Digital Tip in Action: Using PDF Files

[00:00] PDF, or Portable Document Format, is an open standard file format developed by the Adobe Corporation in an attempt to create a file format that could be generated and viewed by nearly any operating system. Unlike word-processing or HTML files, which may appear differently on various computers due to users' preferences, installed fonts, etc., PDF files feature precise, unchanging formatting.

[00:30] Using a PDF ensures that an electronic document will look exactly like its print companions for you and for recipients, regardless of different operating systems or devices. Here is a list of three key features of PDFs. First: consistency – meaning the same appearance in print and online – useful for documents like annual reports that will be distributed in hard copy and posted online. Second: precision, meaning strict format.

[01:00] PDFs lock users from editing and modifying a document, making it ideal for contracts and job applications. Third, security: PDFs include the option to password-protect documents, making them excellent for financial or other critical documents. However, here's a caveat: PDFs are useful, but if you need a document that your readers can edit, or you're concerned that users might not have PDF-reader software installed, consider using a different format, such as

[01:30] HTML. With the proper software, you can create PDF documents from any program that can print. To create a PDF from Microsoft Word, "Save As" to create a new version of the document, and then select PDF under File Format.

[02:00] You can also use the Adobe product for creating PDFs, Adobe Acrobat Pro, which is often discounted for students and educators. And of course, you can also search the Web for popular PDF creation or conversion tools, like SourceForge or PrimoPDF.

[02:30] Special programs add helpful functionality to PDF files. For instance, in Adobe Acrobat Pro, you can use the Form Wizard to import forms from word-processing programs, edit those fields, and then distribute the final, interactive PDF to recipients. Readers will be able to add information in the specific form fields you created.

[03:00] Also in Adobe Acrobat Pro, in lieu of signing documents by hand, you can create a custom stamp of your written signature. Sign a blank sheet of paper and import that image into your computer. Then, under Tools, Comment & Markup, and Stamp, create a custom "signature stamp" that you can insert into any PDF document.

[03:30] Of course, make sure that you're the only one able to add your signature to documents. To learn more, search "PDF Creator" online to see what other readers and functions are popular, or consider Adobe Acrobat Pro, Nitro PDF Professional, or PDFpen. Remember the three key features of PDFs: consistency, precision, and security.