

Flowcode vector graphics output - or "how do I edit PDF flowcharts?"

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The current version of Flowcode misses a way of exporting/saving the flowcharts as vector graphics. So this guide shall help you on your way to vectorized output.

1 Why should I care for vectors?

This is a good question. Not everyone needs vector graphics output of the flowcharts. but imagine following scenarios:

- you want to print a poster e.g. for your final year project, and want to scale the flowchart, but get ugly output with JPG
- you are working on a report (like me) and including JPGs is not really an option. Unfortunately you cannot even choose a partial view or the resolution of the saved image in Flowcode.
- you need scalable output for whatever reason, and JPG is de factor a rasterized bitmap with compression which makes it even worse.

This list is not comprehensive, but it mirrors why there is a place on earth for vector graphics. If you do not believe me, or have no idea what the difference ist, have a look at [Figure 1](#). And it gets worse when you zoom in for the JGP while the vector graphics only gets scaled. By now you should have recognized a difference between rasterized and vector graphics. But don't worry, without the need of commercial software it is quite easy to get from a Flowcode flowchart to a vecotrized output you can use wherever you want and scale as much as you like.

2 Hands-on

2.1 PDF printer

The first thing is: grab yourself a PDF printer software. There is one very well known product from a company everyone knows for their PDF reader, but we want to spend money on nice E-Blocks and not more software. So go for open source software like:

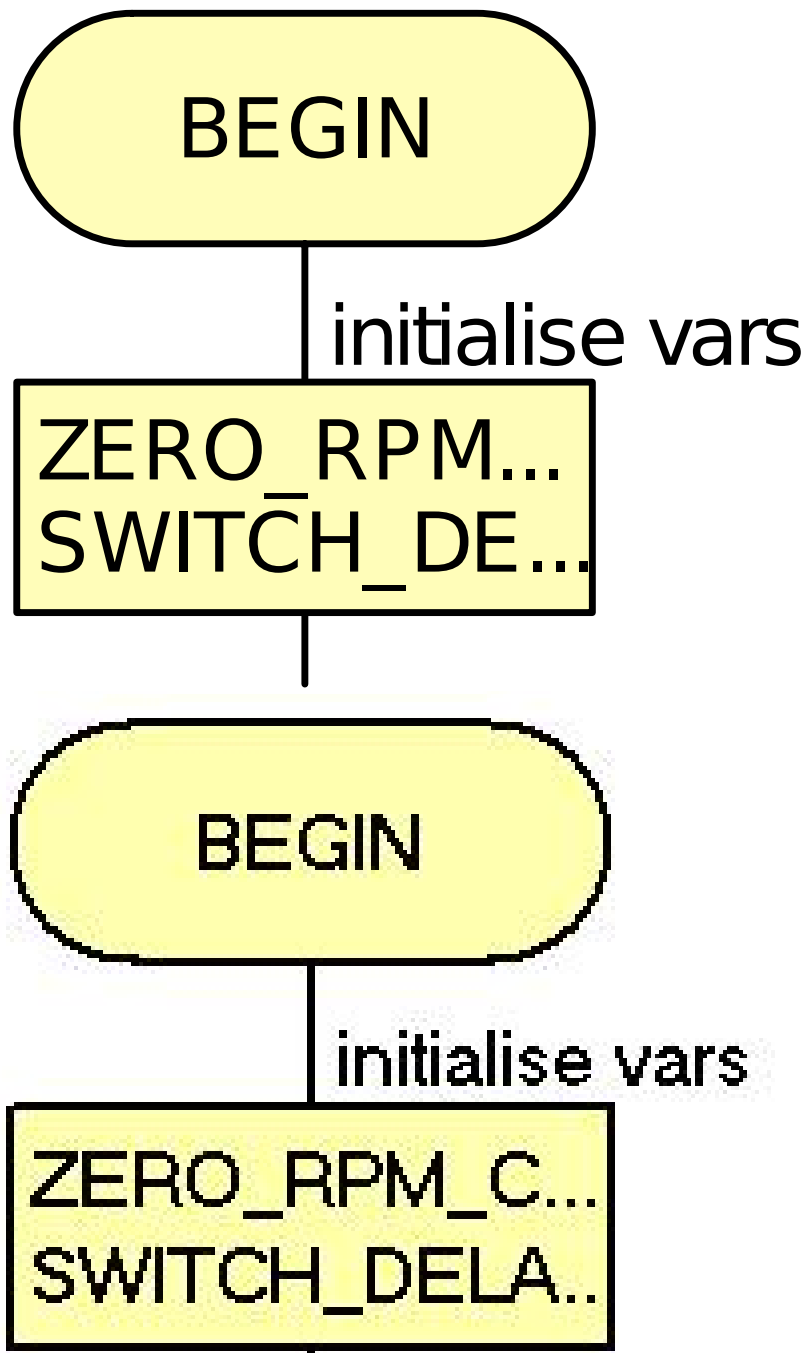


Figure 1: Upper part: vector graphics, lower part Flowcode JPG output both scaled x2

- FreePDF XP <http://www.freepdfxp.de/fpx732.htm> where you have to get AFPL Ghostscript first and after that you can install FreePDF XP. Even if the website is only german, the software itself is multilanguage.
- There are others as well, but haven't tested them yet:
 - PrimoPDF <http://www.primopdf.com>
 - PDF995 <http://www.pdf955.com>
 - and many more ...

After installing either one of them there should now be another new printer. When you try to print out something with the PDF printer, it saves the output in a PDF file on your computer. Open this one and compare it to a JPG image saved by Flowcode and you will see that the output is now vector based.

2.2 and what?

Now that you have your wonderful vector graphics, you thought it is nice to edit it, for some reasons like:

- splitting a very long flowchart into smaller parts, which keeps it readable in a report. The problem is, that even the graphic is scalable, the human eye won't be able to read when the graphic is too small in a printed version. The PDF would be fine, if someone would zoom in.
- join two or more flowcharts and save it in one file

A few weeks ago in March 2008 the software called Inkscape made it possible to import PDFs. This is not so much to wonder about, but Inkscape is a vector based drawing program which enables you to play with the so nice printed flowcharts and save them into various formats you like. Mine is EPS/PDF which I am using in my reports, and SVG as the native data format to save the raw data after importing. You get Inkscape here for almost every platform out there from <http://www.inkscape.org>.

3 Conclusion

Some days ago I made a suggestion on the Flowcode forum to include vector graphics, but for the impatient like me, there is no time to wait until they do it. So I took a look in the vast area of open source and thought it would be nice to share it with other people looking for this as well.

So now you should be able to print out vector based flowcharts and edit them. It may take a while to get used to Inkscape, but if you like high quality output then give it a try.