The PDF Gold Standard—
Adobe Acrobat X

By JoAnn L. Hathaway

It's no secret. For years, Adobe has dominated the playing field when it comes to PDF manipulation and creation. The recently released Adobe Acrobat X ("ten") is no exception. Just when we thought it couldn't get much better, it did, and in leaps and bounds. So now, let's take a look at the features of the new Adobe Acrobat X family.

Adobe Reader X

As a legal professional, you rely on your clients' ability to open PDF files you send them using the free Adobe Reader. The Adobe X family was engineered with enhanced security in 30 languages on all major platforms. In keeping with this enhanced security strategy, Adobe introduced "sandboxing" in Reader X. Sandboxing is a method of creating a confined execution environment for running programs with low rights or privileges. It protects users' systems from being harmed by untrusted documents that might contain executable code. Adobe provides an implementation of sandboxing technology called Protected Mode. This is enabled by default when Reader X launches, and it limits the level of access granted to the program, thereby safeguarding operating systems. If Reader needs to perform an action that isn't permitted in this environment, like launching an attachment inside a PDF file using an external application, such requests are funneled through a broker process using a strict set of policies defining what is or is not allowed, all designed to prevent potentially dangerous access.

Reader now offers two free tools to mark up PDF documents—the Sticky Note tool and the Highlight tool. Also new in Reader X is the ability for Reader users to check files in and out of Microsoft SharePoint.

Users of full versions of Acrobat can enable rights within the documents they create to expand Reader functions for Reader-only users, allowing them to save form data, type on a PDF, add a digital signature, or use a complete set of comment and markup tools. This provides opportunities for open collaboration, yet within controlled and secure environments.

Acrobat X Standard and Pro

So what's new in Standard and Pro?

- **Improved Scanning Results:** Users can expect improved optical character recognition (OCR) with Standard X, as well as 50 percent smaller file sizes, greater image fidelity, and automatic color detection.

- **Firefox Conversion Capability:** Convert a Firefox web page to a PDF file with a single click while keeping all links intact, or select only the content you want and convert with one click.

- **Office 2010:** Create PDF files with a single click from within Microsoft Office 2010 applications. This includes not only Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Publisher, and Access, but specialized applications such as Microsoft Project and Visio.

- **PDF to Word and Excel:** Export PDF files to Word documents and enjoy improved preservation of layouts and formatting. Tables, images, and even multi-column text are preserved along with page, paragraph, and font attributes. Convert PDF document data to Excel format with the option of selecting only a portion of a page to export to an editable format.

- **SharePoint Integration:** Work with PDF files in Microsoft SharePoint. Users can access SharePoint from any Acrobat Open or Save dialog box and check PDFs out and in for editing.

- **Enhanced, Streamlined Commenting:** A single, unified tool pane allows easy access to markup tools and comments. Comments can be viewed and then searched in a list that can be filtered and sorted by page, author, and date.

- **Reading Mode:** The new Reading Mode enables users to maximize their screen for optimal reading and PDF presentations. As before, the stationary toolbar disappears, but now a transparent floating toolbar helps with easier navigation.

- **Improved Web Experience:** Open and navigate PDFs within websites faster and easier than before with enhanced loading and viewing capabilities.

- **Share Files Online:** Use Adobe's Send-Now online services to send, share, and track large files from within Acrobat without concern for file size restrictions, FTP sites, and costly overnight services.

- **Quick Tools:** For easy access, populate the new Quick Tools area by adding your favorite editing, comment, and markup tools.

- **Customized PDF Portfolios:** With the new PDF Portfolio Wizard, Pro users can quickly assemble content into PDF portfolios and customize new layouts, visual themes, and color palettes. Layouts and themes created by third-party developers and designers can also be imported.

- **Action Wizard:** Routine multistep tasks can be automated into a guided Action.

Pro users can create, manage, execute, and share sequences of frequently used steps and apply them to a single PDF or to batched files.

Kicking the Tires

The buzz surrounding the Adobe Acrobat X family is justified. You needn't be an Acrobat zealot to get excited about the latest release of this software.

The new interface is the most prominent and enjoyable improvement accessed upon opening the application. The previously cluttered menu and toolbars have been replaced with a top-line menu containing only a few basic functions and fewer toolbar buttons. The tools haven't gone away; they've just been restructured and reorganized, providing a more-with-less navigational approach.

Tools removed from the horizontal toolbar menu can now be accessed from a slick new Tools pane occupying the right side of the viewing screen. Upon opening, this pane provides a list of labels (Pages, Content, Forms, Recognize Text, Protection, and Sign & Certify). When you click any of these choices, a menu of clearly organized features telescopes down, allowing swift access to related commands. This handy feature is much improved over prior versions that placed toolbars in numerous locations, making it hard to remember what was buried where.

The panel gets even better once you realize it allows you to see and filter reviewers' comments. Users of X can set up a PDF to track reviewers' comments by using Acrobat.com, their own internal network server, a web server, or a Microsoft Share-Point workspace.

Once you've invited others to collaborate, you can track all actions with alerts from Acrobat or Windows when collaborators post comments. After filtering comments by reviewer, you can export all reviewer information to an Excel spreadsheet.

Acrobat X provides greatly enhanced functionality to collect data from multiple people. Send a form to as many people as you'd like. Store the form on Adobe's free Acrobat.com server or your own network server and use Acrobat's built-in features to send e-mails to each of your contacts with a link to the form. Recipients download the form to their desktop, open it in Reader or a full version of Acrobat, and complete the form. A Submit button at the top of the form

automatically sends it back to the server; Acrobat gathers the responses in a designated area it created on your system when the form was sent. Open the responses copy to view the received data in spreadsheet format, which can then be exported for use in a worksheet application or database. Acrobat even tracks which contacts returned the PDF so you can send a reminder to those who did not.

The improved Create button adds a new option for creating PDFs from a scanner. The new Autodetect Color Mode enables the user to load documents of any color and contrast into the scanner and batch scan without having to individually organize the documents and stop to change from black and white to grayscale to color settings.

The enhanced document conversion capabilities are certain to be embraced by legal professionals. Acrobat X does an amazing job of exporting PDF files into Office-editable documents. With its improved OCR software, it can more accurately export even scanned images.

Extracting partial content from already produced PDFs has always been cumbersome; with Acrobat X, it's a breeze. Simply highlight text, a table, or whatever you choose, select Export As and send to Word, Excel, HTML, or XML.

The PDF portfolio options have expanded in Acrobat X Pro. New file formats have been added to the import list. Users can now import live web content into a portfolio, including streaming video (think YouTube), and can log into websites from within Acrobat X.

This overview highlights only some of the many enhancements and additions in Adobe Acrobat's newest release. Test these and other features by downloading the 30-day free trial of Adobe Acrobat X at http://tinyurl.com/46ud5jb.

Support at Its Finest

Unlike many other software applications, help sources abound for Adobe Acrobat. Everywhere you look there are tutorials, blogs, webinars, and more that showcase the numerous capabilities and functionalities available in Acrobat.

For instance, check out the introductory "Adobe Acrobat X for Legal" webinar conducted by Rick Borstein and Mark Middleton, seasoned Acrobat experts and Adobe business development managers. This well-

crafted webinar offers more than 51 minutes of hands-on demonstration. Interestingly, it was announced during the webinar that maximizing the power of the product, particularly for legal professionals, was a focus of the new release; see http://tinyurl.com/4kj3a5r.

The Adobe Acrobat Investment

As always, Adobe Acrobat Reader is free. With its enhanced functionality in X, this version can almost be thought of as a "lite" version of Acrobat Standard.

Here's the breakdown on Acrobat pricing:

Acrobat X Standard
New: $299
Upgrade: $139*
(*From Acrobat 7, 8, or 9 Standard)

Acrobat X Pro
New: $449
Upgrade: $199*
(*From Acrobat 7, 8, or 9 Standard or Pro)

Acrobat X Suite
New: $1,199
Upgrade: $799*
(*From Acrobat 7, 8, or 9 Pro or Photoshop CS3, CS4, or CS5)

The Adobe website offers lower pricing for volume customers.

Purchasing tip: If you're contemplating purchasing a scanner, note that some Fijitsu models come with Acrobat Standard, which can be upgraded to Acrobat Pro.

Author's Report Card

In conclusion, I can unequivocally state that I found the new Adobe Acrobat X a refreshingly intuitive, well-enhanced product, deserving of a solid "A." I'm eager to incorporate Acrobat X Pro into my daily work routine. ■

JoAnn L. Hathaway is a practice management advisor for the State Bar of Michigan Practice Management Resource Center. Previously, she worked in the field of professional liability insurance, focusing on law firm risk management and legal malpractice claims. She is a registered professional liability underwriter, a Michigan-licensed insurance producer, an Adobe certified expert, and a certified independent consultant for Lexis-Nexis Time Matters and Total Practice Advantage.