activePDF
Leading the iPaper Revolution

Server-side PDF Generators

A Product Comparison of activePDF Server® and Adobe Distiller Server®

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Background

Historically, enterprise document distribution has been an expensive, labor-intensive endeavor. In a traditional paper-based system, multiple copies of documents are created, collated, and distributed manually, imposing a tremendous strain on business resources. The advent of the Portable Document Format (PDF) has revolutionized the landscape of document distribution, transforming tedious manual procedures into highly efficient, highly secure processes. PDF provides file creators with a compact, platform-independent, accurate representation of business data, that is easily distributed via multiple channels (email, network, Web, print, etc…) Additionally, PDF offers users rich functionality that is impossible to realize with static paper documents. Hundreds of companies have transformed their archaic paper-based systems into highly-efficient workflows using PDF, maintaining the layout control afforded by paper while reaping the benefits of an electronic format.

The PDF Conversion Process

When using a desktop-based PDF generator, conversion to PDF is as follows: the user generates a PostScript® file by printing from the native application to a PostScript-enabled device. The user then opens a PDF generator application, selects the appropriate file parameters and output options, locates and opens the PostScript file, and (typically) the PostScript-to-PDF conversion takes place. Of course, any problems with the PostScript file or user errors in setting the output options can result in corrupted or incomplete processing of the PDF, requiring the user to begin the process again. Even if the conversion is successful, it is often repeated to generate multiple outputs of the same data with different parameters (for delivery via screen, Web or print.) The obvious problem with this process is that it is labor-intensive, requiring a great deal of user involvement. Further, it requires that each PDF creator has a license of the PDF-generator installed locally on his or her desktop. For companies with more than a few PDF creators, this poses an economic question in terms of the return on investment of the "paperless office."

A Better Way

Server-based PDF-generators eliminate the need for additional software to be installed locally on each user's desktop; Instead, the software resides on a network server. Rather than forcing users to go through the multi-step conversion process described above, server-based PDF generators can automatically perform file conversions entirely without user intervention. Job options can be preset for batch conversions or set on a job-by-job basis, alleviating everyday users of the "guesswork," and allowing companies full control over security and display settings for all of their business documents.

activePDF Server

activePDF Server is a powerful server-based solution for automating the PDF-generation process from enterprise and Web applications. activePDF Server generates PDF files that conform to the latest PDF specification from Adobe® Systems and are interoperable with other PDF tools. Because of the per-server licensing structure, with no per-user or per-document fees, activePDF Server provides robust functionality at a fraction of the cost of comparable systems. activePDF Server is highly programmable, lending it to tight integration with existing business applications, including document management systems, Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, content management systems, and industry-standard databases.

activePDF Server eliminates the problems often associated with creating high-quality PDF files. With activePDF Server, companies purchase one license for each server the product is installed on. Developers can fully integrate activePDF Server into existing business-application processing, making the entire PDF conversion process virtually transparent to the end-user.

Because activePDF Server is multi-threaded, several users can simultaneously generate PDF files, without having to wait in a queue or experience problems with server overload. In this respect, activePDF Server is the most efficient and cost-effective server-based tool for generating PDF files.

What about Adobe®?

Many people are familiar with Adobe's Acrobat® product, a desktop application that generates PDF files by running PostScript files through a module called Adobe Acrobat Distiller®. The product is licensed per user, costing approximately $249 per license. With Distiller, a licensed user can generate PDF files as long as the native application files reside on his or her individual computer. Each user is responsible for configuring output options in each occurrence of the Distiller application, often resulting in inconsistencies among outputted PDF files. Because the

application resides locally on the user's desktop, the burden on I.T. personnel to install and maintain software for workgroup or company-wide implementations is significant. And, since it is a violation of Adobe's licensing policy to run Acrobat or Acrobat Distiller on a server, distributing the software for enterprise use is extremely cost-prohibitive.

Adobe Distiller Server®

Another offering in the Adobe product line is the Adobe Distiller Server. When compared with activePDF Server, the Distiller Server offers similar PDF-conversion functionality, but with the following key differences.

Cost-Effectiveness

Adobe Distiller Server licensing begins with a limited 100-user bundle, costing $5000. Prices for Distiller Server increase to $15,000 for unlimited user licensing. activePDF Server is offered for just under $1000, with a per-server license. This means that a business purchases one license per server, and can support as many users as the server allows with no transaction limitations, and no hidden fees. Because the product was designed from the ground-up with server-side operation in mind, activePDF is able to offer this highly robust system at an affordable price. This makes activePDF Server the most cost-effective solution for companies wanting to reap the benefits of server-side PDF generation.

Performance

Adobe Distiller Server for Windows NT/2000 is single-threaded, meaning it processes one job at a time. Jobs are placed into a queue system, and users must simply wait their turn. This presents a problem if several users are trying to convert simultaneously or if large, complex files are pushed through the system, creating a backlog.

activePDF Server is the only true multi-threaded PDF print driver available for Microsoft® Windows®. This multi-threading functionality is integral to the efficiency promised (but not delivered) by other server-side distilling packages. Multi-threading allows several users to run concurrent jobs under stress. To state it differently, multiple users can convert their files to PDF simultaneously, without having to wait in a queue, and without imposing unnecessary strain on the server. Overall performance surpasses that of comparable products; more documents are converted in less time using activePDF Server. activePDF Server is specifically designed to be fault tolerant with intelligent restarting capabilities, resulting in zero down-time if a conversion is unsuccessful.

Customers testing activePDF Server against Adobe Distiller Server have reported that activePDF Server is at least 10% faster in completing the same single-threaded, PostScript-to-PDF conversion. When testing with multiple jobs, customers have discovered that activePDF Server is up to 20% faster. This increased performance is largely due to the unique, multi-threaded nature of activePDF Server's process handling. Because activePDF Server was specifically engineered to control intelligent processing priority, it is able to optimally distribute threads across multiple CPUs. activePDF Server assigns each thread to each CPU, thereby maximizing the processing power inherent in the network server rather than draining it.

Internet Usage

Although Distiller Server does not include Internet usage, activePDF Server does. The licensing agreement for Distiller requires that users are authenticated, meaning users must be able to verify that they are agents of the licensing company prior to running print jobs. This presents a problem in cases such as e-commerce applications, where businesses need to leverage the features of the PDF format by generating on-the-fly, printable data for their customers. activePDF Server allows any user with access to the server – even a Web server – to generate PDF files. For example, one corporation's implementation of activePDF Server involves a web-based reporting application that generates monthly revenue statements on the fly, delivering them as secure, tamperproof PDF files to customers via the corporate website.

Flexibility

activePDF is a developer-oriented company, offering tools to allow software developers the flexibility to adapt activePDF products to their environments. activePDF Server's unique COM interface affords developers complete control over the PDF generation, conversion, and manipulation processes. Callable from Visual Basic®, ASP, Delphi®, .NET, Cold Fusion®, and a host of other environments, the entire activePDF product suite is highly customizable, allowing developers the flexibility to manipulate the products to enhance existing infrastructure and processes. Unlike the "one-size-fits-all" approach adopted by other vendors, activePDF offers products

designed to be molded to fit the business environment.

Security

activePDF Server is the first server-side PDF print driver to offer **native** PDF encryption, supporting both 40 bit and 128 bit keys. With activePDF Server's fingerprint technology, businesses can easily detect if their PDF files have been tampered with. Once a PDF is generated, Server applies a coded "fingerprint" that is transparent to the end-user. If the validity of a file is in question, activePDF Server or activePDF Toolkit (available as a separate offering) can be used to verify the file's integrity. If the data has been tampered with, the fingerprint and file data will not match. Fingerprint checking can be implemented both programmatically and procedurally, as part of business workflow, to further tighten data management policies.

Image Handling

Unlike Distiller Server, activePDF Server can convert over 40 different image types directly to PDF, without requiring an intermediate PostScript file.

Conclusion

By implementing a server-based PDF generating tool, businesses can enjoy the benefits of the PDF format without incurring the overhead of multiple user licenses and desktop maintenance expenses. The robustness, flexibility and exceptional performance afforded by activePDF Server make it the ideal choice when selecting a server-based solution.

The following table summarizes the primary differences between activePDF Server and Adobe Distiller Server.

	activePDF Server	Adobe Distiller Server
Licensing	$975 per server, unlimited users	$5000 per 100 users, $15,000 for unlimited *authenticated* users
Supported Platforms	Windows	Windows, UNIX
Server-side PDF creation	Yes	Yes
Multi-threaded processing	Yes	No
Internet Usage	Yes	No
Built-In Fingerprint Technology	Yes	No
COM Interface	Yes	No
Programmable job options	Yes	Yes
Direct-to-PDF image file conversions	Yes	No

About activePDF

activePDF Inc., a leading provider of server-side PDF conversion and development tools for Windows®, offers a complete suite of affordable industrial-strength PDF tools that free the developer from the typical dilemmas associated with dynamic PDF creation. The most comprehensive server-side PDF development tools in existence, activePDF software remains unique in the PDF industry by offering a server-based suite of products with no additional per user or per document licensing fees. activePDF provides COM object level access within all of its products to afford developers complete control over the PDF generation and manipulation process. Established in January 2000, activePDF has a global distribution network spanning every continent and more than 5,000 clients worldwide. activePDF customers include Fortune and Global 500 organizations in the financial/banking services, manufacturing, pharmaceutical, healthcare, education and government industries.

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