

Pdf vs. HTML?

By Wesley A. Ford

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Wesley A. Ford
wes@immediate-impact.com

Immediate Impact <http://www.immediate-impact.com>

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Seven reasons good and bad

How many of you marketers have wondered about the efficiency of your web site and CD-ROM documents? Many of our clients have recently asked this question; which one is better? We thought you could benefit from the seven good and bad reasonings.

Let's get the bad out of the way first. Whenever possible avoid .pdf files. There are several reasons for this including:

- Pdfs are harder to read than HTML text unless they are printed
- Pdfs are not indexed by most search engines, Google is an exception
- Your article summary and meta-tags will never have all the keywords that people will search
- Pdfs have to be fully downloaded, before you can read them (though you can "stream" pdfs)
- Most people don't know how to use the Acrobat tool bar and can't search, cut, paste and forward pdfs
- You may have to prepare multiple pdfs depending on your purpose and audience
- Set up is critical. If you use the same pdf as your printer, the files will be huge and take forever to download

Now the good news:

- With a little practice and sensible use, pdf files are easier

to prepare than HTML pages

- Many authors enjoy pdf files because they look exactly like the material they authored
- Google, the search engine, does index pdf files
- If properly prepared, you can cut and paste text from a pdf file
- Pdfs can make it more difficult to steal your intellectual property
- Pdfs are perfect for forms
- Pdf files are email friendly

So, if you are interested in getting loads of material on-line, you expect your audience to print the material and you are not interested in search engine results, then pdf files can be very useful.

If you want to put a lot of words in search engines, capture your audiences on-screen eye and deal with the majority of the public not trained in the nuances of pdf files, then go HTML.

Bottom line, if you have the budget, time and expertise utilize HTML with enhancements such as links to other websites, email response areas, and images, to name a few. If you have a limited budget, are willing to develop an expertise in pdf files on the web and willing to take the time to optimize them for the web, then pdf files can be a useful shortcut.

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Wesley A. Ford is co-founder of Immediate Impact, Inc., a New Media development company that specializes in creating memorable media for tradeshow, web sites and interactive CD-ROMS. For more information on Immediate Impact goto: <http://www.immediate-impact.com> . For additional information, mailto: wes@immediate-impact.com.

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