WILHELM TUX

Campaign for Free Software

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MEDIA RELEASE

Wilhelm Tux – Campaign for Free Software
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Fundraising: PDF signatures in LibreOffice

LibreOffice, the wide-spread Free Office Suite, can be used by anyone for free. It is being jointly developed by many volunteers and companies, therefore offers a wealth of functionality, and is published under a Free Software license. This license makes sure that it is possible to develop own, additional functions (or to have them developed) and to then integrate them back into the LibreOffice project.

Wilhelm Tux wants to support this business model with an improved feature: The creation of digitally signed PDF documents directly in LibreOffice. Therefore we have started a public fundraising campaign.

By Wilhelm Tux

Flexible business model is ideal for extending functionality

Since Open Source programs are usually free of cost for the user, it tends to be overlooked that their development does indeed generate cost on the developers' side. Therefore it is often companies who, together with many individual, voluntary developers, make decisive contributions to the professional development of the most well-known Open Source programs (such as Firefox, Thunderbird, or LibreOffice). The important point is that the programs being developed that way are covered by Free Software licenses, so they are not the property of a single company.

These Free Software licenses now make sure that it is possible also for others to professionally develop stable, enterprise-ready functions and extensions to these programs. Obviously, this again means effort and cost, and therefore a market has established itself, which actually is driven by the real requirements and needs of companies and individual users, rather than by the rules of large software corporations. Because all those extensions and functions that are developed under contract are merged back into the free development branch.

Wilhelm Tux wants to support and advance this very flexible business model and therefore is organizing a public fundraising in order to make a functionality publicly available, which we are convinced is important for businesses as well as individual users of LibreOffice: The creation of digitally signed PDF documents directly in LibreOffice.

Digital vs. hand-written signatures

Today, many contracts are still signed by hand, even though digital signatures are basically accepted as equivalent and therefore juridically valid. Many of the tools required for creating digitally signed documents, on the other hand are cumbersome and restricted in use and often quite costly.

The purpose of digital signatures is the same one as that of hand-written ones: to prove the authenticity of the signed document. Instead of paper and pencil, the exchange of electronic documents makes use of digital keys which confirm the identity of the author and the authenticity of the document. Digital signatures are one of the prerequisites for sending (and archiving) important documents in electronic form. Just think of a contract, where both parties must be absolutely sure to sign the exactly same document.

Currently, digitally signed PDF documents can only be created with additional, usually proprietary software, that often is tailored to work with the programs of exactly one vendor.

Extended functionality: lean, important, and efficient

The Office Suite LibreOffice can already digitally sign normal office documents in its native, ISO-certified ODF format, but it cannot do this for the PDF documents it is able to generate from them. But once the "experimental features" of LibreOffice are activated in the Options tab, the function "Export as PDF" will show an additional tab "Digital Signatures" with the corresponding functionality. Which, at the moment, does not work satisfactorily though, because the code that was developed in a "Google Summer of Code" project in 2012 could not be finished at that time.

But the code is there and thanks to the work done then, there remains a mere estimated 8 days of development to finalize the feature. After talking to LibreOffice developers, Wilhelm Tux has chosen the company Collabora as an ideal partner. Collabora merges all of the modifications and extensions done for customers back into the main LibreOffice project. The additional feature "digital PDF signatures" therefore will remain Free Software!

Fundraising: "The whole world" benefits

In the first phase, Wilhelm Tux will try to gather the required funds by collecting pledges from enterprises, institutions and individuals. We require a total of 8'000 € (ca. 10'000

Fr.) - which is not terribly much, as we find, given that "the whole world" will benefit from it, not just those who purchase costly licenses.

As soon as the required amount has been pledged, the fundraising will be closed. Wilhelm Tux will then commission Collabora to finalize the existing "experimental" feature for the generation of digitally signed PDF documents in production grade and to integrate it into the stable branch of LibreOffice.

More information:

► Main page "PDF signatures in LibreOffice": http://wilhelmtux.ch/?MID=11&PID=93
(German version: http://wilhelmtux.ch/?MID=10&PID=90)

► Background: http://wilhelmtux.ch/?MID=11&PID=92
(German version: http://wilhelmtux.ch/?MID=10&PID=89)

► Donor/sponsor registration: http://wilhelmtux.ch/?MID=11&PID=94
(German version: http://wilhelmtux.ch/?MID=10&PID=91)

About Wilhelm Tux

Wilhelm Tux is one of the oldest associations in Switzerland dedicated to the advancement of Free Software, especially in public and government institutions.

Already in 2002, a legendary paper co-edited by Dr. Dietrich Feist was addressed to the members of the Swiss Parliament in an effort to raise awareness for Free Software in the governmental sector. Another publication, which was well received by the interested public, was our analysis of a decision by the Federal Supreme Court of Switzerland regarding IT procurement in 2011. Today, the association Wilhelm Tux consists mainly of a core group of active members, the board and a few thousand subscribers to our three mailing lists as well as registered supporters.

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