

# Digital Best Practices

## FAQ

**Digital transformations can be complex and pose unique challenges. Over the years, we have received numerous questions about digital signatures. In this short document, we aim to provide all of the answers you're seeking.**

## Your Association and Notarius

### **Q Why did your professional association choose a digital signature as an authentication tool?**

**A** Although each association has its own reasons, for many, it begins with members' requests to offer a standardized solution. Your professional association has chosen to provide its own digital signature using the Notarius trust network. Each member's digital signature is issued after a face-to-face verification of their identity and validation of their professional designation with their association.

### **Q Who is Notarius?**

**A** Notarius is a leading expert in electronic signatures, digital signatures, and long-term document reliability since 1996. We are one of the few firms that issues trusted signatures recognized by Adobe® and Microsoft® and certified according to eIDAS standards. We are also certified ISO 27001 and ISO 9001. Notarius now has more than 50 partnerships with professional associations like yours.

### **Q What is Notarius' role for your association?**

**A** Notarius provides the technological infrastructure for your association to issue digital signatures to its members. To put it simply, Notarius is like the Royal Rubber Stamp Company, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With a digital signature, your members can authenticate electronic documents securely and in full compliance with the applicable requirements. In addition, your association can ensure that only members in good standing are able to sign official documents.

### **Q What are the advantages of digital signatures for your association?**

**A** Through the Notarius trust network, your association can issue or revoke the digital signatures provided to your members. This makes it easier for your association to protect the public and ensure that only members in good standing are allowed to practice digitally. It also provides members the peace of mind that their transition to digital fully complies with your association's standards.

**Q What are the disadvantages of digital signatures?**

**A** Although it speeds up the authentication process and is more secure than self-inking seals, the adoption of this solution requires a certain level of change management. The digital signature is vital link in a much broader document management process. As such, you can expect that this new method will also change habits throughout your digital workflow. This is a process that will likely require support from key stakeholders. Keep in mind that we are here to help and provide extensive support material and training to assist your members in this digital journey.

**Q Why is Notarius the only supplier?**

**A** One of the key challenges to providing this type of service is ensuring that it is trusted by clients and government agencies. The association could choose to build its own service or use several different platforms. This involves large investments in equipment and staffing that may be out of reach for many associations. However, over the last 20 years, Notarius has developed a unique business model that makes it cost-efficient and easy to deploy.

**Q What information is included in a member's digital signature?**

**A** The digital signature is designed to be verified and transparent to the public. When a document is digitally signed by one of your members, anyone can easily validate, at no cost, the information contained in the signature such as:

- 1 The member's first and last name
- 2 The signer's membership in the association and their designation
- 3 The reason for signing
- 4 But above all, it is possible to check whether the information contained in the document has been modified since it was signed.

In addition, a digital signature provided by Notarius meets the highest requirements in terms of legal reliability, which means that over the course of time the documents signed by your members will be admissible in court.

**Q What does Notarius provide in terms of member services?**

**A** To support you and your association's members in their digital transformation, Notarius provides written guides, videos, and technical webinars, and offers personalized customer support. In 25 years, Notarius has developed expertise in terms of best digital practices, especially for the engineering, architecture, and construction industries. We also offer ConsignO Desktop, our free PDF reader and digital signing tool designed specifically for the needs of the industry. Since your members may practice internationally, we can customize our training services wherever they are in the world.

## Digital Signature Alternatives

**Q Why is an image of a seal not sufficient for digital documents?**

**A** The advantage of a digital signature is that it detects changes made after signing. It ensures the integrity of the information. Putting an image of a seal on a document is like placing a Post-It note on your documents. It is easy to remove and copy and it does not protect your identity, nor the information contained in the document in any way. Basically, you are exposing yourself to risk. Contrary to popular belief, fraud does exist in Canada; many discipline cases involve misuse of seals or misrepresentations of the right to practice.

### Digital signature



Detect changes  
after signing

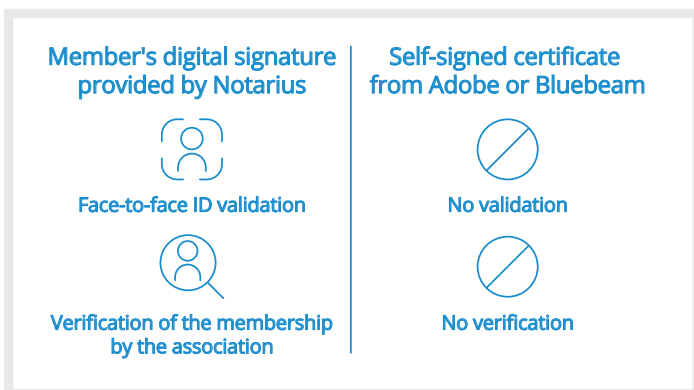
### Image of seal



Easy to copy and remove  
Does not protect your  
documents from changes

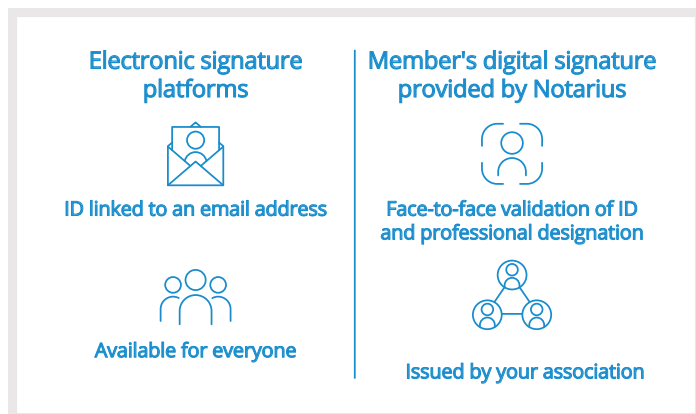
**Q Why are self-signed certificates from Adobe® or Bluebeam® not adequate for digital sealing?**

**A** When a digital signature is issued to a member, Notarius validates the member's identity in a face-to-face ID verification session using two pieces of ID. Then, the association validates the professional's membership in an association. It is only after these identity checks that the member obtains their digital signature. Adobe® and Bluebeam® self-signed certificates, as their names imply, do not include the verification of personal and professional identities. They are self-signed. Thus, they can be replicated, and they can't be verified. To put it simply, with Adobe® or Bluebeam®, your signature is equivalent to Monopoly money. It looks like money, but it is not legal tender.



**Q Why can't DocuSign be used to digitally seal professional files?**

**A** DocuSign offers an electronic signature platform designed for everyone. Basically, it links a person's identity to an email. There are several platforms such as these on the market including ours, ConsignO Cloud. These platforms do not involve face-to-face ID verifications and professional designations. Moreover, keep in mind that Notarius provides the infrastructure to your association. It's your association that is in control of issuing signatures to your members.



**Q Why is password protection not adequate for digital sealing?**

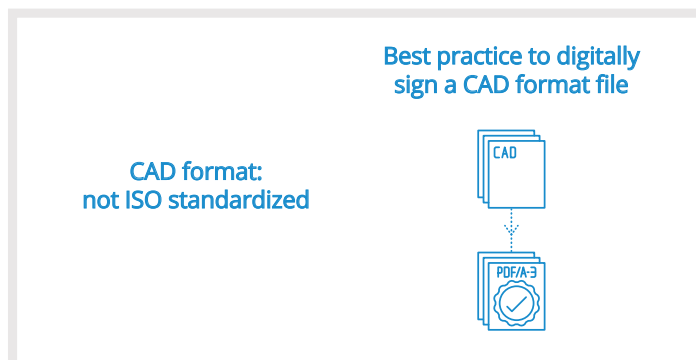
**A** It would be convenient if you could use only a password to seal documents. Unfortunately, password protection does not prevent modifications. Once unlocked, a document can be edited and saved again. The integrity of the information is no longer guaranteed and does not confirm a person's identity. The public also has no mechanisms to validate a member's right to practice.

**Q Why is the Locked Print function not suitable for sealing?**

**A** The Locked Print function can control who prints the documents, but nothing identifies or confirms who locked the document. Furthermore, today's technology makes it very easy to capture information and manipulate it into a new document.

**Q Why is native signing of CAD files not adequate for digital sealing?**

**A** CAD files have the ability to use digital signatures, but the CAD format is not standardized for long-term archiving. The best practice would be to attach the CAD files in an ISO standardized PDF-A-3 and digitally sign it. This ensures that we can know who signed the document years from now.



# The Cost of a Digital Signature

## Q How much does a digital signature provided by Notarius cost?

**A** A digital signature provided by Notarius has an annual subscription fee of \$185 and a one-time sign-up fee of \$140. The one-time sign-up fee is used to pay for the costs related to ID verification and other licensing fees. The yearly subscription covers all support and software updates. Altogether, it costs \$325 the first year and \$185 each subsequent year. Since organizations have the biggest financial gain in going digital, most (if not all) cover the cost of the service for your members. For larger deployments, volume pricing is also possible.

## Q Is it expensive for members who practice in multiple jurisdictions?

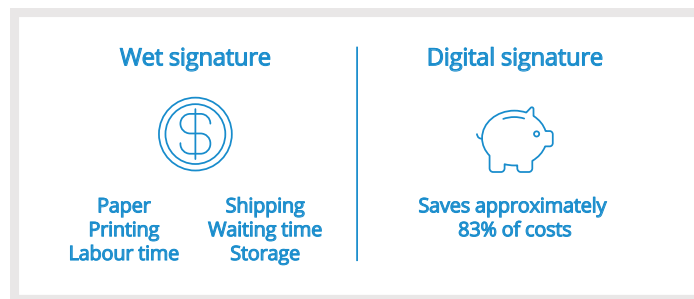
**A** Since most associations across the country issue digital signatures through the Notarius trust network, members who have already signed up for a signature can acquire one in another jurisdiction for just \$75 annually. For example, an engineer from Alberta who already has his digital signature and who wants to authenticate electronic documents in Ontario will pay \$185 annually for his APEGA signature and \$75 for his PEO signature.

## Q Why are the subscription fees annual?

**A** There is a cost to maintaining a government-level Certificate Authority. To offer this type of certified infrastructure, we must maintain a variety of certifications such as ISO 27000-1, 9001 and eIDAS, update servers, maintain security, provide personnel who verify identities, and support our customers. In addition, when you look at the standard pricing in the industry, we are among the most affordable in North America.

## Q Do digital signatures cost more than wet signatures?

**A** An ink seal may seem affordable at first glance – in all, \$50 or less. But you also have to think about the cost of paper, printing, the labour time required to print them, the cost of shipping packages, the time it takes to obtain the other signatures and, above all, the cost of storage. If you do the math, using digital signatures saves approximately 83% of costs compared to ink seals. Signing cycles are reduced from weeks to days, or even hours in some cases.



## Q Is there a cost to sign per document?

**A** No, the digital signature is provided as a yearly subscription; it can be used on as many documents as you wish.

## Q How much does a PDF reader and signing tool cost?

**A** Our ConsignO Desktop PDF reader and signing tool is free to use to prepare and sign documents. ConsignO Desktop is designed to meet the needs of the engineering, architectural, and construction industries. You can batch sign, batch convert to PDF-A format, create a custom signature appearance, and benefit from many other functionalities.

## Using a Digital Signature

## Q Can more than one digital signature be applied to a document?

**A** You can apply as many digital signatures as you want to a document. It is also possible to apply a digital signature without being able to see its appearance. Digital signatures, once affixed, can be verified for free with Adobe Acrobat®, Bluebeam®, and our ConsignO Desktop digital signing tool. We even have a free website that verifies signed PDFs: VerifiO.com.

## Q Is it possible to put a seal, the date and a reason along with a digital signature?

**A** Our ConsignO Desktop software is designed to ensure that members remain compliant. A member can comply with their association's standards or guidelines by affixing the appearance of their seal, the date and reason while digitally signing an original electronic document. Always keep in mind that beyond the seal appearance, the member must digitally sign the electronic document to ensure compliance.

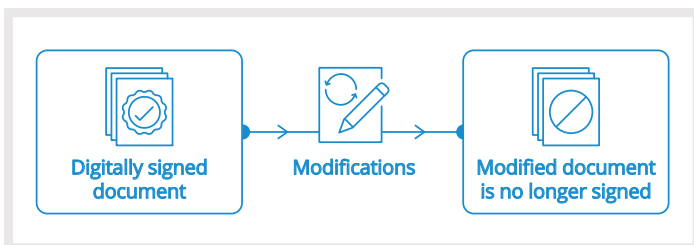
<sup>1</sup> Based on ESRA & Industry Average.

**Q Can you annotate a digitally signed document?**

**A** You can annotate a digitally signed document. However, if you annotate a signed document, the digital signature will indicate that the document contains modifications. This function makes the digital signature more secure than a simple wet signature.

**Q Can I modify a digitally signed document?**

**A** You can modify the source content of a digitally signed document. However, the digital signature will disappear, and the document will no longer be signed. At this point, the new document is a copy. It will have to be signed to make it an original once again. In fact, when modifying a signed document, software tends to warn the user that the digital signature will be removed from the document.



**Q Does your PDF need to be a PDF-A to be signed?**

**A** The PDF-A is designed to provide long-term reliability. However, it is not required to sign documents.

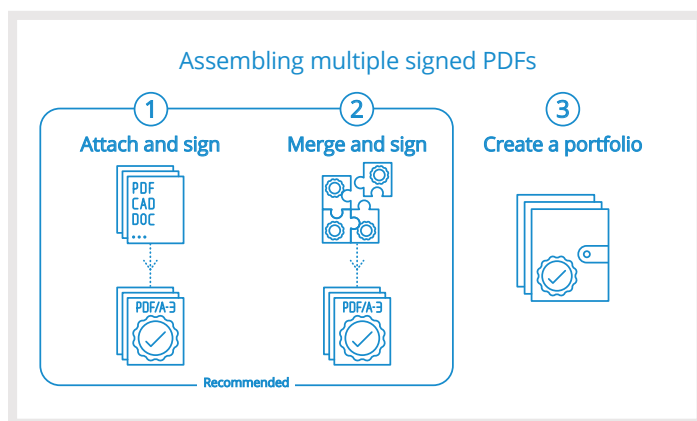
**Q How can you assemble multiple signed PDFs documents?**

**A** Three solutions are available to create and authenticate a document containing several signed PDFs.

- 1 In ConsignO Desktop, you can use a PDF-A as a container to attach various electronic files including PDFs and other file formats like AutoCad®, Microsoft Word® and JPEG.
- 2 Signed PDFs can be merged to create a new document. Since it is a new document, all of the digital signatures contained in the signed documents will disappear. However, if a seal aspect has been applied, you will still be able to see the image of the seals. To make this document an original, just sign the new PDF with an invisible digital signature.

- 3 You can make a portfolio. This format preserves the originals and does not remove digital signatures. However, since the portfolio is not an ISO format, we recommend the first or second option.

We do understand that this is not an easy concept at first glance. Don't hesitate to contact us if you need a demo or support.



## The Security of a Digital Signature

**Q Can a digital signature be hacked?**

**A** A digital signature uses cryptography to create a strong bond between an individual and an electronic document. The digital signatures provided by Notarius use SHA-256 encryption. This is the same cryptography that is commonly used for banking, websites, and secure government platforms. This is the best technology available. The day your digital signature is hacked, you have bigger problems to worry about.

**Q What security protocols has the Notarius certification authority put in place?**

**A** The Notarius certification authority meets the highest security standards. It is ISO 27001 and ISO 9001 certified. It is also on the Adobe Approved Trust List (AATL) and is eIDAS certified in Europe. Only a few certification authorities in the world can compete with Notarius' certifications and most of them come from government agencies or defense departments.



**Q Who has access to the digital signatures, seal appearances and signed documents?**

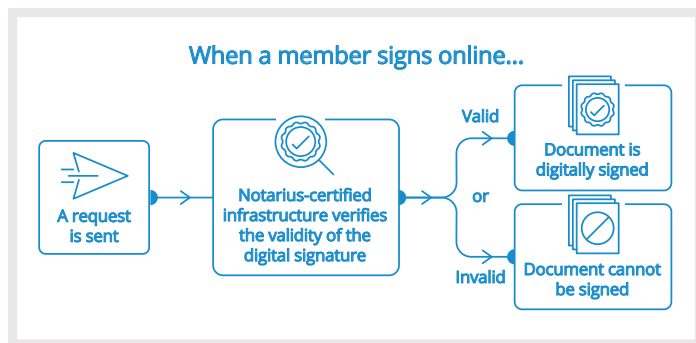
**A** Only a member with a digital signature can use their signature and seal appearances. It is not possible for Notarius or the associations to access the digital signature password and signature appearances. The frequency of use of a digital signature is completely confidential, as are the contents of signed documents.

**Q Who has control over the digital signature?**

**A** The member has full control over the use of their digital signature. The professional association controls the issuance of the digital signature and can therefore revoke a digital signature if the member's license to practice is revoked, if they have retired, or if they have not paid their membership fees. Notarius can also revoke a digital signature if the member does not pay for their subscription.

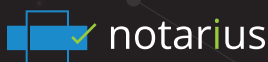
**Q What is sent to the Notarius certification authority when a document is digitally signed with an internet connection?**

**A** When a member signs, a signature request is sent to Notarius-certified infrastructures to confirm the validity of the digital signature. If the digital signature is valid, the document will be signed and will contain the proof that the signature was valid at the time of signing. If the signature is invalid, the document cannot be signed.



**Q Is it possible to sign offline?**

**A** Yes, it is possible to sign offline. This often happens when a professional is working in a remote area. When signing offline, there is no proof of validity added to the signature. The signature validity check can always be done manually by consulting the list of revoked certificates from Notarius. To make your life easier, we always recommend that you sign digitally with an internet connection.



The world is going digital.  
Be digitally reliable.



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