
Understanding File Attachments

As Ben Franklin once said, there are only three things you can count on in life: death, taxes, and how much state agencies love paperwork.

Okay, we may have added that last part, but it's equally true! Every government office has its own forest of documentation in duplicate, triplicate! Online, this hardcopy philosophy typically translates to bloated agency websites with far more downloadable documents than there are pages to browse!

Though there are times when they're necessary, defaulting to a document when you can use a web page can quickly make your web content spin out of control. Web pages load quicker, display better across all desktop and mobile devices, and they're much easier to update. If you maintain a webpage containing information on the required documentation to apply for a service, for example, you don't run the risk of someone accidentally happening upon an outdated PDF with requirements from the previous year. Minimizing documents makes everyone's lives easier, and that should be what our websites are here to do.

Here are some tips on how to think about your file attachments, and how you can maintain control of them on your website.

1 Consider your Users

Your primary goal is to make sure your content is accessible and usable to your audience, regardless of the device they're on. So before you upload a file, think about whether or not it will reach the people who need it most.

Think about mobile first, and avoid downloads whenever possible

From 2013 to 2015, the percentage of mobile traffic on government websites jumped from 20% to 34% that's [a 70% increase](#) [1] in just three years! And mobile's share on the web is only getting bigger. By 2018, the [majority of Internet access will be on a mobile device](#) [2].

Remember that everything is at a premium on a mobile device: screen space, processing power, Internet speed, memory card space, and the attention of your audience. Web pages leave more usable space for content, load quickly, are easy to search, don't require additional applications, don't take up storage space, and reduce the steps between users and your content. Web pages are also easier for you to edit and delete when needed.

If there's any way for your information to be displayed on a web page instead of attached as a PDF, skip the file download headache and just make a web page.

Convert files to PDFs whenever possible

Files made in Word, Excel, and PowerPoint may not load properly or at all on mobile devices, and they won't be accessible to anyone who doesn't have those applications installed on their computers. For this reason, if you absolutely *must* have content as a document, we recommend you try to convert it into a PDF file whenever possible.

The PDF is the most accessible and universal file type of document. PDF files display on most devices, display a large range of information, and have many free tools available to optimize them for the web. There are several excellent, free PDF readers available for both desktop and mobile devices, including Adobe Reader.

For more guidance on file formats, check out our [Web Guidelines for PDF and Alternate File Formats](#) [3].

2 Understand Platform File Management

You'll have an easier time managing your content by understanding how the GeorgiaGov Platform handles file attachments. Here's what you need to know:

Files can be deleted

It's easy to delete a file when you log into your Editor Portal, but watch out!

Once a file is deleted, it's **GONE**. You cannot undo a file deletion, and we can't undo it for you.

Deleting a file will remove any references to it in the Related Files section on any of your web pages, but any links to it in the content will still be there. If you don't delete those after you delete the file, you'll have broken links and frustrated users.

Only delete a file if you know:

- No other page on your site links to it.
- You no longer need that file to be online.

Updating a file? Don't delete and re-upload?check out the next section for a better way!

Files can be overwritten

If you want to replace a document with an updated version, you can save yourself some time and overwriting. When you upload a document with the same name as an existing document, a window pops up and asks if you want to replace, rename, or upload a different file; click **Replace Existing File**.

This can be especially helpful when updating documents that change on a regular schedule. By keeping the same file name, you keep the same URL, so other websites, including search engines like Google, will always have a working

link to your document.

Please note that when you replace a file on the server with a new version of the file, it can take up to 24 hours for the old version to clear out of the server cache and your browser cache. After 24 hours, you should see the new file.

3 Everything in Moderation

As you work through your web content, remember that your job is not to strip all file attachments from your website and cram the information into web pages. There is no one correct format for all content. There is, however, a correct format for each particular piece of content, and you must have the discretion to determine what that is. So think carefully about the information you want to convey, and if you can say it in a web page?which is most often the case?do so. But if a webpage truly won't cut it, then use a file attachment that has an appropriate and accessible format.

Keep these tips in mind, and you should have a good handle on wrangling those files in no time!

Source URL: <http://portal.georgia.gov/interactive/web-guide/understanding-file-attachments>