DOCX sucks, really sucks, it blows goats!

Gawd but I'm sick of all the rigmarole of trying to read DOCX files that people send me. It's, yet another, proprietary crap format, rammed down our throats by Microsoft, who refused to support a publicly engineered open format that everyone could have used.

Don't send people DOCX files, or other word document files. They're meant for you to print and store your own documents for later printing, on your own printer. They're not an electronic publishing format. Use other formats if you need to send a document to someone electronically. e.g. Plain text, HTML, or even PDF (if you must). Heck, if you're emailing someone, type the message in the email, don't attach it as a document. The same goes for webpages; write the document in the webpage, don't make it a file download.

Perhaps I should make you jump through hoops to read one of my documents in a format that Microsoft can't be bothered to support. Or send you a format completely inappropriate for sending something that's simply going to be read on-screen, rather than typeset by a professional printer.

I can't read DOCX on my preferred software (OpenOffice.org on Fedora Linux, by the way), because the format's not supported. Why? Because of the burden Microsoft puts on anyone wanting to support the format makes in untenable, or completely impossible.

Even if there was another program available to me, I don't want to install some other damn program just to read a badly written word processor file attached to an email, when they could have just written the same thing *in* the email. And I certainly don't want to pass the document out for something else to (attempt to) translate it, just the same as I don't show my private mail to other people.

And even while using other people's Windows computers I haven't been able to read those damn files. The computer tells me to get some update to add the feature to their word/office software. I have to get permission to add software. I spend far too much time downloading many megabytes of files, that fill up the drive with even more megabytes when they install (yes, a great many people still use old computers with drives filled to capacity). I have even more of my time wasted by having to shutdown and reboot. And, then, to top it all off, I find that it still can't read the damn file!

So how long did it finally take to get to read a DOCX file on someone's old computer still running Windows 2000? *Well* over two hours of:

- Trying to get the Microsoft office software to update itself.

- Finding out that the plug-in doesn't work, won't load, isn't actually compatible, requires several other upgrades. Which have the exact same problems (doesn't work, won't load, isn't actually compatible, requires even more upgrades—some of them being buying new office software).

- Reading instructions on Microsoft help pages, working out exactly what files should be downloaded from Microsoft, manually. The pages aren't user-friendly. The pages are nightmarish to comprehend, even to technically computer literate people. The links go around in circles, leading to more downloading instructions but no actual direct downloads.

- Downloading (having broadband doesn't help when the server is damn slow, or the pipe to it is), installing, rebooting, testing.

- Finding out that the plug-in can't be used, either. A standalone document reader won't install, or can't be installed with your version of Windows. Or, after more research for another version of the software, it still can't read the file.

- Searching the web to find alternative, non-Microsoft, software that I don't have to pay for, isn't huge, untrustworthy, or hideous to use.

- Downloading, installing, rebooting, trying out one, or more, of these alternatives.

- Cleaning up the mess.

The situation's no easier on someone else's newer Windows computers, which either come with no office software, or seriously crippled editions home- or student-versions.

No, we're not handing more money to try and read someone else's document. The computer isn't some slot machine where you keep on having more and more money swiped from you in the vain hope that you might get something back in return.

What is this, the 1980s all over again? Haven't they learnt anything about usability? Or file compatibility? It's 2010, and Microsoft is still a major pain in the arse, even to their own customers.