

CSIR opts for open document format in its migration to an open source environment

Towards the end of 2006, the CSIR adopted the open document format (ODF) in support of access to information and as an enabler of the adoption of open source software (OSS). In terms of the adoption of the standard, CSIR word processor, spreadsheet and presentation files will be in ODF, wherever possible.

The open source office suite, OpenOffice.org, that supports ODF was rolled out to all 2 500+ workstations at the organisation's main site in Pretoria and at its regional offices.

The adoption of ODF represents an important milestone for the CSIR and positions the organisation alongside lead adopters in India, Europe and the United States. The organisation-wide adoption of ODF is part of the CSIR's migration to OSS and standards that are set to be completed during 2007.

CSIR President and CEO Dr Sibusiso Sibisi, a well-known proponent of OSS and the driving force behind the CSIR's adoption, comments: "Open document standards are of prime importance for allowing open access to information, now and in the future. By using open document standards to store our data, the CSIR is not locked into a specific vendor that developed and implemented a proprietary standard, thus eliminating the risk of not being able to access current data in future when such a standard may cease to be supported," he says. "The maturity of OpenOffice, a powerful open source office suite that implements ODF, has in turn enabled the CSIR to adopt ODF without major obstacles," he adds.

The CSIR's adoption of the standard will support the efforts of the South African Government Information Officers' Council, which has concluded that the role of OSS should be explicitly recognised in e-government policy. The Council has already initiated a first phase of implementation of an OSS strategy. Furthermore, the National Advisory Council on Innovation has produced a discussion document that looks at the role of OSS in education and innovation systems.

"The CSIR's move to open standards will ensure that scientific knowledge produced in the organisation is preserved for posterity and that it can be accessed without limitation to specific tools. In this regard, it will empower the science community, and indeed, ultimately the people of South Africa," Sibisi concludes.

ODF allows anyone to use the tool of their choice to open, view, change, edit and store data. It also allows free exchange of information, irrespective of the software used and it is an ISO standard controlled by the non-profit Organisation for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards. ODF supports most office documents - text, spreadsheets, presentations, charts and graphical documents - and the standard is implemented by a range of applications and companies, including Google, IBM and Novell.