

Want to create PDF documents for FREE? Here's how.

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What is a PDF?

"PDF" stands for "Portable Document Format". It's the native file format for Adobe Systems' Acrobat. Adobe PDF files preserve the look and integrity of your original documents, and you can share them with anyone electronically, regardless of hardware and software platforms.

The Problem

These days, there's a plethora of Office Suite programs and desktop-publishing programs, and their document file formats are not always compatible.

When you save documents in your particular office suite's format, that format might not be recognisable by the office suite of the person to whom you're sending your document.

Even users of the most widely-used office suite, Microsoft Office, have compatibility problems between versions of the same application.

If all you want is to allow your readers to read (not edit) your documents, regardless of what type of computer they're using or what software they're running, there's an elegant and **free** solution.

The Solution

If you printed out your document and gave that to your readers, then they'd have no problems reading your work. PDFs work the same way. The trick is, instead of printing directly to paper, the output is instead "printed" as an electronic document in the PDF format. Then, you can hand (send) that document to anyone and all they'd need is the free Acrobat Reader on their PC to read that PDF file.

Why PDF is good

- **PDF documents look GOOD.** They just seem to have a more polished, professional look to them.
- **You see what the author meant you to see.** Whether you're sending or receiving a PDF document, it should look the pretty much the same as what the author produced.
- **You don't have to worry about word-processor compatibility.** You can rest easy that your readers will see your polished document with all the nice graphics, fonts, colours and layout that you spent so much time agonising over. You don't have to worry about your readers having the right fonts installed, or the same word processor you used, or even the correct version of the word processor you used.

Why PDF is not-so-good

- **To view PDFs, you need to have Acrobat (Reader) installed.** Luckily, pretty much everyone has this installed by now. If they don't, they can get it free from www.adobe.com.
- **Your readers might get annoyed that their computer has to fire up Acrobat Reader just to look at your document.** This can be especially painful if they're running on slow computers, pressed for time, or are having a bad day and just feeling impatient.

How to create your own PDF documents

So you agree that PDFs look good. They give your e-zine, newsletter, emailed invoices, resumés and business reports that professional look. Before, the only way for the average person to create PDF documents was to splash out on the full copy of Adobe Acrobat. In fact, if you're serious about your PDF documents (especially large documents), this is probably the way to go. The full Acrobat 6.0 Professional includes features such as "Electronic Forms Creation", "Support for document layers in technical drawings", "Enhanced tools for printing, viewing, and navigating of large-format documents". Go to www.adobe.com for more information.

Luckily, if your needs are more simple (or your pockets aren't deep enough), you have other options. These days, there are a lot of other players who have their own PDF-creating programs, with varying degrees of functionality and cost.

But you're reading this article because you want to create PDFs for FREE. So here's how:

We'll concentrate on TWO options:

1. **OpenOffice.org**
2. **PDFCreator**

Option 1: OpenOffice.org - "a full office suite." According to the www.openoffice.org website, "OpenOffice.org is a free productivity suite compatible with all major office suites."

OpenOffice.org has a magic button that separates it from most other office suites: **The PDF button.**

It's the icon to the left of the printer icon, and it automatically comes as part of the package.

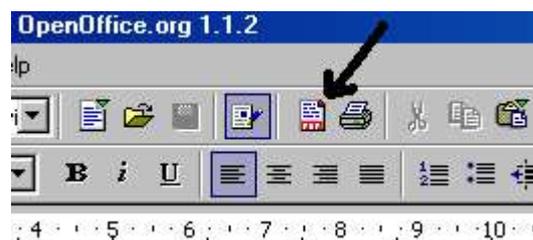


Figure 1. OpenOffice.org's PDF button.

OpenOffice.org allows you to create text documents, spreadsheets, presentations, diagrams. Meanwhile, that

innocent-looking PDF button is always there. Yep, any time you feel like creating a PDF of the document you're working on, of whatever type, click on that PDF icon, type in the name of your document, and it's DONE. Couldn't be easier.

You can get the latest copy of OpenOffice.org from www.openoffice.org. There will be a learning curve to using OpenOffice.org especially if you're used to MS Office, but it's not hard, and it's worth the effort for that little PDF button.

Option 2: PDFCreator - "easily creates PDFs from any Windows program." This program is meant to be installed on your PC where it then pretends to be another printer. When it's time to create your PDF, you "print" your document, choosing the "PDFCreator printer" (see screenshot below). It works like a "Save As" - you'll be prompted for a filename. And that's about it! PDFCreator even has options for the more advanced user, including password-protection for your document against printing, modifying, copying text and images.

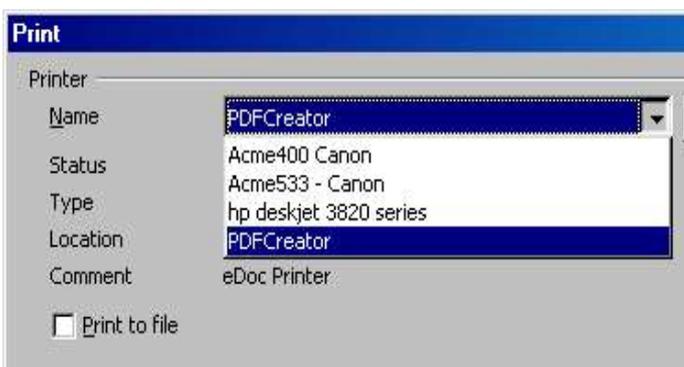


Figure 2. Printing to the PDFCreator "printer".

PDFCreator can be downloaded from www.pdfcreator.de.vu

Installing via TheOpenCD

An alternative (and easy way) to install these programs is via something called **TheOpenCD**. It's "a collection of high quality Free and Open Source Software" including, you guessed it, **OpenOffice.org** and **PDFCreator**.

TheOpenCD is the product of something called The OpenCD Project, which aims to introduce users of MS-Windows to the benefits of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS). The bottom line for you? The programs are FREE!

You start by popping the CD containing TheOpenCD files into your CD drive. This brings up a browser with which you can look around at the available programs. Any time you see one you want to install (like **OpenOffice.org** and/or **PDFCreator**), click on the Install button!

How to get TheOpenCD:

1. Download the CD (ISO) image then burn it onto a CD yourself. Get the file from www.theopencd.org. They also have in their FAQ section some help on how to burn ISO images to CD. Note: The size of the download (over 300 MB) may put off those on slow internet connections.
2. Purchase a prepared CD from one of several OpenCD Project partners and resellers at www.theopencd.org. Although this isn't actually a **free** option, the prices are

cheap. You're basically just paying for the materials and effort these people made to burn the programs onto a CD for you -- not for the development of the applications.

3. Alternatively, if you're based in Sydney Australia, you can contact the author of this article directly – his details are at the end of this article. He'll be happy to work something out with you.



Figure 3. TheOpenCD option to install OpenOffice.org

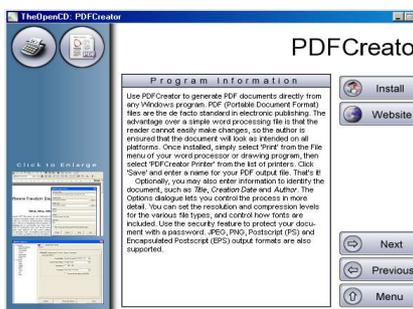


Figure 4. TheOpenCD option to install PDFCreator

Final Words

PDF documents are an excellent way to send your documents over the net while making sure that **What They See is What You Gave**. Simple, free PDF creation. Try it!

Resources & Links

Adobe Acrobat: www.adobe.com
OpenOffice.org: www.openoffice.org
PDFCreator: www.pdfcreator.de.vu
TheOpenCD: www.theopencd.org

Allan Naguit is an IT Consultant for Funai Pty Ltd, an outfit that provides "IT Handyman Services" for small businesses and SoHos based in the Sydney Metropolitan Area (Australia). This monthly e-zine is part of their services, giving ideas for curing IT headaches, and exposing people to their IT opportunities.

He wrote this article using OpenOffice.org and he just loves that little PDF button. He's shown that button to many clients, many of whom are now emailing their business newsletters to their own customers in PDF format at a price that can't be beat.

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