

What's There To Like About Microsoft Office 2007 SP 2?

From an OpenDocument Format perspective, quite a bit.

First and foremost, having an office format implemented by the largest vendor in that market area isn't a bad thing. Office formats, to be meaningful at all, must serve the needs of the users of those formats. The larger the group of users that a format serves, the more useful it is overall. The support of ODF by Microsoft will only help reach more users.

Second, and this is mostly an editor's concern, implementation of ODF by a group new to the standard will help isolate unspecified and under specified parts of the standard. I have yet to encounter any standard that did not have such blemishes and one of the best ways to find them is to ask a new implementer to implement what the standards says (not what may have been meant).

Third, another implementation increases the number of readings of ODF that resulted in actual choices being made about what we said (or didn't say). Comparing the results across implementations is also a good way to find places that may need work in a standard. I would prefer that such differences be illustrated and then the implementers asked (as opposed to being accused of incompetence or malice) why their implementation reached a different result?

Forth, and purely from a standards perspective, the more implementations exist the less cause there is to see a standard as belonging to one group or another. Certainly no one now claims that XML for example belongs to one particular interest or community, well, other than the XML community. If we are ultimately successful in the development of ODF 1.2 and beyond, it will not be seen as “my standard” or “their standard” but “our standard.”

If OpenDocument Format is to be a standard, then it must be a standard equally for the largest vendor as well as the smallest open source project that wants to use it and everyone in between. In order to reach that status, the OpenDocument Format standard must change and evolve to meet the needs of those users. It must belong to the ODF community writ large, ranging from users of MS Office, to OpenOffice and Symphony users, to users of custom software based upon ODF, and everyone in between.

Being a member of the ODF community involves asking questions about possible lack of clarity or missing features in current or prior versions of ODF. In a forum where they can be usefully discussed. Some people prefer to blog on such topics but personally I would suggest joining in the discussions at the ODF TC at OASIS. http://www.oasis-open.org/committees/tc_home.php?wg_abbrev=office

I look forward to hearing more about any ambiguities uncovered and difficulties that Microsoft had with ODF 1.1 so that we can avoid those issues for everyone in ODF 1.2.

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