

novaPDF Professional 2.5
Keith Alcock, TCS Member
tcs@keithalcock.com

novaPDF is a virtual printer driver that generates PDF (Adobe's Portable Document Format) files from any Windows application able to print. Rather than driving the printer, it writes a PDF file in much the same way that Acrobat Distiller or PDFWriter does, but for a substantially lower price. It isn't completely free like some similar software, but is close to it. Unlike the more expensive Adobe Acrobat, it does not provide any tools to manipulate PDF files after they have been produced. This means that it cannot combine documents printed at different times or by different applications into a single PDF file. Neither can the novaPDF SDK (software development kit) be used to manipulate PDF files programmatically. However, if these aren't critical requirements for you, the product performs impressively and earns my recommendation.

novaPDF is marketed as shareware and is available in three different versions: professional, standard, and lite costing from around \$40 down to \$20 at present. The web site includes a detailed feature matrix and links from which to download and later pay for the product. According to the documentation, a small notice will appear at the bottom of every printed page until the software is registered and paid for. Payment is made online through a selection of eCommerce service providers: Plimus, ShareIt, or RegNow. I am not familiar with these companies and was spared the registration and payment steps in acquiring a review copy. The choices offered, not to mention all the awards that the product has won, seem indicative of a very professional operation and product. If you need to make PDFs, it's worth your time to check it out.

The complete installation program amounts to a 1.6MB download. Double click on it, OK the license agreement, choose an installation directory, and that's it. No reboot is required. My only reservation resulted from actually reading the license agreement. It says that the agreement is governed by the laws of Romania. Everything in the agreement is perfectly reasonable, but I wouldn't want to deal with the legal issues if anything went wrong. In any case, one folder is added to the start menu containing links to the product's web site; the license agreement, readme, and help files; and an uninstaller. In the control panel for printers and faxes, a new "novaPDF Pro v2" printer appears and is ready for operation.

From the print dialog in an application, press the preferences or properties button to bring up a dialog with nine tabs providing access to the novaPDF options. Those for page size are fairly standard across different printers and those for document information (title, subject, author, and keywords) are familiar additions of Adobe Reader. novaPDF supports custom page sizes and adjustable margins and zoom levels as well. The seven other tabs are compression, fonts, security, links, save, profiles, and about. Compression enables zip or jpeg compression of text and images, fonts controls embedding of fonts into the PDF file, and security determines document permissions and passwords. Use the links tab to instruct novaPDF to analyze the printed text for URLs and insert a clickable link into the document. The save tab influences how the file

is named and where it is stored. Settings are grouped into profiles, which can be saved, copied, renamed, deleted, and activated. Finally, the about tab is used for registration and license management. novaPDF can be used as a shared network printer, but only for the number of machines that the license allows, which was one in this case. Machine names can be added and removed manually from the list of licensed machines, so one might make do with fewer licenses than machines with manual intervention. Overall the program is straightforward and to the point.

I tested printing from Microsoft Publisher, Word, and Internet Explorer, Adobe InDesign and Reader, and QuarkXPress as well. The driver performed like a charm. The only weakness I found was the automatic link insertion. While it works most of the time, I was able to fool it by manipulating the font (scaling, spacing, weight, style, etc.) within a URL. Email addresses without the mailto: scheme are treated as links, despite them not being URLs technically. There's no way to alter the PDF once it has been produced, unfortunately, so one must accept the links or do without. I wouldn't generally use this feature, so it's not a problem for me.

novaPDF is a reliable and economical tool for producing PDF files and for that purpose it is very well suited. I can indeed recommend it.

Company/Product information

Vendor: Softland SRL of Romania

URL: <http://www.novapdf.com>

Product: novaPDF Professional 2.5

Price: \$39.95 online

System requirements

Processor speed: 400MHz minimum

Memory: 64MB minimum, 128MB recommended

Disk Space: 4MB for application files plus 3MB for installation

Operating System: Windows 2000, XP, 2003 Server, or Windows Terminal Servers