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Open Document Format Principles for the UK Public Sector

This simple and informative document will help you understand and implement small changes which will have a big impact on the future of Government technology.

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Introduction

Purpose

This document is designed to:

- Inform about the wide freedom of choice of software applications and vendors
- Increase value from your technology providers and the solutions they offer
- Facilitate a flexible environment for staff and contractor innovation
- Help find related case studies, applications, and tools
- Highlight risks regarding closed and proprietary formats

Implementing flexibility at the fundamental level of document exchange can have a profound impact on Government choice, spending and efficiency. The following sections outline principles, benefits, options and recent experience with the Open Document Format (ODF)[1]: the de facto Open Standard for documents, which is increasingly being adopted by government organisations.

Executive summary

The ODF frees documents and data from their applications of origin, enabling them to be exchanged, retrieved, and edited with any ODF-compliant software, database or tool. This is essential for preserving technology choices in government, and the prevention of isolated "ghettos" of Public Sector resources and infrastructure which are incompatible with each other.

Additional materials

Included with this publication is a simple infographic to help you share the contained message with your colleagues. All toolkit contents use a Creative Commons license to encourage reuse, distribution, and translation. A comparison of ODF-capable applications is included, together with a list of ODF-related tools.

On the back page, highlights of the UK Government Open Standards policy can be found.

Open Document Format file types

Format	Use
.odt .fodt .ott .odm	ODF word processing (text)
ods .fods .ots	ODF Spreadsheet
.odg .fodg .otg	ODF Drawing / graphic
.odp .fodp .otp	ODF Presentation
.odf	ODF Formulae & mathematical equations
.odb	ODF Database

1 http://www.opendocumentformat.org/features/

Key Principles

Open Standards are influencing almost every aspect of modern life from communications to industry and education. Many private sector companies have built their success on these principles and a growing number of Public Sector case studies demonstrate efficiency and cost savings that can be achieved[2][3][4].

As Open Standards are managed as collaboration between industry organisations, it is committed to transparency in a politically neutral, non profit manner. COIS itself is also managed through the co-operation of supporting industry organisations.

Key benefits of ODF
By design, the Open Document Format is available for anyone to use and this right cannot be revoked. This enables developers to transition between other Open Standards such as PDF and HTML. ODF:
- Guarantees freedom of choice regarding service provider and precludes vendor lock-in
- Safeguards the readability of documents in future from discontinued products
- Allows incremental change of systems and technology, thereby avoiding forced upgrades

ODF and OOXML
Another popular document format used in government is OOXML. Unlike ODF, OOXML does not meet common requirements of an Open Standard, including those set forth by the Dutch Government.

Those requirements include that a standard is:
- Controlled by an independent group of experts
- Open to participation from anyone
- Available for everybody to use

ODF vs OOXML file extensions
- Open Document Format documents use file extensions such as .odt .ods .odp .odg .odf .odb
- OOXML documents use file extensions such as .doc .docx .xls .xlsx .ppt .pptx

File extensions may not be visible in file browsers, so it may be necessary to alter your system settings to reveal the file formats in use if they are hidden by default.

2 http://conference.libreoffice.org/talks/2013/content/sessions/034/files/LibOConf2013_Case_Studies_of_migration_to_LibreOffice_in_Japan.pdf
3 https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/community/osor/case/libreoffice-municipality-neerijnen
4 https://joinup.ec.europa.eu/elibrary/case/limux-it-evolution-open-source-success-story-never

Application choices

Many capable Open Document editors are available: some at no cost, others with commercial support packages, and further options with proprietary licensing. Several packages are designed to meet the needs of the Public Sector, including very large deployments and multi-year maintenance updates.

Software	License	Formats	Platforms	Support	Link
Abiword[5]	Open Source	odt	Linux, Windows	Community	http://www.abiword.org/
Apache OpenOffice[6]	Open Source	All	Linux , Windows, OS X	Community	https://www.openoffice.org/
Calligra (KDE)[7]	Open Source	All	Linux, Windows, OSX, Android	Community	https://www.calligra.org/
EuroOffice	Open Source	All	Windows, Linux, Android	Commercial	http://www.multiracio.com/
EuroOffice Professional	Proprietary	All	Windows, Linux	Commercial	http://www.multiracio.com/
Google Docs[8]	Proprietary	odt ods odp	Cloud	Commercial	http://www.google.com/docs/about/
LibreOffice	Open Source	All	Linux, Windows, OSX, Android	Community	https://www.libreoffice.org/
LibreOffice powered by CIB	Proprietary	All	Linux, Windows	Commercial	http://libreoffice.cib.de/
LibreOffice-from-Collabora	Open Source	All	Linux, Windows, OSX, Android	Commercial	https://libreoffice-from-collabora.com/
Microsoft Office 2013	Proprietary	odt ods odp	Windows, OSX, Android, iOS	Commercial	https://products.office.com/
Microsoft Office 365	Proprietary	odt ods odp	Cloud	Commercial	https://products.office.com/
OnlyOffice Enterprise[9]	Proprietary	odt ods odp	Cloud	Commercial	http://www.onlyoffice.com/enterprise-edition.aspx
OnlyOffice Free[9]	Open Source	odt ods odp	Linux, Windows	Community	http://www.onlyoffice.com/
OpenXchange	Open Source & CC BY-SA-NA	odt ods odp	Linux, Cloud	Commercial Community	https://www.open-xchange.com/

Variation between applications

Although many existing applications provide the facility to save in ODF, the applications may be limited in their support for certain aspects of the standard.

Example: Vital to workgroup interaction, any Tracked Changes will be lost in the Microsoft Office implementations of ODF. Tracked Changes become ordinary Body Text with no indication that they represent historical edits, or record of who is responsible.

ODF is a comprehensive standard supporting many different features. It's important to choose applications which support the latest version of the document standard (currently ODF 1.2) in order to access newer document features such as comments and change tracking.

UK Government policy mandates the use of ODF version 1.2.

5 Partial ODF support with import and export filters
6 The default and recommended outputs are Extended ODF 1.2 documents. Third-party ports to Android, FreeBSD, OS/2 available
7 While there are binaries for Windows, OSX & Android, platforms, they are currently not officially supported and not recreated for every release. It is planned change that with the upcoming 3.0 release end of 2015
8 Supports ODF 1.1 and is working towards ODF 1.2.
9 Partial support for ODF save/download

ODF tools

Tools available to test ODF readiness of applications and ODF standards compliance

- Officeshots – http://officeshots.org
  Compare presentation of documents in different applications using this web-based service

- WebODF – http://webodf.org
  Lightweight web-based ODF document editor library in Javascript

- Fix My Documents – http://fixmydocuments.eu
  Online reporting tool for public sector documents not using ODF

- Pandoc – http://johnmacfarlane.net/pandoc
  Document conversion software supporting a very large number of formats, including ODF

- odpdown – http://s.coop/1w2ay
  A converter for markdown to ODP presentations

- Java ODF library – http://incubator.apache.org/odftoolkit
  Initiated by Sun and IBM and before being donated to Apache

- ODF validator – http://odf-validator.rhcloud.com
  A service to check for conformance of ODF documents based on their OpenDocument Format specification

Contacts

There are many places where you can obtain solutions, advice and support from commercial and non-commercial organisations, whether it be small consultancies to larger implementers or public and private sectors who make up the Open Document marketplace.

Public Sector
- UK Cabinet Office – Education, change and support of policy implementation https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/government-digital-service
- UK Government Digital Service - https://gds.blog.gov.uk/contact/

Community
- http://www.openforumeurope.org/ - advice on standardisation
- http://www.opensourceconsortium.org/ - implementation, support services and community support
- http://fixmydocuments.eu/ - report non-standards compliant documents
- http://www.opendocsociety.org/ - the Open Document community

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Government policy extract & highlights

The UK policy became active on 1st November 2012 and refreshed 7th September 2015. It sets out 7 principles including rationale and implications, the Government definition of Open Standards, and a foreword by The Rt Hon Matthew Hancock MP Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General. "Our aim is simple: government technology that is affordable and open, improving public services for the citizens that they serve. "

The 7 principles:

Principle 1: We start with user needs
Principle 2: Our selected open standards will enable suppliers to compete on a level playing field
Principle 3: Our standards choices support flexibility and change
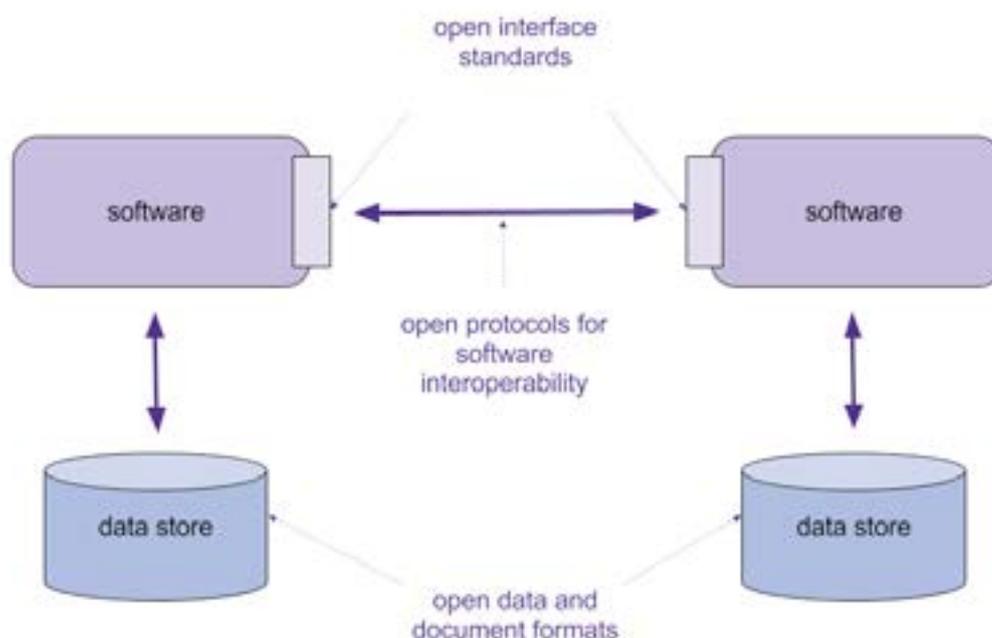Principle 4: We adopt open standards that support sustainable cost
Principle 5: Our decisions about standards selection are well informed
Principle 6: We select open standards using fair and transparent processes
Principle 7: We are fair and transparent in the specification and implementation of open standards

Government bodies (central government departments, their agencies, non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) and any other bodies for which they are responsible) must adhere to the Open Standards Principles - for software interoperability, data and document formats in government IT specifications. Further review of this policy is planned for 2018.

Diagram illustrating the technical scope of the Open Standards Principles for software interoperability, data and document formats.