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PDFs and their content - Part 1

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Editor's Note: *Jim King is a Senior Principal Scientist and PDF Architect at [Adobe](#). This article originally appeared on [Inside PDF](#), and has been reprinted with permission.*

I think most technical people share a problem that I have: we have extreme difficulty in expressing ourselves in one simple sentence. I have this problem when responding to questions/issues about PDF. For example, I have a hard time responding to this inaccurate statement in a short sound bite:

"PDF is great because it is not editable and freezes the content."

Technically that statement is totally inaccurate but there are related statements that are true. For example:

"PDF is great because it not only captures my content but allows me to chose and lock down the look and feel for my content." or

"PDF is great because I can apply a document signature to the file after I create

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it and then people can detect if it has been tampered with between me and them."

And here is one that I encountered from my financial advisor: "I had always sent my customers paper spreadsheets in the mail because I didn't want them to have my spreadsheet electronic files that have my intellectual content as far as the calculations and macros. Once I could make PDF files from my spreadsheets I can send them electronically and not worry." Am I to conclude that his primary value to me was in his spreadsheets?

Editability and Resuse

But to get at the issue of re-use and editability versus frozen content, I have to use quite a few sentences, in fact, the remainder of this blog and the following blog.

The first issue we have to get straight is whether something is a function of the PDF file format or of the software that processes it. If people are concerned about the PDF file format then they need to join the ISO committee that is now managing PDF as the [ISO 32000 standard](#). Many of my [previous blogs](#) record the process of moving the ownership of PDF from Adobe to [ISO](#) which was completed in January 2008.

But most of the reuse issues are a property of the software not the PDF file format. So if someone doesn't like the behavior of their current software they might consider looking for other software and/or convincing someone to provide software with the needed function.

But just for example, there are degrees of reuse that have been incorporated into Adobe's Acrobat viewer including the following:

- **Copy/Paste.** If the author permits it, I can copy content from a PDF and paste it into other files. Adobe has spent a great deal of time and effort to make this work as well as it does, especially given the complexity of dealing with text. Please see my previous blog entry about [text in PDF](#).
- **Export.** Acrobat supports exporting PDF content into various formats including .rtf, .doc, .html, .eps, .png, .jpeg, .xml, .jpeg2000, .tiff, .xls, .ps, .txt. I was almost alarmed when I opened Acrobat to obtain an accurate list and found so many format supported. And there are choices and setting for many of these. I assure you that this represents a great investment by Adobe to provide this support for reuse of PDF content. Many of these export functions are imperfect but do provide a strong basic ability to reuse content.
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- **Forms.** A more sophisticated kind of hybrid file is supported by PDF fill-in forms. This is so cool that I am going to make the discussion about it a separate Part 2 to this entry. (I wonder if the reason I think this is so cool is because I defined the properties for the Acrobat forms prototype in 1993.

Stop sharing of PDFs

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- Stop screenshots being taken



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FEATURES

Collating PDFs using JavaScript

Despite the numerous benefits, there can be potential issues with the conversion of paper documents into electronic archives. When scanning paper pages into PDF, it's possible to end up with the odd- and even-numbered pages in separate PDF files. It can be very time-consuming to collate them manually, but there is an easier way. Sean Stewart explains.

FEATURED PRODUCT

BCL easyPDF SDK



BCL easyPDF SDK is a set of PDF Programming Libraries designed specifically to help Software

Na! It is just cool!)

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Mike's problems:

1. Backed car into fire hydrant last week.
2. Mother keeps bringing up marriage.



Mike Ricci, fictional marketing manager, Sacramento CA

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December 31, 2010

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