Statement on PDF/A Implementation Projects

"What have we learned in six years?"

The ISO standard for archiving digital documents, PDF/A, has been in force since 2005. Dr. Hans Bärfuss, founder and CEO of PDF Tools AG, takes a look at what has been achieved during this time and what still needs to be done.

In 2005, the first part of the ISO standard for archiving digital documents, PDF/A, was released. Knowledge that this standard exists is widespread, particularly in Europe. What is especially pleasing about PDF/A is that it is not solely a paper standard; it has been adapted by practically all leading manufacturers, implemented by numerous notable organizations and accepted by legislators in several countries. Although knowledge about the existence and purpose of the standard has spread in an impressive manner, experience has also shown that little knowledge exists still about the PDF/A process itself. And due to this, the basis for a well-planned and -managed implementation project is often lacking.

Process knowledge needs to be developed

What is meant by this? By following the numerous publications about PDF/A, a reader is well-informed in the categories "Introduction to PDF/A", "Technical Details about PDF/A", or "PDF/A-conforming Products". And interested parties will find a scenario comparable to their own amongst the countless success stories and documented customer use-cases. However, practically no relevant articles exist that deal with process knowledge. The manufacturers know their products very well, but they are often lacking in the corresponding consulting competence. The customer has two alternatives in this situation: either he goes through the learning curve himself, or he lets a system integrator go through it for him. In either case he bears the costs.

Knowledge can help reduce costs

Even a little knowledge can help avoid unnecessary costs. The same questions can always be raised: "Where do I need PDF/A?", "At which point in my process should I convert to PDF/A?", "How can I ensure that only PDF/A-conforming documents end up in the archive?", "How do digital signatures fit into my work process?", and "What legislative requirements concerning traceability and authenticity must I take into consideration?".

So what should one do? Several well-trained and experienced consultants can be found in the PDF/A world. Dr. Hans Bärfuss recommends that any organization conducting a PDF/A implementation project reserve sufficient budget for consulting services during the preliminary planning phases. Experience has shown that higher costs can thus be avoided during the realization phases.

Dr. Hans Bärfuss, founder and CEO of PDF Tools AG: "Although knowledge about the existence and purpose of the PDF/A standard is widespread, little knowledge exists about the PDF/A process itself."