

## **BASICS & BEYOND -- Session #14 -- April '09**

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### **OpenOffice Suite by Sun Microsystems --**

Have you ever wanted or wished you had Microsoft Office Suite 2007, but you did not want to put out the big bucks that it takes to own it? Would you like to have an office suite that is as good as, maybe even better than, MS Office, for FREE? Then consider downloading OpenOffice 3.0 from Sun Microsystems.

OpenOffice 3.0 is a suite which includes programs to create word documents, spread sheets, presentations, data bases and includes a “drawing” program. The original OpenOffice suite (hereinafter referred to as “OO”) is based on Sun Microsystems (hereinafter referred to as “SM”) Star Office suite, which was developed by SM to compete with Microsoft. In 2000 SM released the “source code” of Star Office (the blueprints, so to speak) to the “open source community”. In other words, SM invited programmers and developers to improve upon its Star Office suite, and to offer a “new” suite, free of charge, to anyone in the world who wished to have the program. Thus, OO was born, but under the auspices and watchful eye of SM. Version 3.0 of OO, supporting over 80 different languages, was released in Nov. 2008 and over 50 million computer users worldwide have downloaded this new version, so far.

Listed below are the programs found in the OO suite, with a brief description of each:

**WRITER** – A word processor similar in functionality to MS Word and Word Perfect. It can export Portable Document Files (PDF) files with no additional software, and can function as a basic WYSIWYG editor for creating and editing web pages for producing text documents. WRITER is compatible with MS Word.

**CALC** -- A spreadsheet similar to MS Excel or Lotus 1-2-3. CALC provides a number of features not present in Excel, including a system which automatically defines series for graphing, based on the layout of the user’s data. CALC,, compatible with MS Excel, can also export spreadsheets to the PDF format.

**IMPRESS** -- A presentation program similar to MS PowerPoint. It can export presentations to Adobe Flash (SWF) files, allowing them to be played on any computer with a Flash player installed. It also includes the ability to create PDF files, and the ability to read Microsoft PowerPoint's .ppt format. Although IMPRESS lacks ready-made presentation designs, templates are readily available on the Internet.

**BASE** -- A database management program similar to MS Access. BASE allows for the creation and manipulation of databases, and the building of forms and reports to provide easy access to data.

**DRAW** -- A vector graphics editor and diagramming tool, similar to MS Visio and comparable in features to early versions of CorelDRAW. It features versatile "connectors" between shapes, which are available in a range of line styles and facilitate building drawings such as flowcharts. It has similar features to Desktop publishing software such as Scribus and MS Publisher. DRAW can export its creations to the PDF format.

**FORMULA (MATH)** -- A tool for creating and editing mathematical formulas.

The interesting and neat thing about OO programs is that they can interact with almost all of the programs created with MS Office. You can open, edit, modify and save programs written with MS Office programs, and you can save documents written in OO into a Microsoft format. As an example, you can save a text document written in OO in either the normal OO .odt format or in a MS Word 2003 .xml or .doc format.

Another interesting and neat thing about OO is that when you use one of the OO programs the look and feel of an OO program is that of a MS Office program. They look almost identical, with the exception that an OO program may have a few more options on the tool bar than you would find on the similar MS program tool bar. The "learning curve" to be able to use the OO programs is relatively simple as most of the commands used in MS programs are the same in OO. The similarities between an OO program and a MS program are really quite amazing. And, "Help" can be found in numerous places: in each program, at the SM website and on line.

So, why doesn't everyone use OO since it is totally free? An interesting question. But, as I mentioned above, over 50 million computers have been downloaded with OO version 3.0. If you are still using MS Office 2003, or earlier, you just might want to give OO a try. And, if you only have MS Works on your computer you definitely should look into the OO suite.

So how does one get the OO suite? Simply go to [www.openoffice.org](http://www.openoffice.org) and click on "I want to download OpenOffice.org". On the ensuing page go to the bottom and click on the link "Starting download from". When the box asks you if you want to "Run" or "Save" click "Save". This will download the file in a compressed mode and put a icon on your desktop. And, remember, even though you are downloading a compressed OO file it could take up to 15 minutes with high speed internet to do so, as this is a very large program. Once the program is downloaded to your computer click on the OO installation icon on your desktop. This will start the "unpacking" of the compressed OO files and installation will ensue. Patience in installing the program is of the utmost importance. If you click on something and nothing immediately happens, or you do not see the normal "hour glass" twirling, just sit back for a moment and relax. It will come.

During the installation process you will be given the opportunity to select to have the full suite installed on your computer or you can select to only install specific programs. If you do not want BASE (the data base program) or CALC (the spreadsheet program) or FORMULA (the math program to create formulas) select "custom installation" and choose not to install these programs.

As I mentioned, this is a very large program, just like MS Office, and I am not sure as to whether you would want to download it with a DSL modem. However, if that is your only method by all means give it a try.

**PLEASE NOTE:** I do have the OO installation program on a "flash drive" and if you would like to use it to install the OO program please contact me for obtaining the drive. Using the "flash drive" will result in an approximate 15 minute installation process.

Bottom line: I am surprisingly impressed with OO suite. Give it a try, as I think you will be too.

### **SAFE MODE --**

Normally when we start up our computer in Safe Mode we do so because we are having a problem with the computer. When we use Safe Mode we are starting up the computer with a "bare bones" operating system, so to speak. We want only those necessary programs, devices and modules to boot up and put us

on the Windows desktop. If we can get the computer to open into Windows we can then try and determine as to whether our problem is a hardware or software problem. And, if the computer boots normally into Windows, in the Safe Mode, we can probably assume that our problem is not a Windows software problem but one relating to other software, or a problem with a piece of hardware that was not started in Safe Mode.

There may be times, however, when you will want to boot up in Safe Mode even when your computer is functioning normally. It has been suggested that for the best and ultimate defragmentation of a hard drive that it should be done in Safe Mode. You might also want to be in Safe Mode if you believe that you have virus on your computer and you are running a virus scan/removal program.

In MS Windows you can access Safe Mode during initial start up by either pressing and holding the F8 key, or by continually tapping the F8 key. You will know that you have entered Safe Mode if you see "Safe Mode" in the four corners of your desktop.

### **MS CONFIGURATION UTILITY** –

Built into Windows is the MS configuration utility known as MSCONFIG. Although this utility is basically used for trouble shooting we can also use it to help our computer boot up faster and to overall run faster. As we know, the more programs that start up when the computer boots up, more of the system memory will be used. And, as more and more memory is used for programs that are running, the slower our computer will run. So, it behooves us to have the least number of programs starting up as are necessary and needed, and there are numerous programs that simply are not needed.

To find out just which programs start up when Windows starts we can go to the MS configuration utility by clicking **START > RUN** and typing **MSCONFIG** in the RUN box and then clicking **OK**. Once the configuration utility opens click on the **STARTUP** tab. The ensuing screen will show, via a check mark in the box to the left of the program, those that automatically startup when your computer starts up. If you see a program(s) that you don't need on start up (most can be started later if you need them) click on the check mark in the box to remove it. When you are finished removing check marks click on **APPLY** and close the configuration utility. You will then see a message that states that your computer must be restarted to have your changes apply. Click on **RESTART** and you are finished.

In general, do not remove a check mark if you are not absolutely certain whether you need a specific program or not. However, if you do find that you eliminated a program that you do need on start up, simply go back into the configuration utility and put a check mark back in the program's box. If you have downloaded programs over the years you may find a number of them in STARTUP that you really don't need, or want. Downloaded programs have a propensity for placing themselves into the STARTUP folder without your permission or desire.

### **MS SERVICES** –

In addition to looking at those programs in the STARTUP folder we can also check to see which SERVICES are running on our computer. Follow the above instructions but click on the **SERVICES** tab. In general most of the programs listed in the SERVICES folder are used by your computer. But, you may find a few programs that you can probably eliminate from starting up automatically. Again, if you are not sure what a program does, or if it is needed, it is best to just leave it alone.

