

## **“Why ODF?” – The Importance of OpenDocument Format for Governments**

In today’s digital economy, the vast majority of technology users do not have sufficient control of their own documents now and into the future. OpenDocument Format (ODF) addresses these issues by standardizing the file formats so that anyone can use them and anyone can implement them on any platform at any time.

Using open standards like ODF ensures that the users’ information is accessible across platforms and applications, even as technologies change. Organizations and individuals that store their data in an open format avoid being locked-in to a single software vendor, leaving them free to switch software if their current vendor goes out of business, raises its prices, changes its software, or changes its licensing terms to something less favorable for the user. Adoption of open standards is particularly important for governmental applications because it can effectively ensure that a government document saved today will not be technologically locked tomorrow. Following are some highlights for Governments regarding the importance of ODF.

### **Governments Depend on Documents**

Documents are the life blood of modern governments and its citizens. Governments use them to capture knowledge, store critical information, coordinate activities, measure results, and communicate across departments and with businesses and citizens.

To adapt to ever-changing technology and business processes, governments need flexibility and reliability in accessing, using and maintaining these documents. Open file formats—the technology behind documents that determine the level of control governments have to create, exchange and archive information—are the key enabler of this flexibility and reliability.

### **Open File Formats Enable Future Access to Government Documents**

The requirement to share and save documents with high degrees of fidelity drives common usage of a small number of common file formats. Governments that are tied to technology, strategy and pricing decisions of a single supplier, sometimes without reasonable possibilities to find alternative vendors, are having technology decisions imposed on them, and the businesses and citizens that need to interact with those documents. More alarmingly, governments may not have many options or the right to modify and save archived documents at some future date.

That future access is a compelling impetus to move to an open file format. When the format is open, rather than controlled by one particular vendor, governments get the access, flexibility, and reliability they need. Further, they can ensure interoperability between systems, better cost effectiveness, freedom of action, a level playing field and choice for themselves and their citizenry.

## ODF is a Viable Open Alternative for Governments Today

A technical committee at OASIS is standardizing the OpenDocument specifications. This is the most viable alternative for an open file format. The specifications have the advantage of being: functionally rich; fully published with free availability; controlled by an open industry organization; and implemented in the market by a variety of vendors, including IBM, Sun, KingSoft and Red Hat.

Which vendor's open document format implementation is selected is not ultimately important, as long as it complies with the principles of openness. ODF has considerable technical merit, and it is widely supported with great potential to be pervasively supported. ODF can evolve openly in an appropriate manner with broad adoption and use.

## Governments Can Ensure Open File Formats through Procurement

Insistence on openness needs to be tempered with pragmatism. In general, the best procurement policies are those which meet the technical requirements and adhere to the principles of openness which, for the most part, incorporate business requirements and cost effectiveness.

Governments should move aggressively towards the use of open file formats as a matter of principle and require support for such open file formats. In software procurements, governments can insist on open document formats. To achieve the benefits of pervasive open file formats more quickly, governments should:

- Adopt the OASIS OpenDocument Format as a standard.
- Insist that vendors implement open file formats as "save" defaults in their applications.
- Encourage major vendors to participate in OASIS technical committee, to make appropriate technical contributions (e.g., donate schema) and actively participate in the evolution of a truly open industry specification.
- Contribute user requirements to the OASIS open document format technical committee.

### Benefits of ODF

<b>Access</b>	As a fully open standard, ODF provides governments with enhanced <b>access</b> by ensuring that documents are usable in the future by anyone, at any time.
<b>Choice</b>	By providing complete interoperability among office suites, ODF provides governments with greater <b>choice</b> due to competition among vendors, including both proprietary and open source applications.
<b>Innovation</b>	By providing the standardized basis for interoperable document formats, ODF promotes <b>innovation</b> in the market for office applications.