

# Produce Power Presentations

Marvin D. Silbert, FCIC

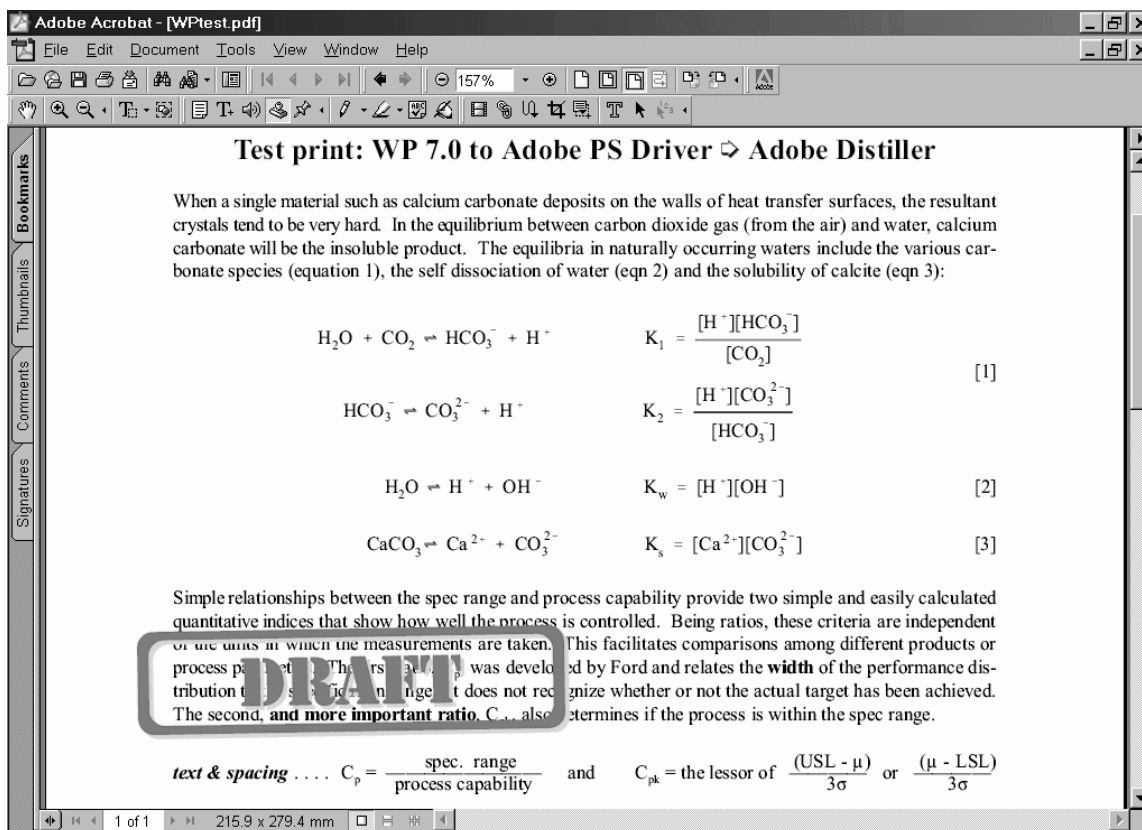
Last year, I had one of those *good news, bad news* messages. I was asked if I would like to give a presentation in Honolulu, but I had to use PowerPoint for my slides. Not being totally out of my mind, I willingly accepted in spite of my dislike for PowerPoint and the many PowerPoint presentations I have endured. Microsoft, as is their norm, has provided a one-size-fits-all presentation package that does everything they think you need. As no clothing with that description ever fits me, why would I expect that claims about a software package would be any better? Its performance is less than spectacular and what's worse is that I find that all the presentations seem to look the same. They go through a sequence of bulleted text sitting upon a background of fancy coloured patterns. About the only sense of originality I see is a company logo instead of that coloured blob. As each bullet gets its turn, the colours switch in sequence to highlight it.

What happens when your presentation contains graphs or diagrams of equipment and you want to add lines or comments to build up a graph or flowsheet as you describe it? There is no similar automatic sequencing. The only thing you can do is to prepare the total figure, make a copy and then remove one item from the first. You then go to the first figure and go through the same operation again to remove another item and so on until you're finished. Now, you can run forward through the slide sequence and see the lines, points or whatever build into the figure. What happens if you want the text to include a sigma or a double harpoon arrow? You can do so if you have

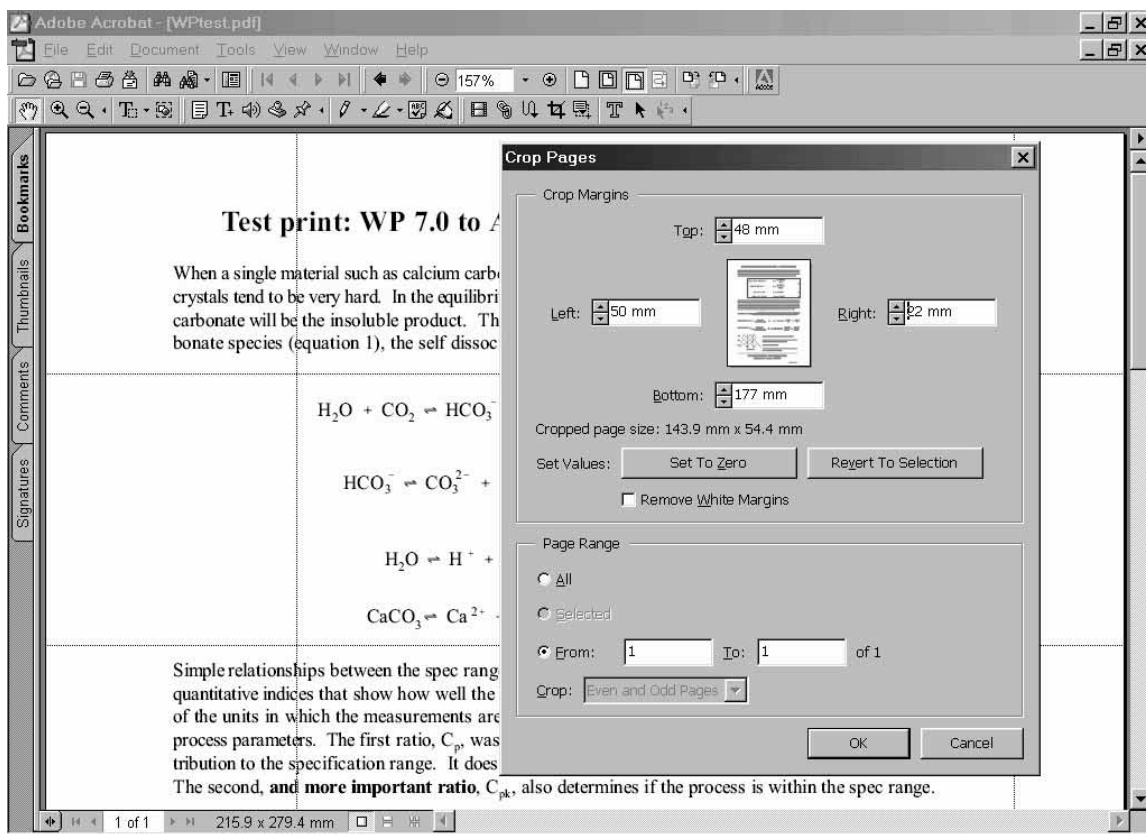
the fonts on your computer, but it may not appear correctly on anyone else's system. Any time you use a non-standard font, you can never be sure what will appear on another system. Some people end up writing the word sigma, using an s or as I once did, superimpose a line over an "o". Has mediocrity defeated us again?

When I make a presentation, I usually bring my notebook and connect my host's projector to it. As a safety factor for those few occasions where I cannot get my notebook connected to their projector, I carry a backup set of files on a CD-ROM or floppy. Everyone seems to have PowerPoint on their system. I guess that's because most people tend to use PowerPoint because everyone else seems to use PowerPoint.

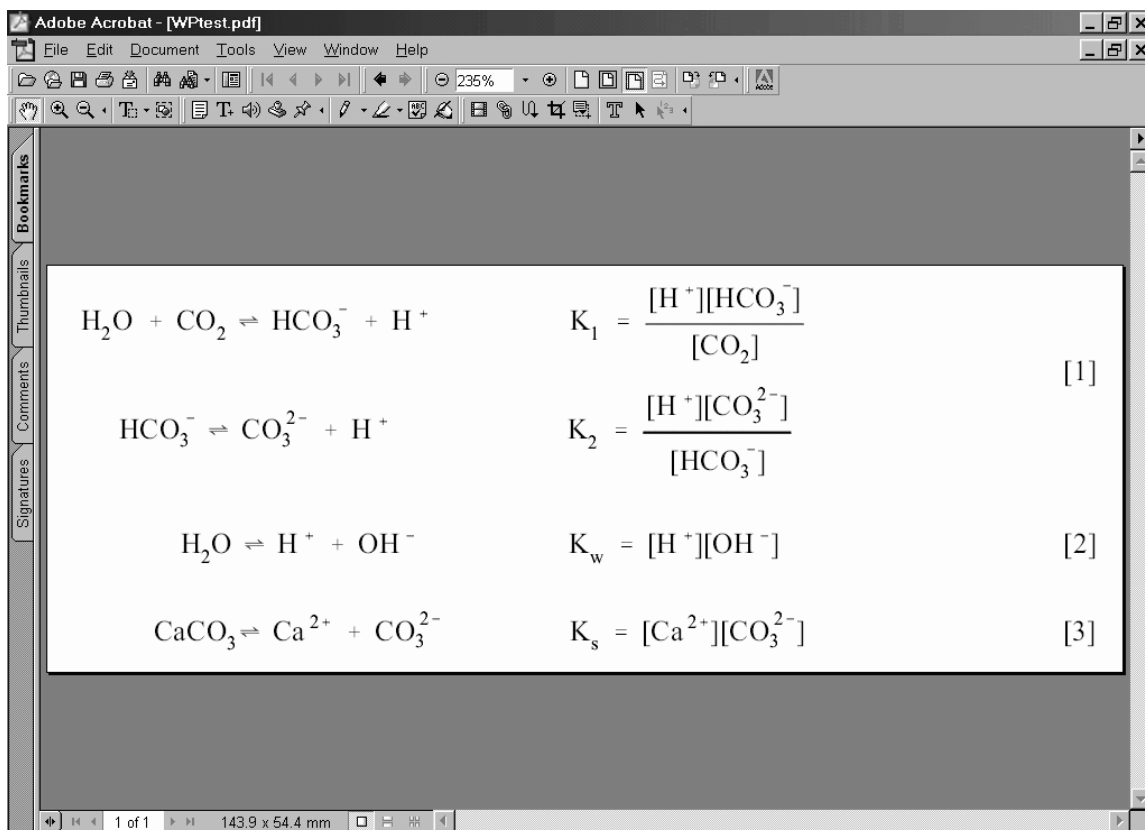
I much prefer to prepare my presentations as Adobe PDFs. I've never found a computer that didn't also have some version of Acrobat. Why would I go this route with the additional steps and complexity involved? The process starts with a need to print the figures to a virtual printer to make the PDF file. Then, the PDFs must be assembled into the sequence that will be used for the presentation. Add to this, the cost. While the Acrobat



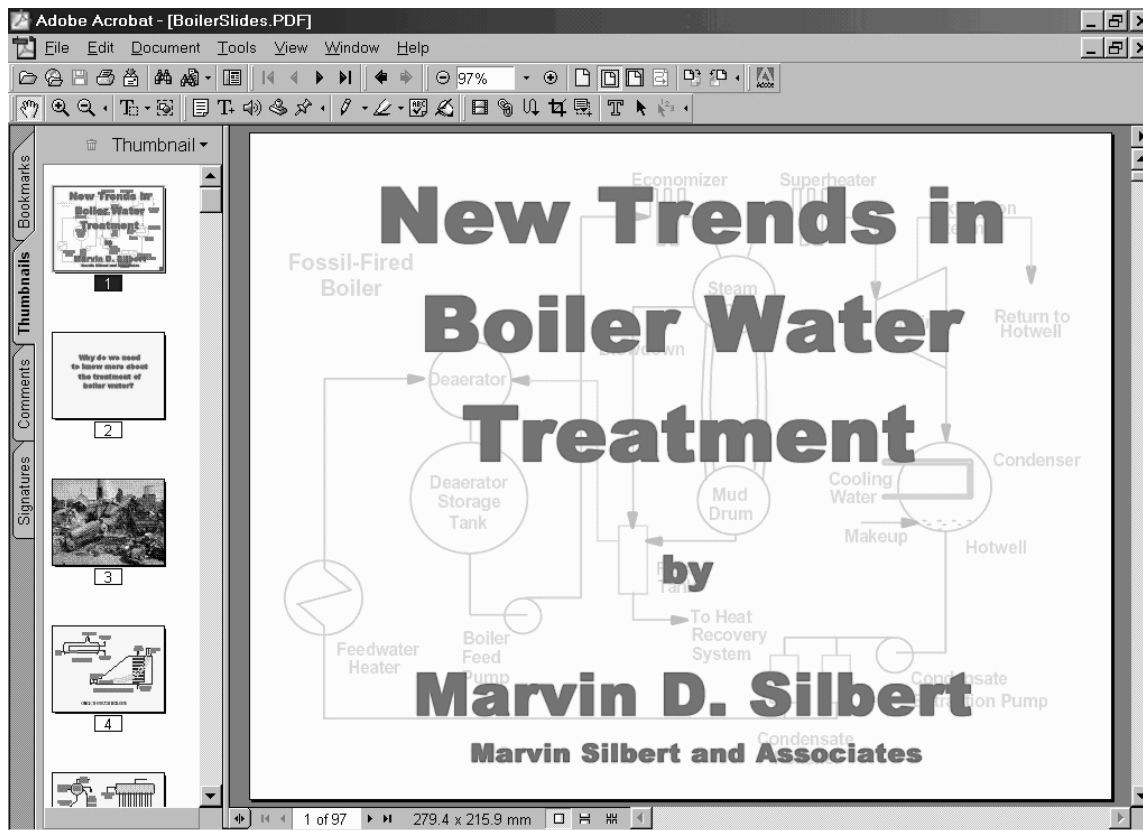
Acrobat screen showing a page of WordPerfect text with equations to be made into a slide. The 'draft' stamp can be inserted with the 'stamp tool' which is activated by clicking on the button just above the second 't' in the word 'test' in the page title. Custom stamps can be made and could include company logos or other relevant information.



The 'crop' feature defines the region to be selected as a slide. The lines defining the region can be seen on the page image.



The cropped region automatically expands to fill the screen width. The image remains sharp when projected or printed. It does not suffer the major resolution losses that occur when bitmapped graphics are cropped.



Display of the first slide of a presentation containing 97 slides. The thumbnails on the left form automatically when the thumbnail window is opened with version 5.0. Right clicking enables embedding of the thumbnails into the file. With version 4.0, the thumbnails must be created with a right click in the empty thumbnail window. Clicking on any thumbnail makes it into the active page. Pressing <Ctrl> L displays the active page as a full-screen image and starts the slide show. The active figure was prepared with Lotus Freelance. The figure represented by thumbnail 3 was scanned from a book.

Readers may be available from many sources at no cost, the Writer is an expensive package. In spite of these negatives, going the Acrobat route has many advantages. The end result is a 'power' presentation that lets you choose the best software to make the individual figures instead of accepting the limitations of a one-size-fits-all package.

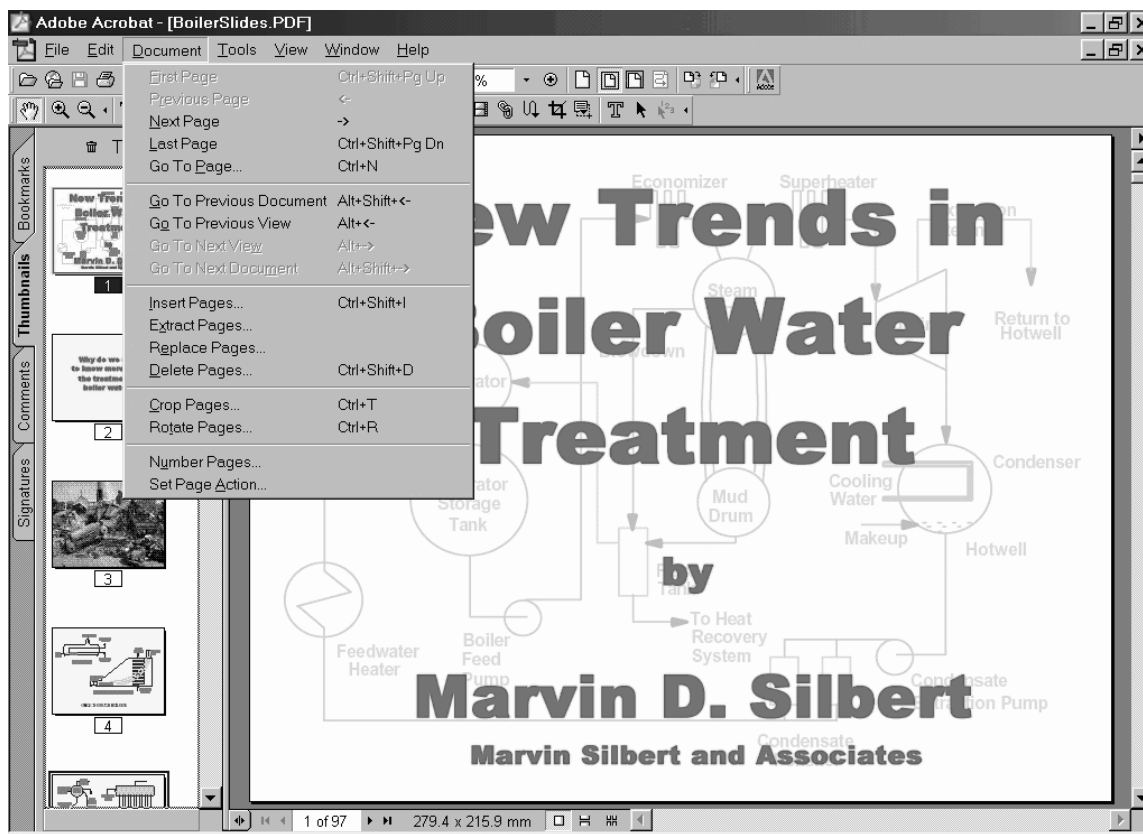
If the slide is going to be a graph from a spreadsheet, that graph can be printed directly to Acrobat from the spreadsheet as easily as it can be printed on paper. This direct route could be particularly handy when that spreadsheet is updated regularly and it might be necessary to update it for the next presentation. If the slide comes from a word-processing file, the page or pages can be printed directly to Acrobat. If you only want a few equations or a table, it's fairly simple to modify the equation or table to fill the page before making the PDF. Alternatively, the pages can be printed as they are and cropped to make the selected regions fill the screen. This crop feature is particularly useful when the page comes from someone else's document and you have to make do with what you have. There is no problem with size as Acrobat automatically maximizes the cropped region to fill the screen.

There is no limit to the software that can be used. I have made PDFs from Freelance, PowerPoint and a few other graphics packages. With my scanner, I just click on the Adobe icon; the hard disk starts up and in a matter of seconds Acrobat comes up showing the scanned image. Starting with version 5.0, Acrobat has a new feature that lets you export bitmap graphics from PDFs. This would simplify and improve the quality of making slides with figures exported from someone else's documents, e.g., one of the ever-growing collections of catalogues and manuals that come as PDFs these days. Once you export the figure, you can put it into your own graphics program and add your own captions or comments and then print it to Acrobat and make a new PDF that does it your way. Don't forget to acknowledge the source. This process seems to be limited to bitmapped graphics. Most of the figures in my

course manuals are vector graphics and I was unable to get at them. These would require cropping to make them into slides, or as I do, go back to the original graphics files.

There are a few precautions to take when printing to Acrobat and which ones apply will depend upon whether your output is going to PDF Writer, Distiller or the Default Postscript Printer, and that choice is dependent upon the application and a little experimenting. It's important to make sure the margins are set to zero and that the PDF is to have 'no look' to make sure you have edge-to-edge colour without a white border, unless you are using a white background. Also, make sure to remove the tick mark that optimizes the output for printing. A few of the extra features enable you to add thumbnails, 'stamps' or annotations. You can also apply a number of security features to prevent others from printing or editing your work. As a bonus, the PDFs tend to be much smaller than the originals from which they are made. A 10 MB PowerPoint or Freelance presentation can often be stored on a single floppy as a PDF.

Once you have a slide show ready, be prepared to hear comments around the room when you start. "What's this guy doing with Adobe?" Press <Ctrl>-L and you go into full screen mode. At this point, PowerPoint and Adobe look the same, except the latter has given you more freedom to make a 'power' presentation. When you finish, don't be surprised if a number of your audience start asking questions about the preparation of your presentation rather than the knowledge you tried to impart.



The same view with document menu pulled down. Those who are familiar with the free Adobe Acrobat Reader will recognize that there are twice as many options available.

## Adobe Acrobat: A New Version with New Features!

Although I felt that the features of Adobe Acrobat were well covered in the earlier review of version 4.0 (ACCN – Sept., Oct. 1999), I thought I would add some additional remarks about the latest version 5.0. It seems to have avoided a trend that has been a bit too common lately and has been getting me more and more frustrated as I review the latest crop of software. The fancy writing on the boxes makes loads of claims about all the new bells and whistles in these new versions. Most often, I find that for each new and useable feature, I have lost maybe 10. All too often, I end up removing the new version and going back to the old. Adobe Acrobat 5.0 appears to be the exception. It has cleared up a number of deficiencies from the early versions. If you look at the Adobe version of ACCN on the website, you may get annoyed at the low resolution of the graphics. I produce training courses and when I started sending material electronically, I started producing them as PDFs. Most of my figures were vector graphics and they didn't give any problem, but a few screen and scanned images did. This is a problem with bit-mapped graphics embedded into text and it is not a consistent problem. Most of mine were OK and fewer than a dozen gave me any problems. I developed a solution for those few that involved converting them to halftones. This did a good job, but only if the conversion was done with HiJaak Pro version 4.5 (ACCN – March 1995; another of those

programs where I prefer the old version to the latest one) and it was done at 60 dpi. Conversions to halftone with any other graphics software gave a low-resolution image and any other screen spacing had strong interference patterns. When I went back to one of the old files and reprinted some test pages with Acrobat 5.0 the problem was gone. The images were sharp without any need to go through that half-tone exercise.

Have I any negative about Acrobat? You bet I do. They don't know how to market the product. I saw it on special in the Future Shop last week for \$399.99. Drop the price to something reasonable below \$99.99 and a lot more people will buy it. This product is a *must have* for everyone who sends documents electronically.

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