

RED HAT'S POSITION ON OOXML AND OPEN STANDARDS

Introduction

As the world's leading open source solutions provider, Red Hat is committed to open standards that are available free from any licensing, royalty payments, or other restrictions, and which are implementable by multiple vendors on multiple platforms. Consequently, Red Hat does not support the adoption of Microsoft's Office OpenXML ("OOXML") as an International Organization for Standardization ("ISO") standard for three key reasons:

1. There is an existing ISO-approved document standard, OpenDocument Format ("ODF").
2. OOXML is not fully implementable by non-Microsoft vendors or partners.
3. The Fast-Track ISO process does not provide sufficient, appropriate review of OOXML.

Multiple Standards Prevent Interoperability

Red Hat strongly supports interoperability among applications in the exchange of data. The easiest way to achieve interoperability is to have one standard to which all vendors adhere. This is not to say that different vendors should not develop multiple *formats* in which to create, save, and exchange documents. ODF, for example, has been implemented by multiple vendors in a variety of products, including Open Office, KOffice, GoogleDocs, IBM Lotus Symphony, and Macintosh TextEdit.

While each vendor has its own format, that format complies to a single agreed-upon standard. In this way, the user has the greatest amount of flexibility and freedom to exchange his creations with other users or to port his own data into other applications, as well as ample choice of vendors that offer the best product to meet his needs. Establishing two competing standards for the same applications (editable documents, spreadsheets, and presentations) serves no purpose in the marketplace and will limit users in the exchange and ownership of their data.

Implementation Limited to One Vendor

OOXML was created solely for use in Microsoft applications. It is not currently suitable as an international standard, because it cannot be completely implemented by anyone without access to inside information. Although it is more than 6,000 pages long, it contains various references to things that are defined only in Microsoft's software, not in the specification itself.

For instance, ECMA (European Computer Manufacturers Association), the organization Microsoft is using to submit OOXML for standardization, notes that "Many National Bodies requested more complete documentation for some legacy application compatibility settings in DIS 29500, such as 'AutoSpaceLikeWord95', 'truncateFontHeightsLikeWP6' and others. ECMA agrees with this comment, and will provide the full information necessary to implement all compatibility settings within DIS 29500." Although ECMA and Microsoft claim that they will provide the information necessary for outside implementation, they have not yet fully done so. However, the OOXML standard that the National Bodies are being asked to vote on is the one in front of them, not something they hope will materialize some time in the future. At this time, implementation by vendors other than Microsoft is not possible with the documentation provided.

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Fast-Track Process Provides Inadequate Review

ODF has been reviewed and developed by OASIS (Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) since 2002, and was unanimously approved as an ISO standard on May 3, 2006. It took nearly four years of open development and review of the 700+ pages to become an ISO standard. Although Microsoft was a member of OASIS, it independently developed OOXML, which it submitted to ECMA for review in November 2005. A little over two years later, ISO delegates are expected to adopt a standard with more than 6,000 pages of documentation.

During the initial review and voting process in September, National Bodies identified 3,522 issues to be resolved in the standard. Those comments were whittled down to approximately 1,100 on the Ballot Resolution Meeting (BRM) agenda in February, but only 20 or so were actually discussed and resolved. In order to complete the agenda, the remaining comment dispositions (which were never discussed) were combined for a single vote. Six delegations voted to approve, four voted to disapprove and sixteen delegations abstained. Four delegations refused to register and vote at all. Since the abstentions and refusals to vote did not count in the final tally, the disposition of comments was approved by a margin of six votes to four votes. Now, National Bodies are being asked to submit their final votes for OOXML by the end of March, when it is clearly evident that there is simply not enough time to review or resolve the proposed changes. The attempt to fast-track this format through ISO provides inadequate review time for the proposed standard.