

StarOffice 6.0

CHANGE IN THE OFFICE



Linux users are blessed with a range of office products that suit a broad cross section of needs. Users of other OSes may not be so lucky and may be stuck with a choice of just one. As Colin Murphy explains, StarOffice 6.0 gives us all more choice

What and why?

StarOffice 6.0 is a fully featured office suite offering plenty of facility for all of the common day-to-day tasks that we find ourselves with, such as creating documents, spreadsheets and presentations. If you have access to Solaris and Windows platforms, as well as Linux, then you will be able to run these applications across the board.

StarOffice 6.0 has been described as the biggest Open Source project in history. Building on the development of StarOffice 5.2, Sun was wise enough to release the source code to the Open Source community, which led to the creation of the OpenOffice.org project, which recently reached its own milestone release when version 1.0 became available. Conscious of the scepticism the corporate and enterprise market have of the Open Source community, Sun has held on to the SunOffice badge, maintaining its own development while remaining closely akin to OpenOffice.

Sun's enterprise customers were keen to see the development of an alternative, but still mainstream, office suite, which would be free from all of the failings that their one main choice had – mainly licensing issues – and freedom from unreasonable pricing and the fear of forced upgrades.

In effect, Sun took the code from the OpenOffice project and added value to it, though this value comes at a cost. OpenOffice is free to use and freely available; StarOffice 6.0 is not free and this is its blessing. Sun realises that 'free' carries a stigma with it, especially for the corporate market. Free, quite often, means no support and no comeback if things go wrong. With the backing of Sun for worldwide support and the carefully considered pricing structure, these fears melt away.

Sun also believes that it can lower the cost for the end user, especially in the enterprise sector. With StarOffice the end user is given much more control over how and when they want to upgrade their office packages. With deployment and migration programs in place, Sun can help and advise on how the user can improve their productivity. Flexible

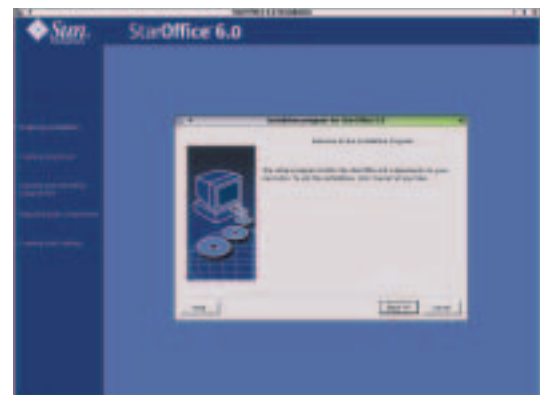
licensing also allows a much wider range of users to benefit from StarOffice. Education customers even have the benefit of only having to pay for media and shipping costs.

Flexible licensing is also apparent for the individual user, where a single licence allows you to run up to five complete installations, so that means the office machine, the home machine, the laptop and the console in the kids bedroom can all have a copy of StarOffice 6.0 from the one box.

One concern from the enterprise market was the use of proprietary file formats that 'their' documents were being saved in. Without the support of the vendor who supplied the application, users would run the risk of not being able to access their own data, or, at the very least, deal with it in an effective manner. This results in a very strong, maybe even oppressive, tie to the vendor.

StarOffice 6.0 makes much noise about using XML, the eXtensible Markup Language-based file format, which it uses by default. Because of this, anyone has the ability to use widely available tools to open, modify and share the data in those files, thereby not tying the user down to a single application that the data can be used on.

Microsoft Office import and export filters are provided with StarOffice 6.0, including filters for Office XP. This now allows people to share data across platforms, and to move away from MS Office if they so wish.



StarOffice 6.0 prepares itself for installation

What you get

StarOffice 6.0 is available in 10 languages, which each come in their own boxed sets. As such the English boxed set will only provide English menus, even though the dictionary tools cater for some other languages. The one StarOffice 6.0 disc provides the installation for Linux, Windows and Solaris (for both IA and Alpha processors). This has led some to assume that the same installation disk would offer installation for all of the languages StarOffice now supports. This is not the case, so, just make sure you buy the right boxed set for the language you want to work in and this will not be an issue for you.

In the box you get the single installation disc, two manuals – the Set-up Guide and the User Guide – a copy of the licence and a StarOffice Entitlement Certificate which is valid for 60 days from 'product acquisition'.

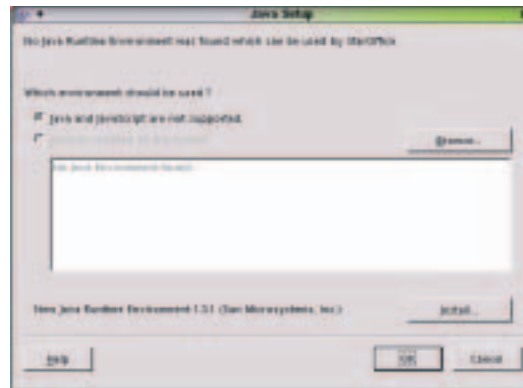
The Set-up guide runs to 71 pages and is detailed enough to explain things like how to turn off the automatic registration prompt. It covers the installation for all three platforms, though will be redundant for anyone who has previously done at least one install of StarOffice. The User Guide has a useful 22 page index to its 462 pages. The User Guide is a real boon to those of use that have been using StarOffice 5.2 and especially OpenOffice: some of those mystery features like Navigator now make themselves know and useful. The User Guide and Set-up Guide are also included as PDF files on the CD.

The applications in the suite include:

- **Writer** – the word processor. This has been improved over StarOffice 5.2 to include Smart URL attributes; is more flexible when creating labels; has the addition of a graphics object bar; automatic formatting and a host of other features.
- **Calc** – the spreadsheet. This now features Roman and Arabic conversion functions; improved interoperability with Microsoft Excel functions – particularly with the inclusion of the new Analysis functions; improved Matrix arrays and new print options.
- **Impress** – the presentation tool. Cache buffering has been added, as has a Crop dialog used when inserting bitmaps to presentations.
- **Base** – the database. StarOffice 6.0 now works with data sources as opposed to the fixed format used in StarOffice 5.2. This comes with its own Data Source administration dialog as well as enhancements to the administration of database tables. Adabas is also included on the CD.

Installation

Installation is simple for the Linux user, as it's just a case of selecting the *start-up* script tucked away in the */linux/office60* directory. From here you are



The Java runtimes are included on the StarOffice CD, so you can install them with StarOffice

presented with a graphical install screen, which tells you what is happening. Very little user intervention is required, especially if you have already been using StarOffice 5.2, as the installation fetches information from your previous install. You will need to confirm a couple of paths and confirm the installation of the Java runtimes if you so wish.

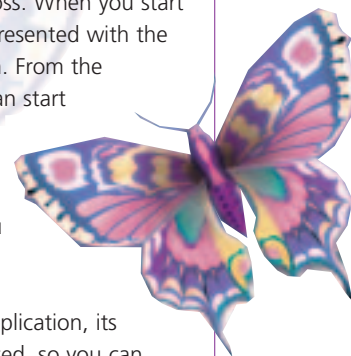
Try as we might, we could not get StarOffice 6.0 to place itself into the KDE desktop of the SuSE 8.0 machine we installed it on. This might be because I already had StarOffice 5.2 and OpenOffice.org installed, and we can't vouch for other systems either. Still, it was not too difficult adding them by hand as an afterthought.

Printer configuration is dealt with as a separate issue, and has its own set-up script, *spadmin*, in the same directory where you ran the installation from.

In use

Those familiar with StarOffice 5.2 will notice the disappearance of the integrated desktop. Some will pine but many will rejoice at its loss. When you start StarOffice 6.0 you are now just presented with the Writer word processor application. From the *File/New* drop-down menu you can start up any of the other applications. This now means that StarOffice fits in more comfortably with your desktop and the themes you have chosen to run and is much better integrated all round.

For each new StarOffice 6.0 application, its own desktop window is also started, so you can position where and how you like.



Star Office 6.0

Supplier	Sun Microsystems
Price	£52.99(RRP)
Web:	http://www.sun.com/staroffice/
Requirements	Kernel 2.2.13 or higher, glibc 2.1.2 or higher, 64Mb RAM, 250Mb free disk space
For:	Possibly the best all-round Office suite there is
Against:	If you want Free, go for OpenOffice.org

rating

