

New LyX document processor released, now with unicode!

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By Troy Unrau | Last updated July 31, 2007 11:03 PM CT

The LyX graphical document processor is an open source program that users to focus on content rather than formatting (akin to how HTML is written when your formatting is taken care of in the CSS files). LyX is powered by the famous LaTeX typesetting engine which produces professional quality results whether you are writing your thesis or simple PDF help files to accompany a program. This week, the LyX developers announced a major milestone release with version 1.5, a release that was more than 15 months in the making.

LyX was started by Matthias Ettrich in the 1990s before he went on to found KDE. To quote an ancient interview with Ettrich: "LyX' main strength [is] long and complex documents, with lots of equations, pictures, cross-references, tables, footnotes and so on." This power comes at an initial price though, as the learning curve can be quite steep for those used to What-You-See-Is-What-You-Get (WYSIWYG) style word processors.

The newly released version 1.5 has been rewritten for Qt 4.x and has gained a number of new features, most notably Unicode support both internally, and in the final output files. This resolves a number of existing problems and smooths out the behavior for non-alphabetic languages and other use cases where Unicode is important. Additionally, it now has support for multi-byte character input such as that required by the Chinese, Japanese and Korean character sets (commonly referred to as CJK).

One of the side effects of the new version is that the file format is no longer backwards compatible with the existing 1.4.x versions. Rather than lock-in the upgrade though, they have concurrently released version 1.4.5.1 where the only change is the ability to read in the new file format. The LyX developers expect this to be the last release in the previous 1.4.x branch, but it gives some time for early adopters to find any problems that may remain in 1.5.0.

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