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Comes v. Microsoft

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Microsoft
Office 
2000

Sun Microsystems StarOffice 5.2
Feature Comparison Matrix

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Office 2000 vs. StarOffice 5.2

Feature Comparison Matrix

Published: August 2000

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Executive Summary

Microsoft® Office is the world's leading productivity suite with an installed base of over 120 million users worldwide. Office 2000 is the latest version of the product and offers best-of-breed functionality in the areas of document creation, data analysis, collaboration, web integration and communication.

StarOffice 5.2 is Sun Microsystems' productivity suite and competes with Office. Sun is currently in the process of signing up OEM partners for StarOffice with the intent of increasing usage by –home and education users and small businesses.

However, a feature-to-feature analysis of Office 2000 and StarOffice 5.2 reveals that Office is a superior product for the desktop PC user. Specifically, the advantages of Office can be summarized as follows:

- **Document Creation:** Office 2000 provides a broader and richer set of tools to help users create professional documents.
- **Productivity:** Office 2000 outscores StarOffice in terms of features that make everyday tasks simple and increase user efficiency.
- **Data Analysis:** While StarOffice has gained considerable ground on basic data analysis functionality provided in Excel, the latter still provides far more tools that enable the sharing and analyzing of data via the Web.
- **Communication:** Office 2000 provides a more comprehensive set of communication tools that enable users to manage their interaction with customers, suppliers, friends and family. StarOffice only provides the most basic communication functions.
- **Collaboration:** Office 2000 enables users to collaborate on documents, projects and in teams, using features far superior to those in StarOffice. In addition, cross-platform file sharing between StarOffice and Office is still not reliable.
- **Other:** Office 2000 is still superior to StarOffice in terms of ease of use, consistent user interface, stability and technical support options.

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Introduction

Sun Microsystems' StarOffice 5.2 software package is productivity software, offered as an alternative to Microsoft Office and eventually to transition users to a web-based productivity offering (dubbed StarPortal) that will build on the features offered in StarOffice. Until recently, the only way to get StarOffice on a PC was to download it for free from the Web or order a CD-ROM for a nominal shipping and handling charge. However, Sun now has some OEM agreements in place that will give consumers the option of having StarOffice ship with their PC purchase, either as a CD-ROM "in the box" or pre-installed on the machine itself. In addition, Sun is also one of the champions of the Gnome Foundation, an organization that plans to "compete directly with Microsoft's Office suite of applications for the personal computer" via the open source movement.

Competitive analyses of StarOffice have tended to focus on the business productivity user, who is Office's largest customer, and in this context Office easily surpasses StarOffice in terms of manageability, ease of deployment, TCO, advanced business productivity functions and enterprise collaboration features. For more on this see <http://dadweb/PR/Competition/star.htm>.

However, with StarOffice 5.2 Sun is using a bottom up approach to increase the number of users by leveraging StarOffice's near-zero purchase price to appeal to cost-conscious users whose needs may not be as complex as the medium-to-large organization. This is evidenced by their OEM agreements, which have been focused on either low cost PC manufacturers (Everex, Emachines) or the low-end models produced by larger manufacturers (Gateway, Sony). -Sun is currently targeting home users, academic users and home/small businesses. Gaining user acceptance could give Sun's StarPortal initiative a jumpstart.

This document contains a head-to-head comparison of Office 2000 and StarOffice 5.2, with respect to these types of users, i.e. the home user, the academic user and the home/small business. The objective is to highlight the functionality that Office 2000 provides to these classes of users and reveal the shortcomings of StarOffice 5.2. Note that although the differences between StarOffice and Office could cover many pages, this matrix highlights the most significant, objective, and concrete feature areas that illustrate Office 2000's superior value proposition.

Application configurations used for this analysis:

Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Word, Excel, PowerPoint®, Outlook®, Access	Writer, Calc, Impress, Draw, Mail, Schedule, Base

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Document Creation

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Create professional and attractive documents	Themes have been created and coordinated between Office applications to make it easy to create consistent-looking Web pages and documents. Word and Access provide themes; the PowerPoint presentation graphics program includes design templates consistent with the themes and the Outlook messaging and collaboration client offers themes that can be used to personalize stationery.	StarOffice offers a selection of document templates that users can build on to create new documents. However, these only provide an initial structure and layout for a document. Any further changes (colors, borders, styles) have to be made separately by the user and then manually replicated to maintain consistency across multiple document types.
Create and edit presentations efficiently	The Tri-Pane View allows users to add slides, double-check the outline, edit and reformat text, and type comments all in one combined view. Users do not have to navigate between slides to keep track of their points, allowing for more efficient presentation creation.	Notes view and slideshow view are not integrated. Each must be viewed independently of the other.
Collect and paste multiple pieces of content into a document	Office Clipboard allows users to gather multiple pieces of content from several locations (other documents, spreadsheets, web) and incorporate these pieces into a document individually or all at once.	StarOffice users must copy and paste content one piece at a time.
Proofing tools	Office 2000 offers an extensive set of proofing tools including spell checking, grammar checking, summarizing tools, and automatic completion of words.	StarOffice only offers a spell check tool and some automatic complete functionality.
Type anywhere in a new document	Users can move the cursor anywhere on a page, double-click and start typing. This simplifies complex document layout.	Not possible with StarOffice. For instance, if user is composing a cover page for a report and needs to type a title in the center of the page, they have to hit enter several times and then center the text to accomplish this.

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
<p>Formatting cells in spreadsheets</p>	<p>Users can add new columns and rows without having to manually apply formatting and formulas. The List AutoFill feature intelligently applies existing column or row formulas and formatting to new fields. Users can also see how their changes will look without having to deselect highlighted cells. The See-Through View lightly shades selected cells rather than reversing them out, so users can make formatting changes and immediately see if they've achieved the desired results.</p>	<p>StarOffice requires users to manually apply formatting changes to any new cells that are added to a sheet. Also, when applying formatting changes users have to deselect cells to see their changes and then reselect the cells if the change was not what they wanted.</p>

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Productivity

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Ease of use	<p>Microsoft devotes considerable resources to understanding customer needs and then involves the customer in a feedback loop during the product development cycle. The result is a product like Office 2000 which boasts a consistent user interface across all applications, intuitive icons and keyboard support when performing tasks and easy discoverability of new or infrequently used features.</p>	<p>Although StarOffice has made several attempts to copy the features, functionality and ease of use offered by Office, it still does not come close to emulating Office. Many icons are non-intuitive (e.g. the Explorer and Beamer icons on the main toolbar); function names are non-intuitive (e.g. not immediately clear what exactly a menu option named Beamer is supposed to do), inconsistent design (e.g. compare consistent look of the Outlook Bar vs. the scattering of colors and designs used in the Explorer Bar in StarOffice). All these factors contribute to a significantly less than pleasant user experience.</p>
Personalize menus	<p>Menus dynamically expand and contract based on usage patterns to avoid overwhelming users and minimizing clutter. Thus, commands that are not used are eventually hidden from view while those that users access most often are prominently featured on the menus. Menus can be easily expanded to reveal all commands when needed.</p>	<p>Entire menus appear and disappear based on the context of the task that a user is performing, but individual menu items do not. This does not help reduce menu clutter on the desktop since for any given menu all options are always displayed whether the users uses these or not.</p>
Help agent	<p>Users can ask for help in their own words and answers are also provided in the user's own words, through a natural language help agent. When an answer cannot be found the Office Assistant provides a link to more information on the Web and a way for users to inform Microsoft. Also, for many common help scenarios, the Office Assistant can actually demonstrate how to complete a task instead of simply telling the user how to go about it.</p>	<p>No natural language help capabilities. Users have the option to use very brief context-specific help when they are in the middle of a task or a basic index/text search to find the information they need.</p>

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Handle missing application components or files	Office 2000 installs programs and components as needed, saving space on a hard drive until users need the functionality. Shortcuts, icons or menu entries for some not-yet-installed Office 2000 programs or components are displayed, indicating their availability. Office 2000 also automatically detects and fixes errors without users even knowing there was a problem. If necessary, Office 2000 automatically verifies and reinstalls the files and registry entries needed to run successfully.	No automatic file repair and install on demand features in StarOffice.
Web-based support services	The Office Update website extends the functionality of Office 2000 by providing access to integrated services from partners (e.g. web storage, e-postage, fax-to-email, training, small business services) as well as a regularly updated set of tools such as the Template Gallery, ClipArt gallery, file converters etc.	No such comparable services or tools offered for StarOffice users.

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Data Analysis

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Analyze data easily and quickly	Users can easily create and manipulate the fields of a PivotTable® dynamic view directly in an Excel worksheet. Users can create charts tied directly to PivotTable data that can be refreshed instantly.	No comparable feature exists in StarOffice.
Interact with data over the Web	Office provides a number of web components that allow users to publish spreadsheet data to the web with interactivity built in. These components allow other Office-licensed users to perform basic spreadsheet functionality in the browser, including entering text and numbers, creating formulas, recalculating, sorting, filtering and performing basic formatting. The Chart component provides interactivity in the browser and automatically updates as the underlying data changes. The PivotTable component is very similar to PivotTable views in Excel and provides a dynamic way to view and analyze database information in the browser. This allows users to interact with data quickly and easily without having to open an Office application.	StarOffice does not include any comparable functionality that allows for interaction with data via a browser.
Working with Access databases	Access 2000 gives users the ability to store, manage and analyze data using an interface consistent with all the other Office applications. In addition to basic database management functions on the desktop, Access also allows users to create live links to data that can be accessed via browser over the web. The large installed base of Access users also allows organizations to easily share Access databases with other users either by simply sending the entire database or using Access as a front-end to a more robust back-end system.	StarOffice has its own database engine and creation/editing tool. However, users cannot share these databases with Access users nor can they view Access databases sent to them by others. Web integration between the StarOffice database tools is minimal and does not allow for the kind of real-time interactivity offered by Access 2000.

Communication

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Personal Information Management	Outlook provides an integrated view of a user's calendar, task list, and email messages with quick access to documents and web pages from within the Outlook window. This enables users to efficiently manage their personal information, stay on top of projects and plan their time effectively.	StarOffice does not offer a similar at-a-glance view for users. Users have to move from one task window to another to accomplish this.
Manage email	Users can define rules to manage incoming email including changing appearance of messages based on sender, sorting incoming mail into folders, and blocking senders to avoid junk mail.	Users do not have the ability to create any kind of rules-based filtering.
Create distribution lists consisting of multiple email contacts	Outlook gives users the option of creating distribution lists consisting of entries from the Contacts folder or new email addresses that are not a part of the Contacts folder. These lists can be used if a user communicates repeatedly with the same group of people.	No easy way to accomplish this in StarOffice.
Create content-rich email with formatting	Users can customize e-mail by choosing personalized font settings, backgrounds and themes.	No predefined themes or templates for email.
Track interaction with other people (clients, suppliers, partners, friends)	Users can create a complete record of all e-mail messages, phone calls, tasks, appointments, and documents related to a Contact. Contact Activity Tracking gives them a consolidated list of interactions—so they can view, group, sort, and filter contact information, and make the most of these relationships.	No comparable functionality in StarOffice.

Collaboration

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Publish to the Web	Office 2000 users can edit documents in Word and turn them into web pages using the HTML companion file format. All of Word's features (except versioning and passwords) are preserved during the "round-trip" from .doc format to HTML and then back to Word .doc format. This means Word 2000 lets users create documents in Word, preview the HTML version, save them as HTML, open them back in Word and still use the features available in Word. In addition, HTML files created in Office 2000 are easily edited using Office applications.	Although StarOffice allows HTML as a companion file format for documents, loss of content and structure occurs during "round-tripping" (i.e. converting from a text document to HTML and then back again). Occasional loss of content and structure can also occur when simply converting an existing text document written in StarWriter to HTML.
Edit HTML documents	Users can easily edit HTML files created in Office 2000 using Office applications. Clicking on the Edit button in Microsoft Internet Explorer will intelligently launch the Office 2000 application that created the HTML file, making editing intranet documents seamless and easy.	No comparable functionality in StarOffice. Documents to be edited must be opened outside of the browser to enable editing.
Publishing drawing objects to the Web	Vector Markup Language (VML) is a W3C standard developed by Microsoft and other companies such as AutoDesk, and is supported by Office 2000 applications. Support for this standard allows graphics created in drawing programs in Office to be published to the web in a form that still allows users to perform actions on it (e.g. editing) as opposed to converting it into an image (e.g. GIF format).	StarOffice does not support the VML standard. As a result graphics rendered in StarDraw and then published to a web page are saved as images and cannot be easily modified.
Share calendars over the Web	Users who maintain an Outlook calendar can share this information with others by publishing their calendar to the web using the Save As Web Page feature. Published schedules can be viewed in any browser, so they can be posted on a Web site or sent in e-mail messages.	StarOffice users cannot publish their schedules to the Web or send their schedule in HTML format.

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Plan and schedule a meeting	Outlook allows users to plan meetings efficiently by using distribution lists (described earlier) to view the free and busy times of the entire team together or to see an expanded list of free and busy times for the individual team members. Once invitees have been selected, the AutoPick function can automatically identify the next time everyone is free.	While StarOffice does have some functionality to schedule group meetings among multiple users of StarSchedule, it does not provide anything similar to AutoPick in Outlook. Also, no integration points exist for scheduling Outlook and StarSchedule users together.

Other

Office 2000		StarOffice 5.2
<p>Worldwide language support</p>	<p>Office 2000 applications are each created in a single worldwide executable for the United States, Europe, Far East, and bi-directional languages such as Hebrew and Arabic (some exceptions for Thai, Vietnamese and Indian languages). This means that all features for all supported languages are in any version of Office 2000. Users can change the language of the user interface without affecting the operation of the application and can write in any language without having to switch the interface language. In addition, Word 2000 and PowerPoint 2000 take advantage of AutoCorrect in multiple languages. Word 2000 makes creating multilingual documents easier by supplying formatting tools previously available only in foreign language versions, applying appropriate punctuation rules per language, and handling the layout of complex Asian and Middle Eastern languages properly. Proofing and editing features that used to be available for only one language per version, such as AutoSummarize, are now available for all languages.</p>	<p>StarOffice only supports most European languages. In addition, each language version has a different executable, which means that switching from one language to another is not as simple and quick as in Office. Users cannot simply begin authoring a document in a new language and have all the editing and proofing tools for that language available to them.</p>
<p>Product support options for individual users</p>	<p>Individual Office 2000 users have a whole host of support options available to help them including no-fee phone support for the first 90 days after a retail purchase (after which fee-based phone support is available), web-based support from the constantly updated self-service knowledge base, and several discussion forums that can be accessed over the Internet.</p>	<p>Individual StarOffice users have no free warranty support available when they initially install the product. Their support options are limited to fee-per-incident email support, a searchable knowledge base, and user discussion forums and live fee-based support from other StarOffice users (not Sun support staff).</p>

Task	Office 2000	StarOffice 5.2
Stability	Many thousands of person hours are spent in testing the stability and recovery processes in Office 2000. These tests often involve industry partners who get to work with beta versions of the product to ensure the highest level of reliability from the application. In situations, where an application error does occur, automated recovery and repair processes help bring the user back to their most recent state.	During the brief testing and usage period of StarOffice 5.2, some application errors occurred when performing simple tasks like file conversion. Although in certain situations document recovery was possible, in most cases the application froze and had to be manually shut down and restarted using the Windows 2000 Task Manager.

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