

Presentation of Technical Information on the Web

Distributing technical information via the World Wide Web is relatively easy to do, thanks to the many tools and techniques that have been developed.

Portable Document Format

Sometimes it makes sense to distribute a document by converting the word-processed version into a Portable Document Format or PDF file. Word-processed documents are usually meant to be printed for reading. Therefore, when PDF files are placed online, others can easily access them, but because they are directly converted from print, they are not easy to read on screen. In short, when reports made available in PDF format, it usually indicates that the company or agency wants to increase public access to its publications without unnecessarily increasing printing or mailing costs.

For instance, annual reports of the Division of Elections – Florida Department of State, are available online. The 1999 report can be seen at <http://election.dos.state.fl.us/publications/pdf/99annrpt.pdf>

With national interest focused on Florida's election practices during the 2000 presidential election, it's likely that the division faced new requests for these reports; making them available on line decreases staff processing time as well as printing and mailing expenses.

Evolution of Online Reporting Formats

To review a selection of Web-based annual reports distributed by one company over the past several years, check out GE's annual reports at the following URL: <http://www.ge.com/investor/annuals.htm>.

Notice that in recent years, GE has provided its reports in two formats:

- A nicely designed interactive annual report suitable for online reading.
- A printable version of the report in Portable Document Format.

In so doing, GE demonstrates its commitment to the needs of its readers. Companies are paying increased attention to audience by distributing online reports in several convenient formats.

When you consider how best to place documents online, it is important to consider not only the impact on the company, but perhaps more importantly, the impact on the reader/customer.