

KOffice Start-up Panel.

This document is to describe my suggestion for KOffice Star-up panel look and feel.

1. Preface, or why an end-user would choose not to use KOffice.

Picture if you will a cold winter morning sometime in mid December. It's almost Christmas time and everyone is on the edge with a million little hopes and cares. And so is Mario.

Now, Mario a just a regular student at a regular college and, as you could easily guess, is always late. It so happens that today is not an exception. The lecture Mario intendeds to attend today has already started some 5 minutes ago. Poor guy is on the run. All tired and sweaty he dashes right into the lecture room and, after a few seconds of desperate search for an empty seat, finally lands himself on a vacant chair by an empty desk.

One should remember however, that the aforementioned lecture has not exactly been waiting around for our Mario to settle down and therefore is already 15 minutes ahead of him. There is no time to loose!

Mario quickly fetches his trusty Linux powered laptop and anxiously hits power button. The classy KDE desktop unravels before the nervous student in all it's composite glory and sits readily, awaiting for it's owner's actions. And it is now that our hero has two choices - start OpenOffice, or KWord... Whichever should he choose?

Alas, the time does never stand still and it all goes down to the speed after all. Mario knows that should he choose OpenOffice he will have to wait a few seconds before the ingenious application, all 254 MB of it to be precise, is fully loaded before he can start taking notes. KOffice, on the other hand, will take a fraction of that time to start. However, KOffice will not let Mario take notes once it's loaded. Instead, our exhausted friend will be presented with quite an ugly start-up screen which he will have to find his way around before he is graciously allowed to do just what he wanted to do when he started the application; which is - no more, no less - take the lecture notes. Finally, the choice is made and OpenOffice is a clear winner here.

This fable clearly demonstrates just how easily a great peace of software can be completely overshadowed by only one small part of it. Of course, I have gone into extremes trying to show my point and you are free and welcome to disagree with me in part, or completely here.

I should close this preface by saying that the description of a start-up screen I provide therein is neither perfect, nor absolute. There could be and most certainly are better ways to accomplish this crucial task. So, please do not face me in arms here as I merely am trying to deliver the fruit of my own mind and imagination which may, or may not meet with that of your own.

2. Overall panel description

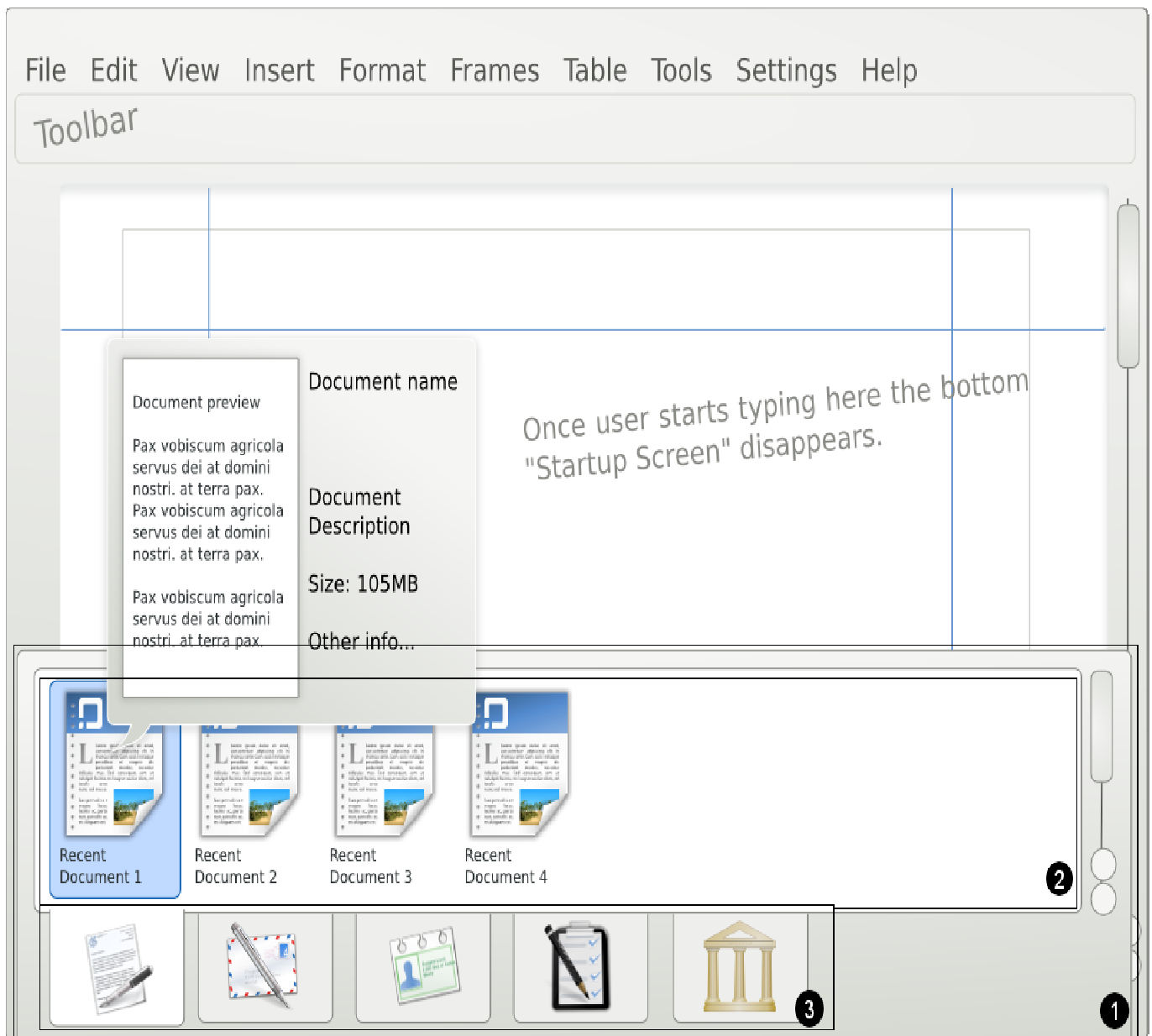


Image 1.

Before I begin I would like to draw your attention towards an illustration [Image 1.] located on the Page 2. This image will aid me in my attempt to describe the panel I have envisioned.

Please disregard the overall widget style. I am perfectly aware that it is not Oxygen. However, the intent of this document was not to portray the style, but rather to describe the widget layout.

2.1. Start-up dialog, it's size and positioning.

2.1.1. Dialog Description

In my humble opinion it is very important to let the user do what he/she wants to right from the start. Therefore, I strongly oppose the 'Choose First' approach taken for the current KOffice. My little lyrical example placed into the 'Preface' of this document illustrates just a case like that. The application is needed quickly and without a delay.

My suggestion here is to start the requested application with the 'Default' document readily opened and available for user to modify. However, I too can see strong advantages behind the 'Choose First' approach. I do not think it has to be discarded. I rather suggest to alter it is such a way that it becomes friendly and non intrusive. This, I think, could be accomplished with a widget of sort.

As you can see on the illustration on page 2 the panel marked (1) is such a widget. Regardless of whether the user has started KWord, KPresenter, KSpread, KRita, Kexy, or any other part of KOffice, it could start up clean, using 'Default' document and display this panel for user to make their choice.

2.1.2. Dialog Size and Position

As I already mentioned in the paragraph above this panel I dreamed up is meant to to be 'friendly and non intrusive'. To accomplish this I located it at the very bottom of the application and thought it would occupy approximately 1/3 to 1/2 of the application screen.

Why at the bottom? - Simple! Both left and top positioning would cover up the the main application space where the 'real' action is. This in turn, would scare user into making an unnecessary choice and waisting his/here time. Right side, however is fine, but placing the panel on the right would make it content look crammed and disallow for better visibility of interface elements. The only acceptable choice here is therefore is bottom.

2.2. Document Preview and and Choose Part.

Now, that I have described the dialog itself let me elaborate a bit on the most important part of it - the actual document view and choice window. You can easily find this window on the illustration under the number of (2).

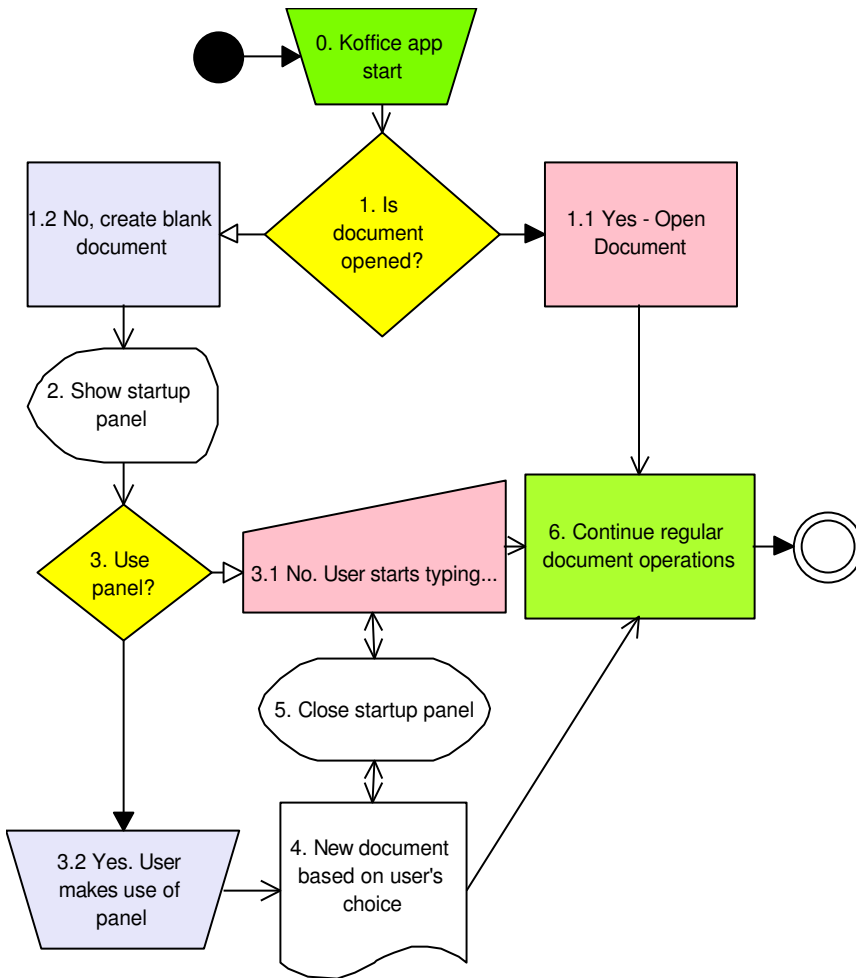
This window is to display the document templates as well as a list of 'Recent' documents and therefore a strong 'preview' functionality is a 'must'. Here I suggest to use 'Dolphin' part if possible as this window is really more like a file browser then anything else. The use of 'Dolphin' part would also guaranty readiness of document previews as well as clean interface.

Now, not being much of a programmer myself I don't know just how possible it is. So, please excuse my uninformed opinion if I'm wrong here.

2.3. The Category Tabs

The final part of my panel is marked (3) on the illustration and is a set of tabs used to choose the template category.

They are as follows:



1. First Tab - Recent Documents
2. Second Tab - Letters, labels and Faxes (all that has to do with communication)
3. Third Tab - etc.
4. ...

Please note that the main idea of this list is not to tell you how the templates should be organized. This topic calls for a totally different kind of critical thinking and brainstorming and is not covered under this short essay.

The idea here is the '1. First Tab - Recent Documents'. Then any number of any other tabs might follow.

Let me explain. - More often than *Diagram 1.* not whenever user is not willing to

start a new document, he/she intends to continue unfinished work on an old one. To aid the user, panel should right away provide him/her with a list of recent documents to choose from. I would suggest sorting them by date-newest-first, but then again, it's only a suggestion.

At this point you may already wonder - 'Where does 'default' template go then?'

The answer is - it does not go anywhere. The application is already started with a blank/'default' document open. I really don't see why this offer should be given twice.

3. Work Flow Chart and Step-by-Step Walkthrough

To help me illustrate this walkthrough better I have designed a work flow chart.

For the purpose of this document it will be referred to as 'Diagram 1'. You can view it on the Page 4.

[Please forgive me my limited knowledge of UML. I have made the chart the best I could. Unfortunately here my expertise is rather limited, so you will have to bear with me.]

Schematically this diagram can be broken into three parts:

1. Start-up part which includes shapes: 0, 1, 1.1, and 1.2
2. Go part including: 2, 3, 3.2, and 4
3. And End part with: 3.1, 5, and 6

3.1. Start-up part

Once the application starts the question we should ask is - 'Is there a document being opened?' (This is depicted by the shapes: [0. KOffice app start], and [1. Is document opened?].)

Of course this is not the question for a user, but rather for the application itself. It is answered positively if application is started with an argument and negatively otherwise.

If the answer is [Yes] we right away go to shape [6. Continue regular document operations]. The panel is not opened here. The user is undisturbed and happy. Shapes - [1.1 Yes - Open Document], [6. Continue regular document operations].

If the answer is [No] then a blank document, based on 'default' template, is created - shape [1.2 No, create blank document]

3.2. Go Part

At this point the panel appears at the bottom part of the screen covering a bottom (unused) part of the document. Shape [2. Show start up panel].

The next question we should ask is - 'Does the user want to use the panel?' (Shape [3. Use panel?])

If the answer is [Yes], meaning that user actually goes to the panel and does something (switches tabs, scrolls the recent document list), then the panel stays in place (may be even becomes larger to allow for better view) and let's user make his/her choice. Shape [3.2 Yes. User makes use of panel]

The result of this 'use' will be the creation of a new document based on a template chosen, or open of an existing document user will have chosen from the list of 'recent documents'. Shape [4. New document based on user's choice]

If, however, the answer is [No], meaning that user does not take any interest in the panel and does choose to start editing the blank document instead (simply starts to type something), the panel is no longer necessary. Shape [3.1 No. User starts typing]

3.3. End Part

The final part of the work flow.

This part would simply close the panel, leaving the user with whichever choice he/she chose to make. Shapes: [5. Close Startup Panel], and [6. Continue regular document operations].

This concludes the work flow description.

4. Closing

There are many small, and not so small things I have chosen to omit for the purpose of this short essay. Things like: some sort of an 'Ok' button for the start-up panel, a close button for it, etc. The main idea behind this essay however, was not to 'invent' a new user interface for KOffice, but rather to add to the existing one.

This concludes my presentation. Thank you for your time and attention.

Eugene

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