LibreOffice 4.2

It's not often an office suite excites us, but **Ben Everard** discovers LibreOffice 4.2 has a trick up its sleeve.
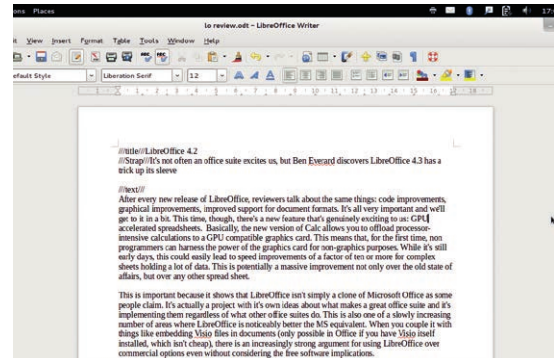
After every new release of LibreOffice, reviewers talk about the same handful of things: code improvements, graphical improvements, improved support for document formats. It's all very important and we'll get to it in a bit. This time, though, there's a new feature that's genuinely exciting to us: GPU-accelerated spreadsheets. In a nutshell, the new version of Calc enables users to offload processor-intensive calculations performed in the spreadsheet to a GPU-compatible graphics card.

This means that, for the first time, non-programmers can harness the power of the graphics card for non-graphics purposes. While it's still early days, this could easily lead to speed improvements of a factor of ten or more for complex sheets holding a lot of data. This is potentially a massive improvement not only over the old state of affairs, but over any other spreadsheet out there.

This is important because it shows that LibreOffice isn't simply a clone of Microsoft Office, as some people claim. It's actually a project with its own ideas about what makes a great office suite, and it's implementing them regardless of what other office suites do. This is also one of a slowly increasing number of areas where LibreOffice is noticeably better than the Microsoft equivalent. When you couple it with things like embedding Visio files in documents (only possible in Office if you have Visio itself installed, which isn't cheap), there is an increasingly strong

LibreOffice Writer one of the key programs we use to create *Linux Voice***. Thanks, Document Foundation!**

argument for using LibreOffice over commercial options even without considering the implications of free software.
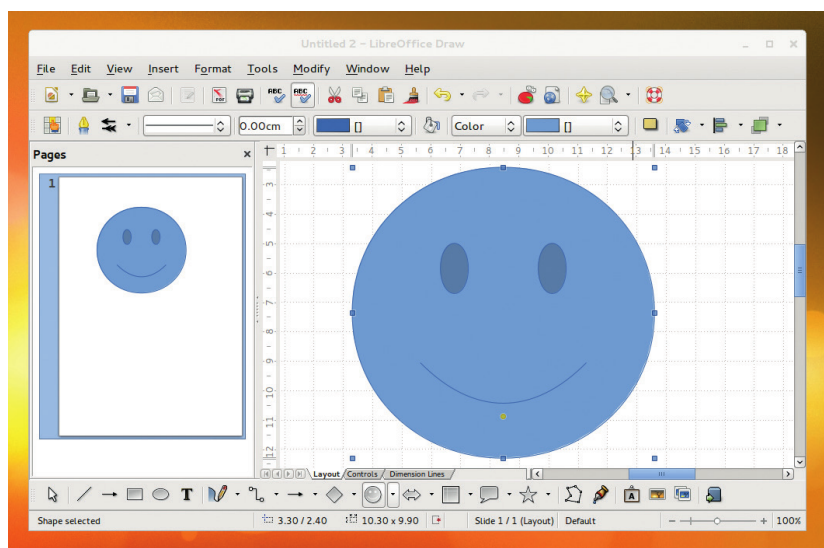
Not only is the GPU-accelerated spreadsheet a great new feature, but it also shows the benefits of open source code. It was developed in part by AMD, which could only do this because it had open access to the code.

Free as in better

There have apparently been improvements to the import of MS Office files, though we're not sure where, as it's been a long time since we've had any problems importing files. Code re-factoring and translation of German comments to English are both featured so much in LibreOffice press releases that they've become clichés, but they are of course important. Once done (it'll take a few more releases), this should make it far easier for developers to add new features (many more developers speak English than speak German), so although it doesn't sound exciting now, it's preparing the code for exciting things in the future.

The crux of any review is the question: should you install this software? Unless you're having issues with the old version, or have a large spreadsheet you want to offload to your GPU, there's probably little to be gained from rushing out and grabbing this version rather than waiting for it to appear in your package manager. What's exciting is the way that, with this release, LibreOffice has taken such a commanding position in the office suite market. **LV**

> ## "LibreOffice isn't simply a clone of Microsoft Office, as some people claim."

The smiley in LibreOffice 4.2 (shown here in Draw) has been improved to make it happier.

LINUX VOICE VERDICT

Another solid release of LibreOffice with a great new feature – exactly what we've come to expect.

★★★★⯪