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Acrobat for the Rest of Us

By Jeffrey Allen

Adobe's new version 6 of Acrobat for the Mac was released concurrently with Version 6 for the Windows platform. The update creates two grades of Acrobat: Standard and Professional. To justify the extra cost, the Professional version includes several additional features, most of which relate to publication and print production. It also, however, supports electronic forms creation, which by itself might justify the cost for attorneys (especially if you upgrade from a previous version of Acrobat, which costs only \$149 for the Professional version). To avoid confusion, Adobe has changed the name of its free reader from Acrobat Reader to Adobe Reader, but it still allows you to open and read, but not create, PDF files.

For some time, I've considered Adobe Acrobat essential software for lawyers, whether on the Windows or the Mac platform. This mandate continues to gather strength as more and more courts require files to be submitted in PDF within their new electronic filing systems.

Mac users will find that Acrobat 6 works nicely in OSX. Adobe substantially improved the interface in this version, making it far more user friendly than ever before. Acrobat 6 allows easy creation of PDF files from a single file, multiple files, a scanned image, or a web page. New collaboration features support document review; commenting; and marking changes, additions, and deletions in layered form, identified by reviewer (and tracked), while still protecting the original document. Adobe also enhanced Acrobat's cross-platform performance. PDF files and the review/revision information move easily from Mac to Windows and back.

Adobe has built a search engine into Acrobat 6 that allows searching a currently opened PDF file or all PDF files in a folder or folders on your hard drive for a desired text string, making it much easier to locate documents and information within documents. The digital signature feature included in version 6 operates easily; it takes just a few moments to set up the initial digital signature file and seconds to apply a signature once the file's set.

Acrobat 6 improves on an already excellent product. Historically, Windows versions have had a bigger feature package than the Mac version. Although this remains true, version 6 narrows the gap. For lawyers, the biggest difference between the Mac and Windows versions of Acrobat 6 is the interface with MS Word. The Windows version allows you to review proposed changes to the PDF document, approve some, disapprove others, and export the approved changes directly to Word 2002, with no need to retype the modifications. The Mac version does not support the direct export, and Mac users will have to retype approved changes. Even so, Acrobat 6 offers a big step up for the Mac user in terms of performance, features, and ease of use.

Don't think about whether you should upgrade to version 6—just do it. The upgrade cost from

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Acrobat 4 or 5 to Acrobat 6 is \$99 for Standard and \$149 for Professional. Buying it new costs a bit more, \$299 for Standard and \$449 for Professional. If you intend to create forms, get the Professional version; otherwise, Standard should suffice. But if you don't have this program, get it now.

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