

Press release

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## **New OpenOffice.org Writer Extension Produces Braille**

The Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (K.U.Leuven) today released an extension for OpenOffice.org Writer that enables users to save documents as Braille or to send them directly to a Braille embosser. "odt2braille" (<http://odt2braille.sourceforge.net/>) is a freeware extension for OpenOffice.org, a office suite that is freely available for Microsoft Windows, Mac OS X, Linux/Unix and Solaris.

Due to the emergence of technologies such as audio books and synthetic speech on PCs in the last few decades the proportion of blind persons who know Braille has decreased. Some people consider Braille as an arcane system that will become marginalised or replaced by audio books and synthetic speech. Nevertheless, Braille is still important: it is not only a reading system but also a writing system, and its defenders maintain that teaching Braille to blind children is important for the development of functional literacy. Braille is also indispensable for persons who are deaf-blind.

odt2braille is available for Microsoft Windows (XP, Vista and Windows 7), and will later also become available for Mac OS X and Linux/Unix. The current version of odt2braille supports eight Braille embossers, and additional embossers will be added later. One of the supported embossers is the Elekul, which was developed at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven by Prof. Dr. Guido François, and which was the first system that could emboss Braille on both sides of the same sheet of paper.

odt2braille is being developed in the context of the ÆGIS project, a research & development project supported by the European Commission. The ÆGIS project develops software for persons with disabilities, covering the desktop platform, the Web ("Rich Internet Applications", i.e. web-based applications that provide user interfaces and functionality that were formerly only available on the desktop) and mobile devices. In November 2009, the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven released another OpenOffice.org extension in the context of the ÆGIS project: odt2daisy (<http://odt2daisy.sourceforge.net/>), an OpenOffice.org Writer extension that converts text documents to audio books in the DAISY format.

### **Downloading and Using odt2braille**

odt2braille can be downloaded from <http://odt2braille.sourceforge.net/>. This website also contains installation instructions and a manual.

odt2braille is suited to both Braille experts and occasional Braille users. In addition to converting text documents to Braille, it also allows users to directly input Braille in a document. In other words, users can determine which specific Braille codes should be transferred to paper. The keys S, D, F, J, K and L can be used to simulate the keys on a Braille keyboard.

More importantly, text documents can be converted to Braille *automatically*. This type of conversion can also be done with other — typically commercial — applications, but odt2braille has important advantages:

Firstly, the whole process runs in a single environment, i.e. OpenOffice.org:

- creating the document,

- formatting the document (including both rich formatting for traditional printing and basic formatting for Braille),
- printing and/or embossing the document.

Secondly, all data are saved in a single file:

- the content,
- the formatting for print (for sighted users),
- and the formatting for Braille.

Consequently, there are no separate versions but a single document, which avoids synchronisation issues between several versions of the same document.

The new functionality is available through the “Braille” menu, which is added to OpenOffice.org Writer when odt2braille is installed.

The Braille conversion is an intuitive process and the output can be tailored by the user. Users with little or no Braille experience can rely on the existing Braille conventions. In this case the Braille conversion requires very little user interaction. odt2braille is also suited to experienced Braille users who prefer to use their own formatting conventions.

The list of supported Braille embossers is still limited and consists of certain models by Interpoint NV (i.e. Elekul), Index Braille and Braillo Norway AS.

It is also possible to export documents to computer files that can be read by other Braille software. In this way, Braille conversion and embossing can be separated in time, and the user can still modify the Braille document before sending it to the embosser.

## Open-Source Software

odt2braille, odt2daisy and most other software developed in the ÆGIS project are or will be available as “open-source software”. This means that users will not only be able to download the finished product but also the programming code or “source code”. They can also modify and improve the source code, provided that they make their changes available to the developers or the community that maintains the software. This process enables a community of users to make improvements to the software and enables these improvements to be quickly available to other users.

## About OpenOffice.org

Several partners in the ÆGIS project are making contributions to OpenOffice.org, including Katholieke Universiteit Leuven and Oracle. The OpenOffice.org Community is an international team of volunteer and sponsored contributors who develop, translate, support, and promote the leading open source office productivity suite, OpenOffice.org. OpenOffice.org’s leading edge software technology (UNO) is also available for developers, systems integrators, etc. to use in OpenOffice.org extensions or in their own applications.

OpenOffice.org uses the OpenDocument Format OASIS Standard (ISO/IEC 26300) as well as supporting legacy file formats such as Microsoft Office, and is available on major computing platforms in over 100 languages. OpenOffice.org software is provided under the GNU Lesser General Public License (LGPL) and may be used free of charge for any purpose, private or commercial.

The OpenOffice.org Community acknowledges generous sponsorship from a number of

companies, including Oracle, the founding sponsor and primary contributor. OpenOffice.org is considered by Public administrations and people working at all levels of government (local / federal / regional / national etcetera) as their ideal software solution.

## **ÆGIS Project**

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