

## **RUNNING YOUR OFFICE ON OPEN OFFICE**

By Joseph S. Beckman (<http://www.IntellectLawGroup.com>)

Most every law office has a Microsoft Windows operating system, Windows 2000 or Windows XP. Every office also has a word processing program, Microsoft Word or Corel Wordperfect are the likely residents. Despite the prevalence of Corel's Wordperfect in law offices, Microsoft Office remains the largest installed, and growing, office application suite. In fact, with the exception of the legal community, Microsoft has a stranglehold on the office market. For lawyers, this can present some problems. Exchanging document drafts with clients using Microsoft Word is sometimes a nightmare. It's hard enough when the documents are simple, but throw in multi-level headings, numbering, perhaps a graphic or two, and the conversion process is a cross your fingers affair. If you track version changes, don't depend on the conversion process. It's not uncommon for me to hear from other lawyers using, and preferring Wordperfect, that a copy of Microsoft Word resides on their computer for cross-compatibility with their client's systems. After all, the client is king, and the time taken in trying to force a square peg (Word .doc file) into a round hole (Wordperfect), is time (and money) lost.

What if I told you there was an Office suite with a word processor, spreadsheet, presentation, drawing and database tools, capable of co-existing with or replacing Microsoft Office...and it was free !? What if it could run on any operating system from Windows 95 to XP and even Linux or the Mac? OpenOffice.org (<http://www.openoffice.org>) is an integrated Office suite capable of working with your existing Microsoft Word files and even creating new files in the Microsoft Word .doc format for use in Microsoft Word. Alternatively, it can save your files in the XML format that is quickly being adopted as the new document standard. Microsoft's Office 2003 is slated to use XML, which allows cross-platform porting of information from static documents to dynamic web pages.

I've installed OpenOffice.org on Windows98 and Windows XP I've then easily uninstalled it and then reinstalled updated versions. An ongoing open source project, OpenOffice.org is being regularly updated to keep pace with its costlier competitors. I've used it to revise existing Microsoft Word documents and to create new documents I've later opened and revised in Microsoft Word. I've also taken an existing Microsoft Powerpoint presentation, deleted slides and created new slides, using OpenOffice Impress, and then played the resulting presentation on Powerpoint 2001 and Powerpoint XP. So far, I've encountered no problems. I've even used it with Dragon NaturallySpeaking voice recognition with excellent results.

Now for the caveats. Revision tracking between Word and OpenOffice is not guaranteed to be perfect. While the latest version of OpenOffice will export to Adobe PDF and even supports certain Palm and Pocket PC formats, the Wordperfect filters are still under development. StarOffice by Sun Microsystems

(<http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/6.0/index.html>) is/was the parent to OpenOffice and will import Wordperfect format, albeit at a cost of \$75 for the StarOffice suite. Expect OpenOffice.org to rectify this issue in the near future. StarOffice will also better integrate with your existing contact manager than OpenOffice, although OpenOffice can build a static database of your contact's names and addresses for use in the office suite. For those using dedicated case management software, this might not even be an issue.

While OpenOffice isn't perfect, it is an excellent Office suite with great cross-platform compatibility between Microsoft Windows, Linux and Mac systems. It imports and exports Microsoft formats with incredible accuracy and at 0% of the cost. It's shortcomings importing and exporting Wordperfect files are some of the same shortcomings shared by Microsoft Word, but with at least a chance of being corrected in the future. As you upgrade your systems, perhaps adopting Linux or allowing that radical lawyer down the hall to keep his Mac, and as Microsoft adopts subscription licensing on an ever-widening scale, it's an attractive alternative.

Joseph S. Beckman is a registered Patent Attorney and Managing Member of The Intellect Law Group. He was recently invited to join the World Intellectual Property Organization's Arbitration and Mediation Center List of Neutrals. He may be reached for questions or comments at 561-776-9703 or [jbeckman@IntellectLawGroup.com](mailto:jbeckman@IntellectLawGroup.com).

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