

## Office of the Future

# STAROFFICE 6.0

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

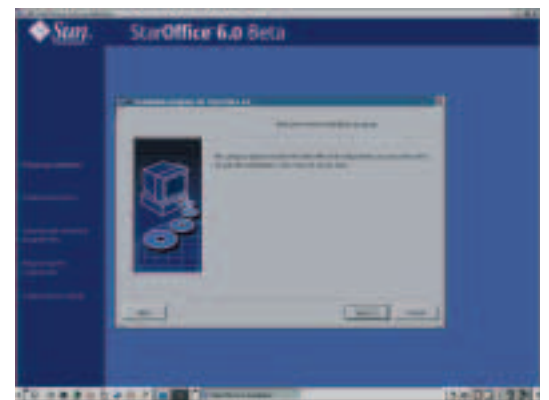


The integrated desktop is gone and many new functions have been added, while others have been improved. Jan Kleinert takes a closer look at Sun's shining star

**D**o we really need Office packages under Linux, when we already have Emacs and TeX? Engaging in this debate gets you about as far as discussing the pros and cons of abstract art. When it comes down to the crunch, you can use Linux applications to perform all office functions without needing to resort to using an office package. However, those who want to expand the quantitative usefulness of Linux as a desktop operating system should welcome applications such as StarOffice.

Sun, the manufacturer of StarOffice, hopes that its latest incarnation, version 6.0, will be given a warm welcome when it's launched on the market later this year. At the time of its release, the previous version (5.2) will be pushing the one and a half years old mark.

StarOffice is now based on the LGPL project OpenOffice.org, which was started up by Sun in October 2000. Sun brought in approximately nine million lines of additional source code and places increased value on the openness of API and file format (XML). This brought the project another license: the Sun Industry Standard Source License (SISSL). The only advantages the bought StarOffice 6.0 will have over the freely downloadable version will be the non-Open sections such as dictionaries and the database (and at present all language



The install is underway.

modules except English). For our test we used the official StarOffice 6.0 Beta version and a Sun internal beta version.

### No unpleasant surprises

The installation of StarOffice 6.0 is similar to the previous version. In the simplest case, i.e. for a single station installation, the `.setup` file must be called up. For the multi-user installation, which is usually the most sensible for Linux systems, `.setup net` is used as root. It can be assumed that rpm and deb packages will also be included in future distributions of StarOffice 6.0. The CD version of StarOffice 6.0 contains extra language modules, in addition to the dictionaries contained in the download installation package.

Sun states its installation requirements as a Pentium-compatible PC with 64Mb RAM, a 2.2.13 or higher kernel and a glibc2 of version 2.1.2 or better. As with all the earlier versions, it is advisable to really bulk up on RAM. StarOffice 6.0 can also be installed parallel to an older version. If StarOffice 5.2 is installed on the system, the 6.0 installation

#### Star Office 6.0

<b>Supplier</b>	Sun Microsystems
<b>License</b>	Not Free
<b>Price</b>	Download version free of charge, CD-ROM with manual probably 50 euros
<b>Web:</b>	<a href="http://www.sun.com/staroffice/6.0beta">http://www.sun.com/staroffice/6.0beta</a>
<b>Requirements</b>	Pentium (compatible) CCU, 64Mb RAM, 300-500Mb free disk space, Kernel 2.2.13, Glibc2 2.1.2
<b>Current status:</b>	Beta, final version second quarter 2002
<b>Alternatives</b>	OpenOffice.org, Corel WordPerfect Office 2000, Abi Word, Koffice

rating



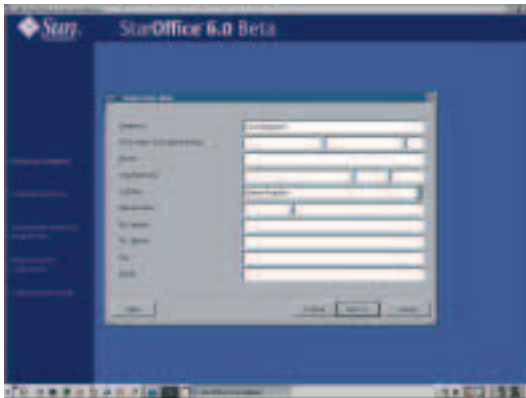


Figure 2: User details, most of which is optional

program offers the possibility of migrating all your existing data.

The program's setup is done with a graphic interface Wizard. The multi-user installation uses the home directory of the installer, i.e. root, as its target. This specification was inherited from the previous version. Copying the files onto the hard drive took barely three and a half minutes in our test and took up 310Mb of disk space.

The next task is to install the relational Adabas D 11.0 database, included in the StarOffice CD. This is either executed automatically in the course of the StarOffice installation or started manually by the administrator under *.adabas*. You will need to specify a sensible installation target, wait one and a half minutes for the 60Mb to install. This is without doubt a rather basic version of the program, with three parallel database connections and a maximum database size of 100Mb being the limits of this single user database.

## One workstation installation per user

As with earlier versions, a workstation installation is required for each user. This is done per user by starting *StarOffice-directory/program/setup*. After each user has entered his or her contact details into a template (see Figure 2), the setup program looks for a Java environment suitable for StarOffice 6.0. If nothing is found or successfully verified, the Install button helps with setting up the Sun Java runtime files (see Figures 3 and 4).

When starting the actual application for the first time you will be confronted with a Wizard, which enables you to import existing address data. In addition to supporting Netscape and Mozilla address books, the program also now supports LDAP addresses. With a minimum of manipulation, contact data from dBase, Adabas or ODBC sources can also be imported.

## No integrated desktop

After the installation has been completed, the uninitiated may look for StarOffice in the window

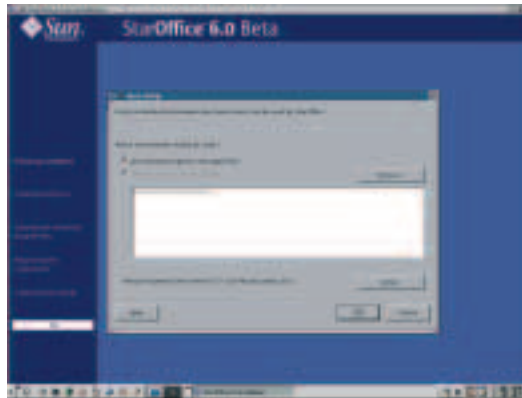


Figure 3: After each user has entered his or her contact details, the setup program looks for a suitable Java environment

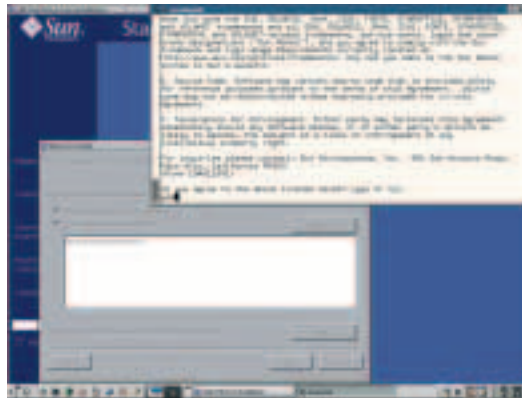


Figure 4: If not previously installed or successfully verified, the Install button will then try to set up a Sun Java runtime

manager of their choice. However, this search will be to no avail. The reason for this is that Sun has abolished the integrated office desktop, which the Star division marketed as an outstanding feature in its time. Sun justifies this omission as following the wishes of its users, however it would have been nice to be given the individual user the choice of whether or not to use this feature. A more serious omission is that of the date planner, which in earlier releases even had the ability to organise group dates. Sun is allegedly working on a replacement for this feature.

What you will find in the StarOffice 6.0 menu of KDE or GNOME are: StarOffice Writer (text documents), StarOffice Calc (tables), StarOffice Impress (presentations), the HTML editor (HTML documents) and StarOffice Draw (drawings). In addition to these are the submenus Autopilot (various wizards), Information and set up (StarOffice and printer setup) and Others (for label and business card creation, the formula editor and global documents).

## Mainstays: Writer and Calc

Users who have migrated from Microsoft Office will have no problems getting up to speed with the menus (and tool bars) of Writer and Calc. The tools cannot be torn off and repositioned, however some tools fold out into secondary tool bars.

Sun has done a particularly good job with the menus for formatting characters and paragraphs in Writer. These were comparatively clear, if not clearer, than those in the latest Microsoft suites. In our tests the Margins, Spacing and Initials register cards were

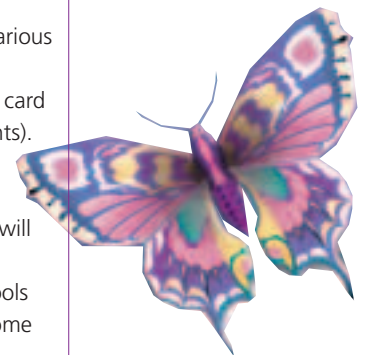
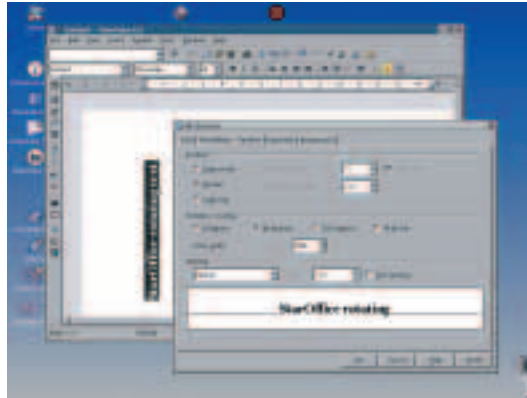


Figure 5: One new function is the possibility of rotating text



particularly pleasing. Writer has also made new innovations in font special effects that place very high demands on the font management of monitors and printers. Writer can now rotate text 90 degrees (see Figure 5), control kerning and execute various other font special effects like interrupted underlining.

The Writer beta test also offered the opportunity to check the automatic re-creation function after a program crash. It works – with exception of the last typed entry – the open text document was saved.

Calc has received many new arithmetic functions,

which better facilitates the import of complex Excel files. One highlight is the ability of Calc 6 (like Excel) to embed external data from the Internet, which is then automatically updated – particularly practical for stock market data, for example.

A small window has replaced the annoying help assistant that popped up in Star Office 5.2 at every possible opportunity. Mr. Help greets us now only from a distance and after a while of not being used, quietly disappears again.

### Graphically: Impress and Draw

The presentation program Impress has not been substantially developed, which is not necessarily a bad thing. With its many effects (such as fading in and out), useful templates and a Draw toolbar, you're not likely to be stuck for options or ideas for that critical presentation.

Draw is highly useful, whether as an independent drawing program or within another application. It possesses all the most important graphic tools and can offers rudimentary support for layers. It's not in the same league as Corel Draw but can deal with the design of letterheads or simple overview diagrams (both typical office applications) effectively and with ease.

You may have noticed that at first glance, a pixel-oriented graphic program seems to be missing. Upon closer inspection we discovered that this is not the case. As soon as you insert a picture into a document – it doesn't matter in which StarOffice program – and click on it, the lower, context-sensitive toolbar transforms into a raster graphics toolbar (see Figure 6). A second bar is hidden behind the triangle button on the right.

### Adabas D

As we mentioned above in the Installation section, StarOffice 6.0 again features the relational SQL database Adabas, from the German Software AG. Those who already have Adabas 11 on their system need not update this.

To create a new database for StarOffice conditions

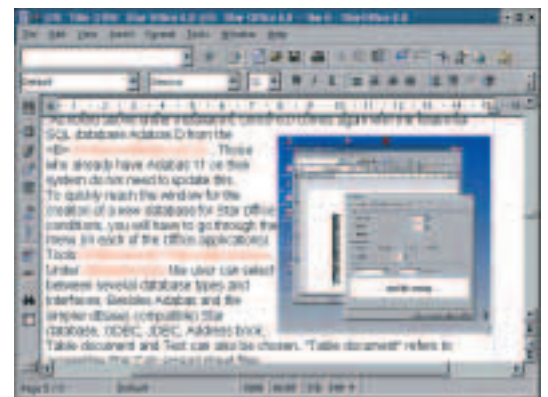


Figure 6: When you click on a picture, the lower, context-sensitive tool bar transforms into a raster graphics toolbar

## Table 1: Comparison of loading times and file sizes of Star Office

5.2 and 6.0 Beta (1)

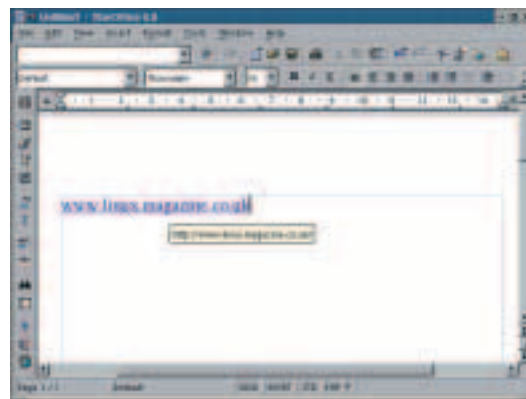
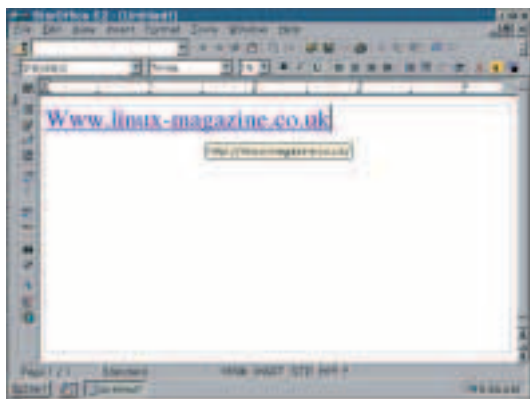
	Star Office 5.2	Star Office 6.0 Beta
<b>Starting application</b>		
Desktop	27s	N.A.
Writer	5s	35s / 9s (2)
Calc	3s	36s / 7s (2)
Impress	5s	36s / 9s (2)
<b>File size: StarOffice files</b>		
SDW/SXW	724Kb	746Kb
SDC/SXC	120Kb	11Kb
SDD/SXI	93Kb	31Kb
<b>Loading time: StarOffice files</b>		
SDW/SXW	5s	3s
SDC/SXC	7s	Crashes
SDD/SXI	8s	7s
<b>Import of MS Office files</b>		
DOC (126Kb)	7s	9s
XLS (16Kb)	16s	23s
PPT (61Kb)	2s	1.5s
HTML (76Kb (3))	3.5s	8s

### Footnotes

(1) tested on Celeron 450 MHz, 196 MB RAM, Matrox Mysique, Mandrake

(2) Star Office 6.0: Loading time from scratch / loading time when another Star Office application had been started and quit

(3) HTML document contained 9 files.



Figures 7 and 8: In version 5.2, subsequent modifications to links did not change their functions. This bug has now been eliminated (right)

you'll need to access the *Tools/Data sources/New data sources* menu from within any of the StarOffice applications. Under Database type, the user can select between several database types and interfaces. Besides Adabas and the simpler dBase-compatible Star database, ODBC, JDBC, Address book, Table document and Text can also be chosen. Table document refers to accessible Calc spreadsheet files.

### Internet functions not included

Sun has apparently given up its desire to integrate various Internet functions into StarOffice. For example, the email module (POP and IMAP capable) has been omitted. Sun has probably capitulated on this point due to the instabilities of the Mail module experienced with large mailboxes. The loss of the news client from the old StarOffice will probably be as painful for most as that of the feeble Web browser.

Due to these changes, the client services now require external programs, such as Netscape Communicator, to take care of them. This at least makes it possible to send a document from each Office application by email, or to link to an external browser by mouse click (though this function is not available in the beta version). Here the programmer have directly eliminated a bug: in the old version, subsequent modifications to links did not change their functions (see Figures 7 and 8).

It is at first impossible to tell the difference between the HTML editor and Writer when opening an HTML file. It is only when you click inside the page (structured as a typical table) that the second tool bar changes, thereby allowing for the formatting of tables (cells). The representation is very similar to that in a genuine browser – including animated GIFs. The page designers have really succeeded here.

Another very nice feature is the Autopilot (with Microsoft, it would be probably called a Wizard), which runs in its own window and creates HTML files to a given style or template. Simply click on a template or a style and the result is displayed straight away in the editor window. The word processor's source text mode also pleases with its highlighting of syntax.

Sun's HTML editor cannot be compared with the top standalone editors such as Macromedia's Dreamweaver. It doesn't take long for the user to notice that important processing functions, namely Java scripting and site management, are missing. In the end, the HTML editor is essentially just a reworked word processor.

### Import and export filter

Even those who don't use any Microsoft products will not be able to ignore this paragraph, for hardly a day goes by when one doesn't receive some document in the Word, Excel or PowerPoint format by email. StarOffice 5.2 did extremely well in this department, and this was Sun's main advertising argument for an upgrade from Star Office 5.1 to 5.2.

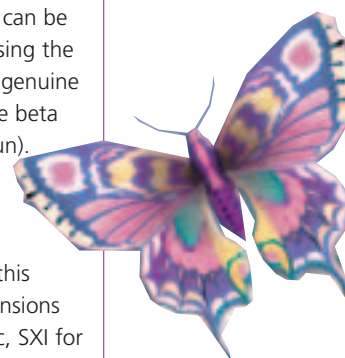
The current version has taken another step forward in the area of MS data exchange. (As a small aside: some uncommon multimedia text attributes of Microsoft Office 2000 cannot be transferred to StarOffice 5.2). Table 1 gives a first impression of the loading times when importing. These could change for the final version however, which may perhaps run faster.

One special improvement (for Linux and Solaris) is in the interaction with OLE objects in MS Office documents. In Figure 6, a Word 2000 document with an embedded picture is correctly displayed in StarOffice 6.0, whilst in the previous version it would have displayed incorrectly.

The export formats from Star Office 5.2 are all available for version 6.0. The fax solution and Ghostscript in PDF mode, both available in the Linux system, can also serve as printer drives. Both can be set up, as can TrueType font management, using the SPAdmin printer setup tool. The Star-specific genuine printer driver could not be tested because the beta version crashed (a well-known error under Sun).

### Format of the future: XML

The technically outstanding characteristic of StarOffice 6.0 is its file format, XML. It is, in this respect, right up there with Koffice. The extensions are accordingly: SXW for Writer, SXC for Calc, SXI for Impress and SXD for Draw. You can view a



comparison of the file sizes and loading times between the old and new versions in Table 1. For all of you who are not yet up to speed on the theory of the meta-language of the future, take a look at our XML feature on page 30.

StarOffice stores XML files as (GNU)zip archives in standardised form. DTDs are not included. They are situated in the directory `Office-directory/share/dtd/officedocument/1_01`. The file `office.xml` can be found under this path. A quick attempt to have a look at the contents of this, using an XML editor (Xmetal 2.0 from SoftQuad), failed due to incompatibility. Thus StarOffice seems, in contrast to

the XML editor, to have included its DTD modules not in the order of incorporation, but in blocks.

By the way, the formula editor, which has been absolutely neglected in this article, saves its files with the ending `SXM`. This content is fully compatible with the MathML standard.

### Multi-platform architecture and a new API

This is the third architecture in the history of StarOffice in which the manufacturer permits the interface with different platforms. Less than 10 per cent of the C++ code is dependent on the target platform. StarOffice and OpenOffice.org are logically structured in a system abstraction layer, infrastructure layer, framework layer and application layer. A FAQ at <http://www.openoffice.org> explains the details.

For programmers, StarOffice is interesting (OpenOffice.org even more so) because all ports are left open. The API can be docked into via C, C++ and Java. The API of StarOffice 5.x was object-oriented – the new kid in town is by contrast component-oriented. More information (with a view to practical applications) for interested system developers can be gleaned from the Office Development Kit ODK.

## Info

StarOffice 5.2	<a href="http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/5.2/features.html">http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/5.2/features.html</a>
OpenOffice	<a href="http://www.openoffice.org">http://www.openoffice.org</a>
Licences from OpenOffice	<a href="http://www.openoffice.org/license">http://www.openoffice.org/license</a>
StarOffice 6.0 Beta	<a href="http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/6.0beta/get.html">http://www.sun.com/software/star/staroffice/6.0beta/get.html</a>
OpenOffice API FAQ	<a href="http://www.api.openoffice.org/faq.html">snapshot of www.api.openoffice.org/faq.html</a>
ODK	<a href="http://ludk.openoffice.org/ludk_package.html">http://ludk.openoffice.org/ludk_package.html</a>

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