

Plug-Ins: Frequently-Asked Questions

Does the ODF Alliance support the use of a plug-in to convert documents to ODF?

At this juncture, plug-ins remain a work-in-progress. In general, anything that helps governments move toward an open environment is worthwhile to pursue. The ODF Alliance promotes the adoption of ODF broadly and supports governments moving to openness.

What is your knowledge of any existing plug-ins and their effectiveness?

As we understand it, there are multiple plug-ins under development, and we look forward to hearing from implementers about their experiences and helping to inform others about the benefits of such an approach. As we are a vendor/product neutral organization, we will not endorse or support any particular plug-in.

Massachusetts is specifically exploring the use of a plug-in to convert documents to ODF. Does this represent an abandonment of their policy?

Just the opposite. This represents Massachusetts' strong commitment to meeting its objective to be ODF compliant by January 2007, and we commend their commitment and support their decision to take steps they view as necessary to meet their objectives in the most efficient manner possible. While remaining committed to the January 2007 target, Massachusetts officials have never allowed quality to be sacrificed for the sake of speed. The Alliance looks forward to seeing many responses to the Request for Information (RFI) in the form of plug-in components or converter options that would allow Microsoft Office users to easily open, render and save to ODF files.

Will a plug-in over the long-run accomplish all of the objectives of ODF and the Alliance?

While plug-ins could be useful for governments transitioning to ODF in the short term, it is unlikely this approach would serve as a viable long-term solution. A plug-in that works today will enable reading, writing and saving in ODF. With ODF, users are then assured of unfettered access to their own documents by ensuring that those documents are usable in the future by anyone, at any time. However, merely using a plug-in for non-ODF-compliant office productivity software does not enable other key benefits of an open-standard document format such as ODF.

Ultimately, the benefit of adopting an open standard like ODF is that it enables multiple office suites to compete on features, services, and price. From this competition and openly available specification, innovation and consumer choice can be spurred.

A much easier way to achieve interoperability would be for Microsoft, like many other major vendors,

to support ODF in its new software suite. We invite Microsoft to do so.

So why would Massachusetts or anyone else seek to use a plug-in as a short term solution, and what is the long-term strategy?

If a customer is sufficiently locked-in to a vendor and would like additional time to evaluate how best to move to openness, a plug-in would serve as a suitable short-term solution to provide for a transition to reading and writing to ODF almost immediately. Remember, we are talking about technology that has had virtually no choice or innovation over the last 10 years. A bit of a transition period is expected while customers actually learn about the range of products to choose from and evaluate which ones best meet their needs. Isn't choice a great thing? In the short term, a plug-in can help move to openness by allowing users to retake control of their own documents while savoring this newfound choice.

Couldn't Microsoft break the plug-in in their next release of Office?

It is always a possibility that Microsoft can break the plug-in in their next release of Office. This highlights the problem of a vendor not natively supporting a standard like ODF even though many customers are asking for it. We think any such move would and should get substantial negative publicity.

Do your commercial members have an objection to the creation of the plug-in?

While these members can speak for themselves on the issue, we do know that they are each committed to the success of ODF itself as an open standard. This means that their support of ODF signifies their willingness to openly and fairly compete on a level playing field. Many of them have also publicly discussed the worldwide innovation that could result from broad support of ODF and the value that it will bring to their customers.