METHODS TO ADD FORM FIELDS IN ADOBE ACROBAT

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I. SUMMARY.

Fillable fields can be added by a form creator either manually, or automatically, or by using a combination of manual and automatic techniques. There are pros and cons of each method for form creators, in speed and accuracy, depending on the number of form cells and sharpness of the form (lines and text).

For a small number of form cells (no more than a few hundred), the manual method can be more accurate and productive than any other method. Automatic field detection is usually not accurate and needs manual check, control, and adjustment. Adding rows of cells automatically is very fast, but has disadvantages for form users. Adding multi-row fields for a part of a page or for a whole page (manually or automatically) are rarely used methods. Despite all disadvantages, a form with a multi-row field covering a part of a page (or a whole page) is a preferable option over a non-fillable form.

II. METHOD OF ADDING SINGLE-CELL FIELDS MANUALLY.

Adding single cell fields manually is the traditional method.

Basic steps. Opening a PDF form in Adobe Acrobat (full program), recognizing form cells to be filled in, making certain determinations for each cell (the best information representation, field type, field name, etc.), drawing field rectangles, setting field properties, adjusting the size of each field rectangle with respect to cell borders, aligning each field (inside the form cell, inside the form rows and columns, and inside the page), setting the order in which a user tabs through form field rectangles.

Advantages for form creators. For a small number of form cells (no more than a few hundred), the manual method can be more accurate and productive than any other method. In general, a single specialist working a few days is able to accurately recognize a few hundred form cells and make relatively correct decisions regarding information representation, field sizes, field alignments, field properties and other form features.

Disadvantages for form creators.

1. For a large number of form cells (e.g. thousands of forms containing hundreds of thousands of cells), the manual method usually results in thousands of errors making "fillable" forms useless. A relatively large team of specialists working many weeks or months is practically unable to accurately recognize all hundreds of thousands of form cells and make correct decisions regarding information representation, field sizes, field alignments, field properties and other form features. It is practically impossible to effectively check and control the quality of such work. If a needed field is omitted or a location or property of just one of the fields is incompatible with the information to be entered, then a form user is forced to fill out that field by hand or typewriter. For many form users, such a partially fillable form has no advantage over a flat form. In other words, for many form users, if only a few fields on a page are useless, the page cannot be filled out and becomes useless. As a result, there are millions of useless "fillable" forms posted on the Internet.

By this reason, it is very important to allow users to change (in Reader) field locations and properties (text size, text font, number of lines) to adjust to specific information to be entered (and possible to correct creator‘s errors). This is possible only with relevant JavaScript actions added by a form creator, as in the FBF (Field-by-Field) method introduced in 2000 by USA-Federal-Forms.com). You will not find such features on forms posted on U.S. government Websites (as probably anywhere on the Internet, except USA-Federal-Forms.com).

2. Manual method is slow. It often takes less time to issue new versions of thousands of forms than to convert the old versions into fillable by the manual method. As a result, many government agencies and large organizations are forced to continue to issue thousands of non-fillable forms.

Note. For advantages and disadvantages for form users of typing into single-cell fields, see *Comparison of Methods to Fill out PDF Forms* (link below).

III. METHOD OF ADDING SINGLE-CELL FIELDS AUTOMATICALLY ("FORM FIELD RECOGNITION").

Adding single cell fields automatically ("Form Field Recognition") was a new feature in Adobe Acrobat 8.

Basic steps. Opening a PDF form in Adobe Acrobat (full program), then pressing "Forms > Run Form Field Recognition".

Advantages for form creators. This method is automatic, very fast, and sometimes accurate.

Disadvantages for form creators.

1. Acrobat is able to recognize only relatively sharp lines and crisp text. If a form is not sharp enough, Acrobat produces no fields.

2. In general, even for a sharp form the method is often not accurate. Acrobat is often unable to accurately recognize all form cells and to make acceptable decisions regarding information representation, field sizes, field alignments, field properties and other form features. As a result, Acrobat often produces fields outside of form cells, produces no fields in form cells, sets incorrect field types, field properties, and makes incorrect decisions regarding other features.

3. Automatic field detection needs manual check, control, and adjustment. Fields detected by Acrobat Automatic Field Detection feature cannot be left "as is" without any manual work (needed to detect and correct Acrobat errors). A combination of manual and automatic techniques is the only practical solution.

Note: For advantages and disadvantages for form users of typing into single-cell fields, see *Comparison of Methods to Fill out PDF Forms* (link below).

IV. METHOD OF ADDING ROWS OF CELLS AUTOMATICALLY.

Adding rows of cells automatically was a method introduced in 2000 by USA-Federal-Forms.com and illustrated by 10s of 1000s of federal forms converted into fillable. The name of method: ITAOP (Insert Text Anywhere On Page).

Basic idea. Covering each form page by horizontal transparent fillable rectangles to allow users to insert text anywhere inside any rectangle.

Advantages for form creators. This method is automatic and very fast. The form conversion algorithm produces about 60 fillable forms a minute (one form a second)

Disadvantages for form creators. None.

Note. Adding rows of cells manually is completely impractical: it is even much slower than adding single-cell fields manually.

Note: For advantages and disadvantages for form users of typing into rows of cells, see *Comparison of Methods to Fill out PDF Forms* (link below).

V. METHOD OF ADDING MULTI-ROW FIELDS COVERING A PART OF A PAGE OR FOR A WHOLE PAGE (MANUALLY OR AUTOMATICALLY).

Adding multi-row fields for a part of a page or for a whole page (manually or automatically) are rarely used methods.

Basic idea. Covering each form page by one or a few transparent fillable multi-raw rectangles to allow user to insert text anywhere inside any rectangle.

Advantages for form creators. This method is very fast. The manual method is not as fast as automatic, but much faster than adding single-cell fields manually.

Disadvantages for form creators. None.

Note 1. For a form user, typing into a multi-row field covering a part of a page (or a whole page) has disadvantages over typing into single-cell fields or typing into a single row of multiple cells, or typing into a flat space. The larger the multi-raw space -- the more difficult to place a text in the best position for each cell. In general, the larger the multi-raw space -- the more difficult to place a text in the best position for each cell. For a relatively small field, it is possible to find an acceptable text position with relevant JavaScript actions added by a form creator. Despite these disadvantages, a form with a multi-row field covering a part of a page (or a whole page) is a preferable option over a non-fillable form.

Note 2. For advantages and disadvantages for form users of typing into multi-row fields, see *Comparison of Methods to Fill out PDF Forms* (link below).

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