Cella PDF Server on a Windows PC: step by step

Cella PDF Server 1.1.2 · Sorted Solution

Cella PDF Server keeps a project's drawings and everyone's markups in step across the office: people working on the same sheet see each other's markups arrive live, on Mac, Windows, Linux and iPad. You run it on a PC of your own. This guide assumes you are comfortable installing programs on Windows and have never used Docker. It takes about half an hour.

What Docker is, in one paragraph. Docker Desktop is a free program that runs other programs in sealed boxes called *containers*. Cella PDF Server comes as a container, so you never install the server itself: you install Docker Desktop once, and a setup script in this folder tells Docker to download the server and run it. You won't need to learn Docker's commands.

What you need

- **A PC that stays on**, running Windows 10 or 11 (64-bit), with 8 GB of memory or more and free disk space for about three times the size of your current drawing sets. An ordinary desktop in the office is fine. It does not need a screen once it is set up.
- **An administrator account** on that PC.
- **This folder**, unzipped somewhere permanent such as `C:\cellapdf-server`. Don't run it from inside the zip or from Downloads: the folder holds the server's settings from now on.

Three things to know before you start:

- The server runs while someone is **signed in** to that PC (the screen can be locked). After a restart, sign in again and it starts by itself. If the PC should come back unattended after a power cut, turn on automatic sign-in for it.
- Docker Desktop is free for firms with fewer than 250 people and under $10 million a year in revenue. Larger firms need a paid Docker subscription.
- **Windows Server** can't run Docker Desktop. On a Windows Server, make an Ubuntu virtual machine in Hyper-V and follow `QUICKSTART.md` inside it instead of this guide.

Step 1. Install Docker Desktop

1. Download **Docker Desktop for Windows** from https://www.docker.com/products/docker-desktop/ and run the installer. Leave **Use WSL 2** ticked.
2. Restart the PC when it asks.
3. Open **Docker Desktop** from the Start menu. Accept its terms. You can skip signing in and skip the survey. If Windows offers to install or update "WSL", say yes and let it finish.
4. Wait until the bottom-left corner of the Docker Desktop window says **Engine running**.
5. In Docker Desktop, open **Settings** (the gear) ▸ **General** and tick **Start Docker Desktop when you sign in to your computer**. Choose **Apply & restart**.

Step 2. Keep the PC awake

Settings ▸ System ▸ Power (Power & sleep on Windows 10): set **Sleep** to **Never** when plugged in. A sleeping PC is a server nobody can reach.

Step 3. Run the setup

1. Open the folder you unzipped and double-click **Setup.cmd**. Answer **Yes** when Windows asks whether it may make changes.
2. It asks two questions:
   - **Your firm's name.** People see it when they join.
   - **Where people connect from.** Choose **1** (only in the office) unless people must sync from home or site. You can change to the other later ("From anywhere", below).
3. It downloads the server, starts it, opens the Windows firewall for it and shows:
   - the **address** people join, such as `https://office-pc`;
   - the **admin token**, a long password starting `rsa_`. It is shown once. Copy it into your firm's password manager now. (It is also saved in a text file in the folder, named "ADMIN TOKEN…": delete that file once the token is in the password manager.)
4. Your browser opens the server's **admin page**. Sign in with the admin token.

If the setup stops, it says why in red and nothing is lost: fix what it names and double-click **Setup.cmd** again. Running it again later is always safe; it never erases a server.

Step 4. Let each device trust the server (office-only setup)

Skip this step if you chose "from anywhere".

An office-only server makes its own security certificate, and every computer and iPad has to be told once to trust it. The setup did this for the server PC and left the certificate in the folder as **cellapdf-server-root.crt**.

- **Each Windows computer:** copy `cellapdf-server-root.crt` and `Trust-Certificate.cmd` to it (a USB stick or a shared folder), keep the two files together, double-click **Trust-Certificate.cmd** and answer **Yes**.
- **Each Mac:** copy `cellapdf-server-root.crt` to it and double-click it. Keychain Access opens: add it to the **System** keychain, then double-click the certificate there ("Caddy Local Authority"), open **Trust** and set **When using this certificate** to **Always Trust**.
- **Each iPad:** send `cellapdf-server-root.crt` to it (AirDrop or email) and open it. Then **Settings ▸ General ▸ VPN & Device Management**, tap the profile and **Install**. Then **Settings ▸ General ▸ About ▸ Certificate Trust Settings** and switch it on.

To check a device: open the server's address in its browser (for example `https://office-pc/health`). You should see `{"ok":true}` with no security warning. If the name doesn't open on a Mac or an iPad, try it with `.local` on the end (`https://office-pc.local`).

Step 5. Invite people

1. On the admin page, **Projects ▸ Create**: name it like the job (`2417 Riverside Clinic`).
2. **Invites ▸ Create invite** for that project, one for each computer or iPad, with a note (`Sam's laptop`). Copy the code (it looks like `J6GV-0WDS-ZJ3B`): it is shown once, works once and lasts 14 days.
3. Give each person the server's address and their code. In Cella PDF they choose **Sync ▸ Join Server…** (on an iPad, the cloud button at the right of the toolbar ▸ **Join Server…**), enter the address, the code, their name and email, then open a drawing and choose **Sync ▸ Connect Document to Project…**.

Each person needs a licensed Cella PDF. When someone leaves or a laptop is lost, use **Members ▸ Remove** on the admin page.

Step 6. Backups

The server backs itself up every night and keeps 14 days, but those backups sit inside Docker on the same PC. Copy them somewhere your own backup covers:

1. Right-click the Start button ▸ **Terminal** (or **Windows PowerShell**).
2. Type, with your own folder (another drive, or a folder your backup or OneDrive covers):

```
cd C:\cellapdf-server
powershell -ExecutionPolicy Bypass -File .\Backup-CellaServer.ps1 -To "D:\Cella Server Backups" -EveryDay
```

That copies the backups now and again every morning at 6:00. To bring a backup back after a disaster, contact us (Help, below): it is three commands and we will walk you through them.

From anywhere (home and site)

For people to sync from outside the office, the server needs a name on the internet:

1. Ask whoever looks after your website's domain for a name such as `sync.yourfirm.com` pointing at your office's public internet address (an "A record").
2. On the office router, forward **ports 80 and 443** to the server PC. Give that PC a fixed address on the router first ("DHCP reservation").
3. Run **Setup.cmd** in a fresh copy of the kit folder if this is a new server, and choose **2**. To change an existing office-only server instead, open `.env` in the folder with Notepad, set `ATRIUM_DOMAIN=sync.yourfirm.com`, put a `#` in front of the `ATRIUM_CADDY_TLS` line, save, and double-click **Setup.cmd**.

With a name on the internet the server gets a recognised certificate by itself, so no device needs step 4. People then join `https://sync.yourfirm.com` from anywhere.

Updating the server

When we announce a new version: download the new kit, copy every file from it into your folder, replacing the old ones, except `.env` (your settings). Then double-click **Setup.cmd** again. Your projects and markups stay as they are. Let Docker Desktop update itself when it offers to.

If something goes wrong

- **Nobody can connect after a restart.** Sign in to the server PC and wait a minute. Check Docker Desktop says **Engine running**.
- **"This site can't be reached" from another computer.** Is the server PC awake and on the same network? Try the PC's address in numbers (the setup listed them; `ipconfig` on the server PC shows it as "IPv4 Address"), for example `https://192.168.1.20/health`.
- **A security warning in the browser** (office-only setup): that device hasn't done step 4.
- **The setup says port 80 or 443 is in use.** Another program on the PC is a web server (often IIS, or an old Skype). Stop or remove it, then run **Setup.cmd** again.
- **You lost the admin token.** In Terminal: `cd C:\cellapdf-server`, then `docker compose exec atrium atrium admin rotate-token` prints a new one.
- **Is it running?** In Docker Desktop ▸ **Containers** you should see **atrium** with two green entries (the server and "caddy", its web front door).

Help

Sorted Solution: https://www.sortedsolution.com/contact/. It helps us if you open Terminal in the kit folder and send what these print:

```
docker compose ps
docker compose logs --tail 200 atrium caddy
```

(The files, settings and commands say `atrium`: that is the server's working name.) `QUICKSTART.md` and `SYNC.md` in this folder are the fuller guides for IT staff.