

How do I protect my pdf ebook?

By Neil Tarvin

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A couple of days ago, the latch broke on our patio door. It's a real pain, especially with two 85 lb Golden Retrievers who like to go in and out frequently. I started thinking about how flimsy that lock was - not much protection there. Which somehow connected in my brain to pdf files, and, since everything I do, see, or experience (in one way or another) is fodder for my articles, I thought that for today I'd answer one of the most common questions I'm asked -

"How do I protect my pdf ebook?"

It's always a concern that someone will steal your ebook - and all the work you put into it. Naturally, you want to protect it. Let me tell you right now - just like birth control, nothing is 100% effective (except abstinence). It doesn't matter if it's HTML or PDF - if somebody wants it bad enough, they can get it. You can't stop them. But you can slow them down, and make it more difficult.

Adobe Acrobat has 2 levels of security. The first level protects the options you allow your readers. You can let them print the ebook, copy and paste the text and graphics, annotate, and fill out forms. You can also prevent the reader from doing these things. These are standard options anytime you do a "Save as..." in Acrobat (the full version, not Reader!) By assigning a security password, no one can change these options - even if they have the full version of Acrobat.

The second level of security assigns a password to the ebook itself. No one will be able to read your ebook without having the password. The catch to this is that the reader has to use the password every time they open the ebook, and for readers, this is not a very desirable situation.

But, what's my favorite saying?? Right - there are always alternatives! So, let's look at a few.

(1) The simplest - WinZip will allow you to create a regular zip file, or a self-extracting zip file with a password. Just zip it up, give it a password, and the file's protected. Simple and quick. And, as I mentioned in a previous article, you can also specify where you want the file extracted, and you can even start it up for the reader. But, keep in mind, a Mac user may be out in the cold if you use this method. (Perhaps look into some of the Mac equivalents to "zip??")

(2) Keep your files in a password-protected directory. There are several free programs that will password protect your directories and manage your users for you. The downside? You'll have to supply the usernames and passwords pretty quickly once someone makes a purchase. If you want

to look into this, LockedArea (<http://www.locked-area.com>) is a very good example. You can also use a 3rd party credit card processor like iBill or Verotel who will process your buyer's credit card and then assign a username and password. (They'll also set things up for you, but the downside is that you'll pay higher processing fees.)

(3) There are tons of installers available out there - both free and shareware. Installers almost always have a password option. (Remember your Mac readers if you use this option! You'll have to find a way for them to use it.)

Here's a special tip - do you use PayPal or ClickBank? If you do, don't put your downloadable file on the "Thank You" page the way they tell you to! All the thieves know that if they find a site selling a product using PayPal or ClickBank, the chances are pretty good they can get the product for free. All they have to do is visit your sales page and look at the source code. PayPal and ClickBank make it easy for them by plainly listing the location of your "thank you" page. You'd be amazed how many people are losing sales every day to these thieves. It's getting more difficult for them, though, since there are now scripts and programs available to encrypt the source code. I use a combination - a password-protected directory and I encrypt my PayPal links on the sales pages. It works pretty well.

The important thing is not to get paranoid about someone stealing from you. Accept the fact that some people will try, but most are honest, and it will surprise you how much time and effort people will spend trying to do the right thing.

Till next time...

Neil

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