

The South Bay Mug

MACINTOSH

A Monthly Cupful For South Bay Apple Mac User Group Members, June 2006

MACHinations

A personal view from Bob

Word Alternatives

Microsoft Word is the undisputed standard for word processing in business. It's usually bought as part of Microsoft Office, which also includes Excel, Powerpoint and Entourage, all very good programs. Still, some who only need Word may balk at its high price. Fortunately, there are many Word alternatives that open and save in the Word format. I'm going to give my initial impressions of three open-source programs, all available as free downloads.

In September 2002 I wrote a review of Microsoft Word X, using Word, with the same layout as my other articles, two sections with both in-line and floating graphics, and an initial drop cap, like the "M" at the beginning of this article. Now I did the same thing, writing my article in OpenOffice, NeoOffice and AbiWord.

OpenOffice 2.0 is the most advanced, receives the most attention and has an excellent spreadsheet (Excel alternative), but is the least comfortable to Mac Users with no Linux or PC experience. It requires Apple's X11, which must be installed with the System. Menus, key commands and Open/Save dialogs are very PC-like. It has a limited set of fonts, although it did import fonts from converted Word documents. Drop Caps are supported but I had trouble using them.

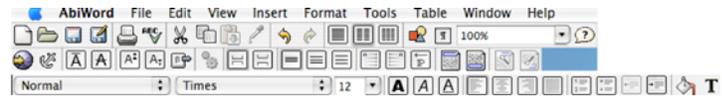


The article you're now reading was written using **NeoOffice 1.2.1**, another open-source (free) alternative to Microsoft Word. It's part of a suite of Office-compatible programs that includes Spreadsheet, Presentation, and Drawing components. I found it easy to use and it converted my Word documents most accurately.

It's very Mac-like except for the Open/Save dialogs that are reminiscent of the PC.



AbiWord has the most Mac-like interface but did the poorest job converting my Word documents. Floating graphics were missing and it didn't support drop caps. Although it's a light version of Word, it's the easiest to use and may be best for those with simple needs.



AppleWorks (OS 9 and X) was bundled free with consumer Macs. It opens many Word files, as well as those in many other formats. Although it's a bit long in the tooth, it's fast and has an amazing number of features. It includes good spreadsheet, database, drawing and painting modules. I still use it a lot.

A year ago Apple introduced **Pages**, a cocoa-based word processing program (bundled with Keynote, \$79). I now use it for my articles. Pages is modern in its handling of text and graphics and does a good job converting Word documents, but doesn't support drop caps and some other advanced features.

TextEdit is a basic text editor/word processor that is included with Mac OS X. It opens and saves simple Word files but doesn't handle graphic and is otherwise fairly limited.

Summary: Nothing beats Word, but NeoOffice is my favorite open-source alternative. I'm sure if I spent more time with it I'd become fluent in its use.



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