

Le Massachusetts opte pour les logiciels libres

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Massachusetts software switch set to hit Microsoft

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The state of Massachusetts has laid out a plan to switch all its workers away from Microsoft's Word, Excel and other desktop software applications, delivering what would be one of the most significant setbacks to the software company's battle against open-source software in its home market.

The decision by one of the most populous states in the US could influence others which have yet to consider the issue, said Sam Hiser, an open source consultant and author.

The state said yesterday that all electronic documents "created and saved" by state employees would have to be based on open formats, with the switch to start at the beginning of 2007.

Documents created using Microsoft's Office software are produced in formats that are controlled by Microsoft, putting them outside the state's definition.

In a paper laying out its future technology strategy yesterday, the state also specified only two document types that could be used in the future - Open-Document, which is used in open source applications like Open Office, and PDF, a widely used standard for electronic documents.

The switch to open formats such as these was needed to ensure that the state could guarantee that citizens could open and read electronic documents in the future, according to Massachusetts - something that was not possible using closed formats.

The proposal, which is open for comment until the end of next week before it takes effect, would represent a big boost for open source software such as Open Office, which is created by volunteer programmers and made available free of charge.

Like Linux, an open-source operating system that competes with Microsoft's Windows, OpenOffice is widely used in some emerging countries, though it has limited use in the US, said Mr Hiser.

Microsoft has already taken steps to head off the threat from moves like the one proposed by Massachusetts, applying recognition from a technology industry standards body for recognition of its own formats as open standards.

However, the new formats, due to be used in the next version of Office, which is expected to come out late next year, would still include some proprietary elements, and are specifically excluded from the Massachusetts proposal.

The Office suite of software, which includes Word, Excel, PowerPoint and Outlook, produces about 30 per cent of Microsoft's revenues and 40 per cent of operating profits.

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