

Adobe Acrobat 3.0

Reviewed by Larry Heyl, Delta Boogie Tech

As the propellerhead at Delta Boogie I had been on the lookout for a way to distribute sheet music and similar documents on the web. There's just no way to tell HTML that you want a bass cleff or an F sharp. GIFs and JPGs are great for artwork and photos but sheet music demands a resolution and a print quality beyond what web art work reasonably returns. I had been looking into some specific solutions like midi files or the Song Write format when a more general solution hit me in the face.

In fact it seemed that everywhere I was going I had to install Adobe Acrobat Reader. The TV shop needed it so they could read schematics over the internet. The public school systems needed it because the state made most of their documents available in the Acrobat PDF format. The architects needed it, the social workers needed it, the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker needed it. In fact everywhere I went I had a little red A peeking out at me from the Desktop. And I guess they could all afford the program because Adobe Acrobat Reader is distributed Free!



Well, since the price was right, and everyone else was doing it I put the Acrobat Reader on my system and looked at some more PDF files and surfed around reading about it and I thought, "This might be the answer for sheet music and other high quality artwork on Delta Boogie." So I read some more and this is what I found out.

The PDF or Portable Document Format is the leading standard for distributing forms, schematics, and other high quality artwork on the internet today. The PDF format is tightly integrated with modern browsers which support it either directly or through free plug ins. The Acrobat Reader is used on millions of systems. Once the reader is installed PDF files are exactly as easy to access from the web as HTML files. You just click on the file name or a link to the file name to view the file. HTML syntax linking to PDF files is the same as to HTML files and most HTML code generators support the Acrobat format.

PDF files are great for printing and are used by the IRS to distribute income tax forms over the internet. In the reader you can zoom in and out with the detail remaining as crisp as your

monitor permits down to the full resolution of the document. If you are reading a schematic you can zoom out to see a subsection or zoom in to read part numbers. The Acrobat program has tight integration with scanners and includes scanner modules making Acrobat the preferred way to convert paper files into electronic documentation.

Version 3 also includes the ability to distribute forms that can be filled in on the screen just like any database program. This moves Acrobat out of document distribution and into data collection significantly extending its capabilities from forms distribution to forms processing.

I convinced myself that it would work and went to work. Acrobat 3.0 was an easy install from the CD. But I immediately hit the first learning curve which I will now help you trundle past.

What do those programs do anyway?

Acrobat is actually several programs. And just like the word Acrobat doesn't really describe what Adobe Acrobat does the program names aren't all that clear either. Here are the programs Acrobat installs on the taskbar.

**Acrobat Catalog
Acrobat Exchange
Acrobat Distiller
Distiller Assistant**

The Acrobat Catalog is used for indexing a collection of PDF files and making them searchable. An advantage of text distribution, that is HTML files, is that text is easily indexed and searched. Acrobat's solution to this indexing problem is the Acrobat Catalog. This is an important feature but it is an advanced option that not all Acrobat users will need.

The Acrobat Exchange is really the Acrobat program. It allows you to view and modify PDF files and convert images to PDF format. This program also sets up forms for data collection as discussed above.

The Acrobat Distiller is a Postscript to PDF converter or what would be called a Postscript interpreter. Postscript is Adobe's Page Description Language where Acrobat is their Page Description Format. When you print on a Postscript printer you are actually sending it a Postscript program which it runs and which outputs the page. Acrobat Distiller runs these Postscript programs and outputs PDF files. Another important advanced

feature that many Acrobat users will never need.

The Distiller Assistant is a memory resident program that lets you send a printout from an application directly to the Distiller without writing a Postscript text file.

The Acrobat PDF Writer

In fact what is more confusing than these names is that you probably won't be using any of these programs very much. Because the real heart of the Acrobat family of programs is the Acrobat PDF Writer printer driver which got added to the printer window when Acrobat was installed. This printer driver is so convenient and works so well that many Acrobat users will use it to create all their PDF output.

This printer driver works just like a fax program. Whether you are in Word Perfect, Word, or Paint Shop Pro if your fax program installed a printer driver onto your system faxing a document from these programs is as easy as printing it. Instead of sending the printout to you printer it gets converted to fax and sent over the phone line to the recipient's fax machine.

Acrobat PDF Writer takes the page that would be printed and converts it into a PDF file like [review.pdf](#). This file can be viewed in the Acrobat Reader, Acrobat Exchange, or your web browser with all the advantages of zooming, printing, etc. detailed above. And it's so easy! If you can print you can PDF.

Now Let's Do It

Now for a test of some web publishing using Acrobat PDF files. I just made some sheet music for a new song I wrote titled "That New Song". How difficult would it be to turn the sheet music into a web distributable PDF file?

I had the sheet music for three horn parts in my favorite sheet music program, Music Time. When I tried to print to the PDF Writer I couldn't select it. This is a limitation of my version of Music Time which apparently prints only to the default printer. I exited Music Time, opened the printer window (Start, Settings, Printers), and made the Acrobat PDF Writer the default printer (right click, Set as Default). When I went back to Music Time it now saw the PDF Writer and created the file new.pdf. This would be my sheet music in the Acrobat PDF format.

Unfortunately new.pdf wasn't all there. I was missing the title from the top of the page. I moved the title down in Music Time

and reprinted the PDF file. Now I could see the title in the Exchange Viewer.

When I printed it, however, part of the title was cut off at the top. Not missing but decapitated. So I did what I should have done the first time. I fixed the problem by adjusting the margins instead of by moving stuff around in the document. By setting the margins in the printer driver to 1 inch when creating the PDF file I got the full title in the viewer and the printout.

I loaded the file from Netscape and everything looked great. When printed I got more than readable sheet music, in fact I got excellent quality almost identical to the Music Time printout and not inferior in any way. And here's the proof.

"That New Song"

By using the Acrobat PDF Writer if you can print it you can convert it to PDF format, put it on the web, and anyone can make excellent printouts from their browser. If you have artwork you want to distribute like commercial art, schematics, printed circuit board layouts, maps, or sheet music you will find the PDF Writer easy to use and more importantly universally readable. Nearly all of your target audience already has the Acrobat Reader installed on their systems and for those that don't it is a free and easy download and install.

I found Adobe Acrobat to be powerful beyond my needs. It delivered excellent quality on screen and to the printer. It was easy to set up and use. If you have content to deliver on the internet that requires more than what HTML can do Acrobat is your obvious first choice.

Links to example PDF files

[Resource Bin, Actors and Acrobats](#)
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