

EA-PDF: archiving email using PDF

Organizations worldwide rely on email for daily operations, but often lack the means to effectively preserve and access their email long-term. Enter EA-PDF.

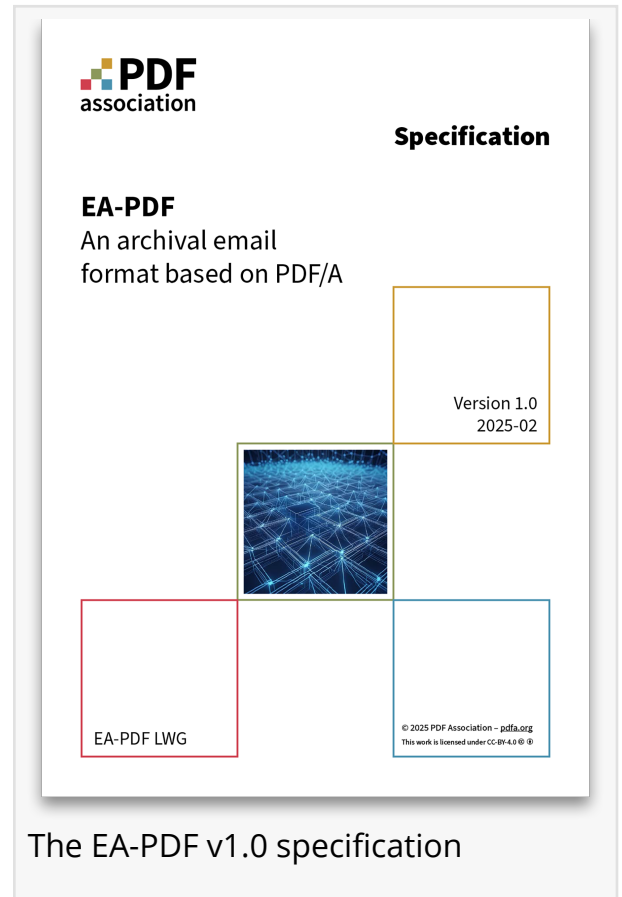
WINCHESTER, MA, UNITED STATES, February 11, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Email is one of the most ubiquitous forms of communication in personal and professional contexts. Organizations worldwide rely on email at almost every level of daily operations, but they lack options for effectively preserving and accessing email over long periods of time.

Due to its widespread use and importance as an asynchronous communication medium, many organizations need to preserve and provide access to email messages. Although the transmission of completed emails is necessarily standardized, the wide variety of open and proprietary email file formats and systems creates challenges for long-term preservation.

Many organizations have specific email retention requirements under law or policy:

- Governments and institutions must keep records of important discussions or decisions, which are often found in email.
- Businesses may need to archive employees' corporate emails as part of their off-boarding processes or when migrating from one enterprise email system to another.
- Individuals may need to keep old emails offline to preserve their ability to search and access information if their email accounts have hard storage limits or if they are switching providers or email clients.
- Archives and libraries wish to adopt easy-to-implement practices for capturing, preserving, rendering, and distributing email that has continuing value to individuals, organizations, and society.

Current options to export or preserve email often lack key functionality, such as the ability to



The EA-PDF v1.0 specification



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*Chris Prom, University of
Illinois Library*

include attachments, manage links in emails, or authenticate a copy of the message against its original source.

Although messages can be exported, they can be difficult to search and use outside of the email client software in which they are stored. For security and other reasons, many people are not comfortable importing others’ archived email into their own email client or system. Likewise, most records management, digital library, and digital asset management software do not natively display all email formats.

A well-considered vendor-neutral packaging and representation of email using PDF can provide a straightforward, ubiquitous, and highly secure way to both preserve and view archived messages.

+ A solution that builds on archival-quality PDF

The new [EA-PDF digital file format](#) is designed to faithfully and verifiably preserve email assets over time.

EA-PDF defines a mechanism for offline preservation of email source data together with a reliable static rendition of the email data. Based on existing ISO 19005 standards for archival-quality PDF files (PDF/A-3 and PDF/A-4f), EA-PDF provides institutions, corporations, and individuals with the following benefits:

- Vendor-neutral offline email storage, regardless of what email systems are used
- Email source data can be included with each email associated with PDF renderings, allowing for easy visualization, programmatic search, and other research activities using existing PDF technology
- A static rendering allows for downstream distribution, markup, or modification without compromising or sharing source data and without having to support numerous proprietary email formats
- The ability to package and preserve hierarchical groups of messages, an entire account, or even multiple accounts into a single PDF via PDF’s unique Collections feature
- Support for unsent and incomplete emails such as drafts

- Control over which URL links in emails should be active to address security and tracking concerns

- Ubiquity and ease – everyone knows how to use PDF and thus EA-PDF

EA-PDF provides a functional experience of EA-PDF in existing PDF software applications and the potential for greatly enhanced browsing and viewing capabilities in EA-PDF-specific viewers.

+ Why PDF?

- Vendor-neutral, ISO-standardized format

- PDF/A is already a readily supported, trusted, and widely used archival and distribution format

- A fully self-contained offline file format (no servers or other external dependencies)

- Allows for authenticity and trust via digital signatures

- Supports embedding and extraction of any kind of file

- Full support for languages and text search

- Powerful page appearance and other features allowing email to simulate the email client appearance and functionality

- All data in PDF can be compressed, ensuring a small file size with a rich experience

- Supports rich extensible metadata

- A healthy global ecosystem of vendors offers solutions for PDF technology

- Building on PDF/A, EA-PDF files can be formally validated against specifications

- EA-PDF supports both PDF 1.7 and the latest PDF 2.0 standard

+ Proof of Concept

To demonstrate the potential uses and value of EA-PDF, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has developed an open-source proof-of-concept EA-PDF writer. This application can convert single emails or a folder of messages (either as an mbox file or set of EML files) to a conformant EA-PDF file. Code and instructions are available on GitHub at

<https://github.com/UIUCLibrary/ea-pdf>.

+ Obtaining the EA-PDF specification

The [EA-PDF 1.0 specification](#) may be downloaded from the PDF Association's website at no charge.

+ Who developed EA-PDF?

EA-PDF was created by the PDF Association's [EA-PDF Liaison Working Group](#) in response to the ideas and needs of stakeholders, including the University of Illinois (which chaired the effort), the US National Archives and Records Administration, the US Library of Congress and numerous other libraries and cultural heritage institutions. Support for the development of EA-PDF was provided under a grant from the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

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