Searching Multiple PDFs

by Phil Russell

If you save your Mouse Droppings PDFs, there is a wonderful way to search all issues all at the same time.

Adobe Acrobat Reader 6 can search multiple PDF documents for a keyword or phrase. Here is how it works. Open any PDF document. Or if you prefer, just open Acrobat Reader 6 (hey, if you only have Reader 5, go to http://www.adobe.com and download Reader 6. It is free). In the toolbar, select Search (Fig. 1.).
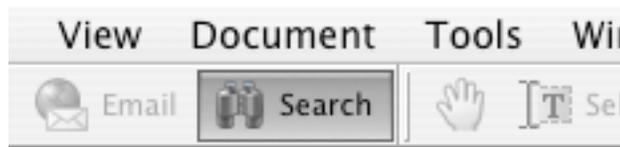

Fig. 1. Press Search button

Type in a search term (I typed iTunes 4). Slide down to Where would you like to search? Select In the current PDF document if you only want to find matches in that document. But the best part of searching Acrobat documents is the next item: All PDF documents in. The default is All Local Disks. But click and hold on All Local Disks and you are presented with a list of possible places to search for PDF documents. Since I want to search only 2004 Mouse Droppings documents, I selected Browse for location (Fig. 2.).
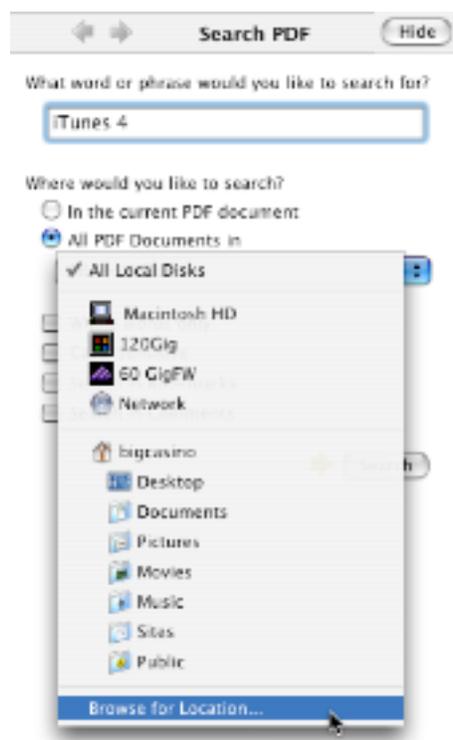

Fig. 2. Select PDFs to search

Clicking on the Browse button lets you navigate to the folder of PDFs you wish to search (Fig. 3.).
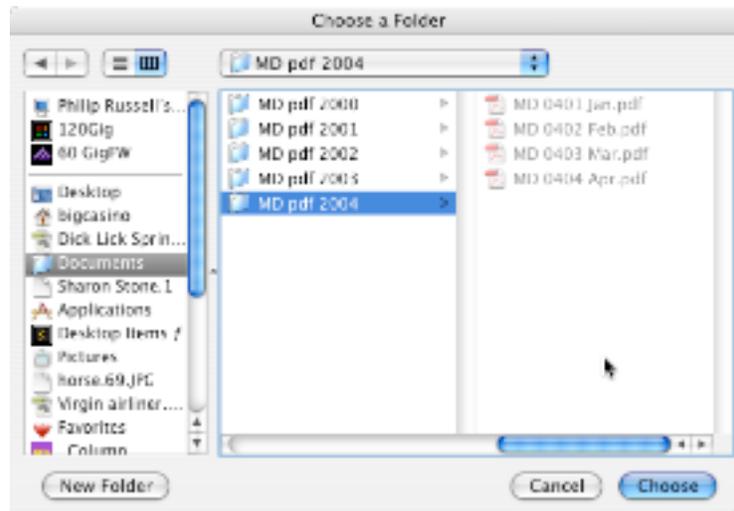

Fig. 3. Navigating to folder

Clicking Search in the Acrobat Search window now brings up any PDF containing the key phrase iTunes 4 (Fig. 4.).

Fig. 4. Matches found

If your keyword or phrase occurs in more than one PDF document, you will see separate matches (Fig. 5.).

Fig. 5. Matches in several PDFs

Clicking on a PDF in Results brings up the page where the keyword is found, with the keyword highlighted on the page (Fig. 6.).
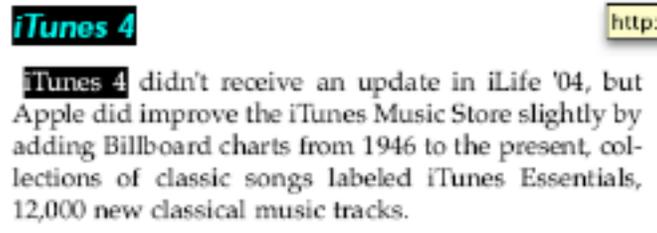

Fig. 6. Finding the first match

Back in the Search pane, if you click the arrow at the left of your first match (it may already be open), you will find all the matches in that particular PDF indented below the name of the PDF in which they were found (Fig. 7.).

Fig. 7. More matches

You can hide the Search pane by clicking Hide (upper right of Fig. 2.). Or you can start a new search by pressing the New Search button (right side of Fig. 4.).

You can search by other than what Acrobat thinks is the proper relevance of the matches. Click and hold on the default Relevance Ranking popdown and select from the choices before clicking Search (Fig. 8.).
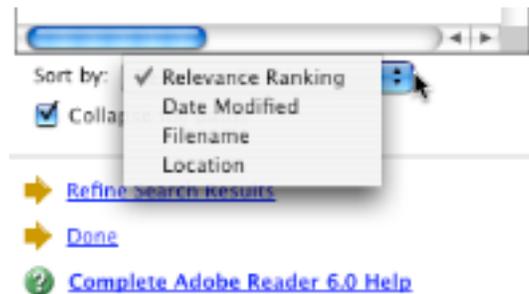

Fig. 8. Ranking order

A Refine Search Results link near the bottom of the Search tab brings up a whole list of ways to search for results within the previously searched keyword or phrase (Fig. 9.). It is a mystery to me when the Use Advanced Search Options and Search PDFs on the Internet links appear. If they do not appear, click Done, then choose Search from the Toolbar again (Fig. 1.).

Searching the Internet for PDFs on your keyword brings up a Google page of results limited to PDF files.

This reminds me. Very Big Deal! If you open Google and type pdf: followed by any keyword (no space after the :) you get a list of PDFs about that keyword.
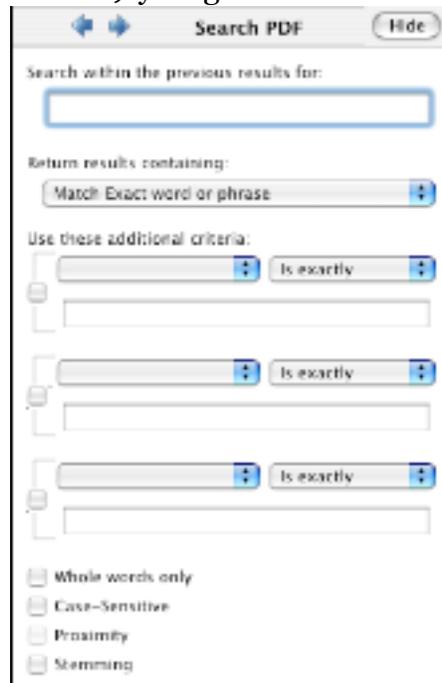

Fig. 9. Advanced searching

There is a lot more to be said about searching in Acrobat. One source of information is the Compleee Adobe 6 Reader Help link at the bottom of the Search pane. There is much more to be said about searching Adobe PDF files. Poke around in the menus, links and buttons as well. Have fun.