PDF Watermarking: PDF Watermarks For Document Security

One way to improve the security of your PDF documents is to add PDF watermarking to them.

PDF watermarks can be used in two ways – to resist falsification, and to link the document with a specific authorised user.

In the first example, PDF watermarking is used in exactly the same way as watermarks on banknotes or cheques. If you try to make a fake it can be made very difficult to exactly copy the PDF watermark, so anyone seeing the document will also see that it is a fake. This use of PDF watermarking can be very important where official documents have to be printed/printable and must be demonstrated to be authentic.

(This is how you know a 20 dollar bill or a ten pound note are genuine. It doesn't mean documents can't be faked. There are still fake banknotes doing the rounds and one pound coin in 36 is a fake. But PDF watermarking is significantly better than doing nothing.)

In the second example PDF watermarking may be used to link an identity to a document. The PDF watermark may be something as simple as a unique number which is associated with the authorized user of a document, or it may be their name, email address, company name and so on. The point of this PDF watermark is to make it clear who the source of the document is if it is not intended to be copied and passed around. This technique has been in use for a long time to identify the source of documents 'leaked' to the press or who it was obtained from by IPR pirates. The PDF watermark works because the source of the information (whether a leaked or pirated document) usually does not want to be linked to it. (This does mean that when using PDF watermarking in this way you need to have a clear link between the identity on the document and the identity of the entity that it was authorized to.)

PDF watermarking may use many of the subtleties of the physical world. If you think of a banknote, some watermarks seem inside the paper whilst others are on top. You can get something similar with PDF watermarks.

Think of the information being printed as if it were in layers, rather like a sandwich. The content sits in the middle, and the PDF watermarking can be over, or under the content, or both. Also the PDF watermark can be set to be lighter or darker than the content. In this way PDF watermarking is able to 'blend' with the content so that it has a more seamless presentation. This can help the PDF watermark to be less visually distracting – unless, of course, you want it to be very much in your face.

So applying PDF watermarking takes a certain amount of discipline and artistic judgement, it is not necessarily a mechanical process of having a 'bog standard' graphic and/or text and applying it to every document that goes out.

A standard PDF watermark may work very well when text documents are being sent, since their appearance is constant, but not so well if there are graphics or high resolution pictures as well.

One other thing to keep in mind when using PDF watermarking is the length of the document being protected. It is impossible to prevent someone from using a graphics or picture editor from editing out the PDF watermark. But, the longer the document, the harder the task for them becomes. See removing PDF watermarks.

Using text PDF watermarks that have a large font size, but are very 'thin', means they do not upset the eye so much, but are much more difficult to remove without making the document difficult to read. This is particularly so if they go over the top of graphics.

Short documents may need PDF watermarks that are graphics in order to occupy much more of the picture space making it more difficult to remove the PDF watermark, but probably making the document more difficult to read.

So if you want to apply PDF watermarks to your documents then there are many things to consider including how easily they can be removed. If you want to apply a PDF watermark that cannot be easily removed then you need to use a PDF DRM system that enforces controls over the document (such as preventing editing, screen grabbing, printing to PDF or image printers, etc.). LockLizard Safeguard PDF Security and PDF Enterprise Security ensure your PDF watermarks are enforced at all times.

About LockLizard

LockLizard is a DRM (digital rights management) company that specializes in document security and copy protection. We protect information with US Government strength encryption and rights management controls to ensure complete protection against copyright piracy. Use our DRM software to stop copying, prevent printing, disable print screen, expire content, and instantly revoke access to information.

We provide copyright protection without the use of passwords to ensure maximum security and usability, and to protect information, documents and web content from unauthorized use and misuse no matter where it resides. Control who uses your content, what they can do with it, and how long they can use it for. http://www.locklizard.com