

Packages - Freedom Issue #1217

LibreOffices non-free XML formats from and for MS-Office

2017-02-15 08:35 PM - Megver83

Status:	not-a-bug	% Done:	0%
Priority:	discussion		
Assignee:			
Category:			
Description			
<p>LibreOffice offers the option to save presentations and documents in the non-free MS-Office formats. These goes for both packages libreoffice-fresh and libreoffice-still. However, in work, in school or business many people may use this formats because MS-Office is very used in the society, pitifully.</p> <p>My proposal is to take one package (libreoffice-fresh or still) rebrand it, because in the >Help>About Libreoffice> box it says "Version supplied by Arch Linux" (I've it in spanish, and it's "Versión suministrada por Arch Linux"), and remove all the nonfree XML formats.</p> <p>About the rebranding, we could also add more translations in the desktop files in /usr/share/applications/. For example, if you see LibreOffice Impress desktop shortcut, the description is "Presentation" no matter the language, so we could use any translator and translate the descriptions to more languages, but this is an idea only, it has nothing to do with the freedom issue.</p> <p>Do you consider necessary to remove this kind of support for Microsoft Office?</p>			

History

#1 - 2017-03-06 01:49 AM - eliotime3000

Megver83 wrote:

LibreOffice offers the option to save presentations and documents in the non-free MS-Office formats. These goes for both packages libreoffice-fresh and libreoffice-still. However, in work, in school or business many people may use this formats because MS-Office is very used in the society, pitifully.

My proposal is to take one package (libreoffice-fresh or still) rebrand it, because in the >Help>About Libreoffice> box it says "Version supplied by Arch Linux" (I've it in spanish, and it's "Versión suministrada por Arch Linux"), and remove all the nonfree XML formats.

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Do you consider necessary to remove this kind of support for Microsoft Office?

In the case of LibreOffice depends of any component that is proprietary software and/or any other source code that makes conflicts with the GPL and/or FSDG, discard it. However, LibreOffice use so far libre/free source code to read, create and edit MS Office file formats.

Actually, LibreOffice is a libre version of Apache OpenOffice that haves a much better support of Apache OpenOffice. There's actually none need to distill the source code of LO in this case, such the case of the usage of RAR format, which the only one way to create .RAR files is using the RAR backend, which is proprietary.

#2 - 2017-03-06 02:46 PM - eliotime3000

Otherwise, the Microsoft Office file format read/create/edit usage is useful for merge from Microsoft Office to LibreOffice. Specially, in the process of update the documentation of any organization. However, the database compatibility and the usage of Visual Basic macros are pendent and/or in working process due to the difficulties that involves.

#3 - 2017-03-06 03:00 PM - Megver83

In the case of LibreOffice depends of any component that is proprietary software and/or any other source code that makes conflicts with the GPL and/or FSDG, discard it. However, LibreOffice use so far libre/free source code to read, create and edit MS Office file formats.

Yes, but that's due to the reverse engineering. The MS XML format is under a nonfree license, like MS-Office itself. Parabola shouldn't support these kind of formats, they can change it anytime MS Office upgrades to make it incompatible with older versions of it, that's against the free software philosophy.

Actually, LibreOffice is a libre version of Apache OpenOffice that haves a much better support of Apache OpenOffice. There's actually none

need to distill the source code of LO in this case, such the case of the usage of RAR format, which the only one way to create .RAR files is using the RAR backend, which is proprietary.

And what if there was a reverse-engineering version of the RAR backend used instead of the proprietary one? So it would not be a problem then?

Otherwise, the Microsoft Office file format read/create/edit usage is useful for merge from Microsoft Office to LibreOffice. Specially, in the process of update the documentation of any organization.

That's why I say to create a libre version of one of the LibreOffice packages (libreoffice-fresh or libreoffice-still) and rebrand it.

#4 - 2017-03-08 05:20 PM - eliotime3000

About the licensing of OOXML, the license is RAND (I mean, Uniform Free Only|UFO), according to this explanation on the english Wikipedia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Office_Open_XML#Licensing

So, the issue with the OOXML is the following: Microsoft does not sue to anyone that uses the OOXML Standard, like Adobe does with PDF. However, the interoperability issues are related with the approved standards of MS Office (ECMA-376 and ISO/IEC 29500:2008), stuff that are solved since MS Office 2013 (specificly, the version 15). LibreOffice began their support since version 4.3, and the ODF have the approved ISO/IEC 26300 standard.

Also, in this page clarifies that the OOXML read/create/edit feature was a contribution of Novell.

https://wiki.documentfoundation.org/LibreOffice_OOXML

#5 - 2017-03-08 06:02 PM - Anonymous

- Priority changed from freedom issue to discussion

- Status changed from open to info needed

#6 - 2017-03-08 06:52 PM - lukeshu

First of all, the name of the family of formats is OOXML. A scummy name clearly meant to cause confusion with OpenOffice, but that's the name.

rebrand it, because in the >Help>About Libreoffice> box it says "Version supplied by Arch Linux

Eh, unless we recompile it, it literally was supplied by Arch. A simple statement of fact. I see no problem there.

and remove all the nonfree XML formats.

No.

The MS XML format is under a nonfree license

What? There is no copyright license; a copyright license on a format is a nonsensical idea. What *is* under a license is the *specification* of the format. The specification of the OOXML is freely available as ECMA-376.

Now, ECMA-376 is not Free in the Free Culture sense of the term; one is not free to make modifications to it. But that's fine. If we were to draw the line there, we'd have to remove HTTP support from everything because of the license on RFC 7230.

Where there *might* be a legitimate concern is that the format infringes on several Microsoft-owned patents. First of all, the point is moot, because Microsoft has licensed the patents freely to those implementing ECMA-376. Secondly, we don't give a shit. Parabola ignores software patents. A legally dubious move (fauno once explained it to me that it's because Parabola operated in Argentina, where there are no software patents), but that's the current state of Parabola policy. If that policy is ever revised, we'd start with all of the multimedia formats that are obviously patent-encumbered before formats that have freely licensed patents.

they can change it anytime MS Office upgrades to make it incompatible with older versions of it

That's a technical argument, not a freedom-related one.

#7 - 2017-03-09 03:04 PM - Megver83

Maybe this is is not a freedom issue, nor a technical issue (maybe). But what I think, is that this is an ethical issue

<https://www.gnu.org/philosophy/no-word-attachments.en.html>

This OOXML format is non-standard, which is native from a program that does not respects your freedom, although libreoffice has nothing to do with MS-Office. And MS played dirty to invent that "it is an open standard"

MS-Office 2007 format is the one that Microsoft got declared an "open standard" by political manipulation and packing standards committees.

We should not support this corporation including programs with its formats, in my opinion.

#8 - 2017-03-09 09:16 PM - isacdaavid

I don't see this as a pressing issue, but I'm cool with someone undertaking the re-branding, and why not, supplying a über-anti-OOXML version of Libreoffice in parallel (think of a [nonprism]-like solution). This is easier said than done however, so I'm in no way demanding that it be done.

lukeshu wrote:

Eh, unless we recompile it, it literally was supplied by Arch.

Many of the packages in blacklist are being recompiled simply for re-branding issues.

Megver83 wrote:

We should not support this corporation including programs with its formats, in my opinion.

Nor should we cripple conscientious users who are aware of MS' dirty move and only use Libreoffice's OOXML support to not be excluded from looking at those documents. I'm afraid that simply stripping OOXML support isn't as lasting a solution as educating people in the problem of interoperable formats, and why Microsoft Office has only begun to pay lip service to the idea that their documents aren't locked in.

#9 - 2017-03-10 03:42 PM - Megver83

only use Libreoffice's OOXML support to not be excluded from looking at those documents.

that's why I say, only strip one of the 2 libreoffice packages (libreoffice-fresh or libreoffice-still)

#10 - 2017-03-23 03:16 PM - Megver83

So, is there any decision here? at least for the rebranding stuff?

#11 - 2022-04-13 04:24 PM - GNUtoo

- *Status changed from info needed to not-a-bug*

I'm closing the bug as no substantial proof of nonfree code or data has been shown.

And I think it's a good idea to at the same time support as many formats as we can, including formats that are not standards, or that are only documented publicly under free licenses inside the free software code that was implemented through reverse engineering or trials and errors.

And at the same time we should push people not to use these formats as obviously we cannot support them well.

The "We Can Put an End to Word Attachments" article mentioned above also gives specific reasons for fighting against Word attachments:

Free software today can read most Word documents, but not all—the format is secret and has not been entirely decoded. Even worse, Microsoft can change it at any time.

So it's not incompatible with trying to implement that format with free software.

That article also mentions risks about patents to push people to fight against word attachments.

But that is a different issue for distributions, the FLOSS community settled in having each distribution choose the risk level they want with regard to patents.

Also note that the word "proprietary format" is often used to mean a format that is not standardized. And "free format" is also often used to mean a format that are documented somehow and that can be implemented by anyone without legal risks.

Non standards formats is a different issue than software licensing.

Many free software have formats that are non standard (for instance savegames formats, kicad format, etc) but they are typically completely documented by free software source code.

Many nonfree software also have non-standards formats but here since the code is nonfree and often lack any documentation, we need reverse engineering or other means to implement them as free software.

And nonfree software also implements standards. So the use of standards are a transversal issues.

Note that it's important to have free and standard formats and at least documentation on the formats (like free software source code at least) as that typically helps free software.

But not supporting such formats in free distro would probably just increase the harm done by these formats and increase the power they have (to keep user dependent on nonfree software).

In contrast fighting against these formats by pushing users not to use them and at the same time keeping supporting them in free distribution both work in the right direction if lowering the harm done by them.

Denis.