

CrossOver Office MICROSOFT MEETS LINUX

Running Microsoft Office under Linux is already possible with CrossOver Office, though as Patricia Jung explains, it's still far from perfect

Wine Wine Is Not an Emulator is an attempt to replicate the Windows API (Application Programming Interface) so that function calls from native Windows applications can be received by Wine and converted in such a way that Linux and the X server will perform the relevant actions (for example drawing a window or reacting to a mouse click).

Microsoft's Office suite may not be the best in the world, but it dominates the market to such an extent that even some Linux users succumb to its thrall – clandestinely booting up Windows to write letters, design presentations or to set up spreadsheets filled with calculations. While it would be more in keeping with the true faith to point out alternatives, the pragmatic approach of the **Wine** project – to make Windows programs run under Linux – will benefit users who are not concerned with ideological debates.

The wine of the code weavers

When the company CodeWeavers, whose main developer is Alexandre Julliard – the driving force behind the Wine project, introduced its new product CrossOver Office 1.0.0 at the end of March, it caused a wave of euphoria, and not just in the Linux-related media. CrossOver Office is designed to enable the installation and use of Winword and its cohorts under Linux.

However, if you take a closer look you will see that CodeWeavers Inc. is trying to play fair with its potential customers. They freely admit that CrossOver Office only brings MS Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook 97 and 2000, as well as Lotus Notes, to the Linux desktop. You will have to make do without Outlook Express, FrontPage, Access or Internet Explorer, and also without Clippy, the office assistant – who is unlikely to be sorely missed. The company also warns that non-US versions of Office packages will not work with CrossOver Office 1.0.0.

That last statement could not be generally verified in our test: not only were we able to install a version of Microsoft Office 2000 SR 1 Premium Edition without problems (apart from Outlook) under SuSE 7.2 with KDE 3.0 or *fvwm2*, we could also use it as advertised. The same was true for an MS Word 2000 SR1 OEM version on **Debian Testing** with KDE 2.2.2, and for the combination of GNOME 1.4 (Figure 6) or *fvwm2* (Figure 5) and MS Office 97's Winword, Excel and PowerPoint in the SuSE installation mentioned above.

Debian Testing

Debian GNU/Linux (<http://www.debian.org/>) is the most widespread non-commercial Linux distribution. It always comes in three variants. The first is "stable" (currently Debian 2.2, code-named "Potato"). This is the thoroughly tested and stable version in which only security updates are incorporated. Then there is "testing", the contender for the next stable release, which incorporates the latest software that has undergone initial testing (current code name "Woody" – the future Debian 3.0). The third version is "unstable", the developers' workhorse and the main test subject, in which some features may well not be working properly (currently "Sid").

Inscrutable

During our test, the only thing that went smoothly was the installation of CrossOver Office itself and that of the Microsoft Office products. When it



The installation of applications is done smoothly, but that's only half the story



Where would you like to install CrossOver and MS Office?

comes to actually using them there seems to be a lot of luck involved. An action, such as inserting an MS Graph 2000 diagram into a Winword 2000 document, which worked fine in one setup, caused the entire GNOME desktop to freeze in another. KDE proved more robust, while the test run with *fvwm2* was subjectively better overall.

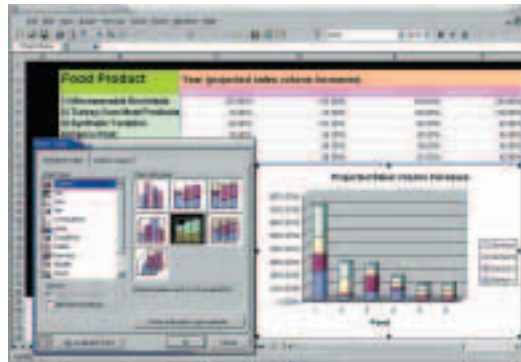
Apart from anything else, much depended on the particular version of CrossOver Office. While the insertion of the diagram mentioned above was no problem with the tested CD release, it caused the downloaded version to crash completely. This seems to point to CodeWeavers using the same version number (1.0.0) to distribute constantly improving versions of the software.

After countless, often futile attempts to reproduce errors our two main pieces of advice for potential CrossOver Office users are to have patience (if you are too impatient waiting for an action to finish you are at a greater risk of everything freezing up) and be ready to do some tidying up afterwards.

To this end CrossOver Office comes with a program called *cxoffice_reset* in the *bin* subdirectory of the installation directory, which, unlike Winword and its friends, acquires an entry in the KDE or GNOME start directory during installation. Calling this program will restore the functionality of your desktop if an MS Office program freezes, so that you can try again. It is generally a good idea to get this tool to clear any old CrossOver processes after the end of every MS Office session, no matter how successful it may have been.

Practical testing

The CrossOver Office *bin* directory also contains links called *excel*, *powerpnt*, *winword*, *outlook*, *frontpg*, *ieexplore*, *notepad* and *msaccess* (depending on the MS Office installation). When you call these (specifying the path if necessary) you will be disappointed to find that only *powerpnt*, *winword*, *notepad* and *excel* actually work properly. All these links point to the shell script *wine* in the same directory, which works its magic to ensure that the relevant Windows binary, from *support/dotwine/fakewindows/Program Files* below the CrossOver Office installation directory is called, with Wine as an intermediate layer.

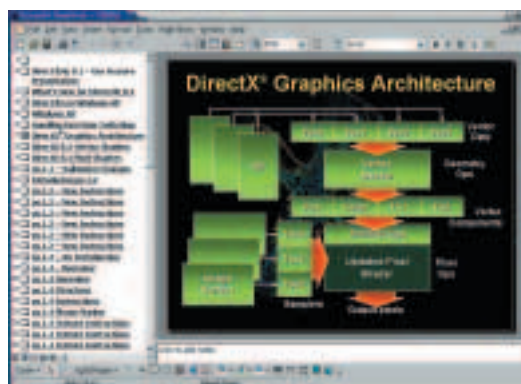


Excel on Linux

If you want to run .exe files under Linux, you need to be prepared to endure a certain amount of misery. Not only will you encounter frequent and unpredictable waiting times and annoying crashes (which, eerily enough, may occur even when the application is simply left to its own devices for long enough), but the way in which the cursor has a tendency of flicking across the desktop in a strange and unexpected manner does not exactly improve usability.

Copying and pasting between different applications (Figure 4) is a hit-and-miss affair. The extent to which it works depends on the version of CrossOver Office as well as that of MS Office. Templates can sometimes be used, as long as they don't contain any VB scripts. Inserting pictures works, but you have to make do without the Microsoft clipart gallery. The macro recorder is perfectly useable, unlike the VB and Microsoft script editor. Printing also worked without a hitch in our tests. In contrast, the screen display was rather disappointing despite the built-in TrueType fonts.

You quickly get used to the fact that the file selection dialog refers to "drives" in true Windows fashion (Figure 5). The /tmp EZTZ<http://www.winehq.com/> Wine from CodeWeavers <http://wine.codeweavers.com/> What works and what doesn't http://www.codeweavers.com/products/office/the_real_dirt.php



PowerPoint running on Linux

CrossOver Office	
Supplier	CodeWeavers Inc.
Web	http://www.codeweavers.com/
For	Use MS Office under Linux
Against	Prone to crashes, unstable
rating	★★★★★