



[HOME](#) • [ABOUT EMEDIA MAGAZINE](#) • [SUBSCRIBE](#) • [ADVERTISE](#) • [CONTACT US](#)



information insider

Ecommerce Dilemma: Controlling What You Sell

Robert J. Boeri
Martin Hensel

EMedia Magazine, September 2000
[Copyright © Online Inc.](#)

Whether you distribute digital content on CD media, the Web, or both, you're engaged in ecommerce (and probably have been before that trendy term was coined). And by anybody's calculation, the amount of ecommerce--especially Web-based--will skyrocket, with some estimates that within five years it will amount to 10% of US GDP. Largely due to the ease of digital--especially Web-based--distribution, ecommerce will reduce distribution costs and stimulate demand. On the other hand, recent events with the distribution of illegal MP3 versions of licensed music emphasize how difficult it can be to control digital products once they've been delivered--like so many sorcerer's apprentices, they can multiply unbidden.

Recently, solution choices have increased and some offer control over many types of content, wherever it resides. Features now even include supporting subscription, rights management, and workflow. Even low-end solutions are a far cry from a couple of years ago when you could purchase what amounted to Acrobat plug-ins with security that was cumbersome to manage and easy to circumvent. Not surprisingly, the function-price performance range has also increased, from a large number of server-based solutions to a very few standalone solutions. Price ranges from a \$2,500 one-time authoring fee to more than 100 times that figure.

None of the products are yet household names. Two out of three of the high-end solution vendors are recent startups: Authentica's PageVault, Web Vault, and MailVault; ContentGuard; and Datum's Confidential Courier. PageVault typifies the industrial-strength security products and touts itself for critical information like trade secrets, chip designs, and Merger & Acquisition (M&A) activities. Authentica cites Cambridge Technology Visions (Burlington, MA) as using PageVault to control M&A information down to the page level, including who can see the document and when they can see it, whether they can copy or print the document, even after delivery across the Internet ContentGuard Inc., a spin-off from Xerox (with strategic alliances and investments by both Xerox and Microsoft) combines patented research with an open source XML-based markup language called XrML (extensible rights markup language). ContentGuard offers a comprehensive solution from workflow to content protection and integrity, rights specification and enforcement, usage tracking, and royalty management. ContentGuard Inc. is working with Adobe to integrate support for PDF technology while Microsoft is developing its own Windows ebook reader, "Microsoft Reader," competing with Adobe's Acrobat Reader.

Confidential Courier, using its own security patented techniques, can secure a variety of digital assets: Acrobat PDF,

word processor, HTML, images, data, and even executables, such as exe's and dll's. Distributors develop "CourierPak" collections, which they can distribute on standalone optical or magnetic media or via the Web. Target platforms include UNIX and the Windows family. Like many systems, Confidential Courier uses RSA encryption. Optional capabilities include the ability to name specific applications that can use the encrypted information, providing expiration dates for encrypted information, and server-based management of keys.

Adobe's much-touted PDF Merchant (server side) and Web Buy (client plug-in) are not designed for distributing libraries of PDF files nor for distribution on standalone media. Rather, they are for distributing individual Acrobat-based ebooks. Web Buy lets you download encrypted files from the Web and unlock them to read on a single PC or reading device. Using a lock-and-key metaphor, PDF Merchant is the lock and Web Buy (Acrobat plug-in) is the key. Adobe has lined up big names to use its technology: Barnes & Noble, Fatbrain.com, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, and R.R. Donnelley among others.

On a smaller scale, SoftLock offers a combination ecommerce and secure Web distribution method, for Acrobat PDF files on Windows platforms only. SoftLock's approach lets you view an excerpt before purchase. If you decide to buy the product (or a gift voucher for someone else), you (or they) download it and associated key files that permit viewing it only on the PC where it was downloaded. Want a solution for on or offline secure distribution of document collections? One intriguing vendor--the only one we know that can also secure large offline collections--is FileOpen Systems. This vendor has a server-based encryption and distribution engine (FileOpen WebPublisher) and a desktop solution (FileOpen Publisher) for \$2500 that allows you to secure and distribute your Acrobat documents freely over the Web, email, or CD-ROM. FileOpen Publisher even includes an installer, and your customers need not remember a password to open and use the resulting seamless product. For a modest cost, you get industrial-strength controls, such as guarantees against unauthorized copying or use, and subscription support so that your documents can be available only within timeframes you specify. FileOpen Publisher's data encryption is performed using its proprietary techniques, plus RC4 technology as licensed by Adobe from RSA Data Security Inc. Although FileOpen currently secures only Acrobat content, it plans to extend its reach to other content including XML.

Whether your business involves Web or offline delivery, Acrobat, or other content, secure solutions supporting your ecommerce plans are emerging.

Robert J. Boeri (bboeri@world.std.com) and **Martin Hensel** (mhensel@texterity.com) are co-columnists for *Information Insider*. Boeri is an Information Systems Publishing consultant at a Boston-area insurance company. Hensel is president of Texterity, Inc., a Newton, Massachusetts-based consulting firm that builds SGML-based editorial and production systems for publishers, corporations, ecommerce services, and type-setters.

Comments? Email us at letters@onlineinc.com.



[\[EMedia Home\]](#) [\[Subscriptions\]](#)

Copyright © 2000, [Online Inc.](#) All rights reserved.
info@onlineinc.com