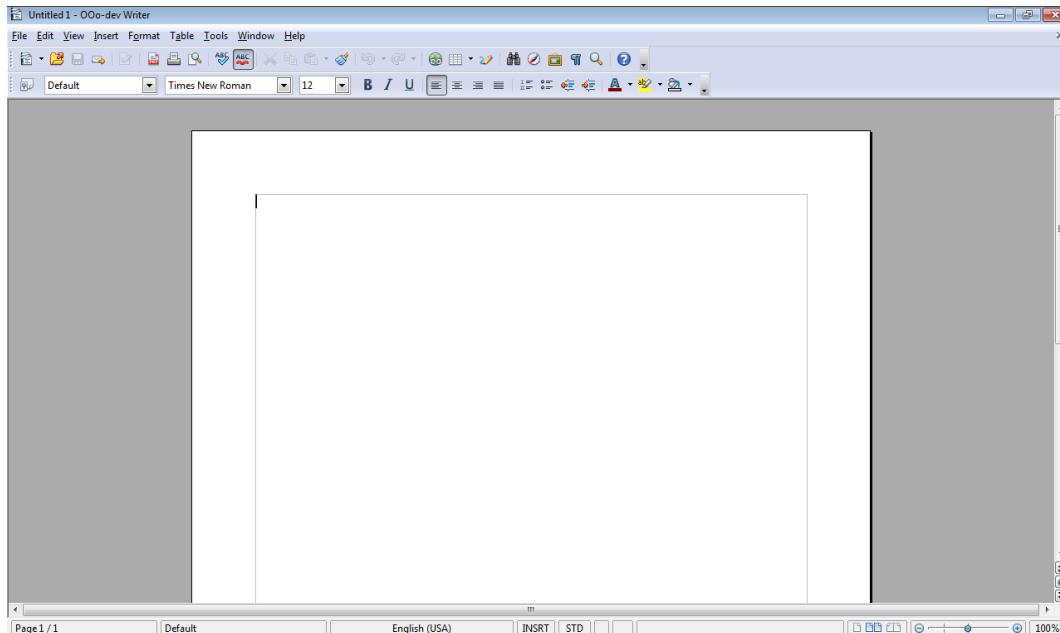


A new application background in OOo

OpenOffice.org users must be depressed.

Of course there are many great things concerning OOo, like the sucessful 3.1 release last may, with its load of new features and bug fixes.

When I mean depressed, it's not about features. It's about... color! If you spend some hours working with OOo Writer on a laptop, it probably looks like this:



The document itself takes about 48 % of the screen space (taskbar subtracted). 30 % of the whole screen space is used by this abominable color, sometimes referred poetically as "battleship grey":

#ABABAB

How to change it

From the browser world, we know that the average user does not change his default search engine. That's why Google pays millions to Mozilla for being the default search engine in Firefox: they know that most users won't change it, and simply use Google.

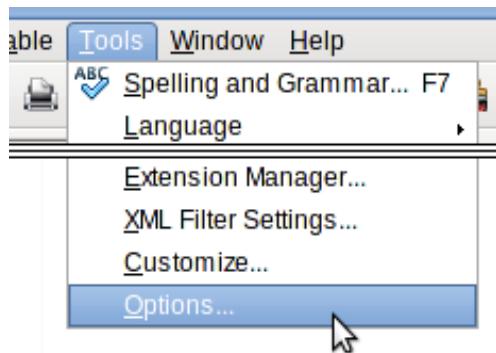


This user behaviour will also be the case in OpenOffice.org. The average user

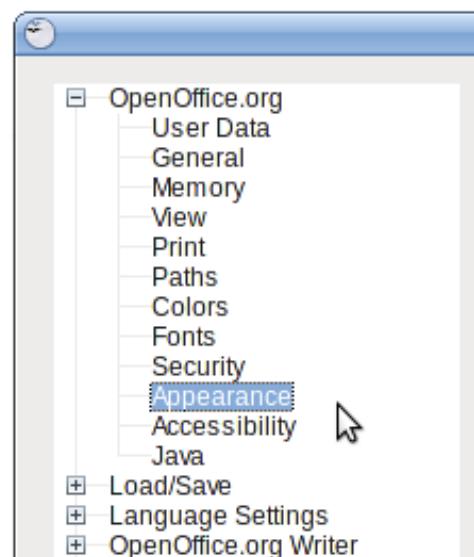
won't change the default background color. Even if he tries to change it, he probably won't succeed. Here is what you have to do to change the background color:

Step 1. Tools → Options

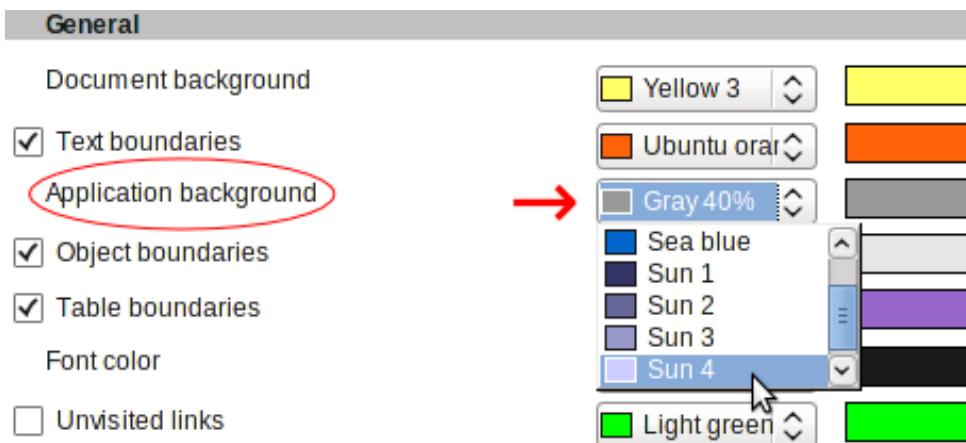
Note than "Customize" won't work, for you don't "customize" your application background, you "option" it!



Step 2. You are confronted with the GOD, the (in)famous Great Option Dialog of OpenOffice.org! Be careful and select "Appearance". If you select "View" or "Colors", you're lost forever. I know, you want to change the color, but just don't select "Colors".



Step 3. Finally, you can select a color in the "Application Background" dropdown menu. This menu is ridiculously small and displays only 5 elements: it's not so easy to scroll down. "Sun 4" is an acceptable color for a light blue background. Give "Light red" a try if you want your eyes to pop out of their orbits.



Step 4 (optional). Use the lunch break to change some of these options on your colleagues workstation. For example:

- Change "AutoSpellcheck" from red to white will hide the spellcheck wavy line. They will never find out why, and end up crazy.
- Change "Field shadings" to any color like "Green 8".

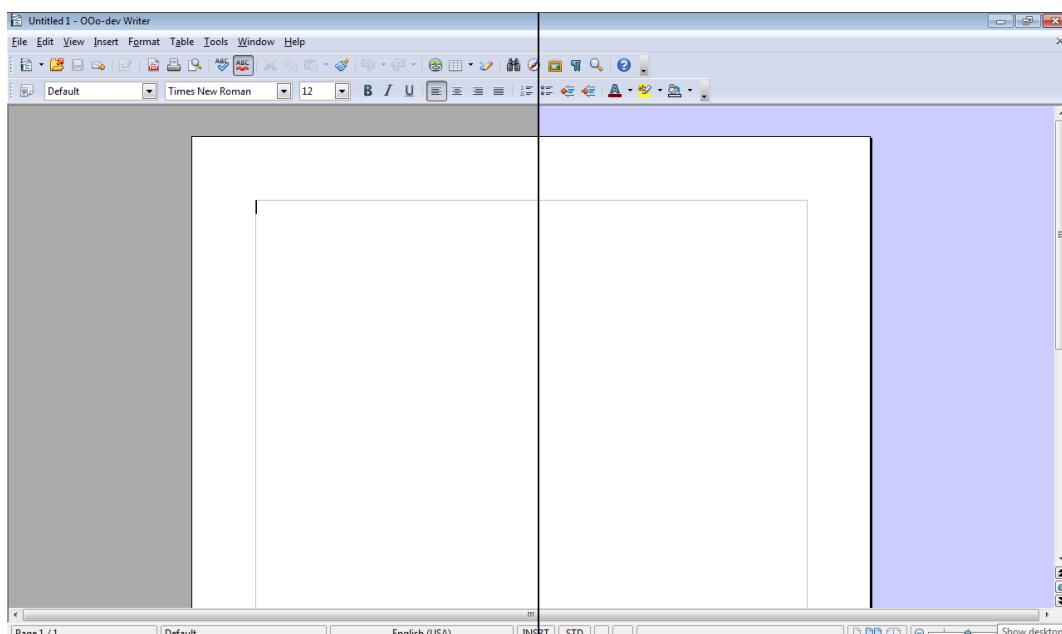
Just to be sure that they notice unbreakable spaces:

« **I love soup** »

- These pranks are pretty poor. Check out hilarious ones here.

The result

Nothing exceptional, be reassured! It just looks a little bit more friendly. Here is a before / after screenshot:



If you think that the default background color of OpenOffice.org should be changed to something else than "Depressive Grey" by default, vote for this

issue:

Issue 75049: Change the OpenOffice.org Background Color

Check the bottom of the page for how to vote for an issue.

Where it could get interesting

For years it has been possible to change the default desktop background of the OS... I remember playing around with the background bitmap in Windows 3.1. You could only see the background picture when the Program Manager was minimized.

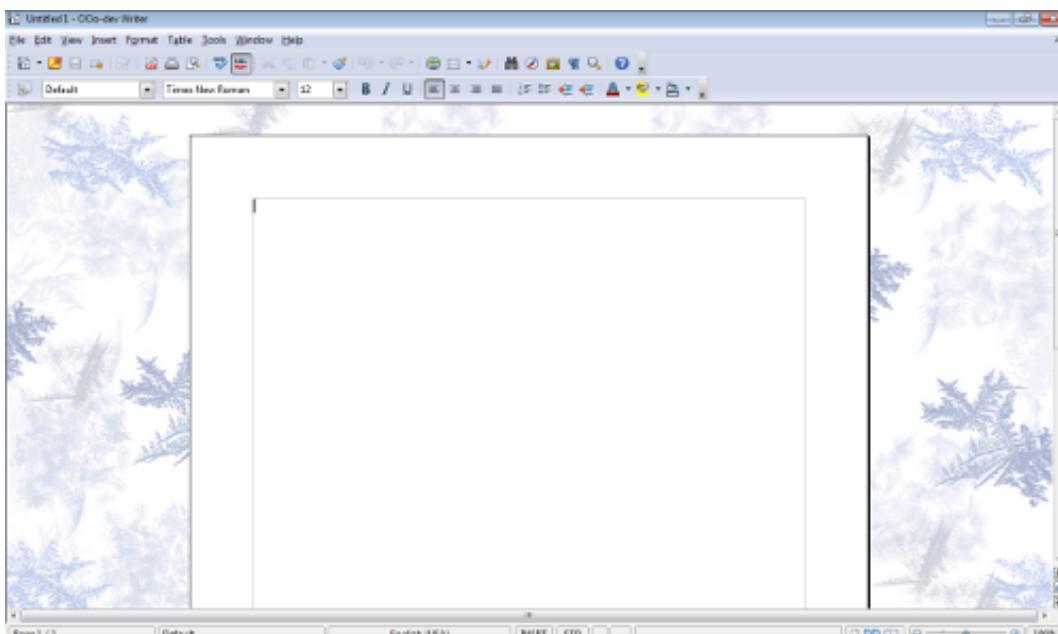


What about changing the application background in OpenOffice.org to a picture or a pattern instead of a color?

Here some examples of what it could look like.

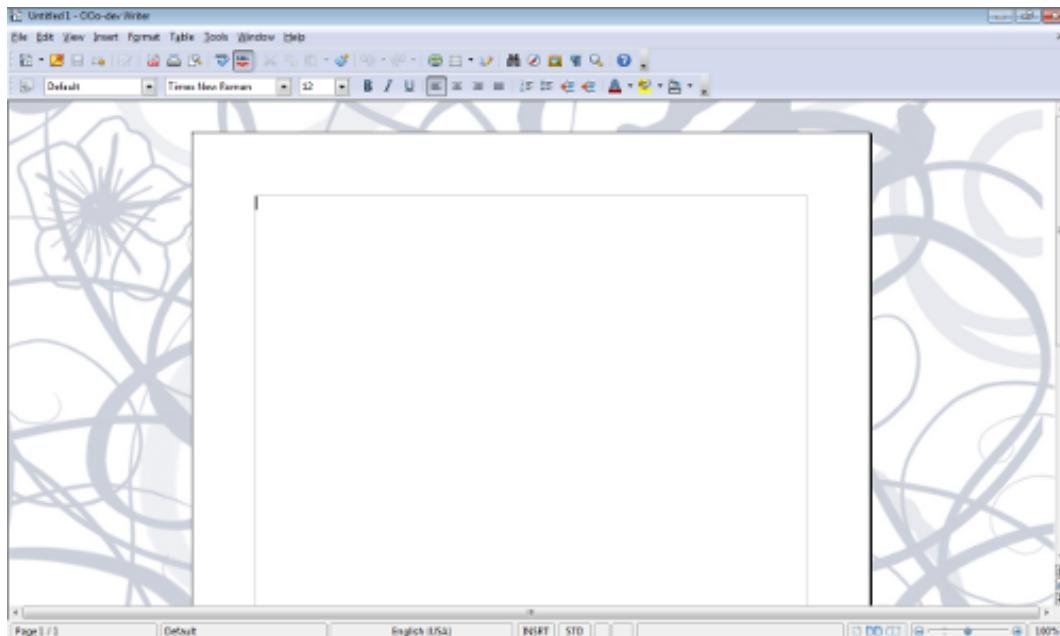
(To my knowledge, there is no current plan to implement this in OpenOffice.org. I'm not a developer, and it's just an idea.)

Mockup 1, with Frost Texture Brushes by Obsidian Dawn:



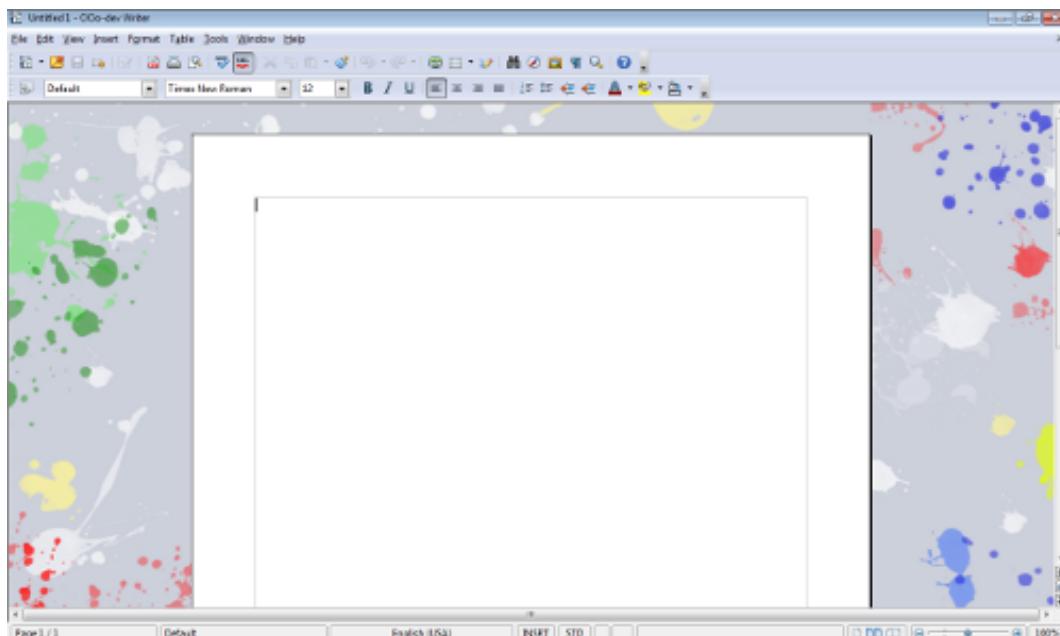
The Frost Texture Brushes can be found [here](#).

Mockup 2, with Foliage Swirl Brushes by Obsidian Dawn:



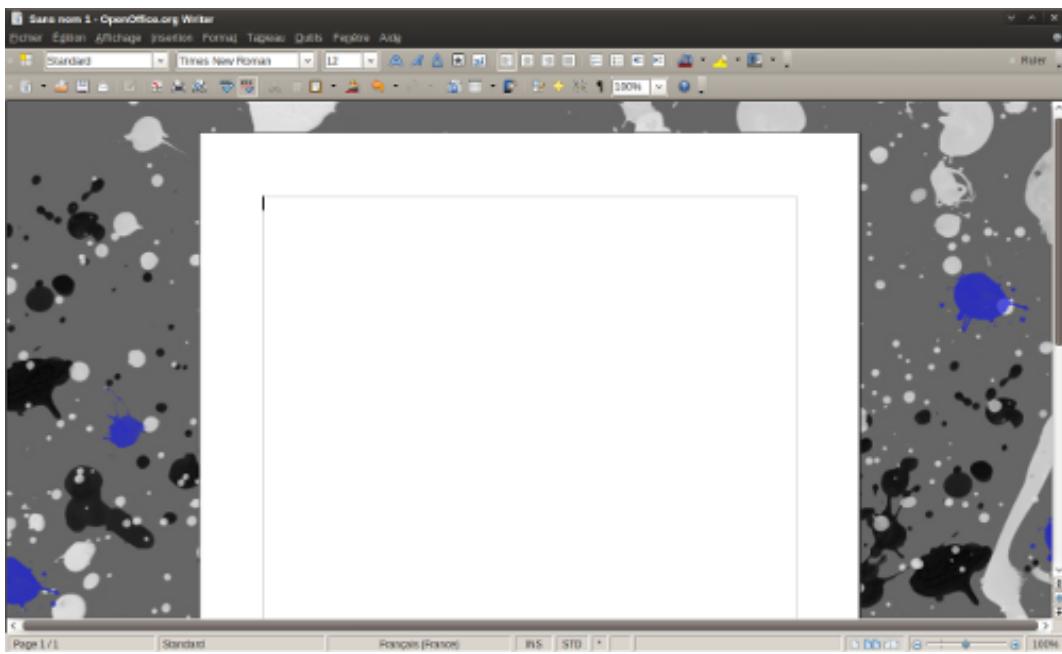
The Foliage Swirl Brushes can be found [here](#).

Mockup 3, with Splats and Splatters Brushes by Obsidian Dawn:



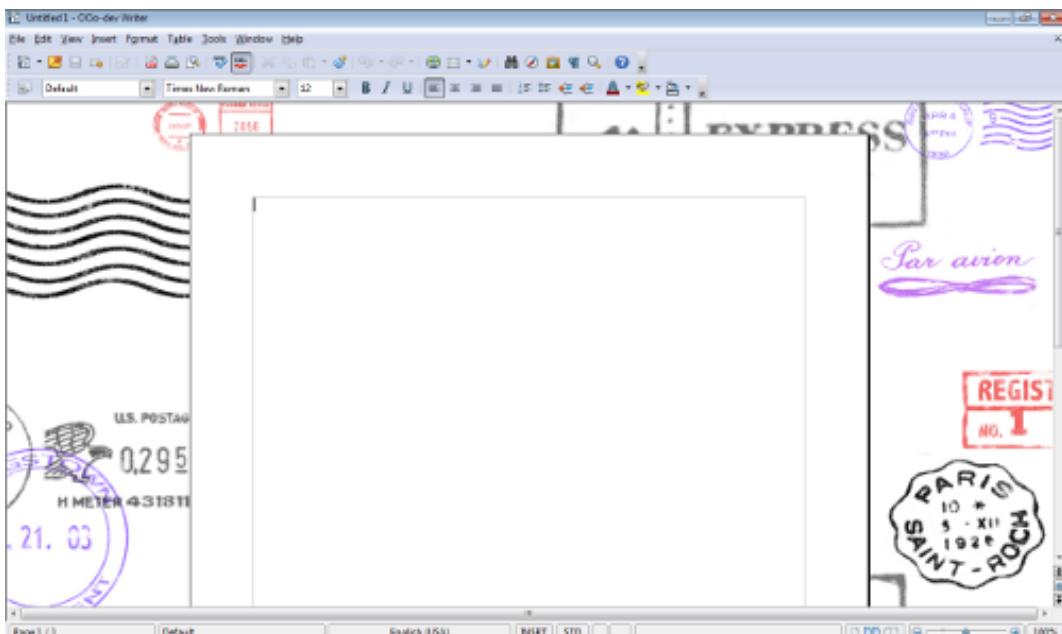
The Splats and Splatters Brushes can be found [here](#).

Mockup 4, more splatters, same brushes:



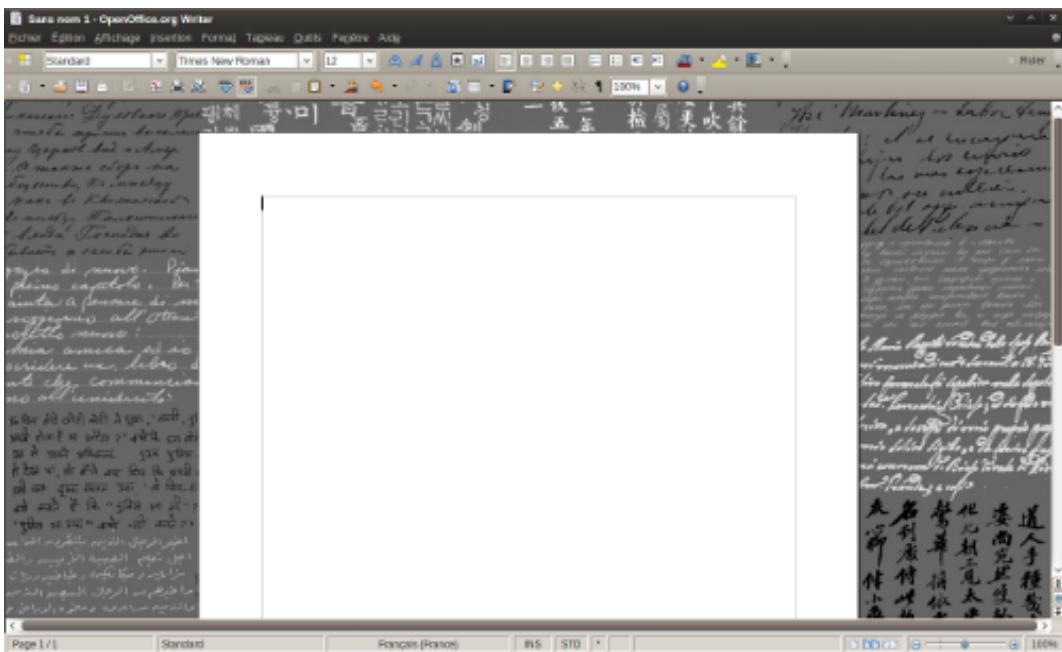
The Splat and Splatter Brushes can be found here.

Mockup 5, with Postage Brushes by Obsidian Dawn:



The Postage Brushes can be found here.

Mockup 6, with Handwriting Brushes by Obsidian Dawn:



The Handwriting Brushes can be found [here](#).

Parchment types of backgrounds would be great, too. I have no time left to make tryouts and mockups in this direction, though.

NB. I'm not a graphical artist at all! These mockups are poor, and if you can do it better, I would be happy to publish yours.

Important point: for not disturbing the concentration of the user working with OOo, the background pictures have to be discreet, but beautiful. Especially when the background picture comes closer to the document, it has to be unobtrusive.

(I did not succeed to respect all these conditions in my mockups...)

New Master Pages for Impress and Gallery pictures could be based on some of the background pictures.

Final word

Changing the application background won't change the world. Indeed it is a useless feature, and a very minor enhancement.

But most people struggle with their computer. The software is too often a handicap they have to cope with to get things done.

Making OOo a little bit less arid, a little bit less monotonous wouldn't change radically anything. But if it could help the users to have some positive feelings

about their software, it would definitely be a big step forward.

More arguments:

1. Having a bitmap/image as application background would allow Linux distributions to personalize OOo. Corporations/organizations could also be interested in having a customized application background.
2. The most important thing is not always how great the software is. TakeOpera, for example. Great software, but almost nobody uses it.
If OOo would look great, people would more easily believe that it is great.
3. No other office suite has this feature.

How to vote for an issue?

There is already an existing issue about the default background color in the OpenOffice.org bug tracking system:

Issue 75049: Change the OpenOffice.org Background Color

I filled up a new issue about bitmaps/patterns instead of plain color as background, here it is:

Issue 103915: Use bitmaps/patterns/pictures as Application Background instead of plain color only.

YOU can make the difference: please vote for these bugs!

It will take you only 5 minutes. If you don't have a login, here is the page (update: dead link, removed) where you can join OpenOffice.org. (You will need to join to vote for bugs.)

After joining, go to the issue page, and follow the "Vote for this issue' link marked in the following screenshot. You can use up to 2 votes for an issue.

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| * Summary: | Use bitmaps/patterns/pictures as Application Background instead of plain color only |
| Status whiteboard: | |
| Keywords: | |
| Attachments: | Date/filename: Thu Jul 30 21:58:00 +0000 2009: 00o 3.1 Windows 7 1280x800 - 2 Background with Foliage Swirl Brushes by Obsidian Dawn.png |

Issue 103915 depends on:

[Show dependency tree](#)

Issue 103915 blocks:

Votes for issue 103915:

[Vote for this issue](#)

| | | | |
|--------------|----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
| Total | 0 vote(s) used out of 5 allowed. | | |
| ui | 18829 | Support for skins | <input type="text" value="2"/> |
| | 86822 | UI modernization based on past and present discussion | <input type="text" value="1"/> |
| → | 103915 | Use bitmaps/patterns/pictures as Application Background instead of plain color only | <input type="text" value="2"/> |

And who knows, maybe you will soon be feeling in your stomach the warmth of having, once again, done something useful to the community... To save the world, though, you'd better start here or here (better links are welcome).

By Johannes Eva, July 31, 2009

About the author: I have been using OpenOffice.org since it was called StarOffice 4.0, back in 1998. The same year I made my first steps with Red Hat Linux 5.1 “Manhattan”, and soon became a strong partisan of Free Software. Nevertheless, and despite using a Linux environment as my main platform, I am preoccupied by the slow progress of the FOSS movement, and its lack of unity.

Disclaimer: I'm not affiliated with Sun or Novell. The opinions exposed here are only my points of view, and do not necessarily reflect any consensus in the OpenOffice.org community.

Read also: A plea for hidden rulers in OpenOffice.org

This article has been linked on Tuxmachines, LXer.com and Linux Today.

COMMENT FROM JOAQUIM TORRES (09-07-31 12:05:36)

There is a lot of unused space on left and right sides of the screen. Why not use this space to put the menus and taskbars, leaving all the vertical space for the

document? This is more compelling with wide screens. How? I don't know, but I trust the competent programmers to find an innovative solution. Be different! Be better!

COMMENT FROM JZA (09-07-31 06:25:58)

Looks pretty good although I guess I could hear many people saying that this will distract the users. I see the same thing happen with MonoBook wiki and I dont think many people are distracted in the end.

COMMENT FROM PIP (09-08-02 11:26:52)

I've always wanted them to get rid of the dead space. It serves no purpose. The default should be that it just shows the document you're working on. I know I can reduce the page size for that purpose, but then there are menu bars to allow me to see the dead zone again: why?

COMMENT FROM ALAN (09-08-05 05:19:42)

Or, you could just not maximize the window horizontally. Mine is usually the width of the page. That's why they're called windows, not screens. 8-)

COMMENT FROM MPROVE (09-08-11 05:10:58)

thanks for pointing out this almost hidden feature. I just changed my background to 53/85/107 to get a calm dark blue (and not distracting) background.