LibreOffice uses the international ISO/IEC standard OpenDocument file format as its native format to save documents for all of its applications (as do its OpenOffice.org cousins Apache OpenOffice and NeoOffice). The OpenDocument file format is now also supported by all major competing office suite applications (proprietary and open source). LibreOffice is also compatible with other major office suites, including Microsoft Office,[9] through a variety of import/export filters. The file formats of Microsoft Office are well supported, though some layout features and formatting attributes are handled differently in the application or are not entirely supported in the filters.[10] LibreOffice is available in over 110 languages[11] and for a variety of computing platforms,[9] including Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X 10.4 Tiger or newer, and Linux. It is the default office suite of most popular Linux distributions.[12][13][14][15]

Between January 2011 (the first stable release) and October 2011, LibreOffice was downloaded approximately 7.5 million times.[16] During 2012, the office suite was downloaded about 15 million times.[17]

Members of the OpenOffice.org community who were not Sun Microsystems employees had wanted a more egalitarian form for the OpenOffice.org project for many years; Sun had stated in the original OpenOffice.org announcement in 2000 that the project would eventually be run by a neutral foundation,[50] and put forward a more detailed proposal in 2001.[51]

Ximian and then Novell had maintained the ooo-build patch set, a project led by Michael Meeks, to make the build easier on Linux and due to the difficulty of getting contributions accepted upstream by Sun, even from corporate partners. It tracked the main line of development and was not intended to constitute a fork.[52] It was also the standard build mechanism for OpenOffice.org in most Linux distributions[53] and was contributed to by said distributions.[54]

In 2007, ooo-build was made available by Novell as a software package called Go-oo (ooo-build had used the go-oo.org domain name as early as 2005[55]), which included many features not included in upstream OpenOffice.org. Go-oo also encouraged outside contributions, with rules similar to those later adopted for LibreOffice.[56]

Sun's contributions to OpenOffice.org had been declining for some time,[57] they remained reluctant to accept contributions[58] and contributors were upset at Sun releasing OpenOffice.org code to IBM for IBM Lotus Symphony under a proprietary contract, rather than under an open source licence.[59]

Sun was purchased by Oracle Corporation, the deal being concluded in early 2010. OpenOffice.org community members were concerned at Oracle's behaviour towards open source software,[60] the Java lawsuit against Google[61] and the lack of activity on OpenOffice.org — as Meeks put it in early September 2010, "The news from the Oracle OpenOffice conference was that there was no news."[62] Discussion of a fork started soon after.[63]

On 28 September 2010, The Document Foundation was announced as the host of LibreOffice, a new derivative of OpenOffice.org. The Document Foundation's initial announcement stated their concerns that Oracle would either discontinue OpenOffice.org, or place restrictions on it as an open source project, as it had on Sun's OpenSolaris.[64][65][66][67]

LibreOffice 3.3 beta used the ooo-build build infrastructure and the OpenOffice.org 3.3 beta code from Oracle, then adding selected patches from Go-oo.[68] Go-oo was discontinued in favour of LibreOffice. Since the office suite branded "OpenOffice.org" in most Linux distributions was in fact Go-oo, most moved immediately to LibreOffice.[69]

It was originally hoped that the LibreOffice name would be provisional, as Oracle was invited to become a member of The Document Foundation. Oracle rejected requests to donate the OpenOffice.org brand to the project[70] and demanded that all members of the OpenOffice.org Community Council involved with The Document Foundation step down from the OOo Community Council, citing a conflict of interest.[71]

LibreOffice was initially named BrOffice in Brazil. OpenOffice.org was distributed as BrOffice.org by the BrOffice Centre of Excellence for Free Software because of a trademark issue.[72]