

ODF Turns Five: A Look Back on the Journey to a Mature Open Standard Document Format

May 1, 2010, marks the fifth anniversary of the OpenDocument Format (OpenDocument v1.0 specification) [approval as an OASIS Standard](#). Although the full history of ODF dates back well before this five year period as a recognized industry standard, this date marks the unofficial beginning of a campaign for document freedom that many people probably didn't expect would be so durable, or so significant.

ODF was created on the principles that interoperability and innovation were paramount, and that these are based on open standards. Not coincidentally, ODF's creation coincided with the growing support of [open ICT architectures](#), which grew from the Web model where the standardization of HTML, an open, royalty-free standard, enabled the Web to be an open platform that enabled much innovation on top of it. The key was interoperability, or the ability of multiple parties to communicate electronically, without the need that they all run the same application software or operating system. Also critical to the development of ODF was the introduction of OpenOffice.org, the open source office suite that first implemented the format, and the rise of XML as a widely-supported foundational standard for describing structured data.

In the pre-ODF era, office productivity application innovation had all but halted. The “.doc” emerged as a de-facto—but proprietary—format, but it only worked well with one vendor's applications on one vendor's operating system. At that time, people—more importantly governments—didn't have much control of their own documents and there was little choice of applications.

However, over the last five years, ODF has led directly to the current environment where governments around the world increasingly understand and appreciate the value and utility of open formats, and more governments have made open standards-based solutions an essential feature of their eGovernment strategies and open ICT architectures. As a result, ODF is today an integral part of the global open movement.

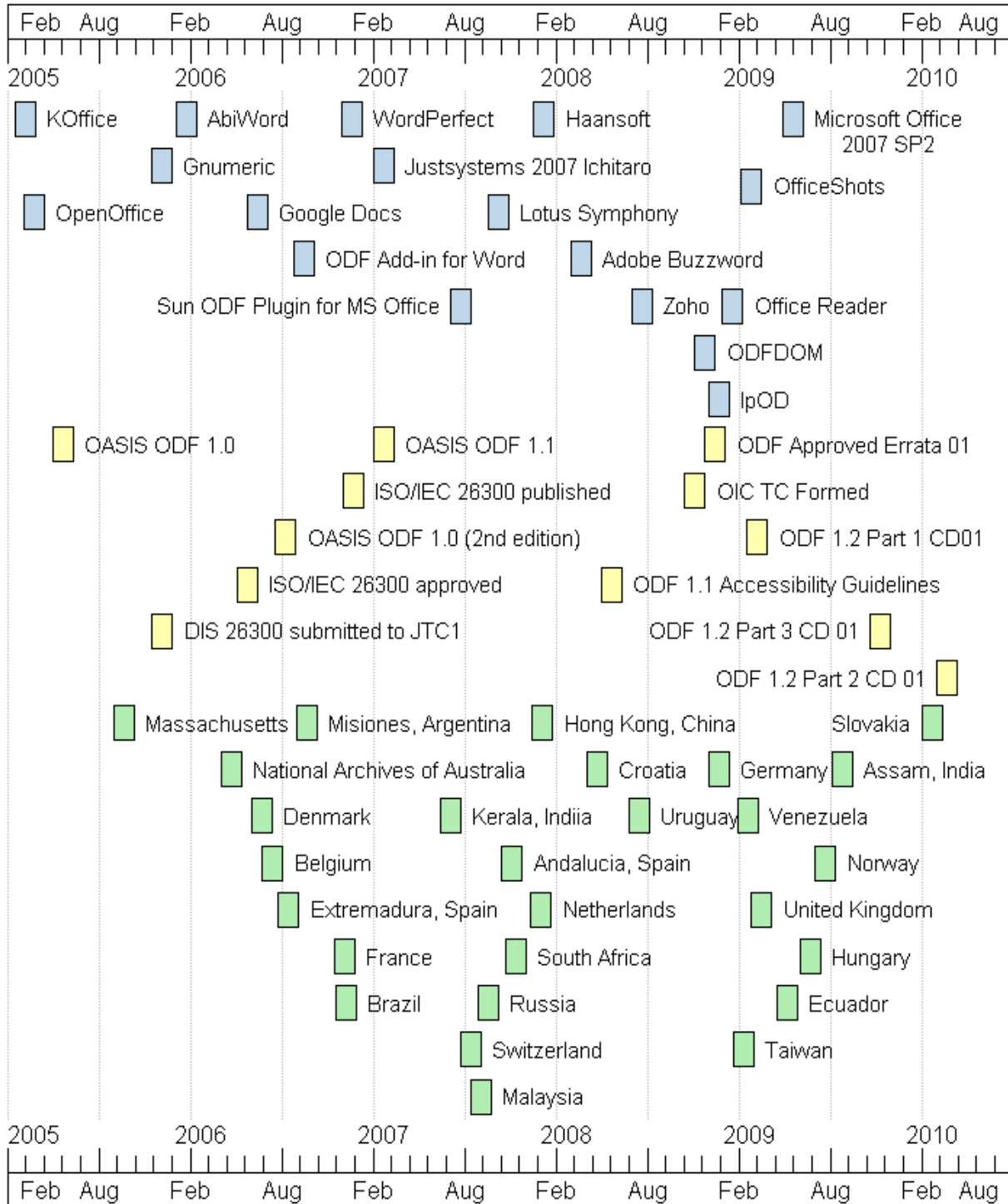
Five years, twenty seven governments and myriad applications later, ODF is very well established—albeit continually a work in progress like any worthy format. Not only has ODF exceeded even the high expectations of many initial supporters, it can said without question that ODF has permanently altered the evolution of document formats for the better. Of course, the next five years are likely to be even more important, as more governments continue to implement their open frameworks. While we cannot gaze into a crystal ball to predict the next five years, following is a summary of ODF's accomplishments—including a time line of these milestones—of the last five years. Congratulations, and happy birthday, ODF:

Standardization – After the initial approval of ODF 1.0 in OASIS on May 1st 2005, ODF was submitted to ISO/IEC JTC1 for approval, where it was unanimously approved as an International Standard in May 2006. February 2007 saw the approval of OASIS ODF 1.1, bringing several accessibility improvements. ODF 1.2, with RDF semantic web metadata, a detailed spreadsheet formula language and other features is expected to be approved by OASIS later in 2010.

Government Adoptions – ODF has become widely recognized and increasingly accepted by public sector authorities who increasingly understand and appreciate the value and utility of open formats, while more governments make open standards-based solutions an essential feature of their eGovernment strategies. As a result, ODF is today an integral part of the global open movement. To date, [Twenty seven governments](#) (national and provincial) have adopted pro-ODF open standards policies. These adoptions have occurred through laws, executive decisions, interoperability frameworks, or policy initiatives requiring or recommending the use of ODF between and among government agencies and in their interactions with the public.

ODF Application Support – ODF is widely implemented and available on all major platforms, including traditional desktop editors, as well as web and mobile applications. At this time, all leading office suites support ODF, as do an increasing number of mobile devices. The rise of ODF and demand for open formats has coincided—not coincidentally in our view—with a proliferation of new office productivity applications not seen since the PC was first introduced in the 1980s.

5 Years of Open Document Format



Legend: ■ Standardization ■ Products ■ Adoption

This chart shows milestones of the first five years of ODF as a recognized industry standard in three key categories. "Standardization" refers to approval and publication dates in OASIS and ISO/IEC. "Products" is a representative sample (non-comprehensive) of support of the standard into particular products, where such dates could be ascertained. "Adoption" refers to government publication or announcement of pro-ODF policies.