

# Opening the potential of OpenOffice.org

By *srlinuxx*

Created 18/09/2005 - 6:41pm

Submitted by srlinuxx on Sunday 18th of September 2005 06:41:54 PM Filed under [Software](#) [1]

As a consultant, consistency and trends are essential signifying elements in determining where software, hardware and IT is heading. In some cases this can be predictable, such as Linux, but it can also be a total surprise right out of the blue with success piggybacking onto an application from nowhere, such as with Firefox and Moodle. Either way, it is important that the consultant identifies how the application is becoming used, and importantly for Open Source tools, the long-term vitality of the project. Sure it may be cool now, but will it be around next year?

One of the most critical Open Source desktop applications is OpenOffice.org. Back in the day when I started taking a keen interest in Linux on the desktop, an office suite was always the problem. There were efforts going into KOffice, but about the only mature office suite that anyone could use was Applixware. There was one problem, Applixware sucked. It looked ugly, involved your wallet and felt quite clunky. Another option was StarOffice, an office suite barely known, despite its early roots, and a behemoth of an application which was so bloated it actually included its own desktop. Back then there simply was no Open Source office suite that was mature enough to use, but that was about to change.

As time moved on and StarOffice creator StarDivision were bought by Sun, the announcement was made that OpenOffice.org would become the Open Source licensed version of StarOffice. This was critically important, and as important as Netscape opening up their browser (which later became Firefox). This move ensured that the strength of the GPL could unite a community of contributors to dust off the code, fix it up and make something happen. The potential for an Open Source office suite, a critical component for an Open Source desktop, was here.

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