

pdfDocs compareDocs 3.1

By Brett Burney

Comparing two documents should be an easy task — today's software should be able to take two versions of the same document and effortlessly show the differences. Microsoft Word has a compare feature built-in, but it's limited in what it can do. Adobe Acrobat will allow you to compare two PDFs if you have the expensive Pro version of the software. The most well-known standalone software for document comparison is DeltaView from Workshare, but that utility has been merged into the more comprehensive Workshare Professional software suite that includes many other tools.

Fortunately, pdfDocs' compareDocs from DocsCorp is a simple, effective and reliable software tool that can compare two documents and give you a clear and comprehensible output on the differences between the two.

CompareDocs focuses on comparing either two Word documents or two PDF files. You also can compare Word documents with PDF files. While compareDocs doesn't explicitly compare Microsoft Excel spreadsheets or Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, those file types easily can be converted to PDF and then duly compared in compareDocs.

You might already have an application that converts files to PDFs (such as Adobe Acrobat), but compareDocs actually is part of a larger pdfDocs software suite that includes a "Desktop" component that streamlines the PDF conversion process. While compareDocs can be purchased on its own, it gets an extra boost of PDF power when it's bundled with pdfDocs Desktop. For example, you can ask compareDocs to compare two Excel spreadsheets, and the pdfDocs Desktop component will do the PDF conversion behind the scenes without any additional steps.

In my estimation, however, compareDocs is most useful for comparing two Word documents. I commonly have two different versions of a document and I need to see the differences so I can make the appropriate adjustments for a final version.

To compare documents, you simply point compareDocs to the "Original" and "Modified" files. Next you select the output for the comparison, which can either be a new Word document or PDF file. If you select a Word document for your comparison output, you can opt for either a "consolidated report marked up with Track Changes" or a "consolidated report marked up with formatting."

"Track Changes" is a nifty feature in Word, but not everyone is comfortable using it. It's most commonly used as an electronic "red-lining" feature, but because Word actually keeps track of the changes made to a document, there have been some horror stories in the press where document recipients were able to discover all the changes made to a document, including comments written about it. Plus, the Track Changes feature can be frustrating to use if you don't know how to use it properly.

What I like about compareDocs is that you don't have to worry about whether or not a reviewer has Track Changes turned on — they can make changes to the Word document in "normal" mode. Once you get the modified version back, you can run it through compareDocs with your original document, and compareDocs will create a new document with Track Changes ready for you to use. You then can accept or reject the changes that compareDocs indicates. For example, deleted text is shown in red strikethrough font, and text that was added is double-underlined in blue.

If using Track Changes makes you uncomfortable, you can choose the second output option, Marked Up With Formatting. In this output, a new Word document is created but the Track Changes feature isn't activated, although the changes appear in the same way — deleted text in red strikethrough and added text double-underlined in blue. You can't easily accept or reject changes in this output, but you can select the text and manually change the formatting as appropriate.

If you prefer to have a PDF output of your comparison, compareDocs allows you to create a PDF marked up with annotations. This output is very helpful when you need to e-mail the PDF output file to someone who might not have Word on his or her computer.

When you create a comparison, you can elect to have the document open on your desktop, or you can have the comparison immediately attach to an outgoing e-mail message. If you select this option from the Compare menu, a box will open, allowing you to choose whether you want the original, modified or comparison document attached, or all three.

Lastly, compareDocs (and the entire pdfDocs software suite) integrates easily with a number of document management systems such as Open Text, Interwoven, Worldox and NetDocuments. This helps keep your workflow intact if you are required to save documents into a document management system.

I am thrilled to find a simple and reliable document comparison tool in pdfDocs' compareDocs. I appreciate uncomplicated software that does a specific task, and does it very well. CompareDocs focuses solely on comparing documents and, for that, the software has no comparison. [LAT]



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Pros: Simple and reliable comparison application; comparison output can be either Microsoft Word or PDF; seamlessly integrates with pdfDocs Desktop; excellent tech support.

Cons: Only specifically works with either Word or PDF files.

Verdict: I definitely recommend this product for comparing two different versions of Word documents.

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Please see our Web site for the following related review: "PdfDocs Desktop 2.1 Suite," by Milton Hooper, May/June 2008.