3-Step-Migration: Microsoft Office 2003 to Oracle Open Office
3-Step-Migration from MS Office to Oracle Open Office

This brief paper is designed to assist IT professionals and system integrators who want to move an organization from Microsoft Office 97/2000/XP/2003 to Oracle Open Office. The migration is a simple 3-step-process:

Step 1: Evaluation and Business Case
Step 2: Software and Data Migration
Step 3: Integration and Maintenance

There are some differences between these two office suites that may affect the way the two products process and store information and data. However, the majority of functions are similar making the switch to Oracle Open Office seamless to the majority of users.

Step 1: Evaluation and Business Case

Licensing costs of Microsoft Office are generally very high. Here Oracle Open Office provides an important benefit as it has a huge licensing cost advantage. The cost of an Oracle Open Office license is typically just 20% of a Microsoft Office license. The cost advantage for Oracle Open Office can be even higher for users with more than one workstation or notebook. Oracle Open Office licensing allows up to five Oracle Open Office installations per user while Microsoft charges extra license fees for additional machines belonging to the same user.
There are many more benefits. Oracle Open Office stores all your data in an ISO standardized OpenDocument (ODF) format and can also read and write files from Microsoft Office. The document format topic is critical and is covered in the “Handling work flow critical documents, templates, and macros” section below.

Microsoft Office users can also easily read, edit and write files to ODF with the Oracle ODF Plugin for Microsoft Office, which is available in the Oracle store.

The platform independent architecture of Oracle Open Office allows a smooth and easy transition to a non-Windows operating system. This opens up additional new cost saving opportunities.

Step 2: Software and Document Migration

An office suite is an integrated part of the company work flow and it is essential for the daily business of most employees. It is important to plan and execute a migration carefully. The following four steps provide guidelines on how best to start a migration.

1. Implementing a Pilot phase

Oracle Open Office is, to a large extent, compatible with Microsoft Office, but it is a different application and like Microsoft Office has its own strengths and drawbacks. The pilot phase allows you to identify problems that could affect the migration process, as well as ensure that the work flow and exchange of documents work as intended.

It is recommended to test Oracle Open Office in a pilot with voluntary participants. The participants should be representative of the entire business work flow and they should be trained or at least have access to trained colleagues.

2. Creating an inventory of tools and Microsoft Office dependent solutions

There are a number of CRM, ERP or other applications available which either depend on or provide interfaces to Microsoft Office. These applications need to be identified and checked. Questionnaires given to team leads or group managers can be used to get a better insight into how the business solutions interact with Microsoft Office.

3. Handling work flow critical documents, templates and macros

Moving to a new productivity environment also provides an opportunity for some serious “house cleaning.” Chances are that a good deal of the existing documents, templates, and business applications in your organization are no longer in use, or will have outlived their usefulness after your move to Oracle Open Office.

It is recommended to use the ISO standardized ODF file format as the default in your organization. Oracle provides the Professional Analysis Wizard with Oracle Open Office 3.x to help you create an inventory of existing Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint documents.
Microsoft Office Macros cannot be run directly or “as is” in Oracle Open Office because of some fundamental programmatic differences in the object model for each product. Fortunately the Oracle Open Office VBA Runtime Layer emulates the object model for a subset of objects so some Microsoft Office macros can be converted to an Oracle Open Office macro and then be used. Of course, your organization can create Oracle Open Office macros to increase productivity and to streamline work flow.

The migration to Oracle Open Office provides an excellent opportunity to rethink your company’s existing processes. For example, before you migrate any existing Visual Basic macros, try to determine if the macros are still needed. You can then discard the macros that are no longer useful. If you want, you can also re-engineer the remaining macros manually in Oracle Open Office Basic. However, it is better to use web-based solutions which are much easier to maintain and they provide better run-time security and error-handling than Visual Basic macros. There are a large number solutions and frameworks available.

4. Training and Support Options

To minimize support calls and maximize productivity from the start, you should also prepare a “Welcome” package for users with supplementary information about the new desktop environment. The package should explain the basic functionality and functional differences of Oracle Open Office.

Oracle Premier Support provides essential support and product updates to help you get the most of Oracle Open Office.

Step 3: Integration and Maintenance

1. Email and Calendar Clients

The standard Oracle Open Office configuration consists of the core Oracle Open Office applications: Writer, Calc, Impress, Base, Draw, and Math. Oracle Open Office also includes Mozilla Thunderbird (most popular open source email client), with an extension for calendaring, as an e-mail and calendaring client. It supports a number of Calendaring servers such as Oracle Calendar Server or the Google Calendar but it currently does not support Microsoft Exchange. The User CALs of Microsoft Exchange Server up to version 2003 include a Microsoft Outlook license. You can contact Microsoft and request an Outlook installation CD.

The Open Source project DavMail\(^1\) is also an option. DevMail provides an interface for Mozilla Thunderbird to communicate with a Microsoft Exchange server.

Generally, a migration of the email client is not required. The Oracle Open Office setup application automatically recognizes your default e-mail client and no extra configuration is required.

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\(^1\) DavMail POP/IMAP/SMTP/CalDav/LDAP Exchange Gateway (davmail.sourceforge.net)
2. Migrating Databases

Oracle Open Office Base is the database application for Oracle Open Office. Base provides you with wizards to help you to create forms, reports, queries, and database tables so that you can easily access your data from within Oracle Open Office. An Oracle Open Office Base file stores the methods and layouts that you use to access a database.

Oracle Open Office Base can read and write data to the MySQL, Oracle, JDBC, ODBC, Microsoft Access, Text, dBASE, and ADO interfaces as well as spreadsheet data sources. The Microsoft Access and ADO interfaces are only available under Windows.

Microsoft provides a free Microsoft Access 2007 / Microsoft Access 2010 Runtime which allows a distribution of MS Access databases to users who have Oracle Open Office installed on their computers. These users can add and edit data, but they cannot modify the MS Access forms, reports, and queries.

3. Editable document sharing

In this scenario, recipients can edit the contents of the shared documents, for example to provide feedback or to add more content before the documents are passed to a third party. You cannot assume that a third-party recipient of a shared document has Oracle Open Office or OpenOffice.org. Most likely, the common file format in a mixed Oracle Open Office and Microsoft Office environment is a Microsoft proprietary file format.

One approach is to make the ODF format the default format in your company. Standardization makes it easier to exchange documents, track documents, and maintain the support infrastructure. For this solution, Microsoft Office users would require a parallel installation of Oracle Open Office or the ODF Plugin for Microsoft Office.

Another approach is to distribute the shared documents in Microsoft Office format, especially if only a small percentage of users work with Oracle Open Office in your company.

The following suggestions can also help you to improve interoperability in a mixed environment:

1. Make Oracle Open Office the default office application in groups where users closely collaborate, even if some of the group members are not part of your company. The ODF Plugin for Microsoft Office enables these users to read and write ODF documents.

2. Introduce two main phases to contribute to a document, an edit phase and a collaboration phase. In the edit phase, users create and save files as they normally would and store to their local computer. In the collaboration phase, a single primary document is stored on a central server and shared among users in a mixed office environment. For this phase, you can use Microsoft Office format, but it is better to deploy the ODF Plugin for Microsoft Office and use the ODF document format. Although conversion is used at the end of this solution, loss of formatting caused by intensive “round-trips” during the editing phase are avoided.
Summary

Migrating to Oracle Open Office is easily achievable with good planning, sufficient resources, and skilled project management. The savings of moving to Oracle Open Office are substantial, giving you up to an 80% reduction in licensing costs, no annual fees, and no contractual obligations to purchase upgrades. That freedom and flexibility along with the cost savings make it very worthwhile to start a pilot or evaluation of Oracle Open Office.

Our consultants and sales representatives are very experienced in all aspects of Microsoft Office migration and can guide customers through the evaluation and migration process.

For more information about Oracle Open Office, visit oracle.com/office.

Documents

1. Oracle Open Office 3.3 Getting Started Guide.