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PDFs: Pretty Darned Flexible

If you're looking to add a new technology to your law practice this year, consider PDF! PDF stands for Portable Document Format and you've likely encountered this type of file while searching the Internet. PDF is one of the best tools for a law office because it provides a solution to many issues. Still not convinced? Keep reading.

1. Do your clients want documents provided electronically? Even documents that originally began in paper format? Scanning a paper document and converting it to a PDF makes the file an image so that the scanned document looks exactly like the paper document.
2. If you're concerned about clients making changes to documents that you've sent to them electronically, keep in mind that PDF conversion allows the document to become static so that the recipient cannot alter it easily, if at all.
3. If your clients don't have access to the latest software, PDF documents can be opened on any machine, no matter what operating system is in use.
4. Scanning important paper documents to PDF format also allows them to be easily accessible to all staff. (A great way to cut down on the amount of paper in your office while making documents easier to share!)
5. Most courts that require electronic filing require PDF format.
6. Some PDF versions allow for true redaction, which may be very useful for law offices.

Adobe Acrobat has been the leader in the PDF market since it developed the platform in the '90s. Adobe has just released Version 8 which has many features for attorneys (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/solutions/legal/>).

However, there are a few free resources available as well for converting documents to PDF format.

If you just need a simple, no-frills way to convert electronic files such as Microsoft Word or Word Perfect to PDF, the following tools are available.

Zamzar (www.zamzar.com) –Zamzar is an online service that allows users to browse for files on their computer hard drive or network, choose PDF conversion and then have the converted file e-mailed to them. The process is very fast.

CutePDF (www.cutepdf.com) – CutePDF is a freeware utility for PDF conversion. If more features are needed, CutePDF also has a software program available for a very competitive price.

For information on how you can integrate these devices with your family law practice, visit the ABA's Legal Technology Resource Center's website at www.lawtechnology.org.

—Sarah Palmer, ABA Legal Technology Resource Center

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