

By Mahi Baga, Technology News Editor

Microsoft Shows Open Source a Little Love

Via the Document Interoperability Initiative

At the end of February 2008, Microsoft set course on a new path, governed by new interoperability principles. The Redmond company essentially focused its new course on delivering a bridge designed to connect its proprietary solutions and standards, and third-party software and formats. Among the first steps done in the new direction is the unveiling of the Document Interoperability Initiative. The new initiative, from Microsoft's perspective, is designed to support and promote user choice when it comes down to document formats. The Document Interoperability Initiative aims to be nothing short of the center point for document format implementations interoperability. "Microsoft believes that the industry has a responsibility to come together to address the interests of users in achieving greater interoperability and effective data exchange between widely deployed document format implementations. The labs are designed to bring technical staff together to roll up their sleeves and test interoperability between implementations of formats and address issues that are identified either in those implementations or in the translation technologies used to work across formats," revealed Jean Paoli, general manager for Interoperability and XML Architecture at Microsoft. The first Microsoft interoperability lab was synonymous with a number of independent software vendors coming together in Cambridge. Novell, Mark Logic, Quickoffice, DataViz and Nuance Communications along with Microsoft have debuted efforts to evolve the interoperability between the Microsoft Office Open XML Formats and the Open Document Format (ODF). The lab will not focus exclusively on the Windows platform, but will look beyond to a variety of operating systems including the Redmond company's Windows Mobile, but also the open source Linux and Mac OS X Leopard, iPhone, Palm OS and Symbian OS. On the productivity solution market, Open Office has slowly but surely positioned itself as an alternative to Microsoft's Office System. In the end, this translates into the face-off between Open Document Format and Open XML. In an effort to show its commitment to interoperability, the Redmond company had been building a translator between ODF and Open XML. Version 1.1 of the ODF to Open XML translator has been made available as of March 6, 2008, and connects the Excel and PowerPoint formats with their counterparts. "Microsoft recognizes that users want to choose the document format that best suits their needs and that vendors have a responsibility to work together to achieve interoperability between different format implementations. The Document Interoperability Initiative brings vendors together to achieve real-world interoperability between documents that customers use through testing of implementations, building conformance test suites and creating document formats that optimize interoperability between different formats. As part of the interoperability principles we announced on Feb. 21, this initiative helps achieve our goal of reshaping business practices to meet the interoperability needs of our customers and the market," explained Tom Robertson, general manager, Interoperability and Standards at Microsoft.