exchange* program lets you do cropping and combining. Besides inserting notes, thumbnails, url's, indexing, and hot buttons.

All your end user needs to view, interactively navigate, or print Acrobat PDF files is a *free* Acrobat reader.

Online access is done by inserting an *Acrobat* reader into *Netscape* or another web browser.

To reverse the process, viewer options in Exchange let you print to file. Automatically creating raw PostScript code, those *eps* encapsulated PostScript files, or several enhanced viewing *eps* options. Unformatted raw text can get extracted with the usual cut and paste.

Better still, you could go from Acrobat *directly* into *Illustrator 5.5* or higher *with all formatting preserved!* The only little trick here is to make sure you have your Acrobat PDF *Illustrator* plug-in installed. This plug-in is smart enough to ask you which page of your document you want to get converted at any time.

Illustrator even allows you to change all the fonts *while preserving an exact layout!*

Expect Acrobat PDF plug-ins or similar importers for all major editing, layout, and illustration packages.

Acrobat Exchange also offers several *eps* options.

At present, version 3.0 Acrobat products are available for Windows, UNIX, and Mac. Adobe has a low cost *Acrobat Sampler* CD that includes lots of readers, tech notes and zillions of demos. Per their www.adobe.com site.

Some Guidelines

To do an Acrobat catalog, you first PDF your original hard copy catalog. Next, bring it up in Exchange, adding your note comments, hot button pagemarks, the optional thumbnails, and an index. Then save it as a new file.

Or else use the *pdfmark* notes in Adobe's ap note #5150 to embed these commands in your source docs. For hard copy, all of the interactive bells and whistles are simply ignored at print time.

With practice, it only takes a few minutes to add the index and pagemark hot buttons to any existing PDF or source file. The process is usually fast, easy, and fun.

Here's some insider Acrobat Catalog tips I picked up along the way...

Make them hit the print button– On-screen info is seldom acted on and soon forgotten. Your foremost goal should be to get them to produce their own readable and actionable hard copy. Inform and amuse for sure. Just be certain to remember this rule: *No print, no sale.*

Provide aggressive navigation– A confused customer is a gone customer. So is a bored one. Make it as easy and as simple as possible to move around anywhere on any of your pages. Use both indexes and bookmarks.

Landscape, not portrait– If at all possible, provide screen content that is wider than it is high. There's only so many pixels on the screen. Put them all to work for you.

Crop tightly– Pretty white space around a printed page looks real nice. But this is a total waste of precious pixels on the screen. Maximize each screen message size.

Offer nontrivial content– Resist the urge to oversimplify. Present as much per screen as you possibly can. Use the smallest possible screen fonts, consistent with legibility. If nav ever becomes a chore, your reader is gone.

Reveal your index– An Acrobat index remains invisible unless you force its display. By following the *pdfmark* guidelines in the Adobe #5150 note.

Activate some of a page– Powerful nav features should be provided on each and every page. But do leave more than enough space where the "hand" navigator dominates.

Inset hot zones– Normally, you are only permitted one pagemark rectangle active at once. To fake any hot zone inside a hot zone, first do the center one. Then surround it with four or more larger zones that do not overlap.

Colorize– Black and white content online is a big no-no. Simple and automatic colorizing tricks are easily added to display as tints, while printing as normally shaded grays. Details in [COLORIZ2.PS](#) and [COLORZD2.PDF](#)

SOME ADOBE RESOURCES

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Seattle WA 98104
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Mountain View CA 94039
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Rockville MD 20850
(800) 638-9636

InfoWorld
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New York NY 10016
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PC Week
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Box 809
Thatcher AZ 85552
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Provide byte range retrieval– This is a special service from your ISP that dramatically speeds up access. Details on the *Acrobat Library* shelf of www.tinaja.com

Work in some droll humor– But a little bit of this goes a long way. Since every document has a home screen, and since mine holds good ol *Meowwrrr*, our *Synergetics* puss de resistance on it, my home button is *Casa del Gato*.

Place only wanted files– *Never* send out unsolicited email! This stunt is called *spamming*, and is *certain* to cause you all sorts of grief. Don't even think of it.

For More Info

Several sources of Acrobat products, info, and support appear in the sidebar above. I've posted all sorts of Acrobat tutorials, reprints, and sourcecode to my www.tinaja.com

You can judge for yourself how well my interactive catalog works. Just view [SYNCAT1.PDF](#).

Acrobat's *Pewter* book, loads of other PostScript stuff, and more on Book-on-demand is available per my nearby [Synergetics](#) ad. Free tech support, too. ♦

Microcomputer pioneer and guru Don Lancaster is the author of 33 books and countless articles. Don maintains a US technical helpline you'll find at (520) 428-4073, besides offering all his own books, reprints and various services.

Don has a free new catalog crammed full of his latest insider secrets waiting for you. Your best calling times are 8-5 weekdays, Mountain Standard Time.

*Don is also the webmaster of www.tinaja.com where a special area has been set aside for *Midnight Engineering* readers. You will also find selected reprints of Don's other columns, that [Synergetics Consultant's Network](#) plus extensive annotated web site links here.*

You can also find Don at his [Synergetics](#), Box 809, Thatcher, AZ 85552. Or email don@tinaja.com

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