

Ontario Homicide Investigators Association

Leading law enforcement association adopts Adobe® Acrobat® Professional and Adobe PDF to streamline creating e-disclosures, prompting other law enforcement agencies to follow suit

Ontario Homicide Investigators Association

www.ohia.on.ca



Industry

Government

Challenges

- Establish standards for managing and exchanging case documents
- Safeguard the integrity of case materials

Solution

- Electronic Disclosures
The Ontario Homicide Investigators Association is recommending investigators and agencies utilize Adobe Acrobat Professional to quickly assemble electronic disclosures in Adobe PDF for delivery to courts and legal counsel.

Results

- Minimize administrative time and costs for building case disclosures
- Improve detective and legal counsel's access to critical case information
- Free investigators to devote more time to higher-value research activities
- Enhance the quality of case materials submitted to courts

Systems At A Glance

- Adobe Acrobat Professional
- Platform: Microsoft® Windows® XP

Increasingly complex case disclosures

Long before cases go to trial, investigators can spend months or even years collecting evidence. The resulting documents can fill dozens of boxes, requiring busy detectives to devote weeks of valuable time to copying, collating, and delivering materials for in-house reference and to outside counsel.

“The trend in criminal cases is to provide defense attorneys and prosecutors with more extensive disclosures,” says Randy Rosiak, detective inspector at the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) in Canada. “The challenge for law enforcement agencies is to cost-effectively meet the demand while ensuring detectives stay focused on investigations and not get bogged down with administrative tasks.”

The OHIA states that using Adobe Acrobat Professional software and Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) is improving how detectives manage and share case documents inside and outside of local agencies. The mandate of the OHIA is to promote the use of leading investigative techniques; the use of PDF has proven a valuable tool in reducing the administrative burden and cost of preparing major cases for disclosure.

Inefficient manual processes

Detectives have to track every detail during a criminal investigation, including written testimony, photos, expert reports, videotaped information, and other content. Traditionally, this process required them to continually copy, collate, and manage paper. With complex investigations easily involving hundreds of thousands of pages of case documents, OPP wanted a faster, more efficient way to handle and share the huge volume of information.

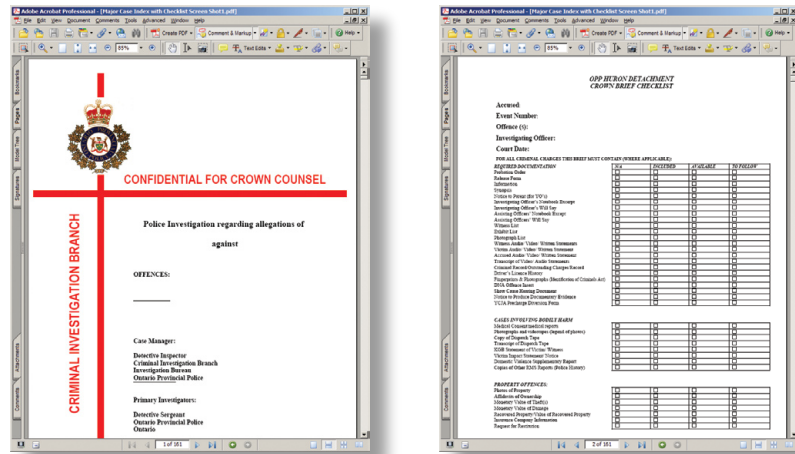
“Managing case documents on paper is problematic,” explains Mike Scott, detective sergeant at the OPP. “Inspector time is valuable, so it is not a good use of resources to have detectives standing in front of copiers and loading boxes for shipping.” In addition, paper files are difficult and costly to manage.

Reallocating limited resources

To address the challenges, law enforcement agencies use Adobe Acrobat Professional software to convert case documents to platform- and application-independent Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files. Materials from a variety of formats—native Microsoft Word files, scanned photos, drawings, spreadsheets, and other content—can be converted to Adobe PDF in a single step. The resulting files can be managed individually, or related items can be combined into a single Adobe PDF package.

“The efficiency gains are dramatic,” says Scott. “Using Adobe Acrobat Professional, we can build an electronic disclosure (e-disclosure) in days, instead of the months often necessary when dealing with paper.” The productivity boost gives detectives more time to devote to investigations and improves the quality and availability of content delivered to courts, defense attorneys, and prosecutors working on a case.

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Previously, disclosure documents were delivered by the box load in trucks. Today, detectives save case materials as Adobe PDF files on easily managed hard drives that are delivered to courts and legal counsel. The savings in paper and delivery costs alone can total tens of thousands of dollars for large cases—without even accounting for the considerable savings in employee time previously spent copying and collating documents.

E-disclosures in Adobe PDF

Courts and legal counsel find the easily managed e-disclosures a welcome change from receiving box loads of paper files. The searchable and indexed Adobe PDF files enable legal and law enforcement staff to locate in seconds specific references within thousands of pages of evidence. Lawyers can also high-light areas of interest on Adobe PDF documents; the only tool they need is the free Adobe Reader® software.

“Sifting through stacks of pages to find references can break the momentum that counsel tries to build in trials,” says Rosiak. “In contrast, the ability to quickly find case details in Adobe PDF files instantly gives counsel access to the resources they need.” In some cases, sensitive documents in Adobe PDF are password-protected to help prevent unauthorized people from opening and viewing materials.

Other agencies take notice

The success with using Acrobat Professional and Adobe PDF to create and deliver e-disclosures has gained the attention of other law enforcement agencies across Canada and the United States. “Agencies are impressed by how easy it is to exchange and manage case documents in Adobe PDF,” explains Scott.

Over 26 separate law enforcement agencies in Ontario are now converting case documents to Adobe PDF files. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Hamilton Police Service, Ontario Provincial Police, and many other Canadian law enforcement agencies have submitted case files to the courts using Adobe PDF.

Building stronger cases

Advanced features in Adobe Acrobat 8 Professional software can further enhance automated disclosure processes. For example, the ability to redact content on case documents is important for detectives dealing with transcripts of witness interviews. “The only thing that matters is what witnesses say—not confidential personal information like their addresses, birth dates, and other details,” says Scott. “With Acrobat 8, we have a clean redaction tool to hide or permanently eliminate sensitive information.”

The taxpayers of the province are the greatest benefactors of the solution; reduced costs across the court system, improved investigative process, and more accurate and secure data to manage cases all assist in maximizing the prosecution of cases before the courts.



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