

It's not only KDE that has made a giant leap to version 3.2; the KOffice developers have been busy enhancing the programs that make up the Office suite. Version 1.3 was released at the end of January [1].

Installation

KOffice 1.3 is available in a range of binaries and sources from the main KOffice website at <http://www.koffice.org/download/>. Binaries, at time of press, exist for Fedora core 1, Suse 8.0, 8.2 and 9.0 and Conectiva and are designed to run with KDE 3.1 or later. Other distributions will have to compile from sources.

If you want to compile KOffice yourself, you will need KDE, version 3.1 of the Qt library, and the accompanying developer packages. Type `tar -xjf koffice-1.3.tar.bz2` to unpack your downloaded tar archive. Change to the new directory, `koffice-1.3`, and type the `./configure` and `make`. KOffice takes a while to compile. Finally as the `root` user, enter `make install` to install KOffice.

After completing these steps, enter `koshell` to launch the KOffice workspace (see Figure 1).

If you just want to take a look at the new KOffice, and have a fast Internet connection, you can download *Slax* [4] off the Internet. The live distribution is based on Slackware, and includes both the latest KOffice, and the latest devel-

KOffice 1.3

A New Office

The next generation of the KDE Office package, KOffice, has been released. Version 1.3 shows evidence of attention to detail, bug fixes, and a number of new features. **BY FRANK WIEDUWILT**

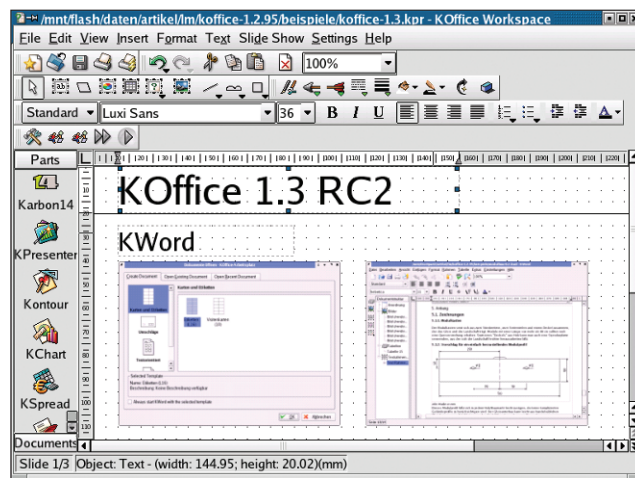


Figure 1: The workspace is the KOffice control center.

oper version of KDE 3.2. You can use *Slax* to test both without modifying your own system.

The workspace is the frame which the individual components of KOffice populate. You can launch a program by double-clicking its icon in the parts area on the left of the frame. Click on the *Files* button to display a list of open documents.

KWord

When you launch KWord, a few things about the new document templates immediately catch the eye. Besides text only templates, there are also templates for business cards, address labels, and envelopes.

Some details of the word processor have also been improved. There is a new hyphenation facility, for example. The developers have also improved the use of text frames, allowing users to complete simple **DTP** tasks. You can now convert tables to body

text, or sort tables with user definable criteria.

Users can now save paragraph styles as templates. To do so, move the cursor to the paragraph with the formatting you want to save, select *Format / Create Style From Selection* in the menu, enter a name for the stylesheet, and use it just like the default styles supplied with the program.

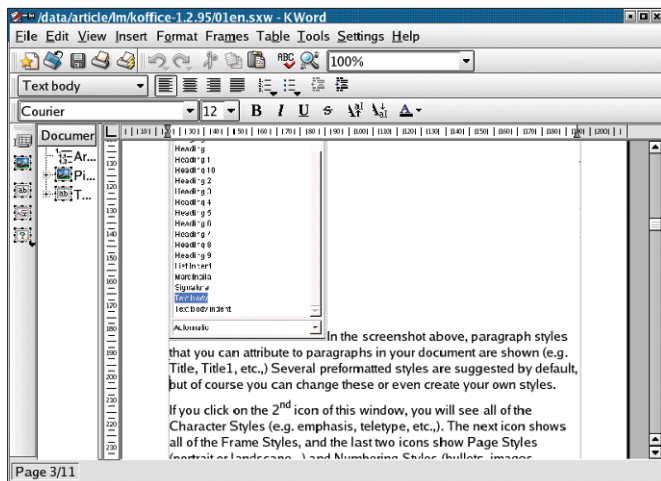


Figure 2: KWord with a lot of improvements under the hood.

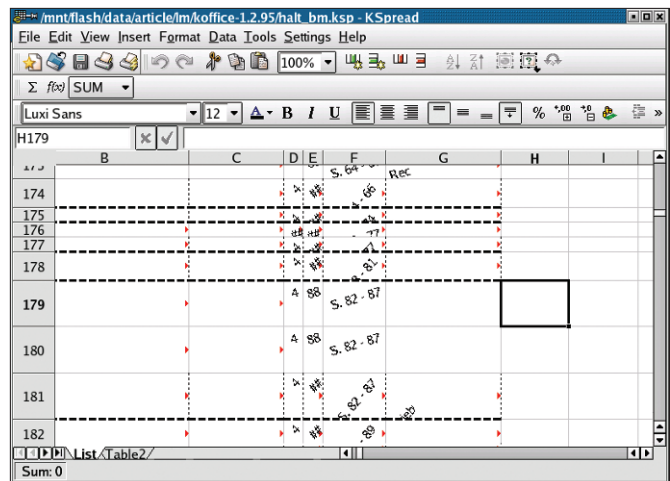


Figure 3: KSpread's import filters need some improvement.

There are a few new file filters, such as import and export filters for documents in OpenOffice Writer format, and the unique capability of the word processor to directly load and edit PDF files.

The quality of these filters leaves a lot to be desired, unfortunately. They should work fine with simple documents, but with more complicated layouts, especially if they contain complex tables, the results tend to bear very little resemblance to the original document.

Let's not forget KWord's improved performance. It allows you to work far more fluently, and is a pleasant change on older hardware.

KSspread

The KSspread spreadsheet has also had a lot of TLC applied. Password protected cells, and worksheets, new templates, and the ability to apply a uniform page format to a whole folder or a whole sheet are the new features to look out for.

The new import and export filters for the OpenOffice spreadsheet application suffer from similar failings to the KWord filters. Although you should have no difficulty importing simple spreadsheets, more complex content and embedded images will cause a few issues (see Figure 3). In contrast to this, we had no trouble at all converting to and from *Gnumeric*.

KPresenter

The presentation tool in the KOffice suite has a few notable enhancements. The developers have removed some bugs in the rendering of graphics, added an enhanced HTML export feature, and a spellchecker for text fields. The granularity of the snap to grid feature allows for more precise positioning of elements on the page.

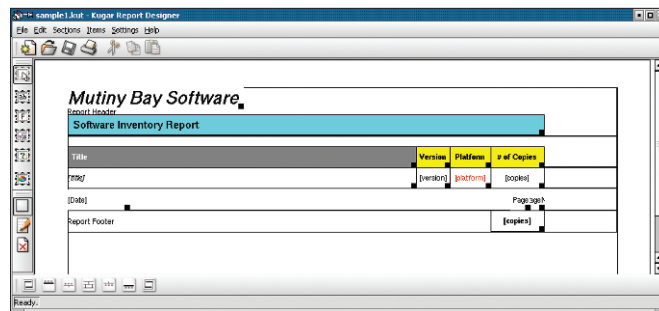


Figure 4: Generating reports with Kugar Designer.

This said, it is difficult to exchange data with other programs. Apart from other KOffice formats, KPresenter supports only **SVG** and is thus incapable of importing files directly from other presentation programs. At least you can export files to the OpenOffice Impress format without any trouble.

Kugar

Kugar is a front-end for creating reports from various database systems. The

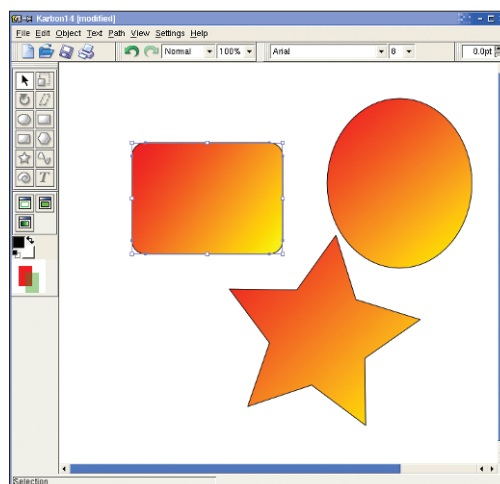


Figure 5: Karbon14 is the KOffice drawing program.

developers completely reworked the program for version 1.3 of the Office suite. As a result, Kugar is now a fully-fledged KOffice component.

The *Kugar Designer* allows you to generate reports. You can define the appearance of the report just like using a graphics package, with text and database

fields, and lines. Calculation fields allow you to output results, and templates are available to create perfect printed output (see Figure 4).

Karbon14

The new vector drawing program from the KOffice package replaced its predecessor, Kontour, quite a while back. Karbon14 can handle

the typical range of basic geometric elements and allows you to create simple drawings and illustrations.

The program is not suitable for precise construction drawings, however, as it lacks basic functions, such as grids, snap to grid, and rules (see Figure 5).

The embedded text tool is extremely powerful, however, with no end of text manipulation techniques and the ability to embed text in other objects. Each element can be assigned fillings with colors, gradients, or patterns.

Unfortunately, Karbon14 is extremely unstable. The program crashed randomly in our lab, losing any data that had not been saved. You should avoid the program in production environments for the time being.

And the Others?

Finally, the KOffice suite provides two applications (KChart and Kivio) for creating business graphics; the latter being specializing in flowcharts. KChart can embed various types of graphics in other KOffice documents.

The database front-end *Kexi* [2] didn't make the deadline for the current version. The developers have promised to release a stable version in the course of this year, before the next KOffice release.

The image processor *Krita* is incomplete at time of writing, and also failed to make the KOffice 1.3 deadline. ■

GLOSSARY

DTP: "Desktop Publishing" is the art of creating layouts and producing printed materials on a PC.

SVG: The "Scalable Vector Graphics" standard for vector graphics is based on XML. Many Web browsers have plug-ins that allow them

to render this format.

Vector graphic: In contrast to pixel graphics, the image is defined as a collection of mathematical functions. This allows for editing of individual elements independently of their surroundings.

INFO

[1] KOffice: <http://www.koffice.org/>

[2] Kexi: <http://www.kexi-project.org/>

[3] Download location:
<http://download.kde.org/download.php?url=stable/koffice-1.3/src/>

[4] Slax: <http://slax.linux-live.org/>