More on ODF and OOXML

I posted yesterday about document formats and applications.

Today a couple of additions and a correction.

I left the Sun ODF plugin for Microsoft Word off the list. So here's an update of my summary table. I have not been able to test it yet.

Updated converter table

All the converters here apart from the last two are using the same technology: ODF Add-in for Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint

Platform	Application	What does it do?
Windows	ODF in Microsoft Word 2003+	The ODF add-in will read .odt files and turn them into .docx. It's slow. (I couldn't make it run on my version of Word 2007 because of what I think are conflicting versions of .NET)
Windows / Linux	OOXML in OpenOffice.org or another ODF aware application (but see below – are there any?)	OpenOffice.org Ninja; a little program that intervenes when you click on a .docx file and converts it it .odt, slowly.
Windows / Linux	OOXML in Novell's version of OpenOffice.org writer	Uses the ODF Addin and allows you to edit a .docx file. Open and save are, you guessed it, slow.
Mac OS X	Microsoft Word	Currently no options for reading ODF AFAIK
Mac OS X	NeoOffice	Contains a the Novell plugin, so you can open and save .docx files (slowly, of course).
Windows, OS X, Linux	OpenOffice.org Writer version 3 (currently in beta)	Contains a new different converter which is much faster than the ODF add-in. But Sun are not aiming to provide round-trip editing of .docx files. This is intended to be an import filter only. (Not based on the ODF add-in
Windows	ODF in Microsoft Word	Sun's ODF plugin for Word. (Uses StarOffice code)

Revised view: how well does the ODF add-in work?

Yesterday I wrote:

> You know, I'm pleasantly surprised to to be reporting that using NeoOffice on the Mac a complex ICE test document seemed to round trip from Neo to Word 2008, where I made a few changes and then back to Neo with no visible problems. This ODF add-in thing has improved a lot since the first time I tried it.

I was a bit hasty there. I tried again with an ICE sample document saving it as .docx and reloading it. Most of the formatting is fine, with a few oddities in the numbering but styles support is very very lacking.

The biggest issue is that list styles get lost and the associated paragraph style is kept in the OOXML but none of its formatting is specified. The result is a document which looks like it is using styles but actually isn't really doing so 100%.

This is not that big a problem if you are using a known stylesheet like we do with ICE. We have the style name so we can write macros or file-fixers to go through the document and repair it up so that it does styles again. We already have a list-repair macro for Word and there's code for Writer to create new styles so this should be doable. Who knows, we may even be able to help fix the ODF addin converter.

This is the point of the work we've been doing – to make sure that our users can have interoperable portable documents. I recommend checking these converters with documents from your own environment before trusting them.

We can report this issue and maybe look into helping with the converter. Daniel? You listening?