

Word or PDF?

User manuals can be produced using a range of software. The choice of outputs however is normally restricted to HTML, Word and PDF documents.

If you require an interactive web-based document you are likely to be interested in the HTML option. Otherwise you will be considering the Word or PDF options.

Either format is a perfectly acceptable choice, but to help you make an informed decision here are a few points to consider:

Point	Word	PDF
Look and design.	Limited use of design. Typically results in a basic looking manual.	Greater use of design based on HTML and CSS stylesheets. Easier to integrate colour and custom elements.
Time to produce.	25% more time to produce due to more demanding authoring process.	25% less time to produce.
Links and cross-references.	Navigational links manually inserted and therefore used more sparingly.	Navigational links and cross-references easier to implement and therefore used more widely.
Integration of external documents such as manufacturer's literature and product drawings.	Held in separate folders and accessed manually or through hyperlinks. Likely not included in page numbering or contents page.	Typically directly integrated into the PDF and more easily indexed and referenced. Included in page numbering and contents page.
Use of authoring software features.	Some software features unavailable for use and/or not supported.	Author able to use all features of the software raising quality of manual.
Updating.	Can be updated by anybody (but with risk to manual integrity).	Difficult to update. After-sales update service provided by AST Authors.
File structure.	File with separate folders containing any additional documentation.	Typically a single file containing all supporting documentation.
Distribution.	Typically end-user needs to host file and folders directly on their computer with folder structure intact.	Easier to distribute. Can be viewed in an internet browser and/or hosted online.
Stability and Protection.	Layout can change depending on viewers software settings or choice of viewing method. Easy for unauthorised editing to take place or for content to be accidentally changed.	More stabilised format, layout is 'set' and will not vary by viewing method. More difficult to edit and content cannot be changed accidentally.