

The PLT to PDF Revolution is NOW!

PLT files don't serve AEC and Manufacturing firms with as high a utility as do PDF's. The actual creation and plotting of PDF's can be a complex and mystifying journey as well. Now what?

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More and more AEC firms are making the move to PDF because they can easily share, view, print, and archive this type of file. Over the last few years CAD and IT Managers have been working to eliminate PLT files and implement PDF's. Software for viewing PLT files cost money versus the free Acrobat Reader. Yes, there are free software applications for viewing PLT's but they are very limited in functionality and let's face it, do you really want to install ANOTHER program for viewing one file type. Add to this the fact that PLT files are really single page documents and the utility of the file format diminishes quickly.

Moving to a 100% PDF workflow is a good idea. You can create a PDF, share, view, print, and archive it. Unfortunately, when it's time to deal with hundreds or even thousands of PDF files, a different set of issues and needs arise. You may think "If I need to create a PDF, I click the 'Create PDF button' and save a new PDF file to my hard drive", or "I open the PDF file and simply select the print button and I'm done, so where are the problems?" A single PDF file, one-here-one-there, workflow is easy for most users in any environment. What do you do when the project you are working on has 300 AutoCAD drawings and not only do you need to create the PDF's, but you also need to plot 50 sets at full size (24x36 drawings)? Most companies have some form of batch automation to create and print PLT files. Their existing PLT workflow is not the same for PDF's because it is too inefficient to sit there and open each drawing and create a single PDF file 300 times over because there is no batch processing for PDF creation. Then, there is the issue of plotting the 300 page set on a wide-format plotter. Almost all wide-format plotters are built to handle PLT and TIFF files well, but are lacking the memory and computing power needed for processing PDF's. This is a very real situation that occurs on a daily basis as more and more companies adopt PDF as their file standard. Still want to make the move to PDF? Relax, there's hope.

AcroPlot Pro from CADzation is built for batch converting AutoCAD DWG files to PDF or DWF. A CAD user can quickly load +300 DWG files into the program, set the print order, and select all the advanced AutoCAD plot settings needed to complete the entire conversion to PDF, unattended. The PDF or DWF conversion output can be one file containing all sheets or 300 individual PDF files. CADzation offers an unlimited 30-day trial of their software at <http://www.cadzation.com>. Now that the issue of batch creation has been addressed, there still remain a few more details that need to be discussed.

Not all PDF's are created equally. The promise of creating a PDF file is so the information contained within it will view and print exactly the same as the native software application that created it. End users only need a PDF viewer, and not the same costly software application, to view and print the information. "Lines merge" functionality is where overlapping CAD lines and solid fills are transparent when plotted. Almost every CAD user will enable this function when installing a plotter and its AutoCAD driver. However, when an AutoCAD DWG file is converted to PDF using the current versions of Adobe Acrobat (versions 3 thru 8) the PDF does not always view and print exactly as it would from AutoCAD. This is because Acrobat does not support "lines merge" in the PDF files it creates from AutoCAD. Most AEC companies need "lines merge" functionality on their plotters and in their PDF's. Since "lines merge" is available in PLT files most CAD users assume that it is also available with any PDF converter on the market, it's not. AcroPlot Pro software from CADzation supports "lines merge" in PDF files created from AutoCAD versions 2000 to 2008.

As the use and utility of PDF files increase in the AEC and manufacturing industry, so will the demand for plotting them on wide-format plotters. Currently, the equipment and software most AEC and manufacturing firms use is not PDF friendly for high volume production printing. Some large format plotters have an option that can be purchased from the manufacturer for processing PDF files on the controller of the plotter. PDF processing on the plotter controller can be slow and doesn't give the end user all the pre-printing settings needed for quality output. The software used to process PDF's is also limited. Applications like Océ Repro Desk, PLP PlotWorks, and KIP QuickPrint, usually use the free Ghostscript utility for PDF processing. Ghostscript is not designed for "lines merge" enabled PDF files, and can take ten times longer to process this type of PDF file. There is a solution. AcroPlot Repro software from CADzation solves the PDF speed and print quality problem and is a viable alternative to Ghostscript. PDF print quality is the same or better than a PLT when using AcroPlot Repro to process PDF files.

Having an end-to-end solution(s) for efficiently batch creating and plotting PDF files is what AEC and manufacturing firms need to implement in order to standardize on this file type. Automated batch conversion for AutoCAD projects will save time, money, and the sanity of the CAD user. Utilizing correct print processing applications completes the PDF workflow and eliminates the need for the PLT file. ◀