



## LIBREOFFICE SOFTWARE

Don Bridle, ToPCity Solutions, draws attention to this free to download open source office suite.

Secretary at Work: May 2012

*Not a true like-for-like copy of MS Office, but it is available free for PCs and Macs.*

If you are looking at buying more office software, and don't like the prices of Microsoft products, try looking at a suite of useful programs which is free. Free to download, with free updates, and free to use without a limited license expiring.



### General Comments

LibreOffice, like OpenOffice, will cope with MSOffice documents (such as DOC, DOCX, XLS etc) without complaint and make a good attempt at interpreting them for use within this suite. The files can be saved in various formats, including MSOffice 2007/2010.

The Help feature is online only, but some excellent guides (PDF) are downloadable for free from [www.libreoffice.org/get-help/documentation](http://www.libreoffice.org/get-help/documentation). This is worth doing right at the start, even if things seem straight-forward enough to begin with.

A neat standard feature of all the programs in this suite is that the document you work on can be exported as a PDF. This allows for easier transit through the 'ether' for emails or web design. The member programs of this suite have their own names, and can be compared with MSOffice at many points.

However, some of their programs, such as Draw and Formula, do not have equivalents.

#### 1. **Writer (A Word Processor, like Word)**

This has lots to commend it. It reminds me of MSOffice 2003 partly because it has no 'ribbon', just drop-down menus and editable toolbars – most things are either visible or visible on 1 click. Unless you have committed yourself to 2007 and 2010 this is refreshingly helpful. Those who have been trained on 2007/10 may be rather frustrated at having to re-learn though.

Some commands/change options have been re-sited in the menus. The idea is almost certainly to be more logical, but those who know the 2003 places can be a little caught out occasionally. For example: to change the page orientation it used to be necessary to find the right place under the Edit drop-down menu. LibreOffice has moved it under the Format menu, then Page. It makes sense; I just had to take a moment to find it. Perhaps, seeing this in a positive light, it was because I could do almost everything else intuitively so only the differences caught me out.

## 2. Impress (A Presentation package, like PowerPoint)

It doesn't take much to make a passable presentation with Impress, and to save it for use with PowerPoint, or to open a PowerPoint file and work on that. I like the choice of styles presented as defaults, and some of the backgrounds too. As PowerPoint has some tricky effects, LibreOffice doesn't always make exact sense of the finer details, and vice versa, so take care to save anything in both formats if you plan to use someone else's computer for a presentation.

There are some subtle (and, at first, slightly annoying) differences in the commands and changes available. For instance, I couldn't find graphs for a while; they are called 'charts' in this package. Don't expect the program to change a table into a chart - this has to be done manually. Use LibreCalc instead to create the required chart from stats and copy it into Impress.

I took some time to find the Add New Slide button. Either click the Insert drop-down, or use the icon in the right-hand section of buttons; they have no labels but a pop-up help prompt saying Slide. Clicking on the button produced a slide with the same layout as the last one and clicking on the arrow by the button gave a selection of styles to choose from. Plenty enough to be going on with.

## 3. Calc (A Spreadsheet, like Excel)

Most things seemed pretty much the same as Excel 2003. The chart feature is impressive – very fast and lots of chart types to choose from. A good working spreadsheet.

## 4. Draw

This is not a little painting program for sketching a few pretty pictures. This is a proper vector graphics package. Vector graphics, as you probably know, are different from the rest because they can be resized without losing definition. Amongst many features available is a manageable supply of 3-D manipulation controls which produced some results comparable with those from quite expensive commercial software packages. Unless you are used to this sort of thing, it will take a while to get used to the idea before something reasonable is produced. The results can be printed, exported as one of several useful formats (including the standard EMF format for vector graphics) and also converted to a web page.

### 5. Base (A Database, like Access)

A relational database package which makes the task of creating a useful database relatively straight-forward. I would seriously recommend the user manual though, in order to avoid the heartache of spending hours creating something that doesn't do the job required. It might avoid that awful moment when you have to decide to start again or pay someone a huge amount of money to create a database for you. Yes, I know that we all want software to be so intuitive that we really shouldn't need the manuals, but it really is worth the effort of reading at least the planning stage.

Overall I have been very impressed with these programs, and the way they integrate together. A lot of thought has gone into their production, and the refining process has taken years. Indeed, that's the idea of Open Source programs; they are refined by the 'community'. After a number of improvements have been suggested and approved, you'll be notified of an update, which is free to download. A real possibility in the Manager's office, but only after careful testing. Best not to remove your current office suite at first. I have been using both MSOffice and LibreOffice for the past year and commend LibreOffice on many fronts for serious consideration. (*This document was originally produced on LibreOffice Writer and then saved as a Word 2007 document for GCMA.*)

To download the package, go to <http://www.libreoffice.org/download/instructions/>

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