



ODF & UNIX Accessibility – Getting to Where We Want to Go

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Agenda

- Setting the stage: the big struggle over ODF
- Digression: “Standards - open vs. closed”
- Goals: options, choices, competition, participation
- Steps toward those goals:
- Open source accessibility -> a new model for people with disabilities
- Making UNIX accessibility viable, competitive
- Q&A / Discussion

The Big Struggle over ODF

- \$3,000,000,000+ / quarter revenue for Microsoft
 - > Business model depends upon upgrades (forced through file format changes only the newest releases can create)
 - > ODF represents a big threat to this revenue stream
 - > There is little Microsoft won't do to protect this
- ODF Accessibility concerns are real, but lots of false statements in press, elsewhere
 - > MS-Office accessible on Windows due to AT vendors, NOT thanks to Microsoft
 - > ODF file format better for accessibility than Open XML
- Need to counter falsehoods with real information!

Standards - Open vs. Closed

- Background on standards
 - > What is a standard?
 - > Benefits of standards
 - > Open vs. closed standards
 - > “Open standard” vs. “open source”
- The ODF open standard
 - > The ODF standard
 - > ODF file format better for accessibility than Open XML
- Need to counter falsehoods with real information!

What is a “standard”?

- De-facto standards:
 - > Width of a road
- Decreed standards:
 - > Imperial measure: inch, foot, yard
 - > Accessibility: Library of Congress audio tape
- Standards from a standards process:
 - > Metric measure: meter, liter, gram
 - > Web: HTML, XML, SVG, SMIL
 - > Accessibility: Closed Captions, DAISY, JSML, SSML, ATK, AT-SPI

Another view of standards: Open vs. Closed

- Closed Standards
 - > Generally “decreed” & “owned” by someone
 - > Helps lock in market dominance
 - > Often limited competition
 - > Generally less frequent updates
- Open Standards
 - > Anyone can participate in the process
 - > Make for a level commercial playing field
 - > Encourages competition
 - > Updates as frequent as participants desire

Examples & Benefits of Standards

- Innovation happens on top of standards
 - > Common electricity system has given us a plethora of products that work everywhere in US; competition in energy generation too
 - > Standard telephone jack, plumbing system, etc.
- MS-Windows/Office as “standard” has meant:
 - > AT market could develop on top of it
 - > User training is uniform for main apps
 - > Easy to exchange files with others (as many can read/write those files)

Examples & Benefits of Open Standards

- HTML
 - > Accessibility wasn't there at the start, but was added by interested parties who joined the effort
 - > Wide range of products on many platforms for creating, reading web content
- DAISY
 - > Lots of affordable DAISY readers on market
 - > Lots of material available in DAISY format from many players
 - > NIMAS comes from DAISY – used now for textbooks

Open Standard & Open Source

- Two very different beasts
- Open standard:
 - > Anyone can use it
 - > Anyone can participate in it
- Open source:
 - > Program code available to all
 - > Anyone can use, modify, redistribute, sell, support the program
- Key Point: easy to have an open source application support an open standard

Open Document Format standard

- ODF created by open community:
 - > Arbortext, Boeing Corporation, Corel Corporation, National Archives of Australia, Society of Biblical Literature, and Sun Microsystems among others
- ODF community has grown
 - > IBM, Intel, Novell, ...
- ODF community addressing new things
 - > Accessibility, formula, & meta-data sub-committees making additions to ODF

ODF Accessibility Opportunities

- Ability for anyone to participate, help improve it. Disability communities explicitly invited!
 - > Already RNIB, Bay State Council of the Blind, and individuals with disabilities involved in ODF
- Competition: many products, some of which are free
 - > Far more choice than the closed/proprietary products
- Platform choices: Window, Macintosh, Linux, Solaris, PDAs, Web
 - > Again, far more choices than closed/proprietary offers

ODF Accessibility Challenges

- Participation of Windows AT vendors
 - > Will they support one or more ODF apps?
- Moving to a new application
 - > Challenge for all, but perhaps more for people with disabilities?
 - > If move includes new AT, extra training needed
 - > Extra time cost for speech recognition users?
- Timeline
 - > Will we have what we need when we need it?

Standards Summary

- Standards are good
 - > Innovation & competition happen on them
- Open standards are better
 - > Anyone can participate; level playing field; new voices can join & expand the standard
- Open source is something different
 - > Great combined with open standards; anyone can improve, distribute open source
- ODF is an open standard
 - > Can be made very accessible by our actions

Goals: Options, Choice, Competition, and Participation

- Today we have a desktop monoculture
 - > The same OS, office suite, browser, e-mail, calendar
 - > No real framework for accessibility
 - > No choice, coerced upgrades, inundated by viruses
 - > Accessibility environment: brittle, with expensive AT
- Want options, choices:
 - > Ability to choose best product based on price & features, not on compatibility with proprietary formats, protocols
 - > “Ease of exit” - remove vendor/product lock-in
 - > Ability to participate in accessibility development
 - > Affordable accessibility – close digital divide

Steps toward these goals

- Remove all proprietary protocols, formats
 - > For e-mail, use IMAP, POP, standard servers
 - > For web, use only valid HTML, XHTML, CSS
 - > For calendar, using iCal & other standards (not Exchange server)
 - > For office apps, use ODF
- Wean yourself off of Win32 APIs
 - > Deploy web apps, Java for software going forward
- Become involved in evolving these open standards and open protocols to meet your needs

Open Standard/Source Accessibility: New Model for People with Disabilities

- Traditionally the disability community's needs were met through advocacy
 - > Pushing for laws against discrimination
 - > Suing companies, businesses, agencies for lack of accessibility
- Open standards & open source provide a new model
 - > Disability community can participate in developing, improving technology standards
 - > Can develop, extend open source AT
 - > Can fix accessibility issues in mainstream IT
 - > Can take control of accessible IT destiny



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