



Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations

Adobe® Acrobat® and Adobe PDF help graduate students reach global audience by providing easy electronic access to theses and dissertations

Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD)

- International organization dedicated to improving graduate education by expanding access to searchable, electronic theses and dissertations
- Location: Coordinating offices worldwide
- Size: More than 190 universities around the globe

www.ndltd.org

Industry

Education

Solutions

- Electronic Document Delivery
- Electronic Collaboration
- Electronic Document Archiving

Product Used

Adobe Acrobat

Organization Profile

The Networked Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (NDLTD) is a rapidly growing, international nonprofit educational organization that promotes improved access to academic research. With nearly 200 universities worldwide participating in the organization, the wealth of graduate research available through NDLTD's Web site is impressive. Increasingly, platform- and application-independent Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files are the standard for online publishing of graduate work, largely due to the format's ease of use, cost-effectiveness, and support for multimedia content.

Challenges Faced

Overcome barriers to fast, reliable sharing of graduate projects

Student theses and dissertations traditionally have been managed on paper, with schools devoting substantial space to storing these research projects. In addition to high costs, paper-based processes for managing this information make it difficult to share materials because only a limited number of on-campus students and faculty have direct access to the documents. In some cases, copies of theses and dissertations can be requested by mail, but the expense and delays associated with sending the copies make this approach less than ideal. To improve access to research, graduate students and faculty need ways to electronically share research materials with colleagues around the world.

Strengthen student skills in electronic publishing and digital research

The variety of content in theses and dissertations has increased dramatically over the years. In contrast to static printed pages with text and images, today's graduate projects can incorporate color diagrams, 3D visuals, and video. For students, the challenge is to integrate these disparate elements into comprehensive final projects and to do so in a way that makes their materials readily accessible to anyone interested in their research.

Improve collaboration among students and professors

Theses and dissertations go through many reviews and editing cycles before being finalized. When paper is involved, review cycles can bog down as students and faculty repeatedly copy, route, and review materials. Students then face the challenge of incorporating difficult-to-read input from reviewers, while faculty must track and sift through stacks of student projects on paper, in pictures, and on video. The ideal system would allow students and professors to quickly exchange information in compact digital files that could be reviewed and commented on electronically.

“Students can integrate their work into one file, without worrying about whether or not it can be viewed. Adobe Acrobat and Adobe PDF go a long way in expanding access to student research.”

Gail McMillan,
Director of digital library
and archives,
Virginia Tech

Success Strategy

Using Adobe Acrobat software and Adobe PDF, universities are streamlining the creation, distribution, and archiving of electronic theses and dissertations. Diverse content—video, photographs, text, complex equations, and other elements—can be incorporated into a single Adobe PDF file that can be read with free Adobe Reader® software. “Students can integrate their work into one file, without worrying about whether or not it can be viewed,” says Gail McMillan, director of digital library and archives at Virginia Tech. “Adobe Acrobat and Adobe PDF go a long way in expanding access to student research.”

Hundreds of universities worldwide, including the University of Florida, Universitat de Barcelona, and University of Melbourne, already require graduate students to submit their research electronically. Completed work in Adobe PDF can be posted to a university’s Web site and linked through NDLTD, offering a searchable, easily accessible repository for finding current research. At the University of Texas at Austin, thousands of electronic dissertations have been submitted in Adobe PDF. Says Dr. Tim Brace, senior systems analyst at the University of Texas, “Online access to projects can build important relationships between researchers who otherwise might never have met.”

An additional advantage of using digital files instead of paper is that universities can eliminate many of the costs of storing and managing student projects. “Library space is at a premium,” says McMillan. “Archiving student work in Adobe PDF saves space and resources.”

Benefits

- Expanded student and faculty access to theses and dissertations worldwide
- Reduced the cost of managing, distributing, and archiving student projects
- Enhanced the breadth of content readily accessible in theses and dissertations
- Improved student and faculty collaboration

According to Dr. Edward Fox, professor of computer science at Virginia Tech and executive director of NDLTD, the most important benefit from using Adobe PDF is broader access to materials. “Electronic theses and dissertations are longer and richer because students and faculty are now creating work for a wider audience. We might have had three people access a thesis or five people access a dissertation each year in the early 1990s,” says Fox. “Today, a popular thesis might be downloaded 10,000 times—that’s an enormous increase.”

Adobe PDF files enable work to be distributed to the widest possible audience because files can be read with the free Adobe Reader software. At the same time, content integrity is preserved, enabling students to deliver materials exactly as intended. Drafts of materials also can be distributed among review teams for digital review and markup using Acrobat commenting tools, eliminating problems associated with tracking and incorporating edits on paper.

Final projects can be posted online in Adobe PDF files. “This helps the university and our students,” says Amanda Athey, coordinator for electronic theses and dissertations at the University of New Orleans. “People worldwide can gain insight into research being done at the university, and our students experience firsthand the advantages of electronic publishing.”

