

File Compression Utilities

WHO SHOULD READ THIS BULLETIN:

Any person who must transfer digital files from one place to another.

There are three good reasons to compress files:

- 1. Speed of transmission.** By reducing the size of the file, it travels faster via modem and takes less time—and space—to copy.
- 2. Organization.** Compressing several files into single files makes document management more efficient. For example, a book with 20 separate chapters and 40 different graphics can be combined into one easy-to-transfer file.
- 3. Protection.** Compression helps to protect the integrity of a file. It's essential for Internet transmission where the possibilities of core file corruption are significantly increased as the file travels through various operating systems.

Note: TechTopics No.15 provides details of Internet file transmission using File Transfer Protocol.

There are also several lesser reasons to compress, which may or may not be applicable to your situation. These include:

- **Security.** The compression utilities mentioned below allow the addition of low-level password protection. It won't protect against a skilled hacker, but will keep unauthorized coworkers from messing up your files.

Note: If you password protect files for transmission, don't forget to communicate the password to those of us on the receiving end!!!

- **Storage.** The practice of compressing files for archival on your own workstation or server can save significant disk space over time.

Software Availability

File compression software is readily available. The two dominant programs in use today are WinZip for Windows and Stuffit for Macintosh. Shareware versions of these self-extracting utilities may be downloaded from many sources, including the "links" section of Copresco's website at

www.copresco.com/links

Note: Please remember...if you use shareware or evaluation software programs, you should register your copy and pay the nominal fee.

Following are instructions for obtaining the most commonly used compression programs.

Windows

In Windows, the leading compression software is Nico Mak's WinZip. Originally the front-end for PKZip (the DOS-based granddaddy of all compression software), WinZip is a full-fledged program that does not require PKZip to run.

An evaluation version of WinZip is readily available for download from the web at:

<http://www.winzip.com>

Over the years, many user-friendly features have been added to WinZip, making it pretty much a snap to use even the advanced features. If, however, you prefer an alternative, consider PKZIP at:

<http://www.pkware.com>

Peruse this site carefully if you want to try before you buy. The evaluation version is kept pretty well hidden.

Stuffit (see below) has a Windows version. Copresco can handle stuffed Windows file, but as a rule, you are asking for headaches if you use anything but zip compression in the PC world.

Macintosh

Aladdin Systems has a variety of items on its web page at:

<http://www.aladdinsys.com>

Stuffit, their flagship product, is available for evaluation as Stuffit Lite. If you prefer to have a CD and manuals, Stuffit Deluxe is for you.

Also available is StuffIt Expander. This handy utility won't compress your files, but it will open compressed files in just about any format. This nifty software is available for both Mac and PC, and, best of all, it's free.

Special Considerations

A few compression formats merit additional discussion.

Self-Extracting Archives

Standard stuffed files are named with a .sit extension; zip files with a .zip extension. Both programs offer the ability to create executable files, or self-extracting archives. These can be recognized by the .sea extension for stuffed files or the .exe extension for zipped files.

Note: The .sea extension applies only to stuffed files, whereas the .exe extension is used for any executable (runnable) file on the PC. Most .exe files have nothing to do with compression.

The concept behind these alternate formats is simple: while .zip and .sit files require the recipient to have the proper compression software to expand the file, .exe and .sea files contain an “applet” that allows the receiver to decompress the files merely by clicking on them.

Due to a number of factors, including some compatibility problems between various versions of Stuffit and the Mac operating systems, .sea files won’t always open, thus completely defeating their purpose!

We’ve never heard of this happening to a zipped .exe file on the PC side. There, the problem is that a zipped .exe file is not immediately recognizable to the receiver as a compressed file. It could be anything, and this may delay opening of your files. How so? Well, one example stands out: digitally transmitted .exe files are the #1 method of promulgating viruses on the internet!

The solution is simple. When compressing files, take a pass on this feature. When sending files to Copresco, rest assured that we possess the necessary tools to open your compressed file.

Acrobat

Adobe promotes its Acrobat Portable Document Format (PDF) as a form of compression. Is it worth the effort to zip/stuff PDF files? In the case of print files, Copresco believes the answer is yes, since the three primary reasons for compression are speed, organization and protection.

Many factors affect the creation of a PDF file. Suffice it to say that PDF files that are optimized for print quality are not optimized for file size. We’ve seen PDF files compressed by a factor of 20 using WinZip. As for organization, the rule still holds. If you have to send a dozen PDF files digitally, it is still more efficient to send one

compressed file than “loose” PDFs (or any other file type for that matter).

Because Acrobat is a cross-platform medium, file corruption should be less of an issue...in theory. In practice, compression still adds a measure of safety. In conclusion, it is generally less time-consuming to compress the first time than to resend or repair.

General Information

Our staff will gladly answer your questions about software applications, digital files preparation and transmission, paper stocks, binding and our digital printing services.

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TechTopics is the proud recipient of the Apex 2001 award of excellence for design, content and overall communications effectiveness.



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