

Open Document Exchange Formats

Karel De Vriendt

European Commission
Directorate-General for Informatics
European eGovernment Services (IDABC)

Content

- Intro: EU and e-Government
- The importance of document formats within the administrative context
- Interlude: Open Standards
- The TAC and PEGSCO recommendations
- The situation today
- An IDABC study on document formats

EU and e-Government (1)

- Policy
 - Lisbon strategy: efficient government, reduction of administrative burden
 - e-Democracy and e-Inclusion
 - Public administrations have ICT “buying power”
- Research and experimentation

EU and e-Government (2)

- Coordination when requested by Member States
 - Facilitate interoperability
 - Encourage good practice sharing and collaboration
 - Pilot projects (e-ID, e-Procurement)
- The European Institutions have a need to exchange information with Member States, businesses and citizens

IDABC

- “Interoperable Delivery of pan-European eGovernment Services to Public Administrations, Businesses and Citizens”
- Support for Commission Services involved in pan-European eGovernment projects
- Horizontal activities (examples):
 - Network, PKI
 - European Interoperability Framework
 - Open source in public administrations

More information

- The European Commission and e-Government:
<http://ec.europa.eu/egovernment>
- Good practices:
<http://epractice.eu>
- IDABC
<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc>

Problem statement (1)

- Documents are the “core material” of public administrations
- Exchanging documents is the most used method for exchanging information (between administrations, between administrations, businesses and citizens)
- Documents have an extremely long lifetime:
 - Re-use of information
 - Archiving

Problem statement (2)

- Administrations should not impose the use of specific (commercial) products on their correspondents
- Administrations should not depend on commercial companies to have access to their information – the administrations must “own” their documents
- Lack of open standards for the exchange of documents

The EU and standards

- Directive 98/34
- Only specifications issued by recognised standardisation bodies are standards (ISO, ITU, CEN, CENELEC and ETSI, national standards organisations) – rest are “technical specifications”
- The Commission is not directly involved in standardisation efforts (but does support European standardisation efforts)
- “Standards” in the rest of my slides – “standards and/or technical specifications”

Open Standards (1)

- Context: public procurement, systems architecture
- Goals: interoperability, competition, freedom of choice (avoidance of vendor lock-in), allowing open-source based solutions
- Standards should be supported by a wide variety of products (commercial and/or free)

Open Standards (2)

- Characteristics of Open Standards (as defined in the European Interoperability Framework):
 - Open process: defined and maintained with the involvement of all stakeholders
 - Published and easily (freely) accessible
 - IPR's made available on a royalty-free basis: free to implement, also in open source software
 - No constraints on the (re-)use of the standard

TAC recommendations

In 2004, representatives of the Member States:

- Stated the problem
- Recommended administrations to go for open standards
- Recognised the ongoing effort on the standardisation of ODF (OASIS)
- Asked Microsoft to open up their formats and to offer them for standardisation
- Asked industry to provide format conversion tools

PEGSCO recommendations

End 2006, representatives of the Member States:

- Recognised that significant progress has been made:
 - Administrations are more and more requesting open standards
 - Industry is moving towards open standards
- But not all problems have been solved
- Updated the TAC recommendations

Administrations are advised to

- Use international document format standards
- Use standards supported by multiple products
- Adapt national guidelines and regulations to reflect the choice for open, international standards in this area
- Define functional requirements for open document formats, ensuring compatibility between applications
- Create guidelines for (non-)revisable document formats for different purposes

Industry is asked to

- Work together to avoid proliferation of standards
- Provide products that handle all relevant standard formats, allowing the customer to choose a default format
- Avoid supersets and/or subsets
- Think about conformance testing to safeguard interoperability
- Improve the existing standards where needed

Situation today - general

- Public administrations:
 - Do not look forward towards a “war of the formats” – costs, convenience
 - Should standardise internally (to stimulate re-use of information)
 - Will need to accept and generate all widely used formats
- Microsoft (supporting OOXML) has a dominant position in the market and “owns” most of the legacy documents

Situation today - ODF

- OOXML's advantage is ODF's disadvantage
- Is the ODF standard ISO 26300, OASIS ODF v 1.1, the format used in OpenOffice.org?
- How many products support the full standard, and only the full standard (no supersets) – is interoperability “guaranteed”?
- Will agreed subsets be needed (products that only handle presentations or spreadsheets)?
- Conformance testing?

Study on document formats (1)

- Action to be launched by IDABC
- Restricted to “administrative” documents
- Restricted to ODF and OOXML
- Objective:
 - Can such documents – structure and representation – survive (multiple) translations between formats?
 - Guidelines for the creation of “translatable administrative documents”

Study on document formats (2)

- Re-use work done elsewhere
- Workshop with Member States to
 - Identify similar initiatives
 - Understand the needs
- Workshops with industry and other stakeholders involved in the standardisation efforts
- Publish results

Interesting links

- IDABC website:
<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc>
- IDABC activities on open document formats:
<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/3428/5890>
- The European Interoperability Framework
<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/3473/5585>
- The TAC recommendations:
<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/2592/5588>
- The PEGSCO recommendations:
<http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/servlets/Doc?id=26971>