

## ODF EAG

Title: OpenForum Europe warns that the Office market is still volatile, stressing the key role of governments in the adoption of vendor neutral standards and interoperability.

OpenForum Europe calls for stronger government awareness about importance of their role in the adoption of open standards in the market place. “A consumer has no choice when a government publishes information in a file format tied to a specific vendor – even if that has not been a problem for decades, now it clearly is”, says Basil Cousins, OFE Director and Convenor of ODF European Action Group. “The market is, in principle, ready to move to a more mature phase”.

Two years ago, the IDABC unit of the European Commission, in conjunction with the German Presidency, ran in Berlin a workshop on Open Document Exchange Formats (ODEF). In the conclusions, Karel De Vriendt called for the full potential of ODEF to be released by freeing documents from the software that creates them. He stressed that only complete standard conformant products supported by multiple products, with no proprietary extensions should be considered and that they should be:

- Defined by an open process in which all stakeholders can participate;
- Can be studied and implemented by anybody, without restrictions....

Finally, he insisted on conformance testing and document validation procedures.

The Hague ODF Interoperability Workshop set out to achieve these goals, clearly demonstrating the availability of ODF in a number of implementations across a number of platform as well as full transparency and broad participation in the ODF process.

Governments have a key role to play in restoring the market to an open and competitive environment in which users can choose Office software to access their own data. “Open Document Format enables such choice. By mandating ODF, governments are providing an important incentive for suppliers to provide high quality products and support”, says Cousins, “which is healthy for the market and healthy for their own sake, because it will make them less dependent on specific software thereby making substantial savings whilst increasing quality, security and usability.”

Procurement is clearly an important instrument, but there are other roles that governments can consider. Over forty organisations worldwide and 12 vendors took part in a two day ODF testing event in The Hague last week organised under the auspices of the Dutch government and OpenDoc Society, a global member-based user-driven organisation that promotes open document standards. Several officials from governments across Europe participated in the event, together with organisations such as Open Forum Europe and the ODF Alliance. In the past a number of ODF workshops have been organised by the IDABC programme together with national governments. Such initiatives have a very direct impact on the market.

It was agreed to implement a perpetual transparent virtual “plugfest” in which all implementers of ODF are invited to participate. It is important that this virtual testing regime be strengthened by quarterly national workshops held in various countries in which local implementers and users of ODF can participate. Such workshops will raise the perception of vendor neutral ODF and increase confidence in its deployment as well as encouraging local innovation.

Important tools were announced including “Office Shots” which enables users to compare different implementations of ODF directly as well as the publication of ODF Implementation Notes which would accompany the release of ODF-supporting software. A community supported ODF validator will be made available shortly.

Basil Cousins: “The Dutch Government has set an excellent example of support for the Vendor Neutral Document Exchange movement by enabling the OpenDoc Society to hold this innovative ODF Plugfest. We have taken an important step along the complex path leading to genuine transparent vendor neutral interoperability. We need a sustained highly visible effort firmly supported by European Commission and National Governments to succeed.”