Adobe® Acrobat®

captured **once**

read by **many**

The Transportation Department at Birmingham City Council is making use of Acrobat's Web Capture facility to evaluate, capture and internally distribute PDF versions of a variety of Web pages, saving staff time on Web searches and delivering pertinent information more quickly.

The Transportation Department at Birmingham City Council is responsible for all transport-related matters for Britain's second-largest city. It employs nearly 1400 staff.

BENEFITS SUMMARY

- Adobe Acrobat's Web capture allows pages from a variety of Web sites to be converted to PDF to provide a permanent and universally accessible source of relevant information for transport policy makers.

- Acrobat's tools allow pages from separate Web sites to be combined into one convenient file with bookmarks and links to allow readers to quickly locate the content they need.

- By hand-picking relevant material from the Web, hours of potentially wasted Web surfing time can be eliminated.

- Storing PDFs on a central server ensures access to all interested council staff even if they do not have an Internet connection.

www.birmingham.gov.uk

As the UK's second largest city Birmingham not surprisingly needs a large city council to manage its affairs. The city's Transportation Department employs nearly 1400 staff and has responsibility for everything from school crossing patrols to highway infrastructure management, road naming to transport planning. With a daily influx of quarter of a million cars to the city centre, over 9100 roads to maintain, and 95,000 streetlights, there's plenty to do to meet the aim of providing the best possible transportation and technical services for the people of Birmingham and visitors to the city.

Like all other departments in town and borough councils across the country, the Transportation Department is required to ensure that its policies are implemented according to current legislation and practice. This involves keeping continuously abreast of information from a number of sources, notably central government's DTLR (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions).

Although the DTLR sends out a regular email bulletin to transport planning officers, this typically lists headline items with links to a number of Web sites for full details. This presents two possible problems – first that recipients need Internet access to follow

up the links, which not all computers in local government offices have, and second, users may spend a lot of unproductive time following up these links searching for specific information and reference material.

But some form of reference to the Web is essential, as Projects Leader Steven Loh explains:

"Externally sourced information is the lifeblood of our policy making; we wouldn't be able to keep in touch effectively without it, but there's a lot of information on the Web and we need to be able to quickly identify the right documents and bring them to the right people's attention."

With 25 years' experience in transport-related roles in local government, Loh uses his experience and knowledge to interpret, review and classify the constant stream of documents, acting as an 'information agent' for his colleagues. He reviews dozens of

"With Acrobat all the information is there in one place, and it's always up to date"

– Steven Loh, Projects Leader, Transportation Department, Birmingham City Council

pages each day on ten or so Web sites, hand-picks content of interest and sends carefully targeted emails to his colleagues summarising what he's found.
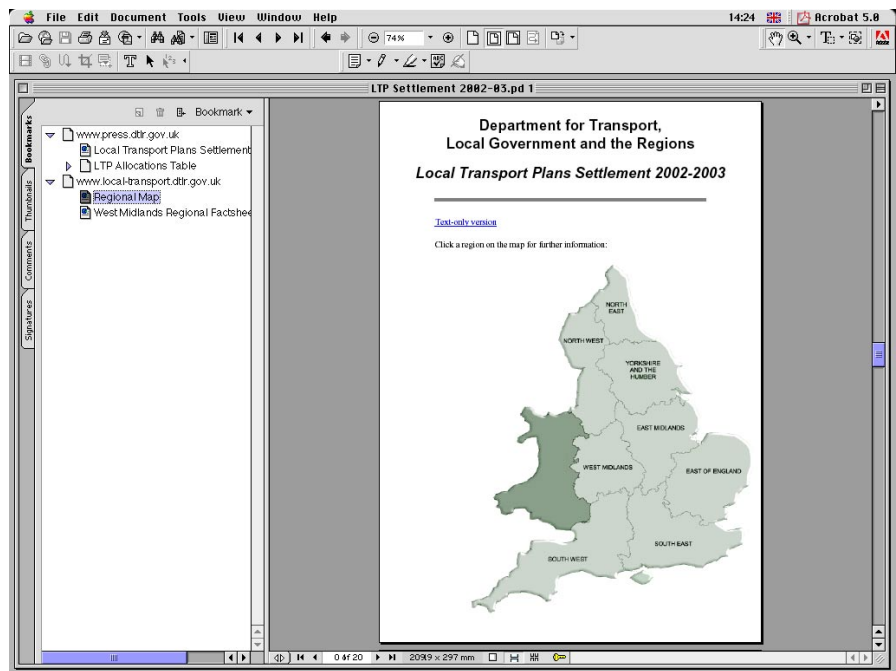
"Some of the relevant documents are already in PDF so I just download these, but for those that are in HTML, attempting to download the source file doesn't really work, you get the text but not the graphics," Loh says. "And passing around URLs isn't always a good solution as not everyone has Internet access."

Acrobat PDF files, by comparison, include both text and graphics and also preserve document layout across different computers and operating systems, allowing all viewers to see and print exactly the same material via the free Acrobat Reader. PDF files are small, which means they impose a minimal burden on network traffic or email, and can support internal and external links in the same way as HTML.

HAND-PICKED INFORMATION

Once he's identified documents that are relevant to his colleagues, Loh uses Acrobat to convert the HTML pages from the source Web site into PDF using the Web capture facility, and then builds compound reference PDF documents containing bookmarks and inter-document links to help the recipients find the pertinent sections quickly. The PDFs are stored on a networked drive. Known as the I-drive, it's a single point of reference for transport-related documents for around 45 policy staff, and with network changes due this year, it will become available to some 600 staff via the Transportation Department's intranet.

A good example of the type of document captured and disseminated in this way is the Local Transport Settlements, a summary of local government budgets and projects that the DTLR published on the Web in December 2001. "We received a press release

that pointed to other documents, but if I forwarded that, the linked documents wouldn't go with it," says Loh. "I converted the headline story and then the linked documents to PDF, put in bookmarks to suit our staff's usage."

The combination of subject expertise with the ability of Acrobat to capture and make permanent the contents of frequently updated Web sites means that Loh is able to put timely and above all relevant information at colleagues' fingertips and save them lengthy and possibly fruitless Web searches for the information they need, a process that he has christened 'capture once, read many'.

In a typical month, Loh will add more than 30 documents to the I-drive, ranging from 20k up to over a megabyte in size depending on content. "A news press release may be only one or two pages, but I may include a linked document that's 120 pages," Loh explains. "This way, all the information is there in one place, and it's always up to date."

Putting the information where it's needed: by capturing Web pages as PDF they can be collated, bookmarked and made available on an internal network drive so everyone in the Transportation Department can find the right material quickly.

TOOL KIT

Software
Adobe Acrobat 5.0

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PCs