

OFE cautiously welcomes Microsoft announcement on ODF

OpenForum Europe (OFE) cautiously welcomes today's announcement from Microsoft of limited support for OpenDocument Format, as inevitable following the momentum generated in the market by ODF. When ODF was ratified by ISO, OFE wrote an open letter to Microsoft challenging it to support ODF within its applications if it wished to be perceived open. It would therefore be churlish not to welcome even this limited route to support as anything other than welcome and supportive of the demands of users worldwide.

There can be no question that ODF has generated massive support worldwide in the market, notably by Government. OFE was an early supporter of the ODF Alliance (www.odfalliance.org) who have seen membership support grow to 230 in the space of barely four months. Over half of these organisations are based in Europe where support has been particularly strong. This reflects Government support and announcement on Open Standards and ODF, notably the recent announcement from the Belgian Government. This week OFE, in partnership with the ODF Alliance has been running briefings in Europe to senior government officials on the impact of ODF, and were able to see one live demonstration of the plug-ins, similar to that now being proposed by Microsoft.

The detail behind the manner in which Microsoft are proposing to provide the support of ODF has yet be reviewed but the announcement reflects commercial realism in the face of customer demand.

It also reinforces the essential need for Open Standards as the mechanism to allow co-existence of proprietary and Open Source solutions, with users able to benefit from increased choice and competition, without fear of lock in to proprietary solutions from a single supplier. For Open Source solutions such as OpenOffice, already able to provide native support for ODF, it provides even greater recognition and ability to compete at an equal level on the basis of price and functionality.