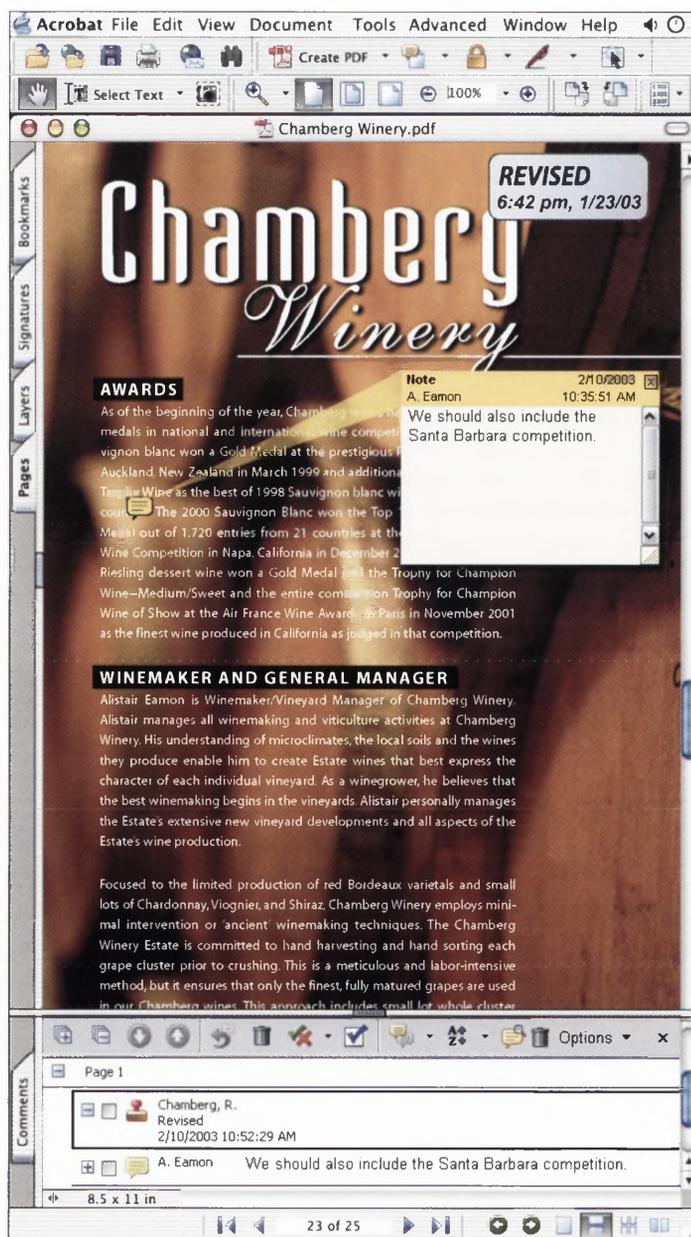


It's time to declare war on large email attachments!

By Rob Davis

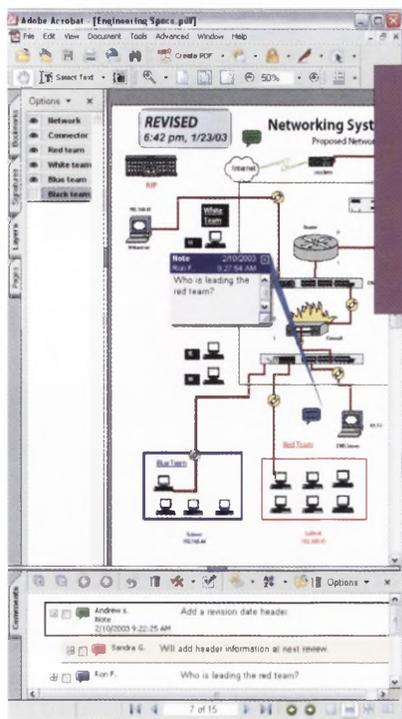


This is the first in a regular column that will examine new, and some old, office technology of relevance for practising lawyers. We will road-test new products, review websites and publications, give solutions to common technology and production problems, and generally make suggestions about using technology to make your work life easier.

One of the fascinating things about new technology is how quickly it can evolve from obscurity to ubiquity. It was not that long ago, for old chaps like me at least, that a major issue facing law firms was how to deliver text messages quickly. As all lawyers know, there is something special about delivering a written communication that oral communications cannot match.

For centuries lawyers relied on couriers, and more recently post, to deliver written communications. Finally, in the early 1970s the modes of document delivery were transformed. No, not fax, that was a couple of years later. I am talking about telex!

Few lawyers today will have used a telex machine – probably most will never even have seen one, outside a museum. It was a manual typewriter of sorts, which punched little holes in a long roll of paper tape. This tape was then used to produce the message for transmission to the recipient's telex. This required a typist who could type a letter without any errors, or one paid so little that it was economic to keep them at the job until they eventually did! As a young, artiled clerk I fell into the latter category. I spent many late nights in unsuccessful attempts at sending correct, 'urgent' telex messages for my master solicitor. By definition, all telex



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messages were urgent, as nobody in their right mind would willingly use that technology for anything else!

What was the point of technology that permitted instantaneous transmission, yet made preparation of the transmission

copy a chore of the highest order? Fortunately, some smart people were working on this precise problem and, after a couple of years, the first version of the fax machine appeared. This was before laser printers; inkjet was a later development again. Before these technologies came to the rescue, the state of the art was thermal printing. It was still a few years before faxes would last more than six months without fading to invisible ink.

Through the wonders of modern technology, the problems faced by the sender had been solved, only to create new problems for the poor recipient.

So what has all this got to do with modern office technology? A lot, as it happens. You see, the more things change, the more things seem to stay the same. Most new technology fills a prior need. But problems often occur when we use that technology incorrectly, or for things it was never intended to do.

Take, for example, the recent love affair of some firms for transmitting scanned documents as email attachments. The convergence of photocopiers and scanners, and gradual trend towards the 'paperless', but never paper-free, office by use of document-management systems, has led to some firms at the cutting edge using email when a year ago they would have used fax.

What's wrong with this, you might ask? Well, nothing, provided it is done properly.

ADOBE

The format of choice for most firms that scan documents for transmission is PDF. PDF format was invented by Adobe Systems several years ago to enable graphics professionals to exchange and print complex documents containing text and images, without the need for the recipient to have access to the application that created the document, or even to the fonts used on the computer of the creator. It was originally

intended to overcome incompatibility between proprietary applications.

Adobe Acrobat (the application that enables documents to be saved in PDF format) and Acrobat Reader (the free application that opens, reads and enables

PDFs to print) are wonderful at making virtually any document accessible to anyone (visit www.adobe.com).

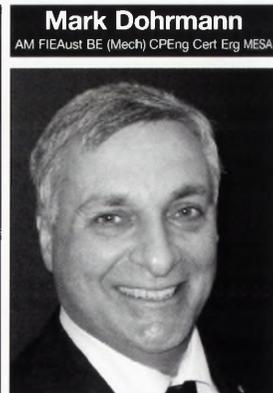
Unfortunately, PDFs contain a lot of information and, unless they are manipulated to minimise file size, can be very large. Why should this be a problem? After all, we do live in the age of high-bandwidth connections and cheap memory!

Well, yes, some of us do, some of the time. But all of us don't for the balance of the time. High-bandwidth connections exist only for Australians who live in the major capital cities – and even then, coverage is patchy. The rest of us still live with low-bandwidth, normal dial-up connections (often around 28.8kbps).

Further, a growing number of lawyers rely on their mobile phones to access email while out of the office. Two technologies are used for this. One involves Bluetooth-capable laptops, which connect to the internet and mail servers via a mobile phone. Some use the web and email services available through a growing number of modern >>

Engineering and Ergonomics Expert

Mark is a professional engineer, a qualified ergonomist and has been an APLA member for several years. His consulting group has advised about 2000 enterprises since 1977 in safety, engineering and ergonomics. He also assists many Australian law firms in their personal injuries matters, and has prepared over 5000 reports on public and workplace accidents. Mark appears regularly in court in several States, giving independent expert opinion, most commonly on **back and upper limb strains; machinery incidents; slips and falls; RSI; and vehicle accidents.** Fee options for plaintiffs include deferred payment, with special arrangements for regular clients. Details, a brief CV and a searchable list of cases can be found at www.ergonomics.com.au



Mark Dohrmann
AM FIEAust BE (Mech) CPEng Cert Erg MESA

Mark Dohrmann and Partners Pty Ltd
PO Box 27
Parkville VIC 3052

(03) 9376 1844
mark@ergonomics.com.au

Search Mark's cases by keyword at:
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mobile phones. Unfortunately, mobile data usually transmits at about 9.9kbps, which is only a fraction of the speed available even to most dial-up users outside capital cities – which is, in turn, only a fraction of that available on a high-speed connection.

This week I received two defences from a Brisbane firm as PDF attachments to an email. Each attachment was less than five pages long, yet more than 1MB in file size! That says a great deal about the sender, or the sender's IT department in this case. It practically *screams* '... this computer technology is beyond us and we should go back to fax'.

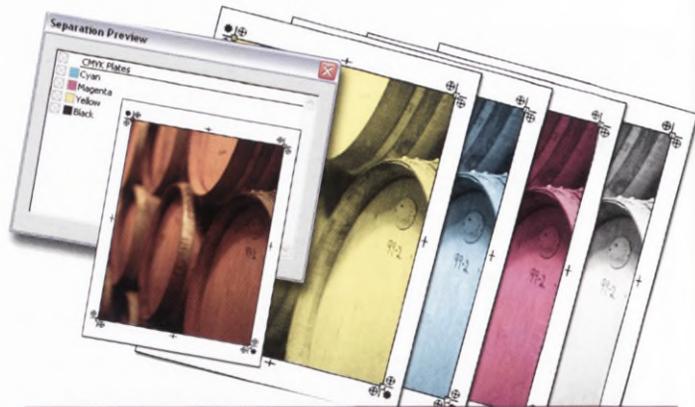
Reduce attachment size

There are many ways to reduce the size of attachments so they become more user-friendly.

First, if the document is already stored in your system as a MS word document, save it as read-only and send it in that format. Word documents are as ubiquitous as PDFs and are one helluva lot smaller.

Alternatively, if the document has to go as a PDF – say, for instance, it is a scanned document – several things can be done to minimise PDF file size from within Adobe Acrobat Distiller (see 'Acrobat tips – reduce PDF file size' at www.planetpdf.com). For example:

- Save the document using the 'save as' command, which saves the file in a more efficient manner, by eliminating



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appended changes; it also permits the document to be downloaded and viewed one page at a time, making viewing quicker for the recipient.

- Optimise the document by down-sampling images and using compression to eliminate unnecessary pixel data. These functions are each available via Advanced > PDF Optimizer > Images.
- Un-embed unnecessary fonts via Advanced > PDF Optimizer > Fonts. Because PDFs are used by graphics professionals who use many different fonts in their layouts, Acrobat embeds several alternative fonts in each PDF to protect against the risk that the recipient may lack a specific font being used in the document. But most legal documents are created in MS word using either Arial or Times fonts. These fonts will exist in your recipient's system so there is no need to append numerous alternative fonts to the PDF file.
- Remove unnecessary additions (such as comments, actions or links) from the file via Advanced > PDF Optimizer > Clean-up.
- Save the optimised PDF by overwriting the original file (that is, by saving under the same name and location as the original). The settings will then be saved in PDF Optimizer for the next time it is used.
- If there are multiple documents, Acrobat can be set to process them in a batch.

Now I am off to New Zealand skiing for a couple of weeks, with my mobile phone and laptop. I hope no one emails me any more 1MB attachments before I return. If they do, I will have to mortgage the house to pay my phone bill! ■

Rob Davis is a consultant and lawyer with Davis Legal & Strategic. He can be contacted at rdavis@davislegal.com.au. Alternatively, more information is available at www.davislegal.com.au.

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