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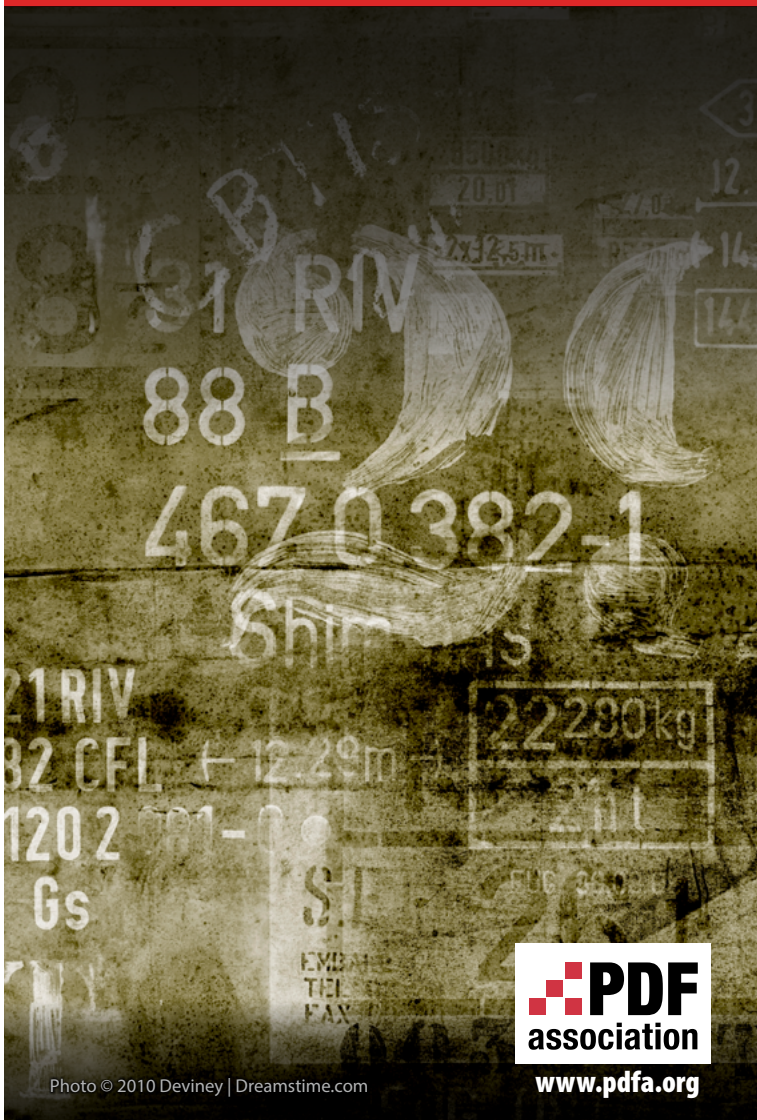
ISO 19005: A Series of Standards for Long-term Digital Archiving



www.pdfa.org

The PDF/A Standard and its Objective

PDF/A is the ISO standard for archiving electronic documents using the PDF format. The first part, PDF/A-1, was published on October 1, 2005. The second and third parts, PDF/A-2 (2011) and PDF/A-3 (2012), enhance PDF/A with support for additional features in the PDF format, including options for combining several PDF/A files into one PDF/A collection or embedding the PDF's source files or other data, support for transparency, and much more.

The creation of the multi-part PDF/A standard required many years of cooperation between international delegates from software developers, industry associations and government agencies.

ISO 19005 defines "a file format based on PDF, known as PDF/A, which provides a mechanism for displaying electronic documents in such a way that the visual image is maintained over time, irrespective of the tools and systems used for their production, storage and reproduction".

PDF/A does not define an archiving strategy; the standard simply details technical requirements for PDF electronic documents to ensure reliability decades or even centuries after the file's creation.

Since 2005 PDF/A has become well-established as the preferred format for archiving electronic documents. The PDF format, itself standardized in 2008 as ISO 32000-1, is used around the world in public and private sectors and, after HTML, remains the most popular format online. PDF will continue to be employed as a robust and flexible document format in a variety of areas for the foreseeable future.

PDF/A ensures reliable access to PDF documents, making PDF ideal for long-term archiving.

PDF/A Applications

PDF/A can be used to archive any electronic document that may be printed, and any non-electronic document that may be scanned. The following examples show a variety of applications that benefit from PDF/A implementations.

Incoming Mail Regardless of how incoming mail arrives – either via traditional post, fax or e-mail – it must be archived. Paper documents should be scanned, and e-mails, including their attachments, should be converted into a suitable storage format with a uniform infrastructure such as PDF/A.

Outgoing Mail Most organizations prefer to archive outbound correspondence as well as inbound. Many converters for print-data streams are available on the market to assist in the PDF/A archiving process.

Computer-aided Design (CAD) Technical drawing files often require their own unique software. Converting these files to PDF/A ensures technical drawings can still be viewed or printed many years later with total fidelity to the original. Now, PDF/A-3 allows the original CAD file to be included with the archived PDF pages.

Scientific Papers Some universities already require dissertations be submitted in PDF/A format wherever possible.

Archive Migration Existing document archives often require an overhaul due to government regulations or changes in organizational policies. Many institutions have already migrated their extensive archives over to PDF/A to remain competitive and compliant with new regulations.

Sectors

Long-term archiving is a critical theme in many business sectors, with the focus varying from industry to industry. Listed below are some examples of long-term archiving requirements in selected sectors. While not exhaustive, these examples illustrate how PDF/A can be applied in any organization requiring high reliability or under a mandate to maintain long-term archives.

Banks and Insurance Company credit and insurance records must often be kept for fifty years or more. Electronic archiving based on PDF/A has become increasingly popular in these industries, not only for new files, but also as a migration target for existing archives. Using a single standard for archiving promotes consistency – a valuable added benefit of PDF/A.

Engineering Long-term archiving is of great importance to engineering organizations, especially aerospace and civil engineering concerns. For example, the design specifications of bridges, aircraft or machinery are often required by law to be stored for up to 99 years. Some regulations specify that all document versions must be archived; PDF/A readily accommodates this requirement.

Publishers Over the last decade it has become commonplace to use PDF/X as an exchange format in prepress and production workflows. PDF/X conforming files can be saved simultaneously as PDF/A conforming files, a benefit to publishers who need to archive their products following print production.

Public Administration Government agencies were among the first organizations calling for a non-proprietary format for electronic document archiving. Typical government applications for PDF/A include legal filings and court documents, forms, zoning files and official notices.