

# Wolfram Research introduces new programmable document type

July 25 2011, by Bob Yirka



(PhysOrg.com) -- Wolfram Research, the same folks who brought us both Mathematica, and Wolfram Alpha (see [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#)), the search computation site, is now announcing via [Conrad Wolfram's blog](#), that it has designed a new document format that allows for simple programming on the creator end, and interactivity on the user end. Called, appropriately enough, the Computable Document Format (CDF), it takes PDF documents one step further by allowing data embedded in a document to be manipulated in real time.

While it doesn't appear, at least for now, that Wolfram intends to compete with Adobe with its new format, it does appear to be sort of a

knock on the static nature of the current PDF format.

As it stands now, if you download and look at a PDF [document](#), it's like looking at an image, in that that's all you can do with it, look and read. With the CDF format however, the person or group who creates the document can embed code in the document so that when a user downloads it, he or she has the option of manipulating data in that document to taste. As an example, per Wolfram's blog, say you wrote a paper on the Doppler effect. With a PDF document, you'd lay down your words and then try to come up with a graph/chart/picture that hopefully conveys the sound of a siren changing in pitch, for example, such as an ambulance passing by. With CDF, you could embed code that would allow a user to actually listen to that ambulance, and then by adding changeable parameters, allow them to adjust such things as the speed of the vehicle, to hear the differences that would result; in other words, you'd have a much more dynamic document.

One unfortunate downside to using the new [format](#), is that in order for a user to receive the benefits of it, they have to [download and install](#) a 150MB installer, which then takes up some 500MB of drive space. There's also the tricky problem of going to all the trouble of programming a document (which the company says is as easy as recording a spreadsheet macro) only to find there aren't any users out there who can see your results, because they haven't downloaded the program, much less heard of it.

On a positive note, now that [Wolfram](#) has shown what is possible, it's likely Adobe will either license and incorporate the new standard into PDF (CPDF anyone?), or come up with its own way of doing the same thing. Either way, users will certainly benefit in the end, especially if this new technology winds up on cell phones, or especially tablets; being able to manipulate data in a report with our fingertips, sounds like something we should already be able to do.

**More information:** [blog.wolfram.com/2011/07/21/la...a-expand-the-medium/](http://blog.wolfram.com/2011/07/21/la...a-expand-the-medium/)

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