

On Becoming an e-Agent—Document File Formats Part VI

By Jo Becker, GRI, BA

To carry the discussion of last month's article on picture file formats a step further, this month I'll discuss document file formats. Any time you draft and save a letter on your computer, and each flyer or brochure you layout and save is a document. The type of software you use to create the document will determine its file format.

For example, let's say you write a sphere letter using Word Perfect or Works (two examples of word processing programs) and save it on your computer. You then want to get that letter to your local print shop to print and mail the letter to your sphere. You can easily create a new message in your e-mail program and attached that letter to the message, sending it to your printer lick-ity-split! However, it is important to realize that your printer may or may not have the program you used to create the letter. Probably the most common word processing application is Microsoft Word. If your print shop doesn't have the program you used to create the file, they will either be unable to open the file or, if it does open, it will likely lose much of its formatting.

This scenario will play out similarly if you are sending brochures or flyers via e-mail or on diskette to clients, and so on. If you plan on sending files to friends, vendors, clients and prospects, your best option is to learn (IE: ask) what software the recipient uses and try to use that program and/or file format when creating your documents. If you are unable to determine the file format your recipient will need, saving the document as a .rtf (rich text format) will likely preserve most of your formatting, allowing them to open your file without much difficulty. Another alternative is save the document as a .txt (text) file which can be opened in just about any program, but will not retain formatting such as paragraphs, tabs, etc. This will make the document hard to read.

In most programs you can save your document in the file format of your choice by clicking on the "File" menu and selecting "Save As" from the menu. From here you follow the steps to save the document where you know you can find it later (either on your hard drive and/or on a floppy disk), name the file, and select the appropriate file format from a drop down menu.

The best method for sharing brochures, flyers and other documents in which you want to retain all layout and formatting elements is with a .pdf (portable document format) file. To create .pdf files you will need to purchase Adobe's Acrobat Distiller software. The .pdf format allows any user with a free Adobe Acrobat Reader download to access the file and see it exactly as it was on your computer.

I hope this brief discussion on document file formats is helpful. If laying out documents, saving them in various formats, and attaching them to e-mail messages seems too overwhelming, ask for help, but keep trying! Before long you will get the hang of it. In the meantime, *hang it there!*



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