

LibreOffice 4.3

The Document Foundation claims “you can’t own a better office suite” than this. Mike Saunders gets out his Truthometer 9000™.

DATA

Web
www.libreoffice.org
Developer
The Document Foundation
Licence
GNU GPLv3/MPL

On the desktop, *LibreOffice* is arguably the most important free software project in existence. Sure, we all love Linux and sing its praises from the rooftops, but there’s still a long way to go before every home user and business running Windows makes the switch. It’s easier to give people their first taste of open source by recommending applications to them, and *LibreOffice* is a great example: it does 99% of the jobs that 99% of people do in *Microsoft Office*, for zero cost. Home users and businesses can see that free software is more than capable of replacing proprietary applications, saving huge amounts of money along the way.

It’s a 215MB download (for the 64-bit .deb packages), and an empty *Writer* window consumes 98MB of your RAM banks, in contrast to 85MB for the previous version. So it’s slightly heavier, but much

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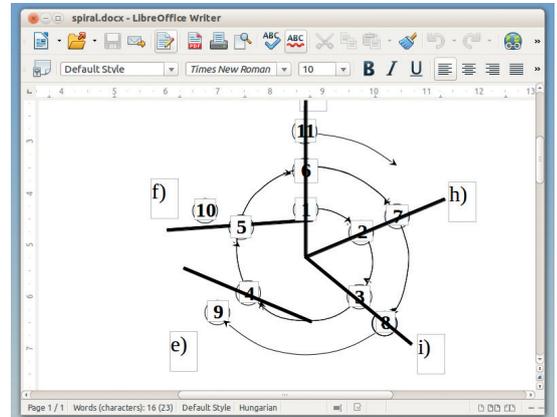
work is being done to make the overall program smaller and more suitable for use on mobile devices.

But the big changes in *LibreOffice 4.3* are the

end-user-facing new features. OOXML documents that previously looked broken in *LibreOffice* should now render much more correctly, especially those that use DrawingML (see the screenshots). Other import filters have been added for *Microsoft Works* spreadsheets and files from *ClarisWorks* on the Mac.

Calc, the spreadsheet, has been boosted in various areas: 30 formulas have been added to enhance

And here it is again in *LibreOffice 4.3*, with everything in its right place.



Here’s an OOXML file containing DrawingML, rendered completely broken in an earlier version of the suite.

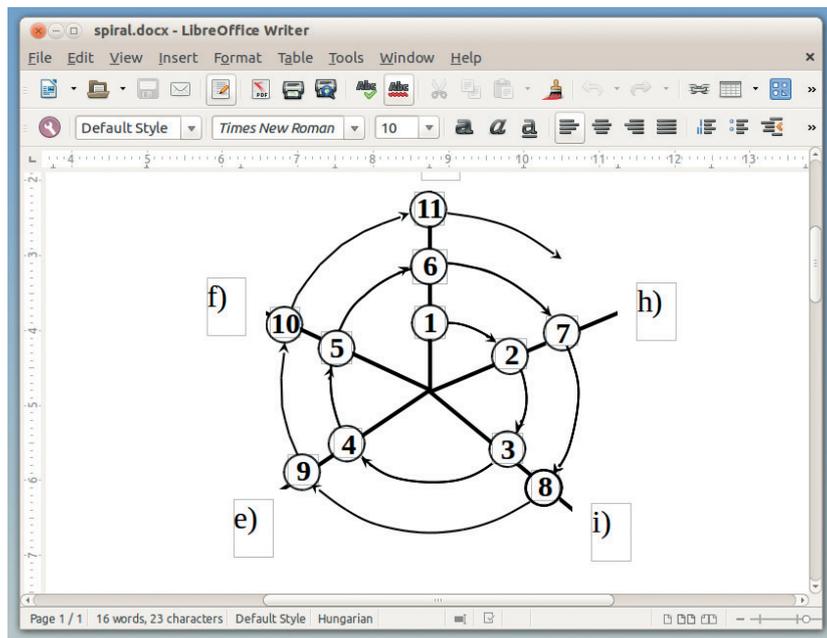
compatibility with *Excel*, and in-cell formulas are displayed with better highlighting. When you select a bunch of cells, the status bar now shows the number of rows and columns. Collaboration, meanwhile, has been made easier with improved commenting features, including nested comments and the ability to export these comments in various file formats.

Shiny new toys

Impress has seen its share of updates too. Presentations can be made prettier with 3D models (created in the emerging gJTF format), while initial support for COLLADA and .kmz files has been incorporated. Then there’s a mountain of bugfixes, GUI improvements and documentation updates covering every aspect of the program.

LibreOffice is miles ahead of *Microsoft Office* in many key areas: file format import and export; support for many different operating systems; cost of ownership; and so forth. The advancements made in the OOXML import filters make it increasingly viable as a drop-in replacement for Microsoft’s products.

But then, we don’t use *MS Office* and don’t rely on some of its obscure or rarely used features. Home users and businesses will have to try *LibreOffice 4.3* to see if it finally does everything they need, and opens all their files without problems. One thing’s for sure: there’s never been a better time to switch. 🍷



LINUX VOICE VERDICT

New features are good, but it’s the improved *Microsoft Office* compatibility that really makes this a worthwhile upgrade.

