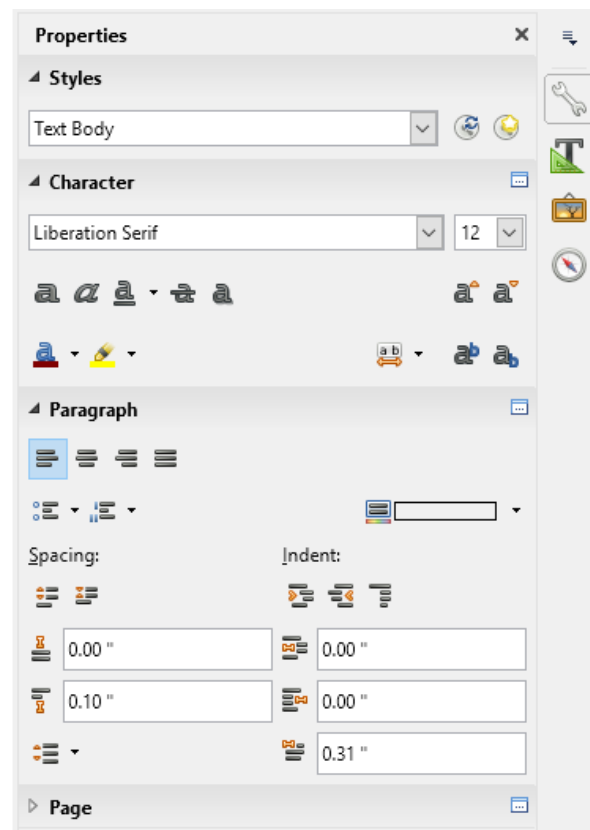# What do you expect from the sidebar in Libreoffice?

With the release of LibreOffice 4.1, the Sidebar was introduced. It was originally developed for IBM Lotus Symphony, apparently as an alternative to the toolbar, however the usability foundation of this concept was not elaborated. The question "What is the sidebar good for" should be answered clearly in order not to overutilize or abuse this widget.

The first reason is that modern widescreen monitors provide a lot of horizontal space, whereas it is limited vertically. Unlike common toolbars, the sidebar takes no additional vertical space, so it improves on the traditional toolbar model by giving access to frequently used functions.

However, limiting the number of functions in the toolbar makes sense not only because of the space. Human perception is restricted. And although similar functions can be grouped, for instance a chunk of file operations Open, Save, Print etc., having access to only the most frequently used features is crucial for usability. The sidebar contradicts this axiom.

An alternative concept is to use the sidebar for access to frequently used properties. In other words, the toolbar is there to start *functions* - for instance inserting a shape - and the sidebar to change *properties*, i.e. the shape's color. The common text formatting toolbar, as an example, consists of direct formatting options like bold, italic, and underline. Those items change the property of the selected text, and would be accessible from the sidebar only to strictly meet the concept.

Another concept is that of dockable panels, which is well known for a long time. You can easily arrange the UI to your preference by dragging the toolbars and docking it to the left or right side. In Libreoffice you can have the Navigator (F5) as a separate panel, usually docked to the left side. This panel allows to include more and larger controls such as lists or

trees. With docked panels in mind you would ignore the aspect of frequently used features in favor of a container for interactive controls.

Questions

Why do we need a clear concept? Ideas concerning the sidebar are repeatedly filed at the bug tracker. As of today we have 87 bug reports or feature requests linked to the sidebar meta bug [tdf#65138](). From the conceptual perspective, it is relevant to define constraints such as whether this panel can be replaced and docked somewhere else or fully undocked, if the resizing is limited, what type of information is shown, etc. Those questions are discussed repeatedly in the UX team, but with no consensus. What we need is your personal position regarding the handling of the sidebar, but please keep in mind that with more functionality, the complexity increases and the ease of use diminishes.

To answer our question please go to the following page
<Link to the study>

Thanks a lot for your contribution. The study will run until March-18. Please spread the word so we get a good number of replies. Results will be reported here as soon as possible.

<------------------------ user weave ------------------------>

<welcome page>
Welcome to the survey about the sidebar in Libreoffice. This study aims to get an impression on how you use the it in order to help drive its future development. What we need is your personal position regarding the sidebar's functionality, but please keep in mind that with more functionality, the complexity increases and the ease of use diminishes.
Click Next on the bottom right to continue.

<survey page>
Do you use the sidebar in Libreoffice?
( ) No, I haven't tried it.
( ) No, I tried it but prefer toolbars.
( ) Yes, but only for Styles & Formatting and Gallery panels.
( ) Yes, I use the sidebar for as many interactions as possible.

Do you want to modify the sidebar's position?
( ) No, I keep it docked at the default side.
( ) Yes, I want to dock it somewhere else.
( ) Yes, I want to not only dock it somewhere else but make it also free floating.

Do you want to resize the sidebar horizontally?
( ) No, it is fine with its default width.
( ) Yes, I want to enlarge or shrink the sidebar within a reasonable range
( ) Yes, I want to resize the sidebar to any width up to the screen size

When switching panels inside the sidebar (like from Properties to Styles and Formatting), may the sidebar change size automatically?

( ) No, the width should be constant, the content of panels should be such that sidebar does not resize when switching panels.

( ) No, the width should be constant for built-in functionality, but the extensions should have have freedom (if they need).

( ) Yes, the width may dependent on the content, and it can resize with a switch.

Do you want to stack other sidebars vertically (more sidebars on top of each other)?

( ) No, please have the dock site solely for the sidebar.

( ) Yes, I want to stack other panels to the dock where the sidebar is located.

( ) Don't know what you are talking about

Do you want to configure the content of the sidebar?

( ) No, please configure it for me.

( ) Yes, I want to switch items on/off.

( ) Yes, I want to switch items on/off and add items.

( ) Yes, I want to switch items on/off, add items, and rearrange them.

Do you want to bring more functionality to sidebar?

( ) No, there's enough already now.

( ) Yes, but only more properties setting.

( ) Yes, even interactive operations, like Find & Replace, or Change Tracking.

What is your monitor's dimension?

( ) 4:3

( ) 16:9 or 16:10

( ) other

( ) no idea

What is your screen resolution in pixels?

( ) low (<= 1024x768)

( ) medium (> 1024x768 and < 1440x900)

( ) high (>= 1440x900 and <= 1920x1080)

( ) extra high (> 1920x1080)

( ) no idea

Do you have suggestions for the sidebar?

[   ]

<Goodbye page>

Thanks a lot for your contribution. Although this study just aims to gather an atmospheric picture, without concrete plans the results will serve as a guideline for the development. We will report about the results at the LibO design blog.