

A new way to buy Acrobat DC: Subscription

By Rick Borstein

Before going further, I need to make sure that you know that you certainly can continue to buy and upgrade Acrobat as you have in the past without buying a subscription

Subscription is a new additional purchase option for Acrobat.

Adobe has other software subscription offerings such as the [Creative Cloud](#). The idea of subscription software is new to some folks, so I thought I would offer some background here and discuss some factors you might consider in making a decision of Buy versus Subscribe.

Note that purchase considerations will vary quite a bit between an individual or small firm and that of a large enterprise and that the opinions below are my own.

Software Licensing Models

Software is licensed using different models.

A *Perpetual* software license offers you the right to use the software subject to the terms of the End User License Agreement, in perpetuity.

A *Subscription* software license typically allows you to use the software during the term that the subscription is valid (or paid). Subscription offerings generally include all updates and upgrades that take place during the subscription term. Many subscription software offerings, including Acrobat DC and Creative Cloud, include access to other online services and products not included with the desktop software.

Perpetual May not be Forever

Note that although perpetual licenses may be used forever, that mitigating factors often dictate a shorter realistic lifespan. If you upgrade your operating system, hardware or companion software, you may need to purchase an upgrade for compatibility.

Examples

- Acrobat 8 isn't compatible with Windows 7
- Acrobat XI or higher is required for compatibility with Office 2013

Another issue is support at End of Life (EOL). Adobe (and other software companies) do not support software forever. Acrobat 9 went EOL on 6-26-2013 which means Adobe is no longer providing security fixes for Acrobat 9. Although you may continue to use it, you could put yourself at risk if hackers come up with a new attack method not addressed in previous updates.

I'll note that Acrobat X goes EOL in November, 2015.

When is a Subscription better than a Perpetual license?

A software subscription typically makes sense if you like to keep your software current or don't want to pay the up-front cost of a perpetual license. If you value the added product offerings, then subscriptions are even more attractive. A subscription can be convenient in that your spending is predictable. You won't have to suddenly find money to pay for a needed upgrade. Larger enterprises often prefer to have software as an operating rather than capital expense.

Dollars and Sense

I do not have a clever analogy or a calculator for the lease versus buy decision. It really depends on what is important to you. Subscriptions may be more expensive than buying perpetual software, particularly if you don't usually buy each upgrade.

However, subscriptions offer many benefits as outlined previously and, at least in the case of Acrobat DC, bundled services which may be valuable to you.

Product Release History

- Acrobat 9.0 shipped 6/25/2008
- Acrobat X shipped on 11/15/2010
- Acrobat XI shipped on 10/15/2012
- Acrobat DC shipped on April 7, 2015

Feature Comparison

Acrobat DC: Subscription vs Perpetual Comparison

	Acrobat Pro DC Subscription	Acrobat Pro DC Perpetual
Upgrade from Previous Version	No Payment as long as Subscription is Valid	Upgrade License must be Purchased
Install Acrobat on your desktop Mac or PC	Yes	Yes
Use Adobe Send and Track to send large files	Yes	No
Collect e-signatures from others and track responses in real time	Yes	No
Create PDFs on the go in a browser or on a mobile device	Yes	No

	Acrobat Pro DC Subscription	Acrobat Pro DC Perpetual
In a browser, merge multiple documents in one PDF	Yes	No
Export PDFs to Microsoft Office formats in a browser or on a mobile device	Yes	No
Add or edit text or – rearrange pages – in a PDF on your iPad in Acrobat Mobile	Yes	No
Release Cycle	Continuous release cycle with new features delivered throughout	Every two years. You must purchase an upgrade for access to new features

Final Thoughts

Subscription software isn't a new idea, but it is relatively new to Adobe. The world is increasingly mobile, so having desktop software that connects to services sold as an all-in-one offering can be appealing. In addition, with subscription software, Adobe can deliver new features throughout the release cycle meaning you don't have to wait to get access to new, productivity enhancements.

One area that definitely merits your consideration is the bundled eSignature capabilities. Acrobat DC with Services allows you to gather legal, electronic signatures on your PDF. This allows you to on-board new clients and get agreements signed anywhere, on any device with a web browser. Instead of printing, signing, scanning or mailing, your clients can move the signature ceremony securely to the cloud which improves client satisfaction. Younger clients, increasingly, expect to business without paper.