

The changing face of charts in OpenOffice.org

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The charting component is probably the least satisfactory part of OpenOffice.org. A few minutes with the issue tracker shows that, since OpenOffice.org 2.0 was released, 62 issues have been filed for charting. By contrast, the bibliography component and the formula editor, two other problematic subsystems that are comparable in size, have nine and 27 issues files against them respectively. Work has begun on many of the issues about charts, but complete relief is unlikely to come until the final release of Chart 2, the rewriting of the charting component that is due to be part of the as-yet unscheduled 2.6 version of the office suite. However, those who are impatient to see what changes are coming can get a few ideas from the recent release of Milestone 8, an alpha version of Chart 2 that gives the first glimpse of what improvements to expect, not just in the way of bug fixes, but, more importantly, in interface improvements.

According to the home page for its development, Chart 2 is being written because "the current chart implementation has become unmaintainable over the years" -- a reference, no doubt, to the notorious crypticness of OpenOffice.org source code as a whole. However, rather than sidestepping the difficulty of learning the code by using plug-ins, OpenOffice.org's charting team has chosen "to reimplement the chart module from scratch to create a useable base for further development and integration of missing features."

Milestone 8 of Chart 2 is available for download in a developer's version of the entire office suite. This version does not allow saving, printing, or any other system calls, but its files can be untarred and ready for use without logging in as the root user.

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