

Reality check for OpenOffice.org

[Update: Andrew Treloar points out that he uses OpenOffice.org and I see that his feedreader (Thunderbird) does not render blockquotes – I should have put quote marks on the quote. And I forgot the link!]

Bruce D'Arcus has [a reality-check for the OpenOffice.org cheer squad](http://netapps.muohio.edu/blogs/darcusb/darcusb/archives/2007/09/21/ooo-possibilities) (with emphasis by me):

“I’m struck by how defensive OOo supporters are of any criticism. I don’t really think they fully appreciate the immensity of the task of not just providing a reasonable alternative to Microsoft’s desktop monopoly, but a superior one that will actually draw users to it. In terms of market share, OOo is utterly failing. Just to give my own experience, **I have yet to meet a single colleague in my field that uses anything but Word to author their documents. I would be surprised if any of them have even heard of OpenOffice.**”

<http://netapps.muohio.edu/blogs/darcusb/darcusb/archives/2007/09/21/ooo-possibilities>

Things are different at USQ, though, because we are actively encouraging people to use OpenOffice.org. For one thing, you have to have it installed to use [ICE](#), even if you choose to edit your documents using Microsoft Word. On the RUBRIC team we decided to standardize on the OpenDocument format and use Writer for all our work, and the staff there have taken to it quite well.

Our strategy is:

- Support both Word and Writer.
- Try as hard as we can to make interoperable templates and conversion software and macros and so on.
But it's never 100%.
- When interop fails – build the feature using OpenDocument and OpenOffice.org Writer. An example is cross referencing between documents, where we could not find an interoperable solution so we implemented for Writer. Word users miss out.

The result is that while you **can use Word** to work on content for ICE, **Writer works better** when you're building books from your content or wanting to use ICE to make changes to your document. Thus it's easy for us to make a case for its use. We're not mandating anything, or shoving anyone around, but we can show people very clearly how a switch to OpenOffice.org will help them.

And we're hoping to start engaging with people in various fields in a more concentrated way, working with them to make for better research practice.

(I have some criticisms of OpenOffice.org and the Open Document Format too, more coming.)