

# California Computer Care

News,  
Views,  
Tips and  
Cool Techniques  
for CCC Members

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We  
speak  
Geek,  
so you  
don't  
have to.

## An Office Alternative

Last month I reviewed the new *iWork '08* suggesting that it is a good replacement for *AppleWorks*, but a poor replacement for *Microsoft Office*. This month I review a real *MS Office* alternative: *MacOffice Professional* (MOPro).

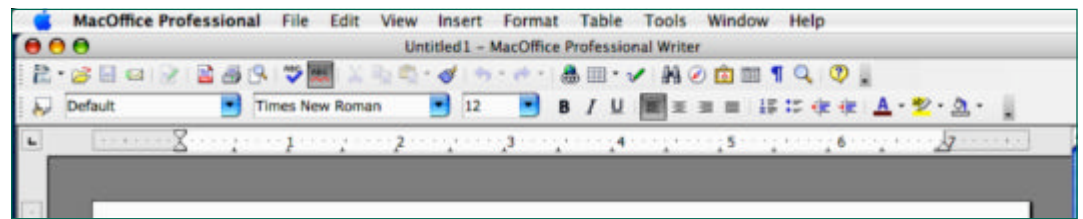
*MacOffice Pro* began life as Sun Computing's *OpenOffice*. Because of its open source heritage, *OpenOffice* was free to download. The free version is still available, but requires much technical skill to install and use (no tech support, either!). The folks at *MacOffice Pro, Inc.* took the free version, converted it for easy install and use under Mac OS X 10.3 or newer. They also added exhaustive, useful Help files and provide email-based support. They charge \$47.95 (verses \$149.99 for the least expensive *Microsoft Office*). Your Mac will need a DVD drive to install *MacOffice Professional*.

Comparing *MacOffice Pro* to *Microsoft Office 2004*, the first thing you notice is that MOPro wins on features. Like *MS Office*, MOPro word processes like *MS Word*, spreadsheets like *Excel* and does presentations like *PowerPoint*. But, MOPro goes farther, adding databases and drawings to its repertoire.

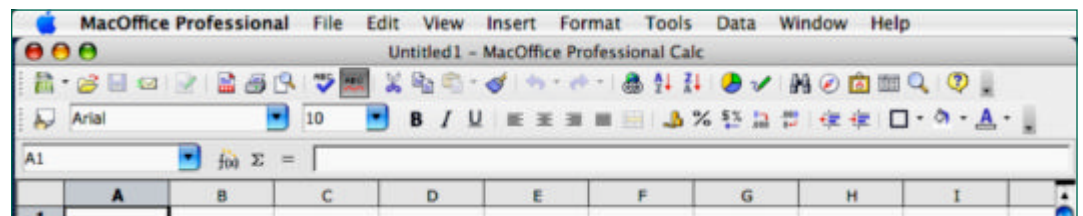
Another big difference is that MOPro is just one, integrated application, not three separate apps. When you launch MOPro, the Writer (word processing) module opens a blank page ready to go. If you like, you can choose the other functions from MOPro's main menu and start other types of documents.

MOPro's interface and toolbars are a bit crude and cluttered. Here are screenshots to give you an idea:

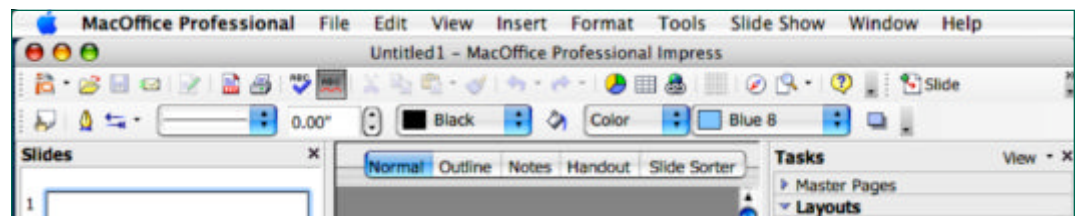
Writer (word processor)—



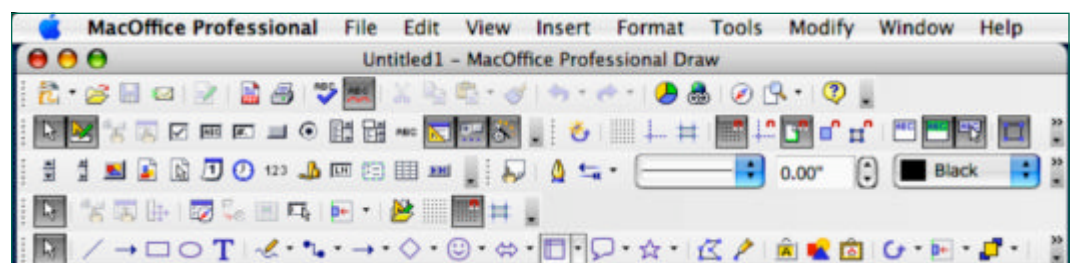
Calc (spreadsheet)—



Impress (presentation)—



Draw—



MOPro has some good stuff to recommend it:

- Fix cluttered tool bars by customizing them. Menus and keyboard shortcuts are customizable, too.
- Excellent spelling and style checker with auto correct options.
- Easy to use mail merge.
- Headers and footers that are simple to add and change. Plus, good footnote, index and table of contents tools.
- Automatic link to your email application for quick and easy attachments. Unique to MOPro is multiple attachment formats (OpenDocument, *MS Word*, PDF).
- Integration! The various modules interact with each other (place a spreadsheet in a presentation or a drawing in a *Writer* document).
- Speed. Faster than *MS Office*, especially on the new Intel Macs.
- Small size. MOPro has more functionality than *MS Office* but fills up 30% less hard drive space.

MOPro has some not so good stuff, too:

- It's open source, UNIX heritage is evident in an unpolished, clunky, non-Mac-like interface.
- No Track Changes making collaborative editing difficult.
- Very few document templates to help you start new documents.
- No phone or live-chat help. Help is available through email only.
- And, most importantly...

**Compatibility.** If MOPro is to be a substitute for *MS Office*, how compatible are *MS Office* and MOPro documents?

Compatibility is good, but not 100%. As a test, I opened many *MS Office* documents with MOPro. Of eight *MS Word* documents, only simple, one page docs were essentially identical. More complex documents suffered from pagination errors that pushed or pulled text from one page to another. All text and graphics were complete, but paragraphs and sections broke in odd ways and, in one case, a block of text was placed in by MOPro *Writer* two paragraphs early.

I opened 25 *Excel* spreadsheets with MOPro and while the text and calculations were correct, again there were minor pagination errors. MOPro's *Calc* also suffers by not having an interactive Page Layout view that accurately shows how the spreadsheet will break up into pages when printed.

Lastly, I opened ten *PowerPoint* presentations. Mostly the slides were identical. However, sometimes there were font substitutions that affected legibility. In cases where fancy transitions were used, they actually looked better in MOPro's *Impress* than in *PowerPoint* (perhaps because the transitions ran slower). In all, MOPro's *Impress* did a better job converting and displaying its *MS Office* equivalent document than did *Writer* or *Calc*.

Is MOPro a usable substitute for *MS Office*?

Yes and no. If absolute fidelity with *MS*

*Office* is your goal, nothing beats the real thing. However, if you are on a budget and close enough is close enough, MOPro will do the job. Also, you get the database and drawing modules that *Microsoft Office* doesn't have.

*MacOffice Professional 1.1* is a good choice for folks who want the best value for their software dollar, but do not need full *Microsoft Office* compatibility or technical support by phone or live chat.

MacOffice Professional 1.1  
\$47.95 plus shipping and tax  
<http://www.macofficepro.com>

Sales info: (800) 884-6323



### October Tip —

Mac OS X 10.5 (Leopard) is scheduled to ship October 26. This is the latest, greatest version of Mac OS X (until the next one!). It looks very exciting (in a good way, I hope!).

I'll be running tests for the next two months and will have a review by this January.

Apple has posted an excellent preview video that I recommend that you see.

Go to:

<http://www.apple.com/macosex/>

and click on the



button to watch the preview video.

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