



# Flying Acrobat

Ken McMahon enthuses over Acrobat 4.0 — particularly its **web capture** development.



**▲ FIG 1 ADOBE 4 DOWNLOADS WEB PAGES AND CONVERTS THEM TO PDF, ON-THE-FLY**

Since I wrote about Adobe Acrobat last May, I doubt that a week has passed when I have not used it either to create pdf's or view them via the web, or from a CD.

If my recent experience of using Acrobat 4.0 is anything to go by, I'll be using it a lot more in the future and in new and exciting ways. Version 4.0 is a major revision including lots of new features all designed to make Acrobat indispensable to anyone who wants to exchange visually rich documents.

**Security has been beefed up** to allow the use of encrypted digital signatures using either Acrobat's self-signature technology or third-party plug-ins. The opportunity for those viewing the document to add their comments has been expanded. New tools include a snazzy highlighter pen which picks out text in Day-Glo yellow, a pencil for circling problems, underline, strikethrough and text annotation, and a user-definable rubber stamp with a few useful defaults such as 'draft' and 'approved'.

It is also much easier to amend Acrobat files if you discover a howler. Where previously you had to go back to

the original document, make changes, create a new PostScript file and distil it, you can now correct typos and even open up pictures in Photoshop to carry out last minute touch-up operations. Of course, you'll need to be careful to also revise the original so that it matches the edited pdf, but this should nonetheless be a real timesaver.

Producing pdfs optimised for screen, viewing, proof printing and high-end output is now a one-touch operation because presets are provided which optimise the job option settings for these eventualities.

**The most exciting** addition to Acrobat's repertoire as far as I am concerned, is the web capture feature. This will make the proofing and updating of web sites as straightforward as it currently is for printed matter.

The way I did it before Acrobat 4.0 would be to produce, say, a small website consisting of a dozen or so pages and upload it to my ISP in a subfolder. Then, I would email my client to say: 'Your website is ready. You can see it at [www.ken.myisp.co.uk/webtest](http://www.ken.myisp.co.uk/webtest) — get back to me if you want any changes.' The client would then check out the site and email me a long list of corrections and we'd go through the same process again until they were happy, then I would ftp the entire site to the client's ISP.

**In theory** there's not a lot wrong with this approach. But if the client wants to print out the pages... well, if you have ever tried to print html pages you will appreciate what a hit and miss affair it can be. Also, the client might want to view the pages offline or show them to someone else and if each recipient is using different browsers, or different versions of the same browser differently configured, there is a good chance that they will not all be looking at the same thing.

Lastly, corrections on the lines of 'On the "what we do" page, can you change the third word of the second line in the fourth para to "also", replace the semicolon with a full stop and start a new sentence with the word "the", which needs a capital T,' are hard work, particularly if you have several pages of them from a number of different sources.

So, the prospect of emailing an entire web site in Acrobat

**▼ FIG 2 THE RECIPIENT CAN ANNOTATE USING A RAFT OF NEW TOOLS INCLUDING A HIGHLIGHTER AND STRIKETHROUGH**



## Questions & answers

**Q** I have been trying to obtain information on graphics tablets such as Summasketch and Eesox to assess their suitability before making a purchase. Have you reviewed either of these or any of the equivalent makes?

NORMAN HAMMOND

**a** Looking through my back issues I cannot find a recent group test we have done. The VisionMaker Sketch 14 — a combined TFT LCD flat-panel screen and graphics tablet — was

reviewed in our December 1998 issue, although at a cost of more than £5,000 (incl VAT) it's a tad expensive. In our January '99 issue, Gordon Laing reviewed Wacom's Intuos range.

Summagraphics boards are manufactured by Calcomp which you can find at [www.calcomp.com](http://www.calcomp.com), or telephone Principal Distribution on 01756 704 000.

You can obtain details of the Wacom Tablets from its site at [www.wacom.com](http://www.wacom.com).

**Q** I have been following the photo-enhancing techniques you discuss in PCW — fine business too! Do you know if any of the

packages can do something with out-of-focus pictures like that on a professional job I once saw at a show? The original was a badly out-of-focus shot of a car, which was enhanced so well that you could read the number plate. I have some badly out-of-focus prints, but the 'sharpen' filter in all the packages I have tried don't help much.

KEN SMITH

**a** Sharpen filters work by increasing the contrast between contrasting areas in an image, thus giving the appearance of sharpening. But they cannot replace the detail that is not present. The filter

'assumes' that an area of the image which makes the transition from, say, dark to light grey within the space of a few pixels, should be a sharp edge. If a picture is badly out of focus, the edge will have been softened to such a degree that no amount of sharpening will restore it — at least not without causing unwanted overall image degradation. Some filters work better than others. Photoshop offers 'sharpen edges' in addition to an 'unsharp mask' and enables you to set the 'pixel radius' as well as the 'amount'. Furthermore, applying the filter several times with a lower setting also gives better results than a big hit.



**▲ FIG 3 DIGITAL SIGNATURES PROVIDE VERIFIABLE PROOF OF A DOCUMENT'S AUTHENTICITY AND ABILITY TO ROLL BACK THROUGH VERSIONS**

properly annotated on the page, and attributable to the person who made them, is very attractive.

**Creating a pdf** from a web site could not be simpler. You just select web capture/open web page from the tools menu and enter the URL in the dialogue box — you need a live internet connection for this to work. Be wary of using the 'download entire web site' option as you could be in for a long wait while your hard disk fills up.

format and having it returned to you marked up with changes which are

drive by dragging them into the Acrobat window, or onto the Acrobat shortcut on the desktop, although I think it would have been useful to have an open file option, as you have in most browsers.

**The safest** and, in any case, simplest approach is to open the home or index page and add the pages you want by clicking on the links in that page.

For example, if your homepage had four buttons linking to news, events, products and contact pages, clicking on any of them would append the relevant page to your pdf and convert the link from a weblink to the external HTML page, to an internal link to the pdf page. You can also easily append web pages for all links on a page by selecting tools/web capture/append all links.

Pages are automatically converted and added to the pdf as they download and even very complex pages take only a few seconds [Fig 1]. You can automatically convert HTML pages on a local

In this way you can create a pdf subset of any part of a site, or indeed any part of the web that you need, with all links intact and functioning internally within the pdf.

The best, though, is yet to come. Having emailed your pdf, the recipient can open it and use all the new annotation tools to add their comments before emailing it back to you [Fig 2].

Acrobat's digital signature features mean that it's possible for your client to sign off electronic proofs but you can also keep track of versions [Fig 3]. Say you send a pdf to the marketing director. He reads, annotates and signs the document, then emails it to the IT director who does the same and passes it on to the IT manager, who does the same and returns it to you. You now have a pdf with three sets of accredited annotations and you can 'rollback' to any of them to see what the document looked like before it was amended.

As well as its own 'self sign' signature handler Acrobat 4.0 includes Entrust Security's public key-based plug in, or you can use a third-party product.

## PCW CONTACTS

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