

MS WINDOWS APPS ON LINUX

CrossOver Office 2.1



Getting to grips with Linux when it's your first time is hard, so why not try using your old Windows apps? Paul Hudson shows us how it's done...

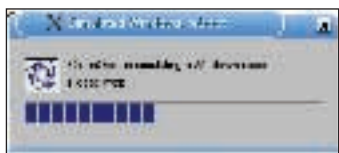
BUYER INFO

Application based on Wine that runs Windows APIs on Linux to allow full MS Office productivity and more.

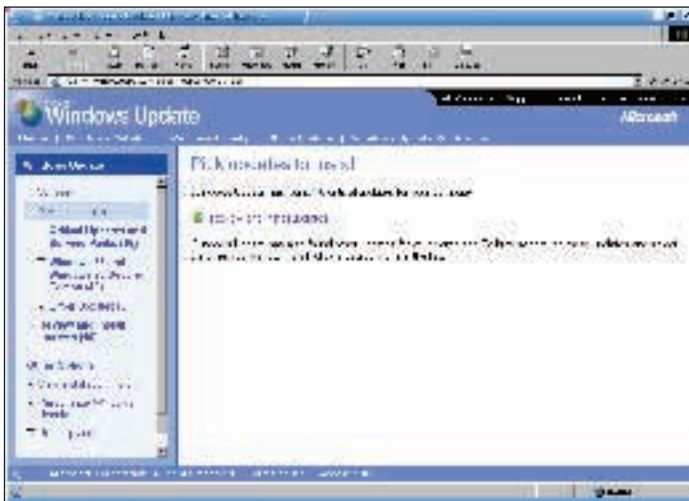
- **DEVELOPER** Codeweavers
- **PRICE** From US\$59.95
- **WEB** www.codeweavers.com

We all know that the big advantage to using Linux at home is that you have a great selection of software at no cost, and you can pick and choose what suits you best. When it comes to office software, some people use *OpenOffice.org*, some, including Linus Torvalds, use *KOffice*, others use *Abiword* and *Gnumeric*, and still others, including the *Linux Format* team, rarely stray out of *Kate*. While this choice is a great boon for those of us comfortable with using Linux, we often get emails from newcomers saying that the choice overwhelms them and that Linux is "just too different" for them to get to grips with.

Although we do recommend people switch away from proprietary software, we also feel there's a real advantage to be had by letting people continue to use software they are used to after they've switched to Linux - *VMWare*, for example, allows people to run all of Windows in a virtual machine, and therefore means they can stagger their migration to Linux. While this is good for people who need all the functionality of Windows, it does mean an awful lot of overhead if all you want to do is open an *Excel* document that *OpenOffice.org* doesn't manage to get quite right.



CrossOver Office automatically 'reboots' its fake Windows setup as necessary, and luckily it only takes a few seconds.



Luckily CrossOver Office doesn't simulate the security holes, as Windows Update thinks that we'd have to download 59 fixes and updates!

If this describes your current way of working, you could benefit from trying out Codeweavers' *CrossOver Office*, now in v2.1. Codeweavers hit the headlines when it released *CrossOver Plugin*, which allows many ActiveX plugins for *Internet Explorer* run on Linux, including the Apple Quicktime and Windows Media Player Player plugins - functionality that is still not available outside of Codeweavers apps. This release was then followed up by *CrossOver Office*, which allowed *Microsoft Office 97* and *2000* to work smoothly in Linux.

The 2.0/2.1 release of *CrossOver Office* adds support for *Office XP*, *Photoshop 7*, *Dreamweaver*, and *Flash*, which should be able to attract even more users to Linux by making their favourite programs available. Of course, the key problem with producing a simulated Windows environment like this is that you're always playing catch-up with the latest release of the software you support, but we'll get onto that later.

Leap of faith

Codeweavers bases its products on the *Wine* project, which is an Open Source implementation of the Windows APIs. Note that WINE is technology an acronym - "WINE Is Not an Emulator"

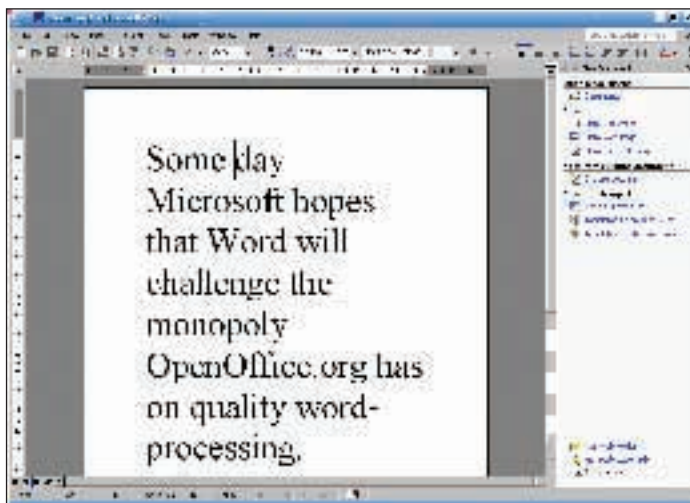
- which is there to remind people that *Wine* does *not* necessarily run slower than its Windows equivalent as there is *no* emulation between Windows and Linux code. Many people even report programs running *faster* under *Wine*, ostensibly as a result of having Linux as the kernel.

In the same way as *WineX* builds upon *Wine* for the purposes of gaming, the Codeweavers development team has repackaged *Wine* for the purpose of specifically handling certain applications. As well as adding a lot of

new code to its port of *Wine* to help its supported applications work more smoothly, the company also provides an easy installation package for programs that it supports, and also the facility to automatically add menu items and file associations for programs that are installed.

Thanks to Codeweavers making sure it contributes a lot of its work back to the community, you can actually use large parts of *CrossOver Office* using the free version of *Wine*, so a lot of the importance of *CrossOver Office* lies in what it adds above and beyond the stock *Wine* distribution. There are some parts of the code that are still available only with Codeweavers, and this does make general operation smoother. Although this extra code is nice to have, it's the easy installation wizard is what makes it truly useful.

Using this wizard you select the application you want to install (or, for the brave out there, you can even try installing an unsupported application), and it guides you through the whole installation, even simulating a Windows reboot where necessary. Furthermore, and this is the *really* clever bit: the installer can detect missing Windows components and automatically download them from the web (from Microsoft) and install them.



Microsoft Word XP is fully functional, and should you be some sort of pervert, you can even play with Clippy to your heart's content.



Not officially supported but we couldn't resist pushing our luck – best to wait until Codeweavers gives the green light!

Once the installation is complete, you'll find your new software in a submenu 'Windows Applications' on your applications menu, and this is ordered pretty much like the Start menu in Windows – there's a Programs submenu in there, and *CrossOver* will add icons as appropriate to that. For people who want the full Windows experience, you can have even have icons added to your desktop!

Accurate simulation

Given that Windows is a distinctly closed-source product, with Microsoft showing so much aversion to the idea of Open Source that it often prefers to use the term "source-available". As a result, you might think it was incredibly difficult to make Windows apps run under Linux, and you'd be right – it's taken quite some time to get things up to the current level.

We found that *CrossOver 2.1* was able to run all the parts of *Office XP* that we tested flawlessly, which is quite an achievement. *Office 2003*, on the other hand, refused flat out to install on the basis that we apparently had the wrong version of Windows. On the upside, *Internet Explorer 6* also works flawlessly, including directing us to the Windows Update site, as apparently our 'version' of Windows needed quite a few patches!

One thing that continues to impress us is CodeWeavers' "truth in advertising" policy, which means that they list exactly what is and is not supported in their product, exactly what you can expect in the form of support, and exactly where your money is going. If this sounds too good to be true, try this quote from the policy out for size: "we will make *CrossOver Office* live up to our claims of what it will do, and **we will make it do so on your machine, and in your environment**" (emphasis theirs). As a result of this up-front honesty, you buy the product in full knowledge of what it can and cannot do, which is very reassuring indeed.

So, what's the difference between *CrossOver Office* and just using *Wine*? Well, because Codeweavers hire several key *Wine* developers, it is also very careful about giving back large chunks of its code to the community, which means that about 95% of *CrossOver* and *Wine* is the same. The company does license the Apple font-hinting code, however, which means that you should get very smooth fonts in your Windows apps even if you don't have X configured terribly well. Codeweavers' big advantage is the ease of use it brings – installing apps using *CrossOver Office* is really as easy as it gets. You select your product,

insert the CD, and follow the wizard as you would normally do in Windows. When appropriate, it will simulate a Windows reboot, then will automatically create the icons for you on your programs menu, add associations, and more. When it comes time to uninstall, *CrossOver Office* will handle that for you also, similarly removing all the icons and associations with no input required.

CrossOver Office is able to support this kind of use because CodeWeavers has so finely tailored its product support – if you try to install unsupported apps, you will likely find many will fail straight off. Having said that, we did get a newer (unsupported) Windows Media Player installed and working fairly well (above).

It's this kind of simplicity that is what makes *CrossOver Office* a hit – you don't have to configure libraries, edit config files, cross your fingers, or hunt around for font files because it does all the hard work for you. Whenever it detected our Windows installation was missing any files, it would automatically connect to the Web, download them, and install it all before continuing the installation. Technically speaking this is an easy way to avoid fuss, and from an end-user's perspective this makes installing *MS Office* on Linux as easy as installing *MS Office* on Windows.

Future upgrades

CrossOver supports *MS Office 97, 2000, and XP*, but as you probably know, 2003 is already available and not supported by *CrossOver*. Similarly, it supports *Photoshop 7* when *Photoshop CS* is available, and it supports *Dreamweaver MX* and *Flash MX* when *MX 2004* is available. When we tried to get *Dreamweaver MX 2004* to install, it failed quite drastically, which means you really need to use very specific versions of the supported products.

Naturally it's not really fair to expect Codeweavers to be able to support products as soon as they are released, but the catch-up game is likely to put a few people off. Having said that, Codeweavers is already working on *MS Office 2003* support, and is likely to also be working on supporting the new releases of other products too.

Although this might not sound very useful if you're trying to get *Photoshop CS* to work, you'll be pleased to hear that when you purchase *CrossOver Office*, you get six months worth of product upgrades included in the price, which means you get to take advantage of the latest fixes and application support upgrades. Of course, it's also nice to know that you're supporting a company that is a huge backer of the Open Source *Wine* project, so by helping Codeweavers you're helping the community.

Overall it's hard to say a bad word about this product – it does precisely what the authors say it will, and criticising it for not supporting unsupported applications is flat-out unfair. The added bonus of getting free updates, having the option to install unsupported software, and contributing towards the Open Source movement makes this a very worthwhile purchase that we simply cannot recommend highly enough. [LXF](#)

LINUX FORMAT VERDICT

FEATURES	10/10
PERFORMANCE	10/10
EASE OF USE	10/10
VALUE FOR MONEY	10/10

If you want to use your Windows applications on Linux systems, this is the place to look for an instant solution.

RATING **10/10**

