

Benefits of Open XML in Preserving Historical Documents

Open XML Already is an International Open Standard

- “ECMA-376 -- *Office Open XML File Formats*” (Open XML) was approved last year as an open standard by Ecma International (<http://www.ecma-international.org>), a Geneva-based standards organization, after consensus was achieved in a cross-industry, cross-organization collaboration that included Apple, Barclays Capital, BP, The British Library, Essilor, Intel, Microsoft, NextPage, Novell, Statoil, Toshiba, and the U.S. Library of Congress.
- Governments and other customers requested that Open XML also be submitted to the International Organization for Standardization / International Electrotechnical Commission (ISO/IEC) for further approval. Formal consideration by a Joint Technical Committee (JTC 1) of ISO/IEC is well underway, and approval (targeted for March 2008) will enhance marketplace adoption, broaden choice, and is fully consistent with what has been done in other areas of technology (e.g., image formats, such as JPEG and TIFF; digital video formats, such as MPEG-2 and H.264; and document formats, such as HTML, ODF, and PDF/A), where overlapping standards (including multiple ISO/IEC standards) that address distinct user needs have been approved and have substantially benefited customers.

Open XML is Platform Independent and Easily Coexists with Other Document Formats to Serve Different User Needs

- While Microsoft initially developed the early predecessor to Open XML (just as IBM and Sun Microsystems initially developed ODF), Ecma participants, including Microsoft competitors, helped ensure that the final standard was fully open and vendor neutral.
- Novell, Corel, Apple, Microsoft, Sun, and others have already adopted (or announced adoption of) both formats for their products on a variety of platforms -- including Linux, Windows, Mac OS, Palm OS, Java, and .NET -- thereby demonstrating that both formats can peacefully coexist. Thousands of developers, organizations, governments, and professionals spanning 67 countries and six continents have already expressed public support for Open XML and for its approval by ISO/IEC.
- The open source Translator that Microsoft funded (<http://sourceforge.net/projects/odf-converter>) is available to anyone at no cost; it enables interoperability between the Open XML and ODF formats for word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation documents.

Important Features Supporting Long-Term Document Retention, Preservation, and Accessibility

- Open XML has been designed to be backward compatible with the content and functionality in billions of existing documents. This enhances archiving capabilities, which is one of the key reasons the open standard is supported by the U.S. Library of Congress and The British Library.
- When Open XML becomes an ISO/IEC JTC 1 standard, maintenance of and future updates to the standard are expected to be performed by Ecma in collaboration with JTC 1.
- Under Microsoft’s “Open Specification Promise” (OSP), any required Microsoft patent rights are freely available to all developers and customers to implement Open XML in either open source software or proprietary software. Both Ecma and ISO/IEC have publicly declared that Microsoft’s OSP, as well as two other royalty-free patent licensing alternatives that Microsoft has made available to all implementers, satisfy (and, indeed, exceed) the Ecma and ISO/IEC licensing requirements. Likewise, leaders in the open source community have applauded Microsoft’s extensive IPR commitments to Open XML. Thus, there are no IPR issues associated with Open XML that should raise concerns about long-term document retention, preservation, or accessibility.
- As a truly international standard, Open XML supports multiple languages and scripts.
- Open XML includes robust support for assistive technologies utilized by those with disabilities.