Adobe® Acrobat®

Hillsborough County, Florida

County creates searchable electronic agendas and archives, including background documents, with Adobe Acrobat, Adobe PDF, and DocMaestro DocDepot

Every other Wednesday, the Board of County Commissioners for Florida's Hillsborough County, home of Tampa, holds public meetings to discuss county issues ranging from health care to land use. Before the meeting, the county must publish a meeting agenda and background materials so that commissioners can make informed voting decisions and county residents can decide whether to attend. Now Hillsborough County has dramatically improved convenience—and cut costs in the process—by distributing agendas as electronic files that can be e-mailed to commissioners and posted to the Web for the public. The solution, developed by DocMaestro Products, an Adobe Solutions Network developer, is based on Adobe Acrobat, Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF), and DocMaestro's DocDepot® and InfoLinker® software.

FROM PAPER TO ADOBE PDF

In the past, the county produced 30 copies of the agenda and supporting documents, usually around 500 pages in length, hand delivering binders to commissioners and other key staff the Friday before each meeting. The paper-based process was time-consuming and inconvenienced just about everyone. Commissioners had to hunt through huge stacks of paper to find information from past meetings. Though citizens could review the agenda on the Web, they had to make a trip to the county offices to view supporting documents. County administrators had to reshuffle paper to make last-minute changes in the agenda, and they spent time and money photocopying, collating, and delivering paper documents.

Hillsborough County decided that by automating the process of creating and distributing agendas and supporting documents, it could provide better service and cut paper and administrative costs in the process. The key would be to publish meeting materials online with hyperlinks from the agenda to supporting documents such as bid packages, budget requests, and other text and image documents.

After evaluating several document management solutions, the county chose DocMaestro Products, a division of ISPA, Inc. The company's document management solution, called DocDepot, would allow county administrators to store, access, and manage Adobe PDF files online—and citizens to view them—with only a browser and the freely available Adobe Acrobat Reader
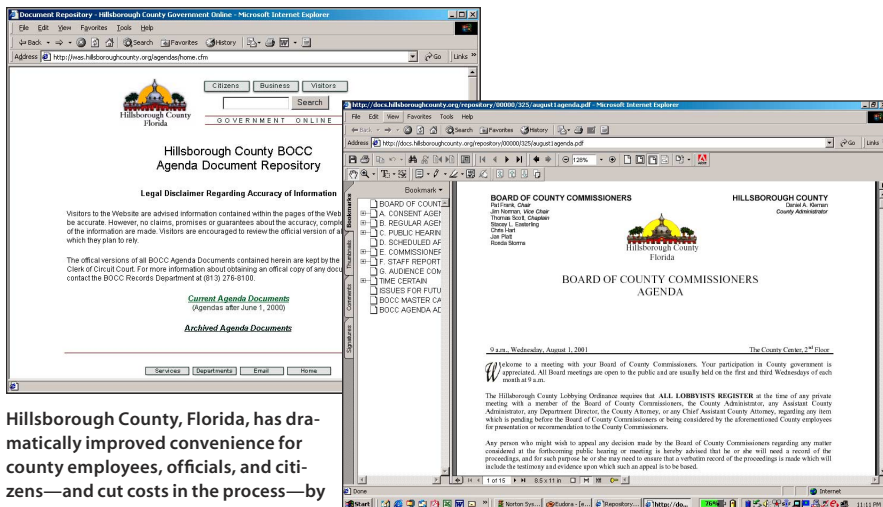
Hillsborough County, Florida, has dramatically improved convenience for county employees, officials, and citizens—and cut costs in the process—by distributing county meeting agendas and related materials as Adobe PDF files that can be e-mailed to commissioners and posted to the Web for the public. With the DocDepot document management solution, county administrators can store, access, and manage Adobe PDF files with only a browser and the free Acrobat Reader.

software. InfoLinker, an Adobe Acrobat plug-in from DocMaestro Products, provides rich options for the automatic generation of hyperlinks and bookmarks from the agenda to supporting documents.

INTERACTIVE, SEARCHABLE DOCUMENTS

To submit documents for inclusion with the agenda, county departments create them as they always did, using Microsoft Word or WordPerfect software. Next, the Administrative Services Department converts the documents to Adobe PDF using Adobe Acrobat. Hard-copy images are scanned and converted to Adobe PDF using Adobe Acrobat Capture® software. Finally, the group uses InfoLinker to link the agenda to all supporting documents. "The final product is a consolidated Adobe PDF file that looks exactly like the original paper-copy documents," says Patrick Cosgrove, manager in the county's Information and Technology Services group. This consolidated Adobe PDF file is e-mailed to commissioners and posted to the county Internet site, using DocDepot, for citizens, the media,

and other interested parties (*http://was.hillsboroughcounty.org/agendas/home.cfm*).

DocDepot also indexes the documents, with metadata such as document type (agenda, meeting recap, or minutes), date, and title, as well as a full text index, creating an electronic archive. "In the past, the Board had to thumb through agendas to find out what was said; now they can use fully searchable Adobe PDF files to find what they want in seconds," says Cosgrove. "And citizens can easily search for a particular date or issue that concerns them, such as storm water."

ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE

Introduced in January 2000, the electronic agendas received an immediate, enthusiastic response from all users. "The biggest benefit of using DocDepot, Adobe Acrobat, and Adobe PDF is that the entire agenda and all backup material are accessible to anyone with an Internet connection," says Cosgrove. "This improves our service to citizens, who used to have to visit the county offices to review backup materials. And the local media loves having files available in Adobe PDF because

they can quickly search for all references to a particular topic."

The DocMaestro and Adobe Acrobat solution reduced administrative workload and costs, as well. "The county reduced the time to prepare its agendas, expedited access to agenda items during meetings, and relieved county staff of most citizen requests by providing Internet access to materials in Adobe PDF," says Jose Mera, vice president of DocMaestro Products.

Buoyed by the success of this project, Hillsborough County plans to extend its use of Adobe Acrobat and Adobe PDF. For instance, the Land Use Agenda and supporting documents will be posted on the Web so that the public can find out the details of a planned new supermarket. In addition, the county will begin distributing documents for internal review as Adobe PDF files, eliminating the time and expense of printing and delivering paper documents, and giving reviewers convenient annotation tools in Adobe Acrobat, such as underline, strikethrough, and highlighting.

"With DocDepot and Adobe Acrobat we're saving costs by not having to copy lengthy documents biweekly," says Cosgrove. "Even more important, we can now make information available in Adobe PDF faster and to a wider audience."

TOOLKIT

Software
Adobe Acrobat Capture
Adobe Acrobat Reader
DocMaestro DocDepot
DocMaestro InfoLinker

Hardware
Microsoft® Windows NT® Server, for DocMaestro products
Canon 3020 and Canon 5020 scanners