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Reviews:

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- *We Check for Hype When Using Skype*
- *Ending the Day with a Round of Virtual Putt Putt*

ISSUE 13 • MAY 2006

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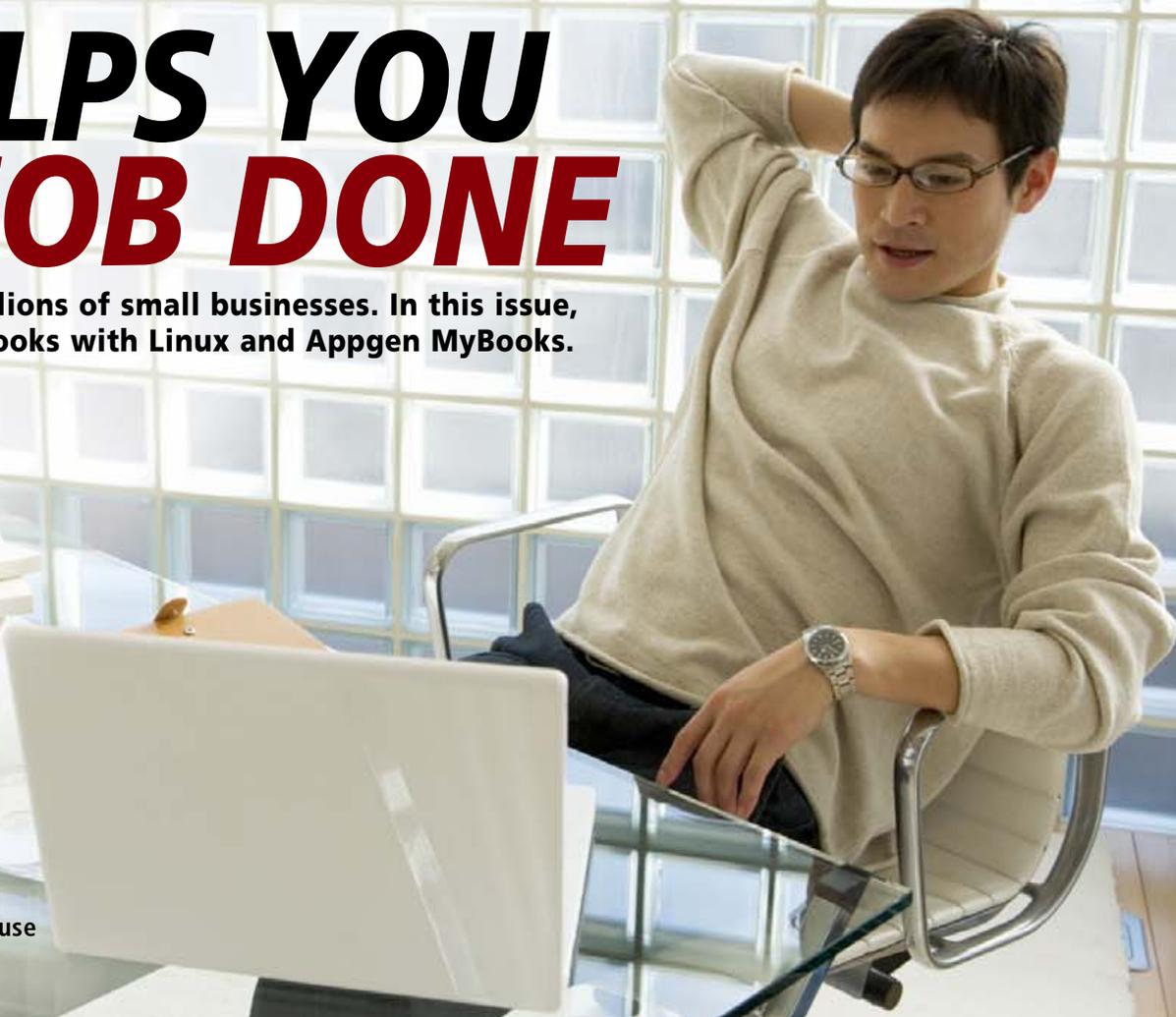
We Show How It Can Help Your Business Deliver the News

FIRESTARTER

Get the Most From Your Internet Connection and Protect It at the Same Time

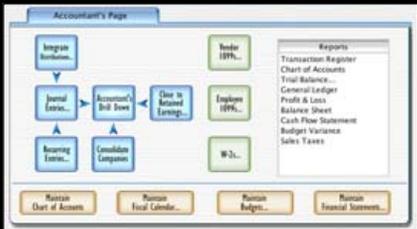
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TUX

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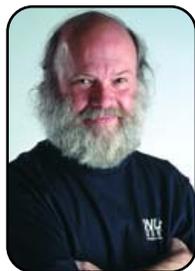
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FROM THE PUBLISHER

The Right Tool?

Virtualization and other mainstream success stories are making Linux move beyond its erroneously perceived infancy.

PHIL HUGHES

I have been watching a discussion on the Scribus mailing list. It started with a description of a teacher who elected to teach open-source tools instead of more traditional desktop publishing tools—in other words, proprietary tools.

After you filter out those that support his decision and those that suggest it was bad because those tools aren't what is used in industry, you get to the point made by a contributor named Roger: "Open source and its tools are in an infancy and growing faster than imaginable; however, it will never be the right tool for everybody, just like proprietary software is not the right tool for everybody."

Okay, he gets it—people use what works best for a given purpose. But, as true as his statement is, we have to consider the politics as well. Thirty-plus years ago, the common expression in IT was, "You can't go wrong buying IBM." Well, although IBM is a big player in the Linux community today, there certainly was a time when people would disagree with that statement.

Let's look at UNIX. UNIX grew in market share, and ten-plus years ago, people *knew* Linux was only a toy and UNIX was the one true POSIX-compliant operating system—another "truism" that went away.

I just read that Microsoft announced support for Linux running under its Virtual Server 2005 R2. First, let me explain what Virtual Server is. It is a product that runs on top of Microsoft Windows that allows you to run other operating systems (in Microsoft's case, up to four), as if they were running on the hardware itself.

Now, why would someone want to run Linux in such an environment? If we take that expression from more than 30 years ago and make a one-word change, we get, "You can't go wrong buying Microsoft." So, you tell your boss you are running Microsoft, and he is happy, and you run Linux on top of it to keep your programmers happy. Does that make sense?

Well, no. Here is the problem. The way Microsoft Virtual Server works, it will be slow. This is partly because it doesn't take advantage of built-in capabilities for virtual systems in the newer AMD and Intel processor chips. Clearly Microsoft knows this, because it also just reduced the price to \$0. That's almost like free software, but without the benefit of being able to see what is inside or the ability to modify it.

Why is Microsoft being so nice? It sees the writing on the wall. VMware and XenSource offer these same capabilities and do it a lot better. In

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fact, the Xen product will be included with the latest SUSE and Red Hat enterprise editions of Linux. That is, you can buy Linux, install it, and if need be, run Microsoft Windows on top of Linux.

So, Microsoft isn't giving away the farm. It is trying to keep people from defecting to the superior solutions available today, while it tries to get its product up to snuff with the competition. You still have to buy the operating system, and Microsoft hopes you will buy a support contract for its now-free Virtual Server product. Once again, Microsoft wants you to see it as the right tool for the job—even if it is only politically right.

Another feather in the Linux cap was the announcement that Linux Professional Institute and Canonical, Ltd.—the

WHY IS MICROSOFT BEING SO NICE? IT SEES THE WRITING ON THE WALL.

people behind Ubuntu Linux—have added Ubuntu professional certification. This puts a little more of the good politics into the Linux camp.

Where am I going here? First, I want to say that Linux today is about as mainstream as you can get. I guess I would think of it as the Toyota of the US car market. Although at one time many people were busy telling us that Japanese cars didn't really work, Toyota and others continued to gain market share.

So, what matters today is will Linux do the job you want done? On the plus side, Linux does, and always has, interoperated with other operating systems. Depending on your environment, a Linux-based server might be the best first step whether the clients are Microsoft-based, Mac-based or a combination—and maybe a Linux desktop added to the mix.

Where you decide to add Linux to your computing mix is a decision for you to make. The only real mistake you can make is to think that Linux will not be a serious mainstream player. ■

Phil Hughes is Group Publisher for SSC Media Corp.

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FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF

Linux's Fundamental Difference

Examining the core reasons why Linux is different from Microsoft Windows.

KEVIN SHOCKEY

My wife and I played host to a senior executive from a major nonprofit recently, and as I was explaining what I was working on, he asked a question that stumped me. It was really a simple question, but I had never heard it put in quite this way. After telling him that I was working on a magazine focused on Linux and explaining that it was an alternative to Microsoft Windows, he asked, "What is the fundamental difference from Windows?"

Obviously, many things immediately jumped to my mind. Well, I thought, it is typically cheaper, it is more secure, it provides more freedom, it suffers from fewer virus attacks, and it is supported by an active and knowledgeable community. However, I didn't really feel comfortable with any of these, or anything else I could think of on the spot. Although all of those reasons are important, I didn't think this nontechnical, attention-deficit-challenged senior executive would get these overly technical reasons. Plus, I also

believed that it was the combination of all of them, plus others that made Linux fundamentally different. To make matters more confusing, I knew from working with senior executives before that their tolerance for jargon and patience in hearing "the point" meant my answer needed to be simple and short. Ask a simple question, get a simple answer, right?

Unfortunately, I muddled through with an answer that I ended up not being happy with, and vowed to boil down the many reasons to one fundamental difference. I did much better when explaining OpenOffice.org. When he asked why should his company consider OpenOffice.org, I said, "It's free!", which seemed to get his attention. It was also something he immediately could understand.

As the weeks went by after my encounter, I kept thinking about the one fundamental difference between Linux and Windows. Finally, after significant subcon-

scious processing, it became clear. For me, the fundamental difference (and I believe the most profound) difference is...control. After a long trend where makers of software assumed more control over our desktops and applications, I believe that free and open-source software, especially Linux, restores control back to us, the owners of those desktops. Stepping back, the wider perspective of control also allows me to include the many other important benefits within one larger single difference. By encompassing all of the other reasons why Linux is different, control suffices to keep the answer short. However, then I have to fit the other major reasons under the umbrella of control.

CONTROL OVER COSTS

With low or no licensing costs, we can get Linux, use it as much as we want, and even share it with our friends. In addition, because the total cost of ownership is lower as well, we have greater

control over the upwardly spiraling costs of proprietary software.

CONTROL OVER HARDWARE

With numerous distributions available, Linux provides more control over implementing an operating system and software that meets our needs, while still using our existing hardware infrastructure. We can expect to implement new versions of our favorite distributions, or even choose a replacement distribution, and reasonably expect to avoid upgrading our hardware to make the new version work. This also helps control our costs.

CONTROL OVER SUPPORT

In my opinion, less support available for Linux and open source is the biggest myth ever. Linux and open source have two sources of support that proprietary software cannot match. First, if you have the desire, you can access the original source programs and provide your own support. Want to know why a piece of code is failing? What not debug it yourself? Second, between a large community of supporters and developers, nearly all projects have extremely talented and dedicated resources ready to help. One of those community members even might be the engineer who actually wrote that particular piece of code. Compare that with wasting your time on first and second

tier support, waiting to talk to an engineer—who, when you finally contact that engineer, says she can't help you because she was unable to replicate the error in her laboratory. Everyone knows that if one can't replicate the error, one can't fix it!

CONTROL OVER VIRUSES

For the time being, Linux enjoys relative immunity from viruses, spyware, adware and malware. This is partly because most everyone follows standard security practices and runs Linux with a user account and not the superuser root account. And, it also is partly due to the amazing process inherent in developing open-source software that permits developers, testers and users (the community) to examine the source code and find more errors, which also allows the community to patch emerging security vulnerabilities more quickly.

CONTROL OVER FUNCTIONALITY

If you are not happy with how Linux does something, and you have either the ability or the motivation to contribute to make it work differently, then you have control over the functionality of Linux. Because of the General Public License, you have the right to modify the original Linux source programs. If you desire, you can obtain all of the original source programs and create a copy of Linux just for you, your company or your country.

And, also because of the GPL, no one ever can take that away from you. Put in those terms, it is easy to see why Brazil and China want to use Linux so extensively.

CONTROL OVER THE SOFTWARE

Because Linux is available only by agreeing to the end-user license agreement, the General Public License guarantees that Linux will always be available to us. No entity can prevent our access to Linux and the source code for Linux. Many useful and important software applications are no longer available to us because the owner of the software did not release the software into the public domain prior to going out of business.

Considering it in this way, it is easy to see why the main difference between Linux and Windows is control. The more freedom we receive with Linux ultimately means more control. With Linux, we are in complete control of our computers; we'll decide what to run and when to upgrade. We'll modify our computers by writing or fixing programs if we are able, and we'll choose when to upgrade our hardware and gain even more security from attack. For those of us that have suffered by having someone else control our computers, the control Linux affords is refreshing and liberating. ■

Kevin Shockey is Editor in Chief of TUX.

LETTERS

Constructive Distribution Smackdown Criticism

I am sure that my mail will be among hundreds of messages pouring in your inbox as far as the choice for the distro is concerned [April 2006]. Frankly, I have tried and tested some three distros before I settled in with Ubuntu as my distro of choice.

There can be many arguments for and against a particular distro. However, I feel that even though Ubuntu may be heavily promoted and advertised, it gets the job done. None of the reviewers highlighted the fact that Ubuntu 5.10 now comes with Automatrix (which is mentioned on the Ubuntu Wiki and the forums), which makes it a breeze to install the non-free software in association with the Penguin Liberation Front. One does have to open up the terminal, but the step-by-step guide makes it a breeze to install it initially and watch the screen roll as it updates and installs the codecs, Flash, firewall and so forth.

I am a novice user. Arguably, I have been miffed with some lack of support on the Ubuntu forums or in the IRC channels, but the world isn't perfect, is it? There are some nagging hassles with KDE 3.5.1 too, but on the whole, my job gets done. While using Linux, people *do* have to involve themselves with the distro; I am speaking this as a newbie, mind you! It isn't about tweaking or command-line stuff, but Linux does demand a little intelligence.

I believe that the next distribution comparison should include similar hardware across categories. With differing hardware, it isn't fair to rate the distros. Otherwise, most of them run on a range of hardware, depending, of course, on the graphical environment.

I have issues with Mandriva too. It may be free to download, install and use, but as a newbie, I need to use urpmi to download the "latest". The primary reason I shifted to Linux was

because it is *free*. And this means freedom from licenses or any future upgrades. Ubuntu even ships for free to my doorstep. All I need to do is to place an order on-line. Why do I have to pay for printed manuals when everything is *free* on-line? Someone who needs the manuals to get it done, needs help for sure.

I come from a resource-poor setting. Internet availability is a mess, and it's next to impossible to get decent broadband. Under these circumstances, I find Ubuntu makes sense, especially for a country like India. It is not flashy with blinky installers either—a basic text-based system does the work.

A major hassle with Linspire is that it runs the whole distro as root, which makes it vulnerable to insults. Again, I have issues with paying for *free* software. I would never touch Linspire with a barge pole—*never*.

One more point of concern is in the review of Linspire, the author maintains that he doesn't have to call up India and be on hold for an hour. Outsourcing is a contentious issue here too. By other accounts on-line, Linspire support is patchy at best, and there are several posts on-line deriding them—even from the call centres based in the country of their origin. I am sure that these subjective biases could be done away with.

The most important fact is that there ought to be a disclaimer of the interests of the reviewers—whether any of them have profited from the exercise. These "interests" ought to be declared in the spirit of open source, or else anyone would be tempted to question the motives behind using the distro and recommending it over others.

Before I end, SUSE is a great distro. However, the RPMs can be a

pain to handle. Newbies, those who don't understand adding repositories, can mess up their systems by downloading RPMs that may not be packaged correctly. It's the equivalent of downloading .exe files. Synaptic doesn't let any Deb file install by itself and usually removes it as a broken package. I would wholeheartedly recommend klik, which does away with the installation hassle on its own. It isn't perfect, but it works most of the time. This factor could have been highlighted as well. It wasn't, and this makes it a very incomplete smackdown.

I hope that you take all of this as constructive criticism. Overall, I love *TUX* magazine for its no-nonsense approach toward Linux for newbies.

—
Dr Abhishek Puri

Thanks for the feedback and I respect your opinions concerning our comparisons. Unfortunately, we don't have the resources to carry out a more controlled review with exactly the same hardware. I'm concerned, however, with your implication that the freedoms provided by the General Public License and other open-source licenses equal free of cost. Nothing could be further from the truth. It states very clearly on the Open Source Initiative Frequently Asked Questions Page (<http://www.opensource.org/advocacy/faq.php>) that you can sell open-source programs. You are entitled to your right not to buy software—or books, training or anything else related to open source—that is your choice. Nevertheless, I believe that by not buying these things or supporting open source in some other fashion—donation of money, resources or time—we jeopardize its strength and long-term viability. Free and open-source software is not without a license; when you use this software you agree to that license. That license ensures the freedom to

distribute, modify and remain available (among other freedoms). None of those licenses indicate a freedom from costs.—Ed.

A Strong Reader Endorsement for Brother Printers

This is the first time I've sent an e-mail to you guys. The magazine is fantastic! I've read every issue. I've noticed several readers' letters have included complaints about Linux drivers. I've been using Linux since 1996 or 1997. I've found, with Linux, to have a great system is to make sure you buy hardware that you know is compatible, at least until everybody makes drivers for Linux. Also, regarding printers, if you don't have one already, buy a Brother printer. Brother has Linux drivers for all its products on the Web site. Also, some distributions have certain drivers that others don't. Look into the distro and try to find out whether it covers the drivers you'll need. Anyway, thanks for the magazine. I'm not a newbie, but I still learn something every time I read your magazine.

—
David A. Tigue

SUSE Deserved a Better Score in the Smackdown

First, I want to say that I really enjoy your magazine. I have to admit though, I was a little discontented with the distribution smackdown for a particular reason. I'm a SUSE user and feel that SUSE's score was way too low for the performance described in the test. The problem was that each distribution was tested by different users, and whereas some users were giving away high grades easily, others appeared to be more strict. The SUSE tester especially seemed to be one of the strictest. Maybe next time you should have a few testers that have to test different distributions in order to make the test more objective.

Apart from that, I really enjoy reading every issue. Maybe you could do a special article about the KDE killer app amaroK [see *TUX*'s first issue for an introduction to amaroK]. There's a new version coming out soon (1.4), and it will surely deserve the attention. Keep up the good work, and don't let Mango Parfait change her style.

—
Jens Uhlenbrock

Ubuntu Deserved a Better Score Too

I wanted to add some feedback to the April 2006 Distribution Smackdown issue. I found the articles overall to be well done and informative. The only problem I personally found was some of the reviews seemed incomplete on some fronts, specifically the Multimedia section in the Ubuntu article. Ubuntu, being a Debian derivative, has the same capabilities to add multimedia playback as Mepis and Debian itself, by either installing the packages manually or by using apt-get. The Win32 codecs, livDVDcss2 and RealPlayer can be downloaded from any number of sites, including <http://videolan.org> and the MPlayer home page, as Deb packages or source. After that point, it's only a matter of switching the gstreamer versions of amaroK, Totem and Kaffeine for the Xine versions using Synaptic/Adept. After that, you can play any multimedia format in Linux that you can in Windows.

For a much easier install, simply adding the PLF repository to the sources.list file (only two lines of text), allows all of the above to be downloaded via Synaptic/Adept. Switching the gstreamer versions of amaroK, Totem and Kaffeine for the Xine versions is still required.

All in all, I love *TUX* Magazine so far, as well as its counterpart.

Keep up the excellent work. I'm sure you will be getting a lot of these messages, as any article regarding distributions usually spawns a lot of feedback—some constructive, some negative. I hope mine comes across as intended, constructive.

—
Aaron Salyers

A Potential Solution for Storing Passwords?

We all know that storing passwords (even in encrypted form) is insecure. But a new open-source project called PasswordMaker (<http://www.passwordmaker.org>) helps you remember your passwords without storing anything. A unique digital fingerprint is created by hashing your "master password" with the URL of the login page. PasswordMaker then automatically recalculates the digital fingerprint at every login.

From the Web site: "Nothing is stored anywhere, anytime, so there's nothing to be hacked, lost or stolen."

—
Phillip

Doubts over Mandriva Review

Although I'm sure that Mandriva is a fine distribution, I believe that the article on it in your Distribution Smackdown failed to prove anything significant. Unlike the other authors, Mr Leibovitch fails to explain each of the categories set out at the beginning.

He mentions that for upgrades, "the Mandriva system can still be fairly intimidating to new users." He also states about installation, "I consider it a real shortcoming in Mandriva." Yet he gives it high marks for both.

Apparently, having up-to-date software is not a particularly

important criteria either: “I find that Mandriva is not as bleeding-edge as some other distributions—for instance, the current version of Firefox as I write this is 1.5.0.1, but the one currently supported by Mandriva is 1.0.6.” I don’t know what other software versions are available, but I’d hardly refer to Firefox 1.5 as “bleeding edge”—some important security changes were brought about between 1.06 and 1.5.

Personally, I’ve downloaded (or bought) and tried quite a few distributions. They include distributions ranging from College, Damn Small Linux, Debian, Fedora, Knoppix, Linspire, Mandrake, Open SUSE, Puppy, Red Hat, Novell/SUSE, Ubuntu, Yellow Dog and a couple of others I don’t even remember anymore. Some worked well; others didn’t even install. Some were marvelously easy to install, but impossible (for a newbie) to add programs or do upgrades. Yes, I have my favorite and my close second choice, but that’s not my point.

If Linux is really to overtake the desktop, it’s got to be easy to install, easy to use, provide the functionality that the whole family can use, and do it at a price that makes Microsoft look less and less attractive. Personally, I’d be willing to pay a few dollars for a distribution that lets me legally play all of my DVDs and see all of the on-line videos I can view if I use Windows or Mac OS. (I might note that there’s no mention of playing such media in the Mandriva review.) And *not* having to learn the console and shell commands is a *big* plus for most everyone.

I’m sorry, but because of the contradictions and lack of information for most of us, I just can’t take the Distribution Smackdown review on Mandriva seriously. I’d think Mandriva would deserve better.

—
Rod Wood

Reader Provides Advice for Adding Multimedia to SUSE 10.0

I’ve just read the last (April 2006) edition of *TUX* (which is a great Linux magazine, by the way) and noticed the review of SUSE Linux 10.0 (among other interesting things). I am a SUSE Linux 10.0 user myself (I’ve used SUSE since version 9.1). I must say that Jes Hall wrote a great review!

In her review, she complained about SUSE lacking multimedia capabilities, so I decided to help (if I may) other SUSE users/new-comers install these missing multimedia plugins and thus improve overall experience with SUSE Linux 10.0.

Installation is quite easy (even for a complete Linux newbie). All you have to do is add some Internet repositories to the YaST Control Center. Open the YaST Control Center (by using `K→System→YaST`). Click on the Installation Source category.

Here you need to add new (Internet-based) software repositories, as follows: click the Add button, and choose HTTP. In the newly opened dialog (under the field Server Name), type the following text:

```
packman.rsync.zmi.at/suse/10.0.
```

Press OK. If that repository link does not work, you can choose one of the mirrors from this site:
`ftp://packman.links2linux.de/pub/packman/MIRRORS.`

Highlight the newly introduced source, and then click Enable, or disable the button until the Status field for this source says On. Repeat this with the Refresh On or Off button for the same source, until it reads On, under the Refresh field.

You will add three additional repositories, as follows: click on the Add button, and choose FTP. Under Server Name, type:

```
mirrors.kernel.org/opensuse/distribution/SL-10.0-OSS/
inst-source-java
```

Click OK. Repeat the procedure for enabling and refreshing this source as well (as explained above).

Click again on Add, and choose FTP. Under Server Name, type:

```
mirrors.kernel.org/opensuse/distribution/SL-10.0-OSS/
inst-source.
```

Repeat the procedure for enabling and refreshing this source as well.

Click one more time on Add, and choose FTP. Under the field Server Name, type

```
mirrors.kernel.org/suse/i386/10.0/SUSE-Linux10.0-GM-Extra
```

Repeat the procedure for enabling and refreshing this source as well.

The Software Source Media dialog of the YaST Control Center should now look similar to the one shown in Figure 1.

Click on the Finish button to exit this dialog. From the YaST Control Center, choose the Software Management category. After several seconds, upon updating the newly introduced repositories, the software manager should open. Now you can install additional packages (not only the missing multimedia packages, but any software that might be missing on the CDs/DVD, such as Nvu, Scribus and so on).

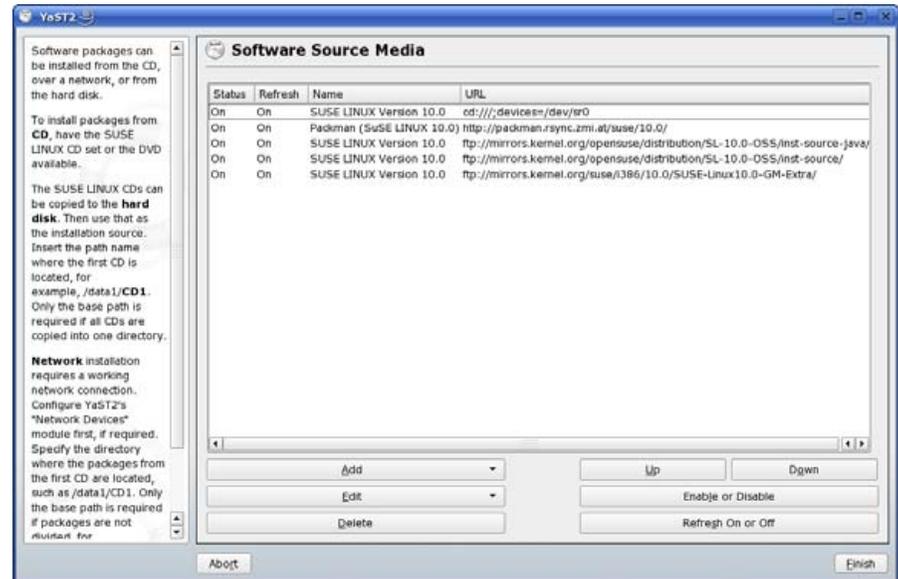


Figure 1. Software Source Media Dialog of the YaST Control Center

To install Windows codecs, in the Search field, type `w32codec-all`. Check it on the right pane and choose Accept. This installs the necessary codecs for playing Windows multimedia files. You may want to search for the following strings: `flash`, for the Flash plugins, and `caffeine-mozilla`, the plugin for embedding the Kaffeine player in Firefox. To add support for the Java language (browser plugin and standalone Java applications), search for `java`, and choose following packages: `java-1_5_0-sun`, `java-1_5_0-sun-alsa`, `java-1_5_0-sun-jdbc` and `java-1_5_0-sun-plugin`. You also may want to install Thunderbird properly (embed it in the Application menu). In the search field, type `MozillaThunderbird`. You also can search for `Nvu`, `Scribus`

and so forth, and install those packages as well, or any others for that matter.

DVD playback support is a little more complicated to install (and illegal in some countries). This procedure is explained on the following Web page: <http://www.thejemreport.com/mambo/content/view/178/42>. This report was written by Jem Matzan, and apart from DVD instructions, it provides similar information to that mentioned above.

You always can disable these newly introduced repositories if you want, from the Installation Source category under the YaST Control Center (highlight repository and click the Enable or Disable button, until Enable status says Off).

I would like to express my gratitude for reading this rather lengthy e-mail. Many regards to everyone at *TUX*!

—
Petar Sarajcev

Kudos for “It’s All about the Applications”

You are absolutely correct [regarding Kevin Shockey’s From the Editor column in the April 2006 issue]. And, until applications are simple to load, simple to run and cover the major needs of a newbie as well as an experienced user, Windows will continue to be the OS of choice—just too much technobabble for me.

—
Bill Parsons

Mango Has Gone Too Far!

Mango went too far when she said, “So if you are too stupid for KDE, GNOME is perfect for you.”

I demand that she apologize for that comment and be fired! That was totally inappropriate for her to say!

—
Jim

As Editor, I’d like to apologize for that comment. I’m responsible for every word that goes into each TUX issue. I should have changed that comment, but I thought it was within her rights to think and write that. However, I didn’t exercise my right to remove it. I should have, but I promise that I won’t let it happen again—either from Mango or from any of our other authors. From now on, I will strive to make TUX rise above the comments that divide our community. If I slip, you most certainly can ask for my resignation.—Ed.

Linspire Robbed of Championship Belt!

I absolutely loved the April 2006 issue and its side-by-side review of some of the more popular Linux distributions. It contained some very helpful information. Thank you. However, I really question Mr John Reep’s review of Linspire. Did he really use it? Did he really dig a bit deeper into its CNR technology? I get the impression that he didn’t. If he did, he’s obviously coming from the perspective of a seasoned, experienced Linux user.

Linspire doesn’t target seasoned Linux pros. Linspire reaches out and targets the new Linux user—one who wants the ease of use of Windows or Mac without having to know all the technical aspects of Linux. Linspire succeeds at this through CNR.

I think a much more balanced, realistic test would have been to give each Linux distribution to new users who know nothing about Linux. Have Linux newbies install software, run applications and so on. I believe your results would be totally different.

Newbies would have easily voted Linspire to be the true heavy-weight winner.

Thanks again for a terrific Linux magazine!

Mark Szorady

Larger Memory Cards for the Nokia 770

Keep up the good work with *TUX*—it's a great magazine and I have learned a lot from subscribing.

Just to let you know, I have a Nokia 770 Internet Tablet, and I use a Kingston 1GB memory card in it [see the March 2006 issue for a review of the Nokia 770 Internet Tablet]. There are no problems, despite what Nokia says, and the Nokia support person said it was not possible to use 1GB memory in the device! I'm sorry I do not have the Kingston part number on hand, but if you go to the site and search for Nokia 770, it comes up.

Like you, I am looking forward to further applications for this product, and once I have upgraded my 500MHz Linux machine, I may write some of my own.

Roy

Thanks for sharing this information Roy. PJ, a friend of mine, also told me that gumstix has 512MB mini-MMC cards for \$60 US plus shipping. Here's the URL: http://gumstix.com/store/catalog/product_info.php?cPath=28&products_id=134.

They also have 256MB for \$35 US plus shipping. By the way, MMC = SD without the encryption. But, they are otherwise pin- and API-compatible with SD cards. Thanks PJ!—Ed.

Call for Newbie Linux Server Articles

As a Linux newbie, I have read *TUX* since issue 1 and have always bemoaned the restriction *TUX* appears to have placed on itself by stating it supports only the Linux desktop.

I run Linux as a server at home (Novell Linux Small Business Server—I believe it's SUSE Linux Enterprise Server 9). This runs primarily as an e-mail server and firewall; however, I recently tried running TwonkyVison Media server pushing Upnp music to a Philips Streamium player attached to my home HiFi.

Personally, I have found the Linux desktop “a jump too far” with my household bemoaning unfamiliarity and demanding M\$oft Windoze apps and so on, so my Linux classroom is limited to the server, which of course, they have no knowledge of. I have had an “interesting” time configuring various services and have found it quite a challenge, as there is little, if any, newbie support out there for anything other than Linux desktops. How about some occasional items on the server side?

I know more and more people are running servers at home to provide network services to their families. Let's face it, Linux fits that role admirably, and why shouldn't *TUX* be a leading light for these newbies? How about an occasional page or two on server issues?

Stan Chelchowski

*I think our sister magazine, Linux Journal, has done an outstanding job covering all topics related to Linux servers. Our mission at *TUX* is to promote widespread adoption of Linux as a desktop operating system. If a server issue helps that promotion, you'll see a page or two on that subject.—Ed.*

A Call for Articles on Creating Web Pages in Linux

I would like to start by congratulating you on an excellent magazine! I discovered it only about a month ago but have since downloaded all the back issues and have read most of them cover to cover.

I have been tinkering with Linux since about 1998, but I have never been able to make a clean break with M\$. The biggest problem is probably my familiarity with Windows. The easy way out is therefore usually to do something in Windows, because I know exactly how to do it and don't have to figure it out first. Installation of new software also has been a major pain with Linux. I am an advanced PC user and build my own machines, set up networks and design Web sites. My home network consists of Macs and PCs running a mixture of Linux, Windows (NT and XP) and Mac OS X.

I recently bought both Linspire 5 and Xandros desktop 3. I must say that both of these distributions are excellent, although I prefer Xandros. (I know you have been less than enthusiastic about it in previous editions but it works for me.) These distributions have come a long way in making Linux more accessible to the general desktop user. Users don't want to compile, configure and hack to get something to work, no matter how powerful the software. They want to push a button; everything should be graphical. Mac OS X is an excellent example. My wife is not very technically savvy, but she was able to start up her first Mac and start working with it straight away. Why can't Linux be like this?

My question is actually this: what software does the Linux community use to develop Web sites? I have been using Macromedia's Dreamweaver, and this is probably the last hurdle preventing me from making a complete switch to Linux on my development machine. I am looking for something similar to Dreamweaver (I don't mind paying for it, so it can be commercial). I need something where I can use graphical tools to lay out pages and style them easily. I want to work in code view (with the HTML) only when really necessary—for example, when writing PHP for database connectivity. I have tried Nvu, and I really hope that there is something better available out there for Linux, freeware or commercial. I found Nvu's interface quirky and could not figure out how to get it to support PHP. Surely something as basic as PHP should be supported by a Web editor with the reputation of Nvu?

Maybe you can dedicate a whole issue to all the tools available and their uses in the Web-building workflow—from graphics, layout and dynamic coding through publishing. Seeing that the majority of Web servers run on Linux, there must be a large amount of people in the Linux community who design Web sites. What are they using? Thanks again for your excellent magazine—keep it up.

—
Cobus van Zyl

It's great that you should ask. Next month's issue will try to introduce a few alternative Web development products to coincide with our Konquer the Web issue.—Ed. ■

TUX Delivers the News

TUX introduces a breaking-news section with the SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop announcement and the One Laptop per Child Project. KEVIN SHOCKEY

NOVELL ANNOUNCES SUSE LINUX ENTERPRISE DESKTOP

<http://www.novell.com/products/desktop/preview.html>

At CeBIT 2006 in Hannover, Germany, Novell unveiled its next-generation enterprise Linux desktop, SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop (SLED). For many, SLED proves that Novell is keeping a promise it made last year, to invest in delivering a desktop that is designed for the business user, rather than for experienced Linux users. Nat Friedman, vice president of Linux desktop engineering for Novell, said, "When we started work on SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop, we didn't want to build the best Linux desktop for business, we wanted to build the best desktop for business, period. By listening to users, we believe we have created a business desktop that leap-frogs the market."

Novell conducted hundreds of distinct usability tests and shot almost 1,500 hours of user interaction video that it used to aid the design of SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop. Each feature of SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop, such as setting desktop preferences, finding files, launching applications, using external devices like USB memory sticks, working with the Internet, and connecting to local and wireless networks, was rigorously tested and refined for usability

to ensure the best possible performance in a business environment.

To simplify migration to Linux, SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop is designed to work with Microsoft Windows, Microsoft Office and Microsoft Exchange. The Novell edition of OpenOffice.org, included with SLED, will support many Visual Basic macros, closing one of the chief compatibility gaps between

OpenOffice.org and Microsoft Office. SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop supports all standard network and printing protocols and integrates seamlessly in existing Active Directory environments, and the Novell Evolution e-mail client includes an integrated connector for Microsoft Exchange.

Finally, SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop is the first enterprise Linux desktop to include the powerful Xgl-based graphical capabilities. These capabilities take full advantage of the 3-D accelerated hardware commonly shipped in modern systems. With Xgl, SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop delivers an industry-leading end-user experience.



Xgl-Based 3-D Desktop Cube

The Blue Model



The Green Model as an E-Book Reader



The Yellow Model

**ONE LAPTOP PER CHILD PROJECT
WILL USE FEDORA DERIVATIVE**

<http://www.laptop.org>

One of the underlying themes of the recent LinuxWorld Conference and Expo in Boston, Massachusetts, was the focus on the One Laptop Per Child Project. Initially started at the infamous MIT Media Lab under the direction of Nicholas Negroponte, the project and Negroponte have since left the university due to support by Advanced Micro Devices (AMD), Brightstar, Google, News Corporation, Nortel and Red Hat.

The goal of the project is to provide children around the world with new

opportunities to explore, experiment and express themselves. And although the devices will be laptops, their primary purpose will be, at least initially, a more effective way of disseminating text books, in e-book format, and keeping those textbooks up to date.

Before you get excited about maybe picking one up for your kids, please note that the laptops, which are not in production yet, will not be available for sale. The laptops will be distributed only directly to schools through large government initiatives. According to the project's Web site, the laptops are intended to be sold in batches of one million. As shown here,

three prototypes currently are available.

Project leaders already have made some key decisions. First, all of the software for the laptop must be open source, starting with the operating system. Negroponte politely turned down offers from both Steve Jobs and Bill Gates and their companies' respective operating systems, choosing instead to base the laptops on a Fedora derivative. Next, all of the applications also will be open source. To project leaders, it is important that as the children grow and pursue new ideas, the software and tools should be able to grow with them and provide a gateway to other technology. ■



Q&A with Mango Parfait

Mango tames crazy clocks and blind mice and then goes on a power trip.

MANGO PARFAIT

Dear readers: you ask many good questions. I want to answer all your questions, but I must ask a favor. Please give me more information. I wish I could visit your house or your company to find out more about your computer or how you run Linux, but I cannot do that. I cannot go anywhere because my boyfriend Otaku has me chained to my computer chair. The chair does not have rolling wheels, so I must stay in one spot unless I hop up and down, and that is hard because the chair is heavy and I am petite and frail but very beautiful. He only feeds me sushi once a day. That is good for my figure but I am a hungry prisoner. I am a poor tortured but beautiful woman.

Did I make you cry? Do you feel sorry for me now? Do not worry, I am teasing you. Otaku really feeds me sushi two times a day.

I am serious that you should send me more information when you ask questions. Sometimes I must know what distribution you are using. Sometimes I need to know if you are using the kernel that comes with your distribution or if you made a custom kernel. Sometimes I must know if you installed the latest updates. Sometimes I must know what kind of PC you are using. Maybe you can even tell me what motherboard you are using, if you know. If you do not know, that is okay. Maybe you are using a brand-name PC like Dell or HP. You probably will not know what motherboard they use.

If you do not know any of this information, then just tell me your shoe size. I do not need this information, but it would be fun to know.

Q Dear Ms Mango: it is a pleasure to read your comments and answers to the questions in *TUX*. I may not be called a new user to computers. I've working with CS since 1965, and with Linux since about 1994, but now I have hit the wall with a small problem.

I bought an ECS Elitegroup 331 laptop without OS, intended for use solely with Linux. After trying Knoppix 4, SUSE 9.3 and 10.0, Ubuntu 5.10 and FreeBSD 6.0, I nearly gave in. None of them could get the X server up and going. (I didn't try to tweak it manually.) So, I had read that SimplyMEPIS could be a good choice for problematic hardware. I downloaded version 3.4.3, burned a CD and went to work. Everything installed without problems. But, I observed that the panel clock seemed to run in double speed. Also, logging off seems to bring SimplyMEPIS to set the hardware clock to the panel clock's value.

I have searched on the Internet to see if someone else has had this problem and solved it. I found someone on MepisLovers, and also some means to solve the problem. It is no solution to correct the fast-running panel clock by connecting to a time server, as was one person's answer. I have also tried to correct some minor punching errors in `/etc/init.d/hwclockfirst.sh` and `/etc/init.d/hwclock.sh`, without help. It looks like it might be a clock interrupt problem, but I don't know.

For normal use, I prefer SUSE and KDE, but in this case,

I selected a distro based on Debian with KDE to give it a try. I will be very happy if you can dig out a solution to the clock problem, so I can stay with SimplyMEPIS, or else I may have to try to get another distro up and running on the 331 to see if the panel clock can get to normal speed. I have another laptop running SUSE 9.3, and two other stationary PCs running SUSE 10.0 without any such problems.

Do you see any way to correct or work around the problem? Don't tell me that I shouldn't have bought that box. Due to my question, the shop tried Knoppix 4.0.2 on it and it worked, though the WLAN wouldn't come up (rt2560 chip). SimplyMEPIS looks like it is happy with the hardware.

Thank you in advance! Continue your good work!—Nils

A You should not have bought that box. Please excuse me, I am joking with you.

You have a crazy clock in your laptop. I have a computer with a crazy clock too. It does not run two times the right speed but it runs very fast. I hear the American expression "time flies when you are having fun." Maybe our computers are having too much fun.

Why is it no solution to connect to a time server? Do you mean that you used the KDE clock setting dialog to set the time automatically? That will not fix your problem. I think this sets the clock one time. It does not check later to see if the time is still right.

You will have the same problem if you set the date with `ntpdate`. This sets the clock only one time. It sets the clock when you boot Linux. The clock will still run fast after that.

Try `ntp-server`. That is the most popular name for the package for Debian and distributions that start with Debian. You can use your favorite package manager to install `ntp-server`. I think

Knoppix includes the Synaptic package manager. It will install some other packages too. This is okay.

Here is the thing you must know. Do not be impatient. You install the time server `ntp-server` on your laptop. If it runs okay, it will set the clock. You will probably see that your clock is still too fast because your time server does not know that your clock is too fast. Wait. Your time server will check a time server on the Internet later and set the clock again. Then it will do it again. After a while your time server will learn that your clock is too fast. It will make a setting in a file to remember that your clock is too fast. Then it will fix the clock speed every time you start Linux.

This does not always work. Sometimes your clock is so fast that the time server gets angry and gives up trying to fix it. But it is a good try.

You also can try the package `adjtimex`. This program does not need an Internet connection to work. This program checks to see whether your clock is too fast or too slow. Then it picks some numbers to fix the clock and saves these numbers in a file. You will see it test your clock when you install it. It is picking the fix-it numbers. Once it picks the numbers, it uses these numbers to adjust your clock every time you boot Linux.

The `adjtimex` program did not work for me. My clock was too fast and made the `adjtimex` program pick settings that it could not use when I rebooted my computer. This does not make sense to me. If `adjtimex` could not use these numbers, why did it pick them? I do not know. This was a long time ago. Maybe the people who wrote `adjtimex` have fixed that problem by now. It is worth trying if you do not have an Internet connection all the time or if `ntp-server` does not work for you.

It is not usually a good idea to try both `ntp-server` and `adjtimex`. Pick one or the other.

Q Today a friend of mine told he changed his mouse from USB to PS/2, and now it is not working on Ubuntu 5.10. As a Debian user, I told him to emit the command `dpkg-reconfigure xserver-xorg` in order to reconfigure the mouse in the X system. As this didn't work, I sent him an `xorg.conf` set with PS/2 mouse configured, and again the mouse didn't wake up.

Maybe he has to create or change the `/dev/input/mice`, but from now on, I can't help him. I appreciate any help.
—George Anderson

A Your problem is very simple. You should not use a PlayStation 2 for a mouse. That is silly.

Okay, I will give you a real answer.

I do not understand why your `xorg.conf` file did not work for your friend. If your `xorg.conf` file was exactly the same as his file, except for the PS/2 mouse setting, it should have worked. Here is what you need to do. You must edit your `/etc/X11/xorg.conf` file. You must do this with root privileges, so you will need to log in as root or use the `sudo` command. If you can use the `sudo` command, open a terminal window or log in to a console. Then, put the name of your favorite editor in the place of `<editor>` in here:

```
$ sudo <editor> /etc/X11/xorg.conf
```

If you cannot use `sudo`, you must log in as root first. Then do this command:

```
# <editor> /etc/X11/xorg.conf
```

Look for this line (or something like it):

```
Option      "Device"          "/dev/input/mice"
```

Change the line to this instead:

```
Option      "Device"          "/dev/psaux"
```

Save the file. Now restart your X server. The mouse should work. If the mouse acts funny, maybe you need to change some of these lines too (they may not say these exact things):

```
Option      "Protocol"        "ExplorerPS/2"
Option      "ZAxisMapping"    "4 5"
Option      "Emulate3Buttons"  "true"
```

I cannot tell you how to change these lines, because I do not know what kind of mouse your friend has.

Your friend may have one other problem. You must make sure that the kernel supports a PS/2 mouse. Did your friend compile his own kernel? He should be sure he compiled support for PS/2 mice. If he is using a normal kernel, maybe the PS/2 mouse module is not loaded. Try this command:

```
$ sudo lsmod | grep psmouse
```

You have a problem if you look at the output and do not see the module `psmouse`. You must load this module. Load the module this way:

```
$ sudo modprobe psmouse
```

If your friend finds out that this module was not loaded, he can make it load every time he starts Linux. Tell him to change `<editor>` to his favorite editor and type this command:

```
$ sudo <editor> /etc/modules
```

Add this line to this file:

```
psmouse
```

Save the file and exit the editor. Now Ubuntu will load the psmouse module every time he starts Ubuntu.

Q I set up a Web server for my company's network running Kubuntu Breezy Badger. It seems to work flawlessly with the exception of its nearly daily random shutdown. Usually, when I arrive in the morning, it has shut itself down during the night. I checked the BIOS settings for an automatic shutdown feature, but none are checked.

My Web server last year was SUSE 8.3, and it didn't display these tendencies. I don't want to go back to SUSE, because I like Kubuntu much better with the exception of the random shutdowns.

Please help me.—chaz

A This is like a joke I heard a long time ago. Maybe it is not a joke but a real story. I do not know. Every night the cleaning lady unplugs the server so she can plug in the vacuum.

If I can look at your machine, I can probably tell you the problem. I cannot look at your machine. I will guess four problems then.

First, maybe your power supply is failing, and you need a new power supply. Sometimes a stinky power supply makes a machine shut down for no reason that you can see. I am guessing this is the problem.

Maybe you have a bad machine. Maybe the motherboard does not work right anymore. This is probably not the problem, but I think it is a good idea to think about this.

Do you have an Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS) for

this machine? Do you have it hooked up to your machine with the serial port or USB port or something? Maybe you also have software that listens to this port and shuts down the machine when your UPS tells it to shut down. Maybe your UPS is failing, or maybe the UPS software does not work right. The easy way to see whether this is the problem is to take away the UPS. Plug the server in to a regular power socket. If your machine stops shutting down, you know the problem has something to do with your UPS.

My last guess is okay, but this guess would make your machine shut down more often than once a day. But I will tell you anyway. Maybe the Linux kernel you use is running a version of ACPI or APM that does not work well with your machine. How do you turn these off? There are many ways. There are so many ways that I do not have space to tell you all of them. So I have to assume you are a geeky user and you can figure out how to change the way Linux boots. Make sure Linux boots with these two parameters: `acpi=off` and `apm=off`. Here is an example from a GRUB menu.lst file:

```
kernel /boot/vmlinuz root=/dev/hda1 acpi=off apm=off
```

It does not matter if your boot scripts try to start a daemon that uses ACPI or APM. This script will not work if you turn off ACPI and APM. You will get an error message when the script tries to start. Ignore that message. You can always uninstall the daemons later if this fixes the problem.■

I am a sweet, humble, delicate and very cute genius who is at your service to answer your Linux questions. Send your questions to mango@tuxmagazine.com. I am deeply sorry that I do not have time to respond to anyone directly by e-mail, but I will select as many questions as I can and answer them here.

F-Spot

A personal photo management application for the GNOME desktop that could be the best program of its kind for any platform, but it's available only for Linux.

JES HALL

TUX has given quite a focus to digital photography, covering digikam in September 2005 and gThumb in October 2005. This month, we take a close look at how to use F-Spot, a photo management application for the GNOME desktop.

F-Spot provides an extremely slick interface for organizing, editing and sharing your digital photographs. It supports a myriad of file types and has excellent support for the various RAW formats used by high-end SLR-style cameras. Even on hardware that is modest by today's standards, F-Spot performs well. It also has support for the gphoto2 library for interfacing with digital cameras.

When you first run F-Spot with an empty library, you're shown the import dialog (Figure 1). To import photographs, choose the location containing your photographs and import them via the Import Source menu. Removable devices like cameras, USB Flash drives and CD-ROMs are shown in the drop-down box, or you can choose Select Folder and navigate to a location

on your hard disk.

By default, F-Spot copies all imported files to a Photos folder in your home directory. You may want to untick the box Copy file to the Photos folder if you are accessing a photograph library over a network share and you'd rather not copy them locally.

F-Spot makes use of tagging and a timeline to help organize your photo library. You can assign multiple tags to each photograph. Categories and tags are similar except categories can have sub-tags.

You can tag photographs in a few different ways. To tag by drag and drop, select a photograph or a group of photographs and drop them onto the tag in the sidebar. You also can reverse this by dragging and dropping a tag onto the photograph. Both methods work if you have selected multiple photographs.

You also can right-click on a photograph or a selected group of photographs and select tags from the context menu. The Tags menu of the main application window modifies

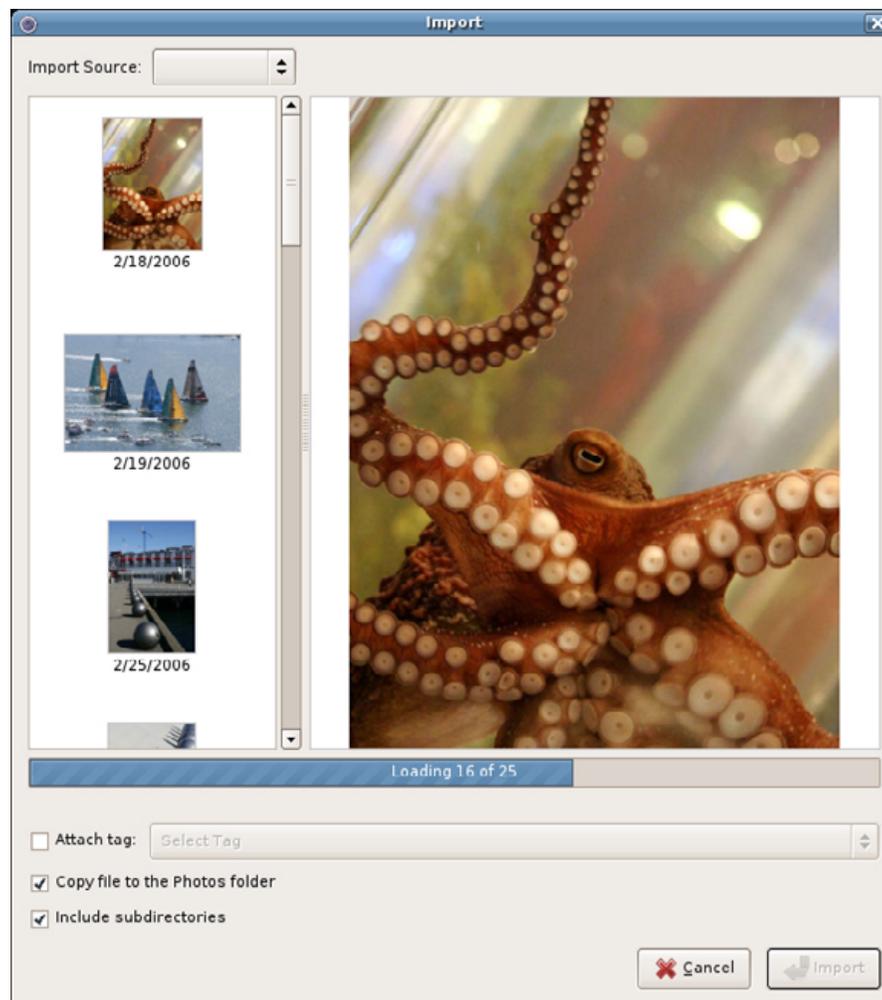


Figure 1. The F-Spot Import Dialog

tags for the selected photograph or group of photographs.

Finally, my favorite method and the most convenient one for mass

tagging is to tag as you type. Pressing T while a photo or group of photos are selected allows you to type tags into the pop-up box to be

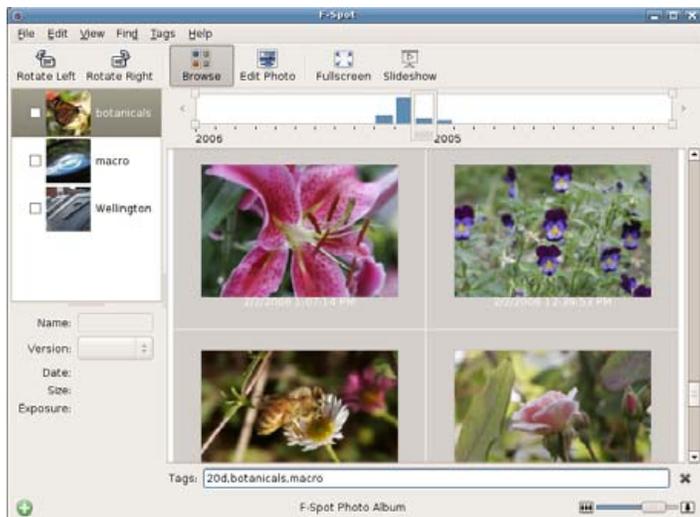


Figure 2. Tagging with F-Spot



Figure 3. A Photograph Taken through Tinted Windows

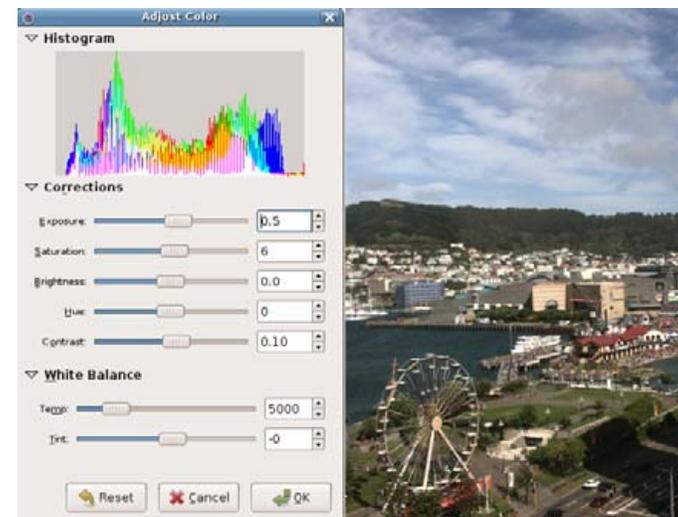


Figure 4. The Same Photograph with the Colours Corrected

applied en masse. You can specify multiple tags by separating them with a comma. If you type in tags that don't exist, F-Spot creates them.

BASIC EDITING TASKS

F-Spot lets you perform basic editing tasks within the application without using an external editor. To enter the Edit Photo view, double-click on an image thumbnail or click the Edit Photo button in the toolbar with a photograph selected. F-Spot always preserves your original image, and all modifications are made on a copy.

The photograph shown in Figure 3 was taken through tinted windows in an office building, so it has turned out very drab. It can be improved by

increasing the contrast and saturation a bit. To correct colour on an image, either click the small icon with three circles below the image in the Edit Photo view, or select Adjust Color... from the Edit menu.

In Figure 4, I'm increasing the exposure, saturation and contrast to brighten up the image until the colours look as natural as I can get them. The image is still a little unreal looking, but it is a vast improvement over the dull original.

If you don't like your changes, you always can delete the modified version and revert to the original. Make sure Modified is selected in the Version box underneath the filename to the left. Select File→Delete Version

to delete the modified image.

F-Spot includes tools to apply black and white or sepia tones to a photograph. These buttons are the last two located on the toolbar below the image. There is also a simple red-eye removal tool. To use it, zoom right in on one of the affected eyes, and select the red area as precisely as you can. Then, click the small icon of an eye on the toolbar below the image. Repeat with the other eye.

One of the most common adjustments I make to images is cropping, either to center the object I want to focus on or to remove unwanted elements. F-Spot's crop tool is simple to use (Figure 5). Drag a selection over the part of the image you want

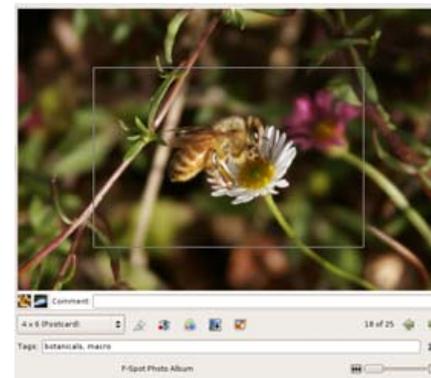


Figure 5. Cropping can recentre the focus of a photograph or remove unwanted background elements.

to keep, and then click the small icon that looks like a penknife below the image. If you want to limit the selection to a certain aspect ratio, the drop-down box to the left of the crop icon contains a list of common ratios.

PHOTO SHARING

F-Spot makes sharing your photographs easy by exporting to popular Web gallery software and creating standalone galleries on disk or CD-ROM/DVD.

Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>) is an on-line photo management and sharing application. It's a lot of fun, with great tools for managing your photographs and creating a network of friends with similar interests or location. Note: to export to Flickr, you need to have a Flickr account.

Select the photographs you'd like to export to Flickr, and then select Export→Export To Flickr from the File menu. In the dialog that appears, click Authorize. F-Spot launches your default browser and navigates to a Flickr page where you can give F-Spot permission to read and write to your Flickr account. Click the large blue button labeled Ok, I'll Allow This.

Once you've done that, return to the F-Spot application, and click Complete Authorization. Now F-Spot should send your selected photographs to Flickr when you click OK. Once these images have finished

uploading, your browser is launched again. Navigate to a Flickr page where you can add titles and comments to your images.

Flickr also uses a tag system, and you can export your images with the tags intact by ticking the box Export Tags.

F-Spot also includes a tool for creating simple standalone Web galleries. Select the images for which you would like to create a gallery, and then choose Export to Folder from the File menu. Type in a name for your gallery beside Gallery Name and select Create standalone Web gallery under Export Method.

Once you've finished with this dialog, click OK. Your gallery is created and saved to the desktop. To view it, load the index.html file from the folder Gallery on your desktop in a Web browser. The gallery is simple but visually striking.

Being able to back up my photograph collection to CD and DVD is important to me. Those photographs are a record of many significant events in my life and the lives of loved ones, and losing them in a hard drive crash would be painful. F-Spot provides a tool for exporting photographs to CD. To use it, select the photographs you want to back up, and then choose Export→Export to CD from the File menu. A dialog appears showing you thumbnails of the photographs you've chosen.

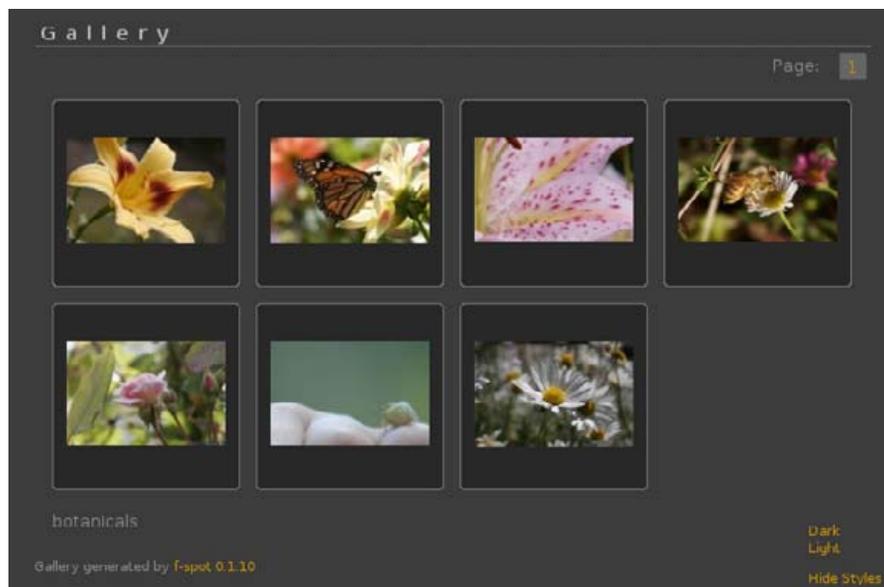


Figure 6. The Export to Folder tool includes the option to create striking galleries.

Click OK to confirm, and F-Spot copies the photographs to a temporary location and then displays the Write to Disc dialog. Click the Write button to start burning the CD. Once the burning process has finished, a dialog asks if you'd like to eject the disk and either make another copy or close the burning tool.

F-Spot is an excellent tool for managing photographs and is the best program of its kind I've used on Linux, Microsoft Windows or Apple's OS X. There is simply no competition for me as far as ease of use and features goes.

Although we've looked at quite a few ways to organise and share photographs with F-Spot, this article by no means covers all of F-Spot's features. To learn more about it, take a look at the F-Spot User Guide at http://f-spot.org/User_Guide. ■



Jes Hall is a UNIX systems consultant and KDE developer from New Zealand. She's passionate about helping open-source software bring life-changing information

and tools to those who would otherwise not have them.

Managing SOHO Businesses with Appgen MyBooks Professional

A look at MyBooks Professional from a Quickbooks' perspective—are the benefits significant enough?

DONALD EMMACK

This month's look at business applications is a great time to see how small-office/home-office (SOHO) operators can use native Linux accounting software to run their businesses. SOHOs are a powerful group, encompassing part-time businesses as well as advanced entrepreneurs. Last month, Novell conducted a survey about which applications people most want ported to Linux. Guess what? Quickbooks was the top pick in one of their recently announced results.

Not surprising, Quickbooks arguably holds the top spot in small-business accounting software with many loyal followers. For SOHOs, being able to stay on top of finances is critical. Without a large staff of accountants, SOHOs usually must balance and manage the books themselves. Most of the ones I know have almost no interest in accounting software unless it's time to make a deposit. So the real unsavory tasks, like figuring taxes and paying bills, need to be quick and easy to complete.

It's a sure thing that most SOHOs would rather spend a lot more time making money instead of tinkering with financial packages. To survive, however, all small businesses have to watch profit margins. One strategy to help is to keep software costs low, so using a Linux operating system with OpenOffice.org fits the budget well. Finding a substitute for Quickbooks is more challenging.

Adopting new financial software can be painful

when you're already comfortable with Quickbooks. After all, you could have years of data on file, your accountant already may be prepared to receive Quickbooks data and no one wants to spend a lot of time learning new software.

If you already have Quickbooks, you could install it on Linux with Wine or CodeWeavers. Or, you could shell out a little more cash and put VMware on your PC to take legacy Microsoft products with you. Of course, this works, but you're still spending hard-earned money on CodeWeavers or VMware. Plus, the cost of Quickbooks upgrades, annual tax tables and monthly payroll processing may be more than you want to spend on accounting.

Without question, a big market exists for Linux SOHO financial software, but choices are limited with no clear market leader. Good Linux applications do exist for personal finance. Some, like GnuCash, even handle receivables and payables, but a business needs a total accounting package with some value-added benefits. Appgen's MyBooks Professional can be a fit for SOHOs and expanding companies alike. MyBooks Professional offers a solid feature set for business users looking for a commercially backed accounting package.

IMPORTING QUICKBOOKS DATA

A primary concern for SOHOs is how to get up and running quickly on any new software. Surprisingly, MyBooks can import your Quickbooks data. Signing up for trial software allows you to download both Windows and Linux versions of the software. MyBooks for Windows converts the Quickbooks .qbb file and produces a compressed .agz file. MyBooks for Linux imports the .agz file containing your old Quickbooks data.

Appgen's documentation is clear, and the one-click import utility is extremely user-friendly. If you decide not to import old data, there are detailed instructions to create start-up entries for important bookkeeping accounts. Overall, the import and setup is not complicated, and SOHOs can start using the software immediately.

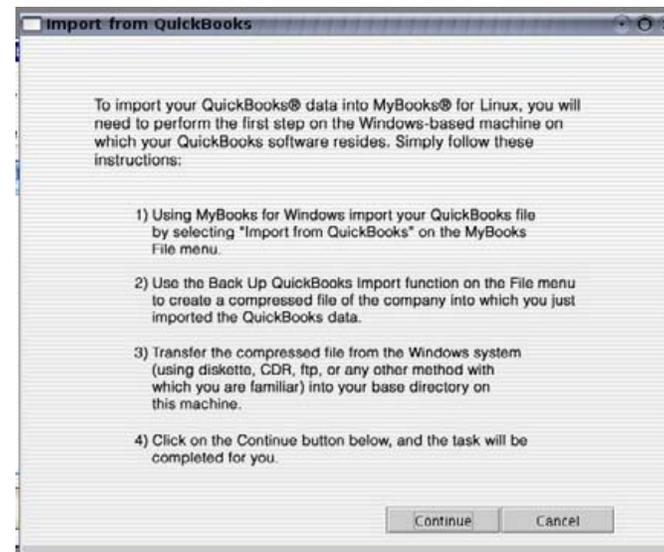


Figure 1. Import from Quickbooks Wizard

LEARNING MYBOOKS

Most people prefer to skim read the Quick Start Guide, but unless you are an accounting wizard, you should learn how to prepare MyBooks for your company's needs. After data conversion, MyBooks presents you with a few short pages of valuable documentation about pre-loading inventory data, tax setup and making the first ledger transactions. Knowing these basics makes the accounting experience much simpler. If you have time, several other detailed manuals are available in the system documentation to lead you through other features like batch entry, vouchers and inventory.

GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH DOUBLE ENTRY

MyBooks differs a bit from Quickbooks in operation, because it conforms to strict double-entry accounting rules. As the name implies, double entry requires a two-step process for financial transactions. First, MyBooks holds any new transactions in a temporary location for final review. Once approved, the transactions are posted and permanently stored. This means you cannot delete posted

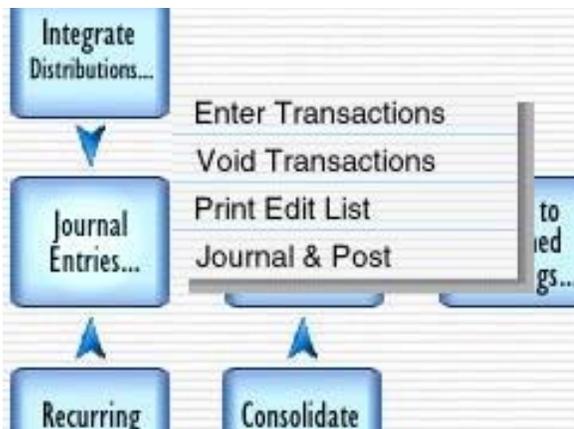


Figure 2. Posting Journal Entries Menu

transactions; adjustments must be made with journal entries or other proper accounting means.

Many former Quickbooks users shudder and proclaim double entry as redundant and restrictive. It is, and Appgen's documentation cites security and conformity to generally accepted accounting principles (GAAPs) as reasons the software is designed this way. That said, it's really not difficult to grasp, and after a few transactions, double entry almost feels comfortable. MyBooks obtains information sequentially, so it's best to restructure your workflow to match the system. Perhaps it is double-entry accounting, or the design of MyBooks, but I was able to lessen my time with data entry and spend more time looking at the financial picture of the business.

CLASSIC ACCOUNTING

Prepare yourself, the look of MyBook's home screen is spartan compared with Quickbook's home screen. However, judging system ability by first glance can be a mistake. Appgen condensed the number of choices into a simple menu for navigation. More complex transactions are found under the Accountants menu, leaving the core features up front. Other reports and features interesting to SOHO operators are readily avail-

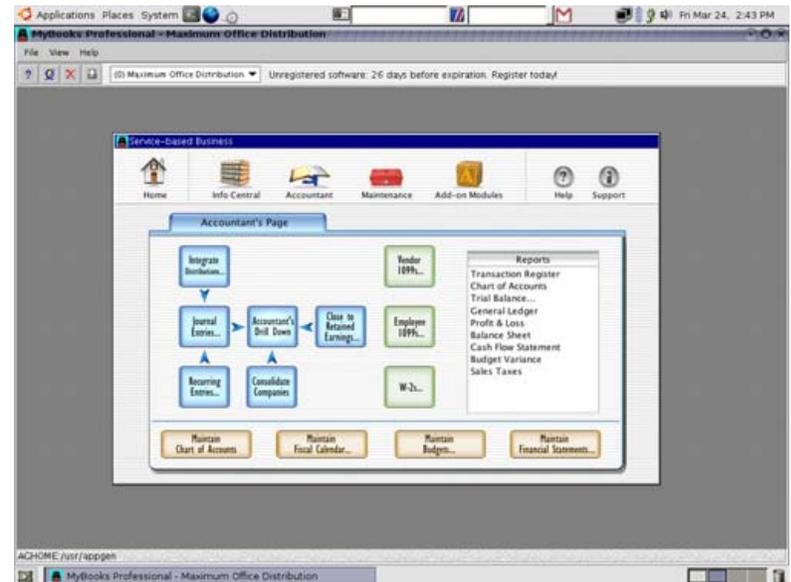


Figure 3. Accountants Main Page

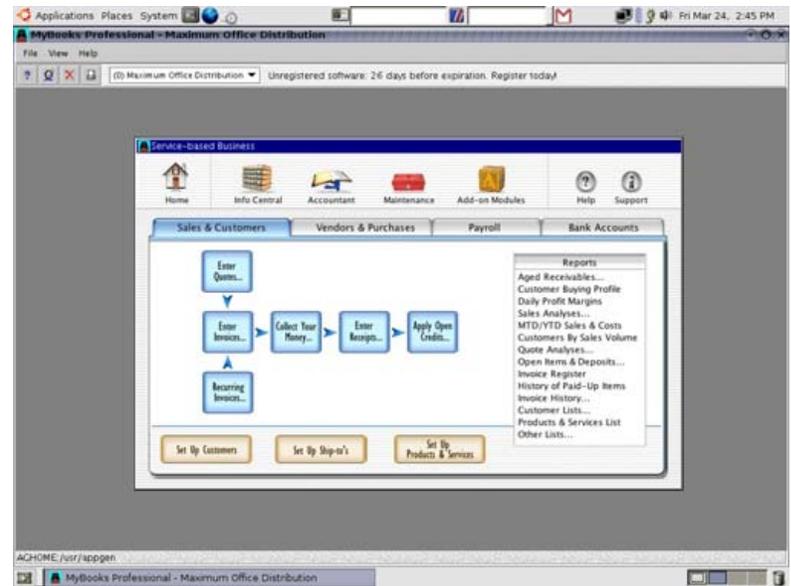


Figure 4. Sales and Customers Tab

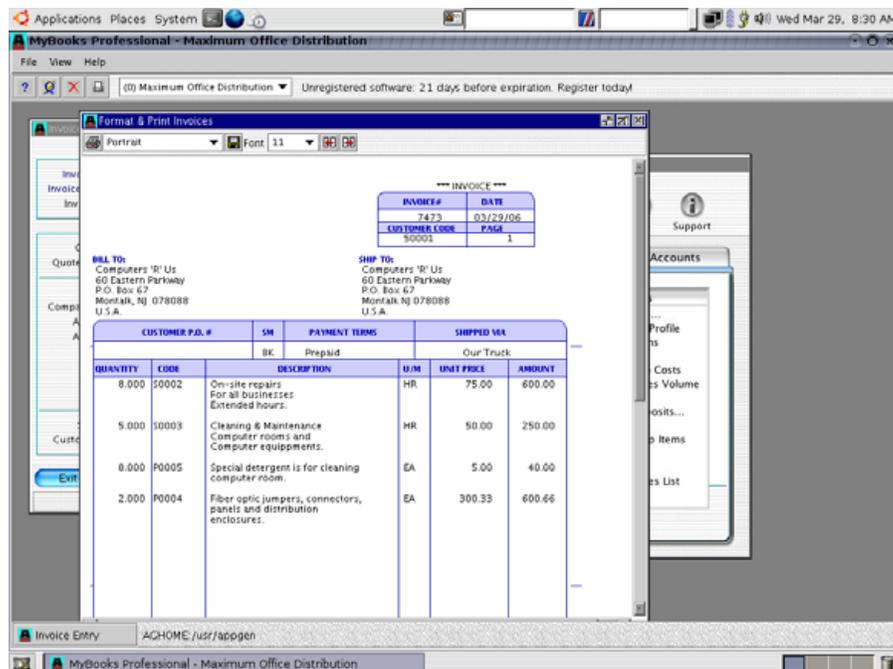


Figure 5. Sample Customer Invoice

able in a package called Executive Dashboard, which I discuss later.

At first use, you will recognize the design of MyBooks corresponds to the work sequence of a SOHO. So, menus differ between service- and product-based businesses, and you can freely switch between the two at any time.

The MyBooks login brings up a home screen that serves as a base camp for most operations, and Appgen divides MyBooks into four areas: Sales and Customers, Vendors and Purchases, Payroll and Banking Accounts.

SALES AND ACCOUNTS PAYABLE

Start-up instructions prepare the system so new users immediately can begin regular tasks like invoicing and paying bills. For each task, flowchart-like menus lead you through the necessary steps to create, check and finally post invoices and bills. Although no electronic interface exists for bill payment, you can print invoices and checks on prefabricated forms available from your local office supply store.

PAYROLL AND BANKING

Employee payroll should be a concern for any

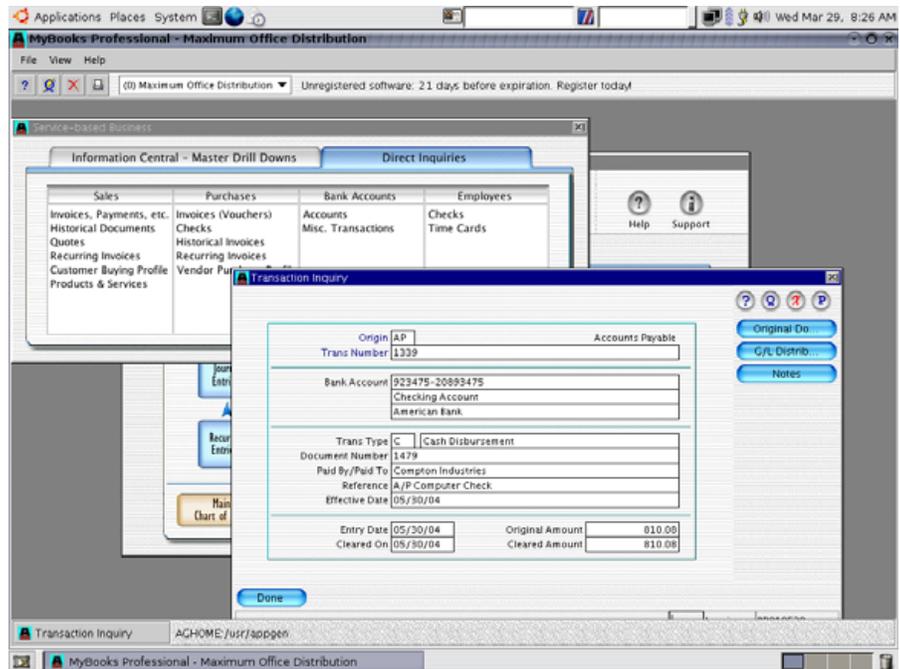


Figure 6. Accounts Payable Transaction Inquiry

small business. Even for a few employees, paying a service provider to calculate payroll is costly. So, to reduce overhead expenses, it's possible to produce payroll yourself.

MyBooks initializes your beginning payroll information so you can start using the system rapidly. The software also handles state tax withholding and other deductions important for employees. These tables expire regularly, but MyBooks Professional provides annual free tax tables for users.

Currently, you must handle banking tasks the old-fashioned way by reconciling your accounts

with monthly statements sent to you from your financial institution. This is a big drawback for any business with lots of ad hoc electronic transactions. There is also no way of importing a .csv or other check register data.

COOL CLIENT/SERVER OPTIONS AND ODBC

Former Quickbooks users are familiar with sending their accountant a snapshot of their data, called an Accountants Copy. The accountant then makes necessary financial manipulations and returns the file for integration with the original data.

MyBooks works differently via a client/server arrangement. When you set up a server version of MyBooks, your accountant can use a client application to access your data.

MyBooks also provides detailed instructions on setting up your own database to tinker with financial information captured by MyBooks. Many SOHOs may not need to use this feature; however, it is helpful when you want to extract data for analysis. It's also useful if you ever need to send data to another system. I've been in this position during a merger, and SQL would have been much simpler than passing a hard copy of the general ledger around for review.

EXECUTIVE DASHBOARD

Just like it sounds, Executive Dashboard allows the SOHO executive to display a snapshot of the company books. This dashboard has many "bottom-line" numbers I've found helpful in measuring my own business' performance. With Executive Dashboard, users get up-to-the-minute information about corporate financial health. Although it can be purchased separately, Executive Dashboard

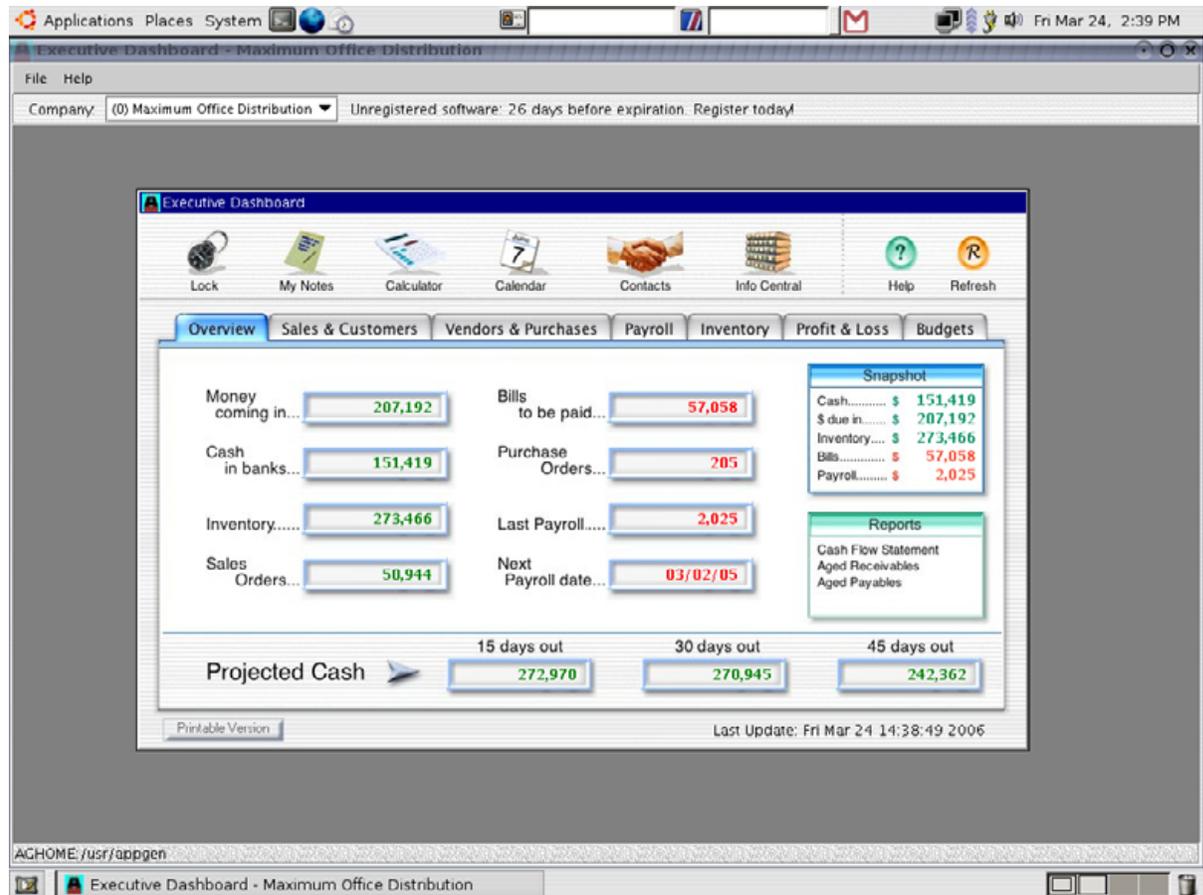


Figure 7. Overview of the Executive Dashboard

is included when you buy MyBooks Professional.

Like Quickbooks, MyBooks provides "drill down" on many pre-made and custom reports. This kind of analysis is handled through MyBook's Information Central menu. Here, SOHOs can

inquire and mine information on most transactions in the program.

CAN-DO WITH MYBOOKS?

For non-accountants like me, bookkeeping is a

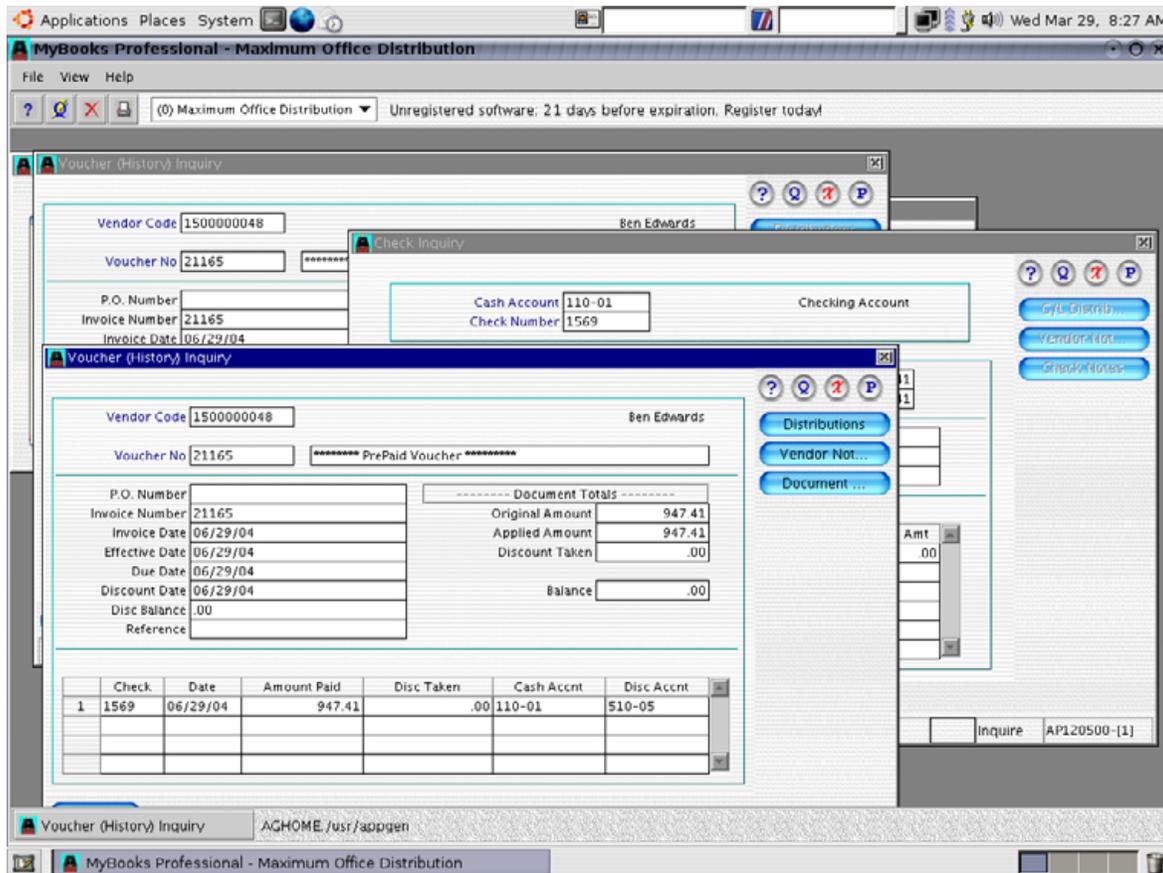


Figure 8. Drill Down with Voucher (History) Inquiry

painful chore. Add to that, Quickbooks' very mature feature list and the years of experience you might have using it to run your business, and the idea of abandoning it seems unrealistic. To make the idea of replacing a familiar package like Quickbooks with something else, there must be significant benefits of using MyBooks. Here's my

list of the top SOHO benefits:

1. Price: MyBooks Professional for Linux currently sells for around \$60 US, substantially less than Quickbooks.
2. Executive Dashboard: a real benefit, simply out-

lining some important management data for daily review in a user-friendly format.

3. Client server/ODBC: just like the competition, MyBooks can get your small business going now and handle more complex activities when it grows larger.
4. Structured Data Entry: double-entry accounting and MyBook's design draws your attention to a formal bookkeeping approach.
5. Commercial support: open source is a great mechanism, but having a corporate sponsor can put you at ease if trouble arises. Appgen's marketing information touts an estimated 10,000 users of its Linux product—looks like a fast growing user group.

From my viewpoint, MyBooks hits these spot on. Critics still might claim Quickbooks as the small business industry standard. That's true—for now. Last year, Microsoft launched its small-office financial software to compete directly with Quickbooks. We'll just have to see how the marketplace responds to each product. Meanwhile, Appgen's MyBooks can give SOHOs a full-featured accounting package that will support a small business now and a growing business later. ■



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Imendio Planner and TaskJuggler: an Overview

Project planning software can be an essential asset to any office; TUX introduces two leading tools.

JES HALL

Project planning tools provide a way to keep track of tasks and resources associated with a project and see how these resources can be allocated for timely and efficient completion of goals. What project management tools are available for Linux, you ask, and how do they shape up? Let's take a look at Imendio Planner and TaskJuggler—two very popular project planning tools.

IMENDIO PLANNER

Imendio Planner (<http://developer.imendio.com/wiki/planner>) is a project planning tool for the GNOME desktop environment. It lets you define tasks and subtasks, resources and resource groups. It can track dependencies between tasks and maintain both individual and project calendars. The latest version includes a simple importer for the XML exchange format used by Microsoft Project 2002 and later.

Planner's interface is divided into four views: Gantt Chart, Tasks, Resources and Resource Usage. The Gantt Chart view is task-focused and shows the tasks that make up the project, who has to complete them and under what time constraints. The

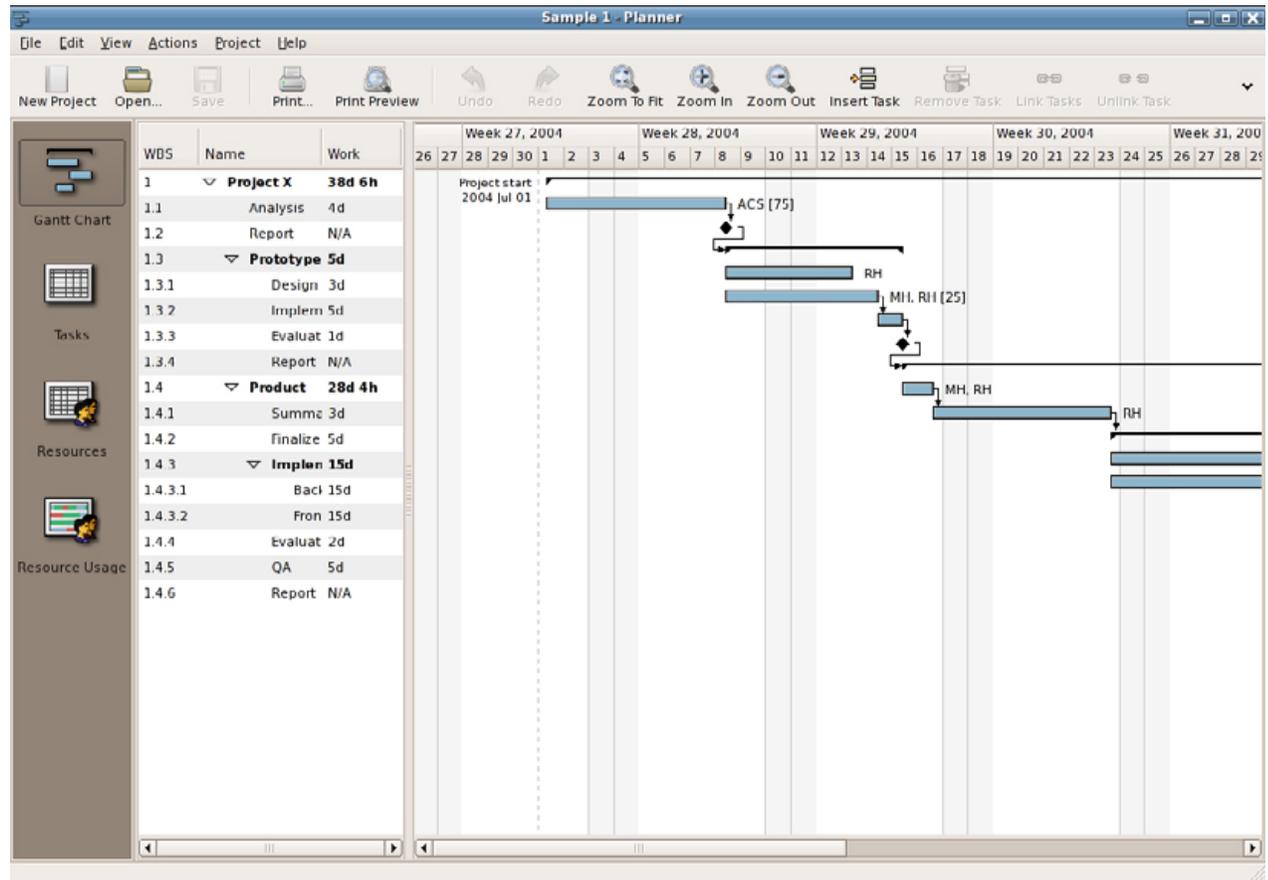


Figure 1. Imendio Planner Showing the Gantt Chart View

Gantt Chart view is where you build up your project plan from items added in the Task and Resources views, by adding and linking tasks and setting time constraints.

The Tasks view provides a table-style view of the tasks that make up a project. The Tasks view allows you to edit more properties when adding a task than the Gantt view does, and so it should be used to add tasks to a project initially.

The Resources view lists resources by name. Resources can include people available to work on the project, buildings or rooms available for use or other equipment required for the project to be completed. Once you have added resources to this view, you can assign them to tasks shown in the Gantt Chart view.

The Resource Usage view displays a sample chart showing how resources are used over time.

Planner concentrates on the use of the graphical interface to create project plans, making it easier to get started for some, as compared with TaskJuggler.

Planner has the ability to use an external database for storing project plans. The only database supported is PostgreSQL, and the support is very rudimentary. The Planner User Guide shows how to set up using an external database.

Planner can export an HTML page of a project. The exported page contains a simplified Gantt Chart, task list and a resource allocation table. Planner's Microsoft Project XML importer is extremely limited, and it is unable to import calendars, project properties or resource groups.

Calendars in Planner are simple but flexible, and let you define working and non-working days for resources, as well as which hours within those days are working hours. Each resource can have its own calendar or use the project default calendar. Changes made to calendars are reflected automatically in the Gantt Chart view.

Planner's documentation is fairly basic, covering only the most rudimentary details about how to create project plans. Imendio provides a low-volume user mailing list that is monitored by the developers for support for Planner.

TASKJUGGLER

TaskJuggler (<http://www.taskjuggler.org>) is a project planning tool sponsored by SUSE. It uses the Qt toolkit and requires KDE libraries, version 3.4 or greater are recommended. It integrates into a KDE desktop environment.

TaskJuggler projects are created by detailing what is known about a project in a text file. The syntax TaskJuggler uses is relatively easy to learn but may turn off those who prefer a WYSIWYG approach. The defined elements cascade, and each sub-element inherits the properties of the previous element, which makes defining elements very efficient.

Flags are used to filter properties to fine-tune reports. Once defined, a flag can be attached to many different properties and can be used to limit reports to exactly those details you want to include.

TaskJuggler lets you define calendars with flexible working hours and supports specific vacations for individual resources. Calendars also support shift work and multiple time zones. Multiple project scenarios are also available, so one can define the original project plan, as well as alternate scenarios that take delays or changes in resources into account.

You can manage costs by creating accounts. Resources can have running costs assigned to them, and accounts can be created to keep track of costs and customer payments for simple profit and loss analysis. Tasks may have initial, finishing and running costs defined that also affect the profit and loss statement.

Once a project is defined, you can use the TaskJuggler GUI to view and modify interactive reports. HTML export allows you to create a variety of reports from detailed calendars to Gantt and PERT charts. Groupware support is implemented in the form of using a revision control system like CVS on the project description files, and you can use a central database for resource allocation.

TaskJuggler's documentation is exhaustive and excellent, with a full reference of elements used in the text project definition files. Workshops and training in TaskJuggler are available from the project, and a forum is maintained for user support.

TaskJuggler is extremely flexible and powerful; it is suitable for use on large and complex projects. The syntax for the project file is somewhat

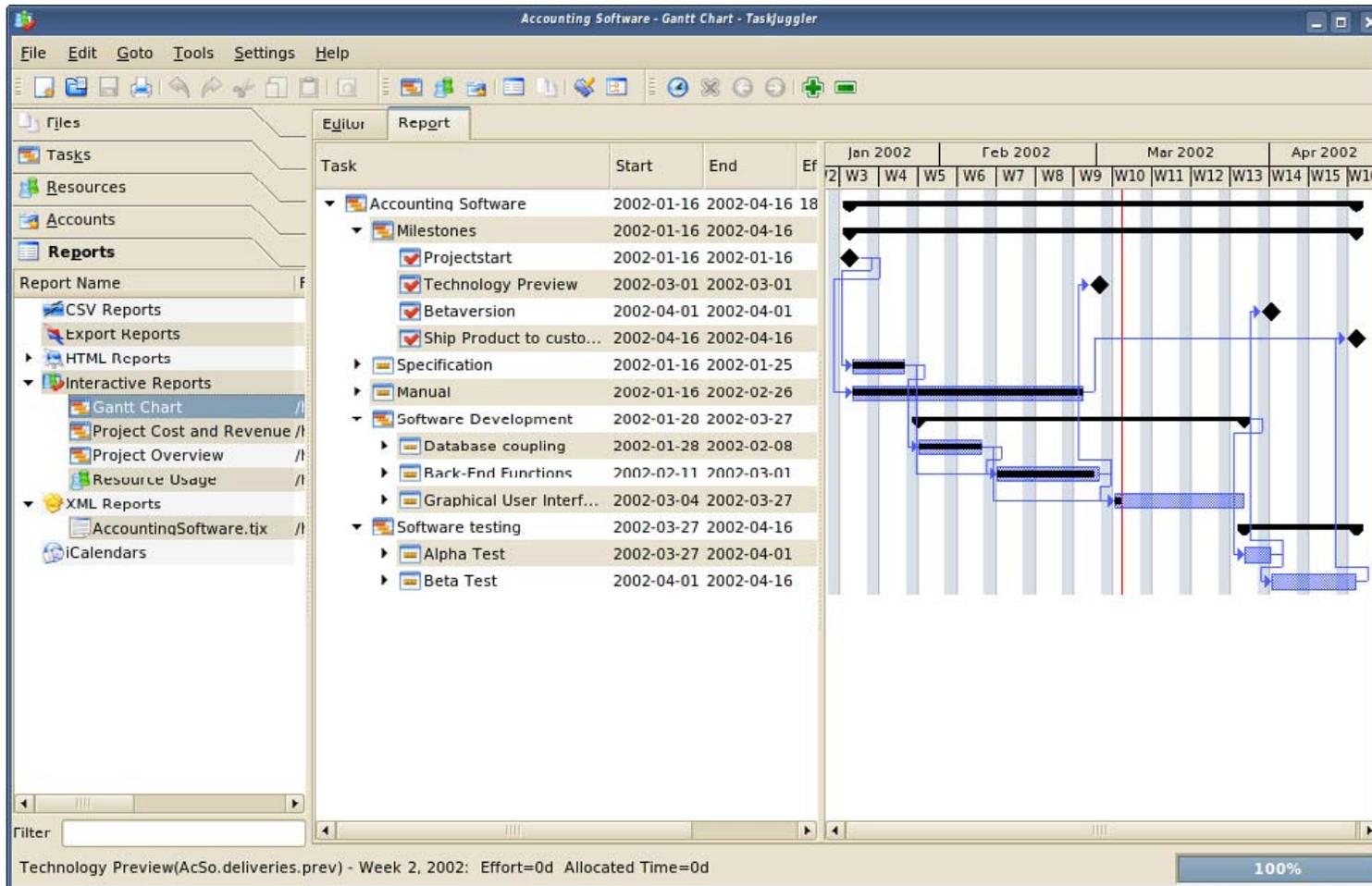


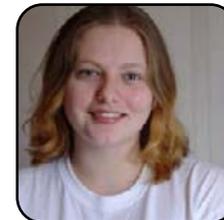
Figure 2. TaskJuggler Showing an Interactive Report

esoteric, and those looking for a simple tool to track a small project may find working with TaskJuggler overwhelming.

Although Imendio Planner has some glaring deficiencies when compared to

TaskJuggler, it's clear that neither program is done any favors by a direct comparison. Each program fills a particular niche for a different target audience. Imendio Planner excels at allowing you to create simple

project plans for small projects quickly. TaskJuggler, on the other hand, is a professional and powerful tool suitable for the most complex project—but with a steep learning curve. ■



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At 5,000 Feet: Using Scribus to Publish a Newsletter

How to approach desktop publishing with confidence using Scribus.

DONALD EMMACK

As a newbie Linux user, it seems natural to explore all the great projects you can undertake with free software. One way to show off open source is to use the Scribus desktop publishing (DTP) application. Scribus has evolved into a user-friendly DTP program that captivates attention for home and business use. It's also just plain fun to create a slick-looking newsletter to show what open source can do and subversively allure potential Windows converts to the Linux operating system.

So, to further the awareness and market share of open source, I put together these high-level instructions about the basics of newsletter creation in Scribus. For this mini-tutorial, I used Scribus 1.3.3, which is a developmental version. The change log of version 1.3 notes some significant differences from previous releases. The most important one may be that file format changes make 1.3 incompatible with 1.2. To keep your data in the proper version, you might need to save any work as Scribus 1.2 file.

GETTING STARTED

The on-line documentation for Scribus includes installation instructions for six Linux distributions, Mac OS X and Windows. Because I used Ubuntu Breezy 5.10 for this article, the base repositories did not include the development release of Scribus 1.3.3. For Synaptic to find Scribus 1.3.3, you must add the following repositories into your `/etc/apt/sources.list`:

```
# Ubuntu breezy
deb      http://debian.scribus.net/debian/ breezy main restricted
deb-src  http://debian.scribus.net/debian/ breezy main restricted

deb      http://debian.tagancha.org/debian/ breezy main restricted
deb-src  http://debian.tagancha.org/debian/ breezy main restricted
```

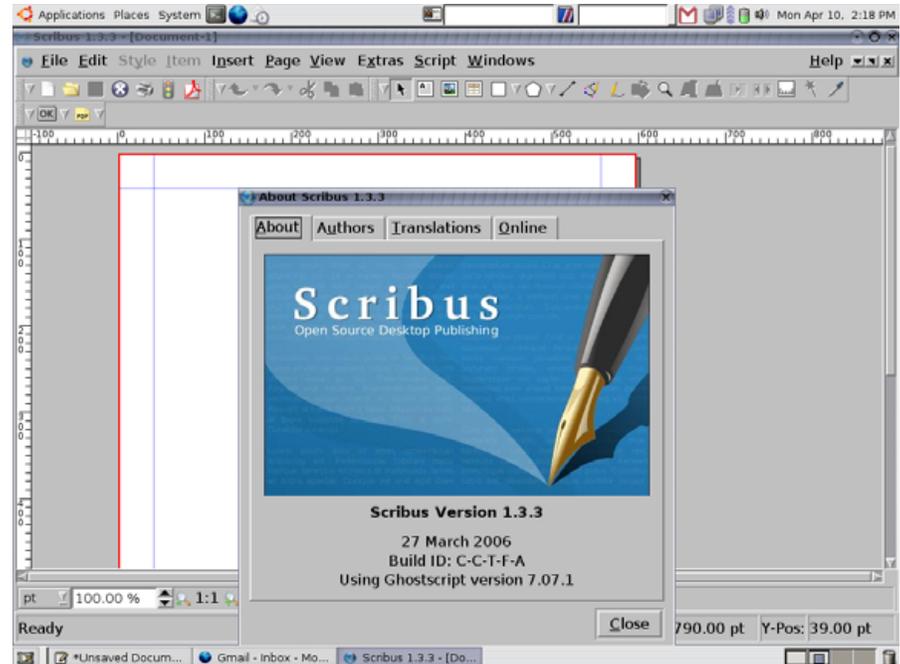


Figure 1. Scribus 1.3.3 about Box

This is a simple procedure, and complete instructions are on-line at <http://docs.scribus.net/index.php?lang=en&page=install-dpkg>. Once you have Scribus on your PC, it's also a good idea to get some templates to use as a starting point for your own projects. You can download a full set of user templates from <http://www.scribus.net>. The templates I installed came from the scribus-temp-all-1.2.1.tar.bz2 file. Read the instructions within the compressed file to learn how to install the templates.

Little cms

Figure 2. The Little CMS Color Management System

THE QUICK START TUTORIAL

Scribus is not a word processor. I think it looks like a merger between The GIMP, OpenOffice.org and Dia. If you're familiar with these applications, the learning curve is minimal. Although, it's prudent to understand the depth of Scribus' features to ensure your output looks the best. I suggest that you go through the on-line tutorial, which leads you through creating a fancy (and rather racy) brochure in less than 30 minutes. Following the on-line tutorial will give new users a better understanding of the tools included with the program. It also introduces Little CMS. Little CMS is a color management system (CMS) to help you match screen colors to those that are in the finished publication (Figure 2). You can go to the Little CMS Web site for more information on how to use it correctly (<http://www.littlecms.com>).

YOUR FIRST NEWSLETTER

After installing Scribus and the template package, you're ready to begin. Start by loading one of the newsletter templates (Figure 3). For this overview, I chose to spin my newsletter from the Newsletter_1 template. After loading, you should have a four-page template on-screen that looks like Figure 4.

From here, take control of your project by manipulating layers, frames, text and adding colorful vector shapes. Just like other graphic programs, Scribus uses layers of objects to help order your work. You can place frames (boxes) almost anywhere and define them as text, images, tables,

shapes and lines.

Scribus' on-line documentation suggests using pencil and paper to create a first draft of your DTP layout. This can be a real time saver for some projects. As we're working with an existing template, I have only a few variations in mind to tailor it for my needs. Because the principles are similar for each page, let's just look at changing the first page of this sample newsletter.

LAYERS

Using the layers feature is just like using layers in The GIMP. Activate the layer control box by pressing F6 or by selecting Tools→Layers from the menu. The control box for layers gives you the choice of viewing the layer, locking it and including it in the output. With the control box, you can change your newsletter layout, add a background image or remove unnecessary layers (Figure 5).

For this overview, I added a vertical color bar to a new layer, shaded it to match the theme and used the layer tool to move it to the background of the graphic (Figure 6). You also could add images, text or other shapes defined in other programs or created with the Scribus tools.

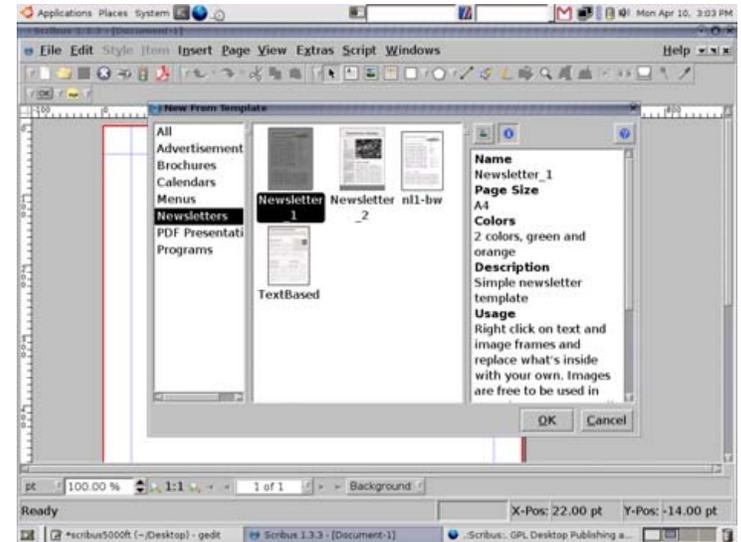


Figure 3. Creating a New Scribus Document from a Template

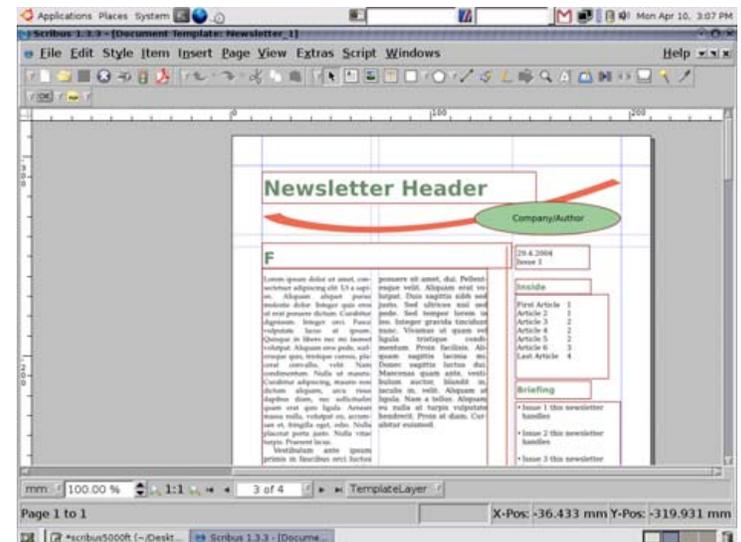


Figure 4. The Newly Created Scribus Document Based on Template Newsletter_1

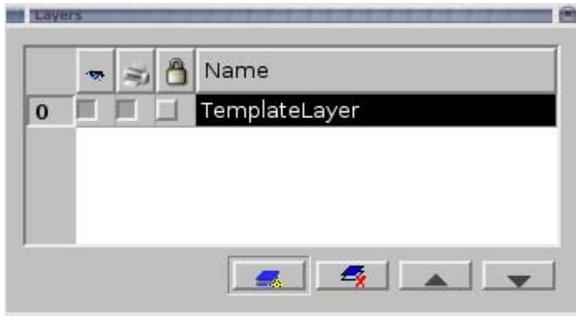


Figure 5. The Scribus Layout Options Dialog

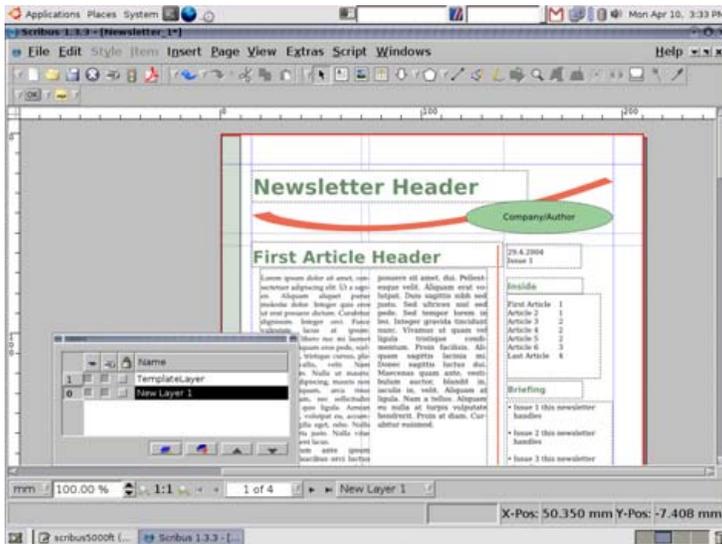


Figure 6. A Newly Created Document Layer



Figure 7. Drawing Tools and Shapes Toolbar

Scribus has several vector-based tools that let you create and change shapes at will. At the top of the screen, you should see several shape samples, which are used to place objects on the active layer (Figure 7). Once placed on a layer, you can adjust their shape, color, opacity and so on.

FRAMES

Frames are the primary underpinning of Scribus. With frames, you can add text, images or other shapes into your project. Add frames through the Insert tab or by typing the matching letter: T for a text frame, P for a polygon and so forth. Right-clicking on the selected frame brings up the Properties dialog (Figure 8). This tool lets you select items and work with the various features of the selected item.

The Properties box for text, images and shapes each contain the same functions and layout. Moving through the tabs (such as Color, Line and Text) gives you control over the item's appearance and size. Once your frame layout is complete, you can lock the frame locations to prevent accidental movement and settle in to writing the copy for the document. I'll

mention a tip for frame manipulation later.

If you created the text in another program or text editor, it's easy to cut and paste the information. Another method is to use the internal Scribus Story Board. With Story Board, you add and change the text of the sample newsletter to something more suitable (Figure 9). Long articles or stories are not a problem, because Scribus automatically joins frames on different pages to make text flow smoothly. So all you need to do is focus on what you want to say in the Story Board editor, and let Scribus work with the layout. Scribus also gives you the alternative of inserting faux text so you get a better feel of the overall layout. In this example, I selected a text box and inserted the default "lorum ipsum" characters.

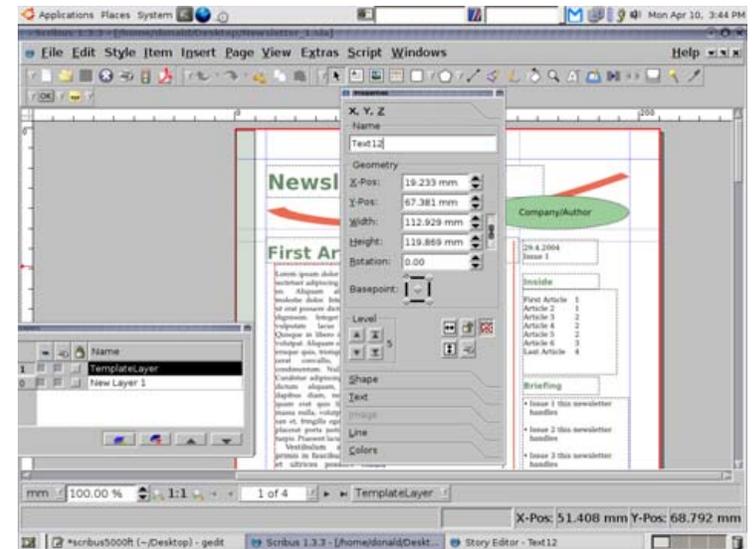


Figure 8. Frame Properties Dialog

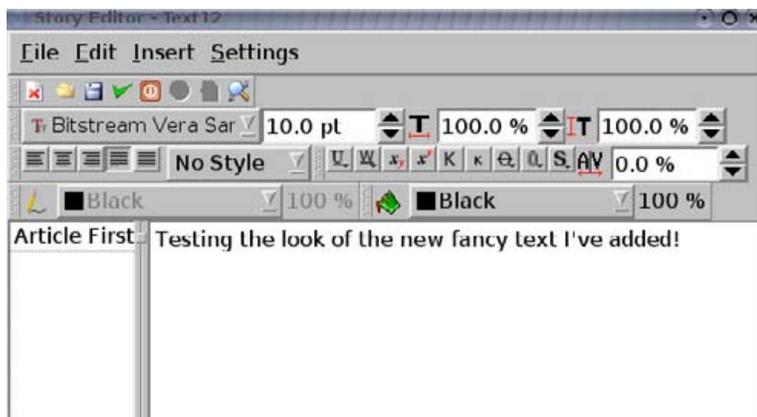


Figure 9. Text Frame Story Board Editor

PUBLICATION AND PRINTING

After you finish placing graphics and typing text, it's time to see the output. DTP is a bit different from on-line publishing. Image density and resolution have to be superior in printed form to get really professional results. Thus, Scribus can handle image output up to 4,000 dpi.

Nowadays, you can export your data on-line to most print shops. Scribus simplifies this process and uses the PreFlight Verifier to catch troublesome issues with your output before final printing. It catches transparency conversion problems, out of boundary errors, missing image files and similar items rather well. To repair a flagged item, click on the reported error and Scribus takes you directly to the problem (Figure 10).

HANDY TRICKS

Scribus documentation implies there is a learning curve associated with the application. As the features and functions are similar to The GIMP, I'm never hopelessly lost trying to understand the software. It's

easy to understand the intuitive menu descriptions, and the Properties dialog has buttons for many frame manipulations. Overall, the interface is user-friendly and the documentation answered all my questions.

For added benefit, the Scribus Web site has posted "Top Ten Hints: Tips and Tricks to make better documents faster in Scribus" (<http://docs.scribus.net/index.php?lang=en&page=topten>).

I think the most useful tip is to use your mouse wheel as a tool to spin through selections on the screen. This gives you faster and greater control over the selected item. Another handy trick is learning how to make a backup of your Scribus user preferences in a hidden directory—just in case.

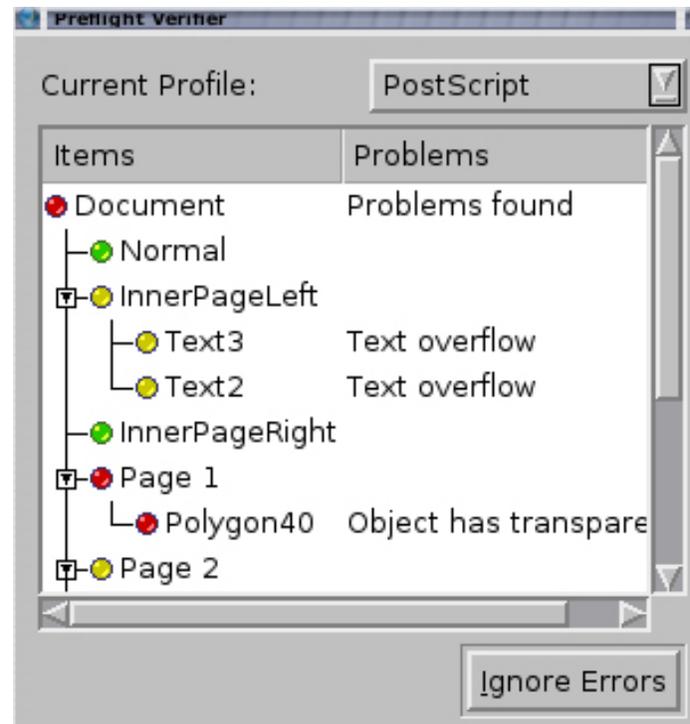


Figure 10. PreFlight Verifier Flags an Issue

CONCLUSION

Using Scribus to produce a newsletter is a straightforward task. After speaking with my commercial print shop, they were knowledgeable and helpful for picking just the right output options (for example PDF 1.4, resolution).

Most of us are not graphic artists, but Scribus contains the fundamental tools required to make your product look good. A short empirical survey of my IT friends suggests that nongraphic people avoid DTP work because it appears complicated.

I still am amazed at what real professional graphic artists produce.

For the rest of us, we can pick a few pre-made graphics and cobble them together for decent output. That said, I think you can approach Scribus confidently, knowing you'll get good results without wasting your time. ■



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FreeMind

Use the sophisticated FreeMind to visualize, classify, structure and generate ideas, and also as an aid in problem solving and decision making.

DANIEL BARTHOLOMEW

FreeMind is a mind mapping application. If you don't know what a mind map is, think of it as an outlining program on steroids. Its task is to help map out your ideas and thoughts on any given subject.

FreeMind is a Java program, so in order to use it, you need to have the Java Runtime Engine installed. Check your distribution's documentation and package repositories to see if there is a pre-packaged version for your specific distribution or, barring that, instructions on how best to install it. If you cannot find instructions or a package for your distribution, go to <http://java.com/java/download> for packages and instructions that work for many Linux distributions.

To get the FreeMind program, check your distribution repositories or go to <http://freemind.sf.net>, scroll down to the Download section and download the max version for any operating system. The current version at the time of this writing is 0.8.0, and the file is named freemind-bin-max-0_8_0.zip.

Once you have downloaded the file, create a folder called freemind, and put the zip file in it. Navigate into that folder and unzip the file using your favorite archive manager. There is only one more thing to do to get FreeMind running. One of the files you just unzipped is called freemind.sh. This is the file we will use to launch the FreeMind program, but it is not



Figure 1. Editing the Permissions of the freemind.sh File

set up to be executable by default. Right-click on this file and choose Properties. Go to the Permissions tab. If you are using KDE, tick the is executable check box, and then click OK. If you are using GNOME, tick the Execute check boxes, and then click Close.

Now you should be able to click or double-click (depending on your settings) on the freemind.sh file to start the FreeMind program. You may get a



Figure 2. The FreeMind Splash Screen

dialog box asking if you want to run or view the file; click run, and FreeMind should launch.

USING FREEMIND

The first time you launch FreeMind, you will get a mostly blank canvas with an oval in the center with the words New Mindmap in it. To start creating your first mind map, simply start typing. For example, let's say I needed to write a paper about games. I would type the word Games and press Enter. Now I have a root node to which I can attach sub-nodes containing all of my thoughts on the subject of games.

In FreeMind, everything is a node, and every node, except for the the root node (the Games node, in our example), has a parent. All nodes, except for the root node, also may have siblings, and all nodes may have children nodes. To illustrate this, let's add some children to our Games node.

To add a new child node, press the Insert key, fill in the box that appears, and press Enter to stop

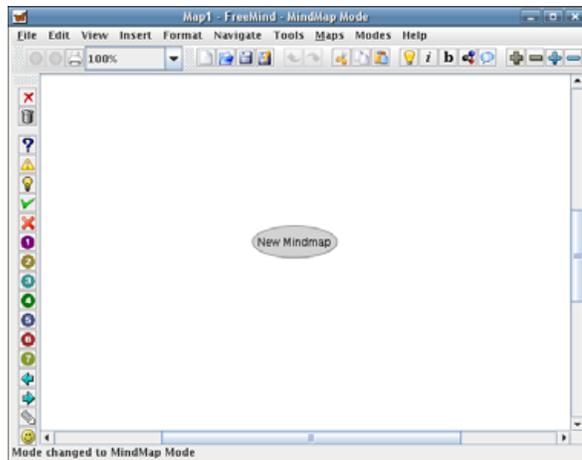


Figure 3. A New Mind Map. Ready for Input



Figure 4. A Simple Example

editing. For my paper on Games, I want to write about game history and the types of games people play, so I press the Insert key, type the word History, then press Enter. Now I have my History node. The Types of Games node is a sibling to the History node. To create a sibling, make sure that the History node is selected, and press Enter. I then type Types of Games and press Enter again.

If you've been following along, your mind map should look like Figure 4. Let's expand the Types of Games node a bit by giving this node some children and grandchildren until it looks something like Figure 5.

We're off to a pretty good start, and I

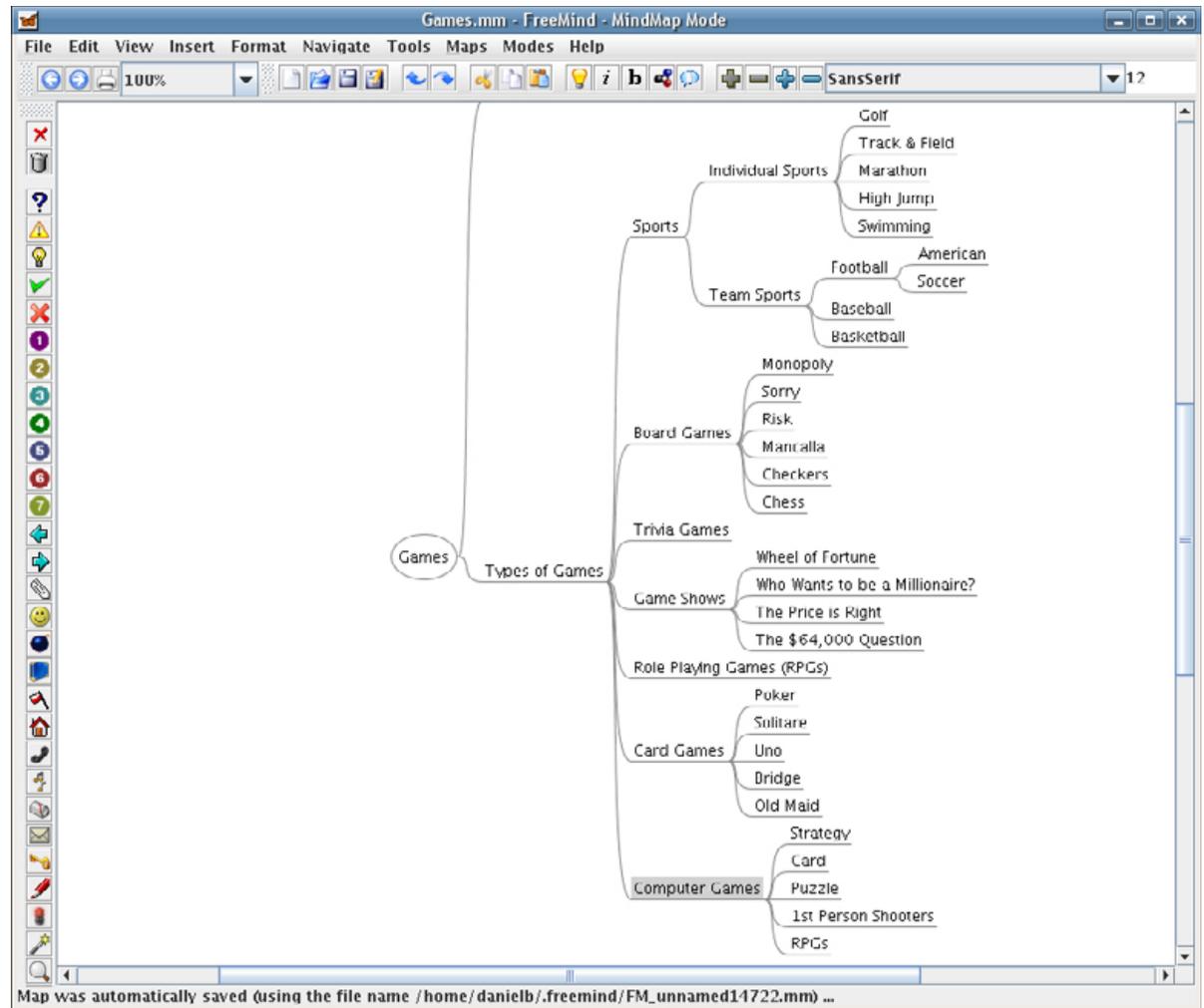


Figure 5. Our Simple Example. Expanded

already can see several areas that could use some improvement. I've focused so much on game types that I've completely neglected to

do anything with game history. In fact, it has been bumped off the viewable area. Let's move it over to the other side of the root node. To

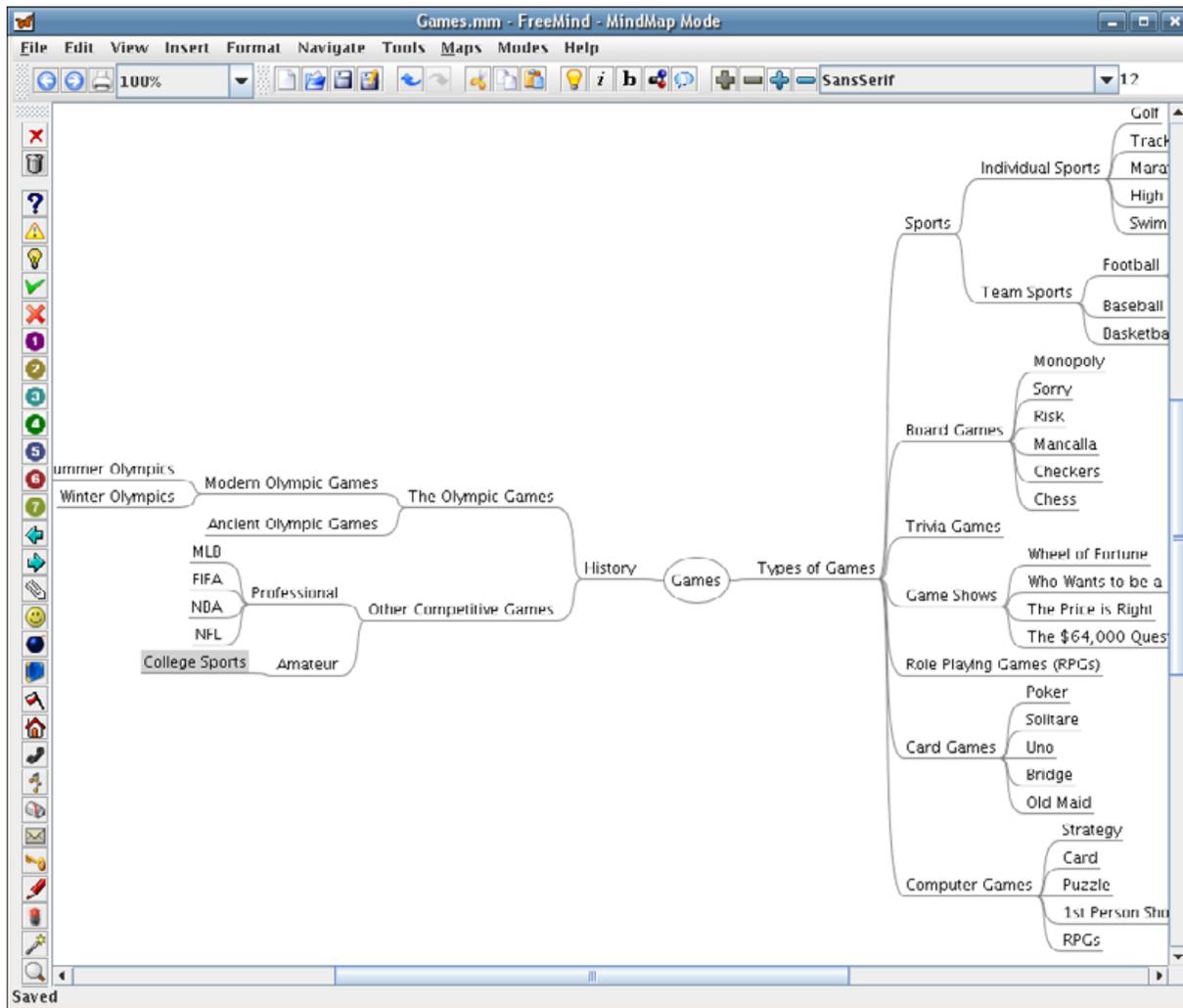


Figure 6. Our Not So Simple Example. Ready for Folding

do this, simply click and drag it with your mouse to the left side of the root node. The left side of the root node will highlight to show you where the node you are dragging will end up. Release the mouse, and the History node will be moved. Let's also take the opportunity to add some child nodes to the History node until it looks like Figure 6.

FOLDING AND INDICATING RELATIONSHIPS

Now we have too many items to show all of them at the same time. FreeMind lets you manage this through folding. Think of it as hiding the stuff you don't want to work on. To fold items, select the parent of the group of siblings you want to hide, and press the spacebar. For example, select the History node, press the spacebar, and every node below it becomes hidden. FreeMind puts a little circle at the end of the line to let you know if there are hidden child nodes.

Several items could be moved around, and some items, although related, are clearly in different categories. Take card games for instance. You can play *Solitaire* (or any of the other card games) with the appropriate deck of cards or on your computer. I don't necessarily want to lump all card games (whether played with real or virtual cards) together, because I want to have a section of my paper devoted to computer games, but I do want to indicate their relationship as part of the brainstorming process so that I keep their relationship in mind. To do this, I select the Card Games node and drag it to the Card node under Computer Games while

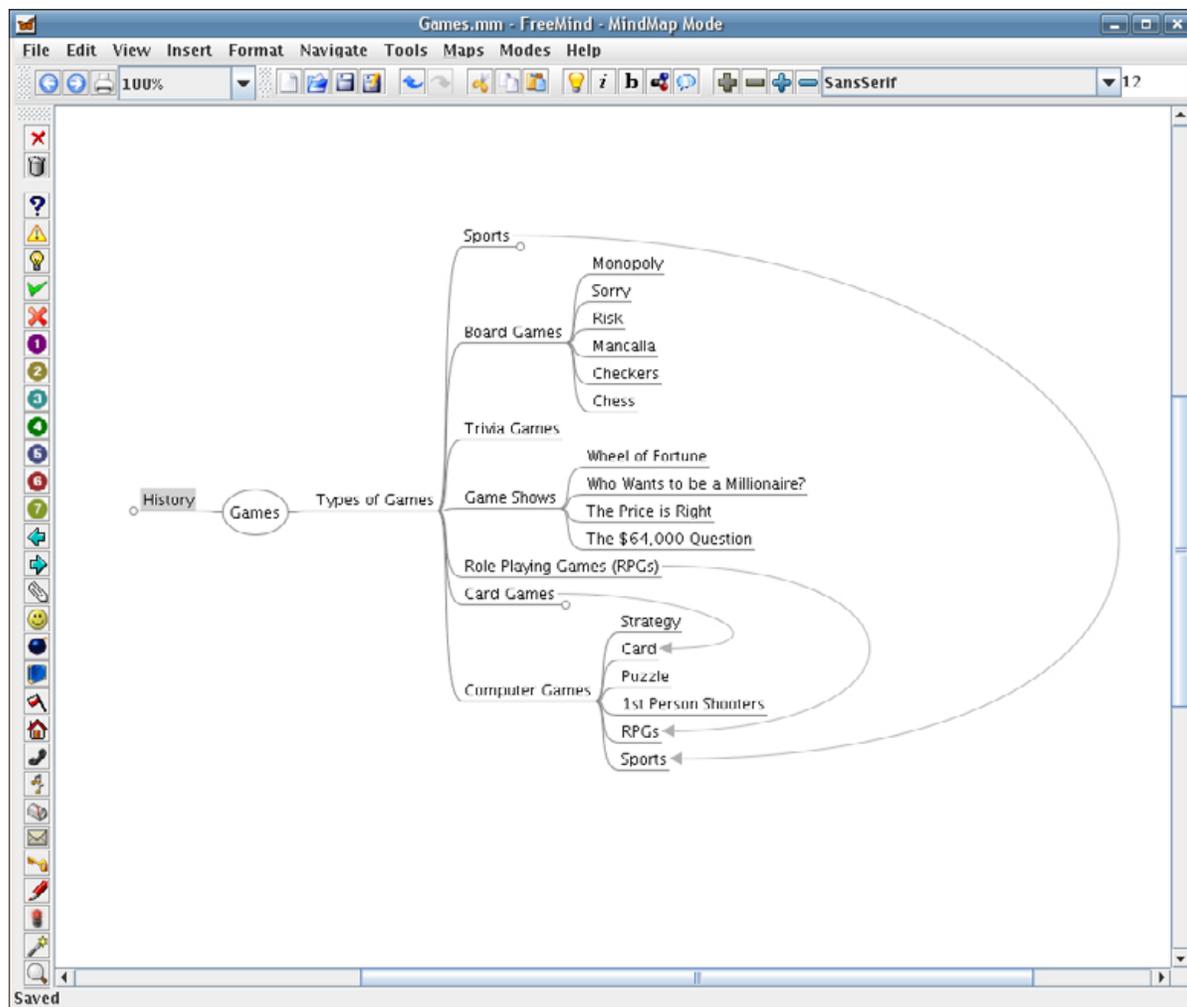


Figure 7. Our Mind Map Folded with Some Relationships Indicated

holding the Ctrl and Shift keys.

After linking a few more nodes and doing more folding, I end up with what you see in Figure 7.

EXTERNAL LINKS

As part of my research into this paper, let's say I want to go into the rules of some games. To do this, I would most likely go to Google or another

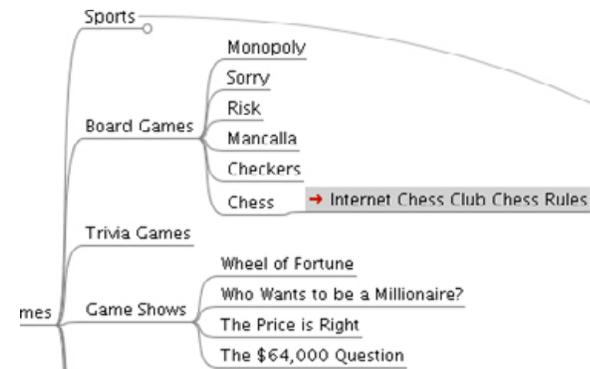


Figure 8. A Link to a Web Site

search engine and do a search for "rules of chess" as an example. Such a search brings up several good resources. I could bookmark them in my Web browser, but the point of making this mind map is to collect everything in one place. To that end, FreeMind lets you place links to Web sites and local files into your mind map.

To make a link, I first copy the address of the Web site I want to link to, and then I select the node I want to be the link and click on the Insert menu and then Hyperlink (Text Field). Then, I paste the address into the dialog box that appears and press OK. As you can see from Figure 8, there is now a little red arrow signifying that that node is a link. FreeMind allows only one link per node, so if you have several links that relate to a single node, make them child nodes.

FINDING WHAT YOU WROTE

A problem you may run into with a very large map is finding the single node with the information you need. An example of this is the FreeMind documentation, which is implemented as a single large mind map. One way to locate nodes is with

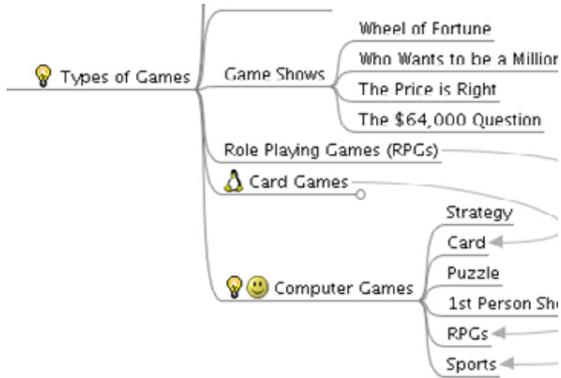


Figure 9. Icons Applied to Various Nodes

the Find feature, accessible from the Edit menu or by pressing Ctrl-F.

Search in FreeMind works a bit differently than in other applications. Instead of searching the entire map, it searches only the selected node and that node's children. Although this is a handy way of limiting the scope of the search, it also can be annoying. An easy way around this is to press the Esc key before you start the search. The Esc key is a shortcut to the root node, and by going there before you start the search, you will be sure to search your entire mind map.

Another way FreeMind helps you find nodes quickly is through icons. Icons can be assigned to any node, and any node can have as many icons as you want. The icons you can use appear along the left edge of the FreeMind window. To apply an icon, select a node and then click on the icon you want to give it. To remove an icon, select a node, and then click on the X or trash can icons (the first two icons in the icon list). These two

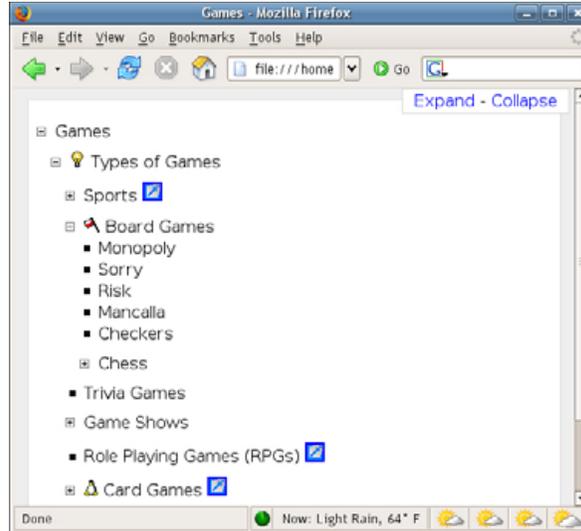


Figure 10. An XHTML Export Example

icons delete the last icon applied and all icons applied to that node, respectively. See Figure 9 for how the icons look when applied.

SHARING YOUR MIND MAPS

You may reach a point where you want to share your mind map with others. The best way to do this is to have people download a copy of FreeMind for themselves. Then, all you have to do is send them your file. However, this may not be practical in all cases.

Barring sending them your actual FreeMind file, the easiest way to share your map with someone is to use FreeMind's export feature. Several export options are available, all through the File→Export menu. The PNG and JPEG image

options are pretty self-explanatory; they create a picture of the current state of your mind map—folds, icons, currently selected item and so on. The PDF and SVG options do much the same thing, only the output will be better for printing than with the other image formats. All of these are static snapshots of your mind map.

A more interactive way to share your map is to use the HTML or XHTML export options. The HTML option does not include any graphics, so everything is contained in a single HTML file. If you want to include your icons and other graphics, use one of the XHTML export options. All of them use JavaScript that enables you to fold and unfold nodes with the default folding being whatever state your mind map was in when you exported it. Figure 10 shows what it looks like.

CONCLUSION

FreeMind is a great way to organize your next project or paper, and you don't have to limit it to those uses. FreeMind also works well for address books, collections, bookmarks and recipes. And with all of the talk about parents, children and siblings—FreeMind also works quite well for creating genealogical pedigree charts.

Give it a try. I think you'll like it. ■



Daniel Bartholomew has been using computers since the early 1980s when his parents brought home an Apple IIe. After stints on Mac and Windows machines, he discovered Linux in 1996 and has been using various distributions ever since. He lives with his wife and children in North Carolina.

Expand Your Reach with WengoPhone

With a rapidly growing customer base, WengoPhone is open-source software and a standards-based alternative to the more popular Skype. DMITRI POPOV

With all the excitement surrounding Skype, it's easy to forget that there are other Voice over IP (VoIP) service providers out there. One such provider is Wengo, which offers WengoPhone software as well as the VoIP service. Although WengoPhone doesn't have the same mind share as Skype, it does offer something more valuable—namely, open-source VoIP software based on the open Session Initiation Protocol (SIP) standard. Although OpenWengo is a relatively new project, it already has 400,000 subscribers, and 10,000 new accounts are created every day. Of course, WengoPhone's success lies not only in the open-source software, but also in its competitive rates.

As you would expect, PC-to-PC calls via WengoPhone are free. Like Skype, WengoPhone also allows you to call landline and mobile phones, and at first glance, WengoPhone's prices look even lower than Skype's. For example, Skype charges approximately \$0.021/minute for calling most European countries and the US, while Wengo charges roughly \$0.010/minute. However, you should keep in mind that Wengo's CallOut service initially was intended for EU customers, and although non-EU users can freely use the service, they will be charged additional taxes. In practice, this means that as a non-EU user you have to add approximately 15% to the quoted rates. Still, if you do the math, you will see that the tax is virtually negligible ($15/100 \times 0.010 = 0.0015$). The good news is that Wengo has a free introductory

offer for new users, so you can try the service without spending a penny. Even better news is that the upcoming version of the WengoPhone software will be able to use other VoIP providers, which means you can switch to any service that offers even better call rates.

That's all fine and dandy, but there are some areas where WengoPhone is not on a par with Skype. Most notably, Skype offers a few additional services not available at Wengo such as Skypeln (your own Skype phone number that other users can call) and Skype voice mail. So if you can't live without these services, you'd be better off sticking to Skype until Wengo rolls out something similar. Skype users also have a large number of available accessories, ranging from headsets to standalone phones (you can use a headset with WengoPhone, but that's about it).

Wengo operates two Web sites and offers three versions of the WengoPhone software, so before you actually install WengoPhone on your computer, you should know where to go and what to download. Wengo's main Web site is at <http://www.openwengo.com>. This is the commercial part of the service, where you create and manage your Wengo account as well as download the latest stable version of WengoPhone. At the <http://www.openwengo.org> Web site, you'll find WengoPhone's source code, developers' Wiki, forums and so on. The WengoPhone application is available in three flavours: a standalone Classic

version, a Firefox extension and WengoPhone NG (Next Generation).

- WengoPhone Classic is a stable version that offers a full range of features, including voice calls, text messaging and text and video chat.
- The Firefox extension lets you use WengoPhone directly from within the Firefox browser, but its functionality is limited to voice calls only.
- WengoPhone NG is a bleeding-edge version of WengoPhone. It is still at an early stage of development, it's only available in the source code form, and some features are still to be implemented. Obviously, this version is of interest mainly to developers and very curious users. WengoPhone NG's killer feature will be the ability to work with other VoIP providers.

Because WengoPhone Classic is the most mature and full-featured version of the software, let's start with that. Before you download and install WengoPhone, check whether your computer meets the minimum requirements. WengoPhone requires Linux kernel v2.6 or later, an ALSA audio subsystem and a Qt 3.3.5 runtime library. Most modern Linux distributions, such as Knoppix, PCLinuxOS, SUSE, Mandriva and so on, have the required components by default. You also will need a microphone or a headset and, obviously, a broadband Internet connection.

The Linux version of WengoPhone Classic is available as both .deb and .rpm precompiled binaries. However, if you are looking for a quick-and-dirty way to take WengoPhone for a spin, you might want to install it via klik. If you are running

Kanotix, simply launch Konqueror and enter `klik://wengophone`. For other Linux distributions, you have to install the klik client first. Press Alt-F2 and type the following command:

```
wget klik.atekon.de/client/install -O - |sh
```

Then point Konqueror to `klik://wengophone`, and klik will take care of the rest. Later, you can move the `wengophone.cmg` file to your home directory and launch it at any time using the following command (where `$HOME` is the path to your home directory):

```
$HOME/.zAppRun $HOME/wengophone.cmg
```

The first thing you should do when you launch WengoPhone is create a Wengo account by pressing the Create an account link in the login window. In the opened Wengo Web page, fill out the necessary fields, reply to the confirmation e-mail to activate your account, and you are good to go.

Once you are done configuring your account, enter your e-mail and password into Wengophone's login screen and press OK (tick the Open my session automatically check box, so you don't have to log in manually every time). But before you make your first phone call, let's take a closer look at WengoPhone's interface.

The main toolbar contains five buttons (all of them are self-explanatory): Home, Contact List, Call History, Add a Contact and Find a Wengo contact. Also, the Status button allows you to change your on-line status. Besides the default values (Online, Away, Offline and Do not Disturb) you also can define your own custom status. Simply click in the My Own Status field and enter a new name. At the bottom of WengoPhone's



Figure 1. Log in to WengoPhone

windows, there are four icons. The first button from the left indicates the status of your Internet connection. The second button indicates whether you are using the latest version of WengoPhone. The third shows whether you have logged in successfully using your Wengo credentials. Finally, the last button lets you check whether the audio system is configured correctly. Ideally, all four icons should be green, indicating that everything is configured properly and WengoPhone is ready.

Quick tip: if you are having trouble getting WengoPhone connected to the Wengo service, check whether you are behind a firewall. If you are, choose Wengo→Configuration and tick the Safe mode connection check box in the General section. Usually, WengoPhone does a good job of configuring your audio and video settings, but if



Figure 2. WengoPhone's Main Window

for some reason these settings require further adjustments, you can access them via the collapsible Audio/Video Configuration section. You also can use this section to adjust the volume of the input and output devices.

Okay, it's time to put WengoPhone to some use and make your first call. Simply enter the desired phone number (including the country code) in the input field and press the green phone button. Alternatively, if you want to call another Wengo user, you can enter her user name instead. You are, of course, not limited to voice calls—you also can send text messages to mobile

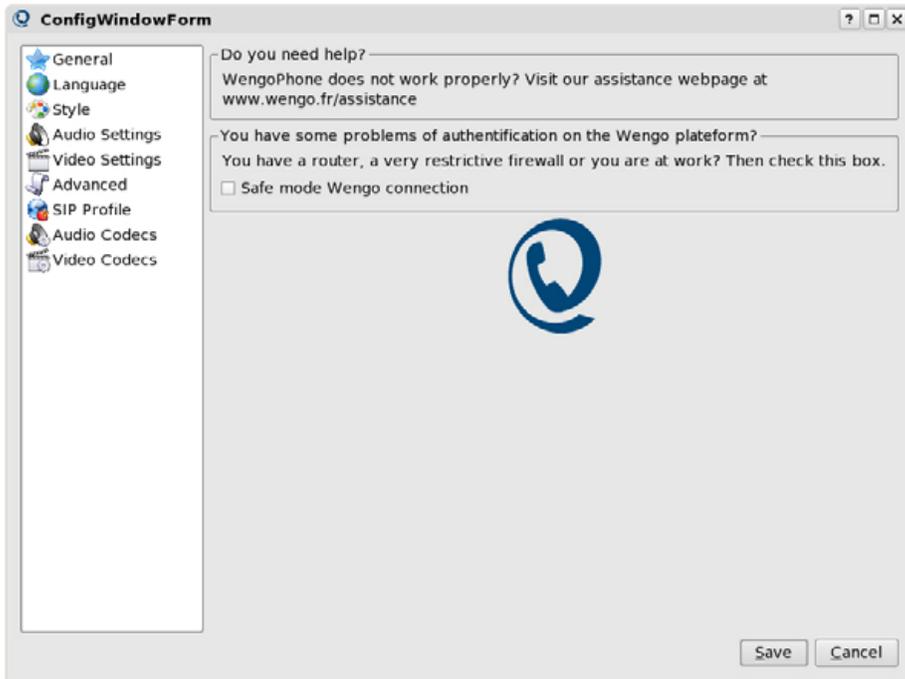


Figure 3. If you are behind a firewall, make sure that the Safe mode connection check box is ticked.

phones, make video calls and chat with other WengoPhone users. WengoPhone stores all the called numbers in the Call History section, and you can call any number on the list simply by double-clicking on it.

To check your balance and purchase credits, choose Account→View My Profile and Accounts→Credit Your Account, respectively. This opens the My Wengo page, where you can purchase credits called Wengos, manage

your account settings as well as view recent calls and invoices. If you have multiple Wengo accounts (which can come in handy if you want to keep your private and business WengoPhone expenses separate), you can



Figure 4. My Wengo page allows you to manage your account.



Figure 5. Use the Wengo Directory to find other Wengo users.



Figure 6. Using WengoPhone, you can make calls from within the browser.

switch between them easily via WengoPhone's Account→Open Another Profile.

Once you've tested WengoPhone, it's time to fill up its address book with some contacts. Adding contacts to WengoPhone has two major benefits. First, it lets you call the desired phone

number using the Wengo→Call shortcut. Second, for all contacts that are also WengoPhone users, WengoPhone will display their on-line status, so you easily can see who's on-line at the moment and who's not. To add a contact, click Add a Contact and fill out the

form. Wengo also maintains a directory of all WengoPhone users (you can choose not to be listed in it when you create an account), and you can search it by clicking Find a Wengo Contact. Quick tip: WengoPhone stores the profile data, including contacts, in the \$HOME/.wengo directory, and it's probably a good idea to back up your profile on a regular basis.

As mentioned above, WengoPhone also is available as a Firefox extension. It offers only the voice call feature, but it allows you to make calls without leaving your browser. The Linux version of the extension is still at an early stage of development, and it is a bit unstable. You can install the extension to try it of course, but as they say, "don't use it in a production environment".

CONCLUSION

WengoPhone may not enjoy the same attention as Skype, but it does have a lot going for it. First and foremost, WengoPhone is open-source software based on the open SIP standard. It's also the first VoIP application that can be installed as a Firefox extension. More importantly though, WengoPhone has an active and committed developer community that is dedicated to bringing you the best VoIP software out there. ■



Dmitri Popov is a freelance writer whose articles have appeared in Russian, British and Danish computer magazines. His articles cover open-source software, Linux, Web applications and other computer-related topics.

Internet Connection Sharing with Firestarter

A simple GUI application provides point-and-click administration of a firewall and Internet connection sharing utility. KEVIN BROWN

It's simple. You have a laptop that has a wireless connection and a wired Ethernet port. You have a desktop machine with only a wired connection. Why can't your desktop partake of your wireless connection? Or, perhaps you have a computer with a wireless card that's always plugged in to the Ethernet network, and you don't want to have to invest in an a wireless access point. A simple piece of software called Firestarter can provide a solution to these scenarios.

Firestarter is a program that allows you to configure a firewall and Internet connection sharing on a Linux machine. I warn you now though, if you're not very familiar with networks or network settings, you may lose your Internet connection. Make sure you have a friend nearby or on the Internet who can help you get reconfigured if you do lose your network settings. With that disclaimer aside, let's get started.



Figure 1. Firestarter's Wizard

Of course, to start, you need to install Firestarter. If Firestarter does not appear in the applications menu on your distribution, you can see whether it's there by typing `firestarter` on a command line or in the run command facility on your desktop.

On my Kubuntu Dapper Drake system, Firestarter is not installed by default, so I used adept to install the package called `firestarter`. Use the packaging management tools of your distro to install it and run the application. You'll be asked for the root password on the machine, and then you should be presented with the screen shown in Figure 1.

You'll need to know some things about your network setup before you proceed through this wizard. You can use your distro's configuration tools to find the necessary information. On my system, I can figure out what I need to know from the Network Settings screen, shown in Figure 2.

In Figure 2, you can see that my system defines my wireless card as `eth0`, sees that it is currently connected and that it automatically configures itself. My wired connection is not plugged in, so it is shown as disabled. Now, going back to the wizard, click forward and you are presented with a screen asking you what your Internet-connected device is. I selected `eth0` and checked the DHCP check box. Because I do not use dialup, I left the other check box unchecked. Then, you'll be presented with the dialog in Figure 3.

Obviously, check the all-important Enable Internet connection sharing check box, choose your other network interface, and then click

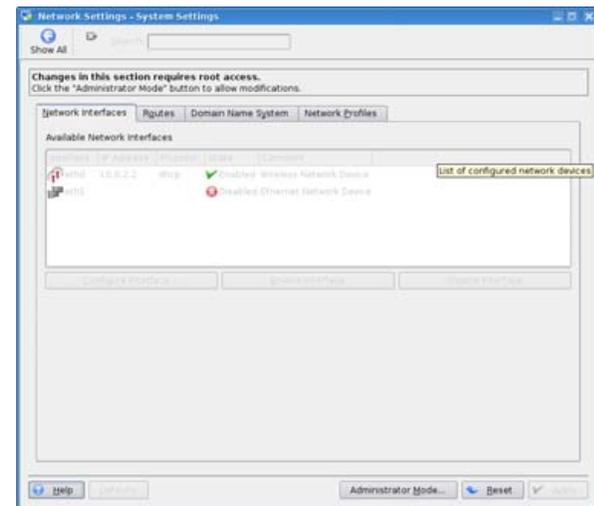


Figure 2. Snooping Kubuntu's Network Settings



Figure 3. Enabling Internet Connection Sharing

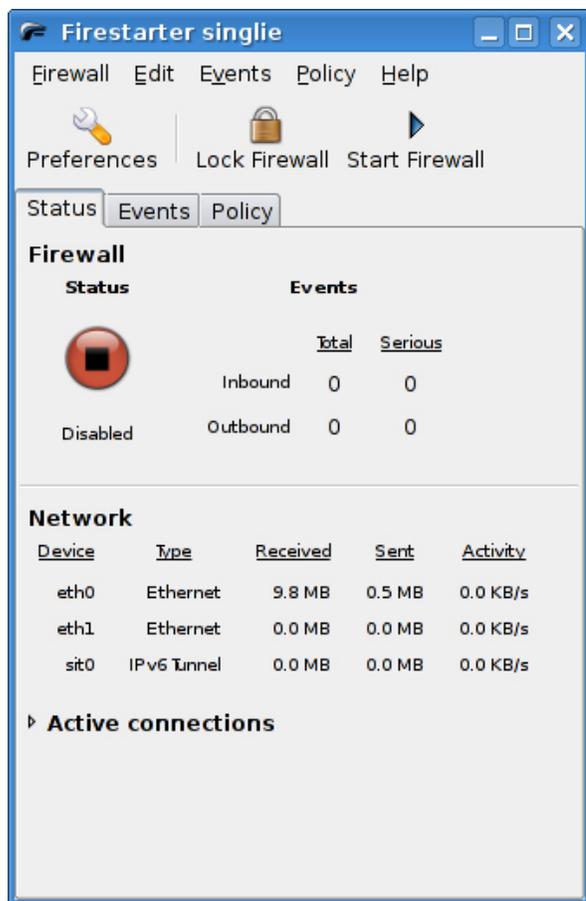


Figure 4. Firestarter's Main Screen

Forward. You'll see a screen that says, "The wizard is now ready to start your firewall." Leave the check box checked and click Save.

You might get an error message at this point, informing you that one of your interfaces is not ready. Don't worry; we still have a little more configuration to do. The main window of Firestarter is



Figure 5. Configuring DHCP on Your Local Network

shown in Figure 4.

Click the large Preferences button to reach the Preferences screen. Select the Network Settings section of the configuration (Figure 5).

Check the Enable DHCP for the local network check box. DHCP allows your devices to configure themselves automatically when they connect to a network.

Next, go ahead and click the Accept button, and then the Start Firewall button. You should see the Firestarter main window change to show that you've successfully started the firewall (Figure 6).

If your Internet connection is wired and you shared the wireless, you should be able to get on the wireless network with your other devices. If you're doing what I did in this situation, you should be able to connect other devices via a hub, switch or crossover cable and communicate now. To encrypt your wireless traffic (always a good idea), use your distribution's configuration tools to enable encryption for your wireless card.

Now, thanks to Firestarter, you can use your laptop to extend your wired network or create a wireless access point in a pinch.■

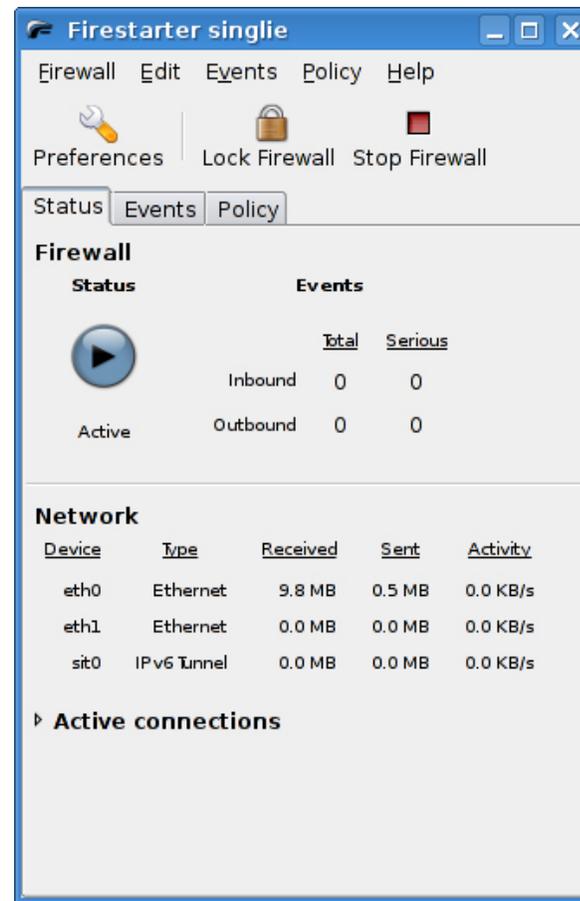


Figure 6. Success! The firewall is active.



Kevin is 22 years old and currently lives in Nicaragua with his cat Guapo. He is proud to use *nix systems exclusively, especially with regards to his job as a Software Engineer. He likes helping others learn what he has learned, whether it be computer knowledge, playing bagpipes or Spanish.

With Skype, the Whole Business World Can Talk for Free

With reliable PC-to-PC calls and paid features that allow outgoing and incoming calls from traditional landline and mobile phones, Skype may be right for your company. JAY KRUIZENGA

It's no wonder that 60-million registered users have chosen Skype's free PC-to-PC Internet telephony service. Its popularity is driven by superb digital call quality, ease of use, secure encrypted calls and large user base due to Skype being available for Windows, Mac, PocketPC and Linux. Skype (rhymes with type) is one of many VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) programs available for Linux. Other competitors (such as Gizmo) are equally stable, but for the purpose of this article, we examine Skype exclusively to see how it meets the needs of small businesses worldwide.

Skype was recently acquired by eBay and is being incorporated into the eBay mainframe site, enabling buyers and sellers to contact one another free of charge. This acquisition worried some users who feared that Skype would no longer be a free service; however, eBay officially has made it known via the Skype Web site that Skype PC-to-PC calls will always be free. Thus, eBay's economic stability can be only a benefit to Skype, and one certain benefit to using the Skype service is knowing that it is rock solid and will continue to be updated and improved upon. But, if Skype PC-to-PC calls are free, how does eBay make any money? eBay makes money from services like SkypeOut and SkypeIn, which may be of benefit to regular users, but are of special benefit to small businesses. We take a look at these services later in this article.

INSTALLATION/COMPATIBILITY

Whichever Linux distribution you use, Skype offers numerous downloads on its site at <http://www.skype.com/download/skype/linux>, including RPMs for SUSE 9 and newer; Fedora Core 3 and Mandriva 10.1 and newer; a Debian package (Xandros, Mepis, Ubuntu and others—Linspire users can download from CNR); and a dynamic binary tar.bz2 with or without Qt 3.2 compiled within. The same download page includes instructions on how to get Skype up and running on your PC with very little effort. We found installation to be quick and painless.

Installation Score: Good

EASE OF USE

To use Skype, you need a high-speed connection (wired preferably) and a headset with microphone built-in. You can purchase a headset from any computer store that either plugs in to the sound card (audio and microphone connections) or USB. The headset we used for this review was the Plantronics Audio USB .45 (Figure 1). It consists of stereo headphones and microphone



Figure 1.
Plantronics Audio
USB .45



Figure 2. Select a unique user name and ID at initial startup.

that blocks out most background noise, and it worked extremely well with Linux. Headsets also can be purchased directly from the Skype Web site.

Every Skype user initially must set up a unique user name and password on the screen that appears the first time you start Skype (Figure 2).

You then will want to add a few contacts. Click on the + inside the green circle at the top



Figure 3. Click + inside the green circle to add contacts.

of the main page (Figure 3), and the screen shown in Figure 4 appears.

The Add a Contact dialog shown in Figure 4 lets you add phone numbers and Skype user IDs of people you know. If you don't know someone's user ID, you can use the search

WITH SKYPE, YOU CAN RECEIVE CALLS AND/OR PLACE CALLS TO LANDLINE OR MOBILE PHONES DIRECTLY THROUGH YOUR PC WORLDWIDE!



Figure 4. Add phone numbers and user IDs to Skype.

feature on this same screen. Simply type in your contact's name, and the Skype system will find it for you. To make a call, you merely click the Contact tab in Skype, highlight the name of the contact you want to call, and click the green phone at the bottom of the page (Figure 5). And, that's it!

Ease of Use Score: Good

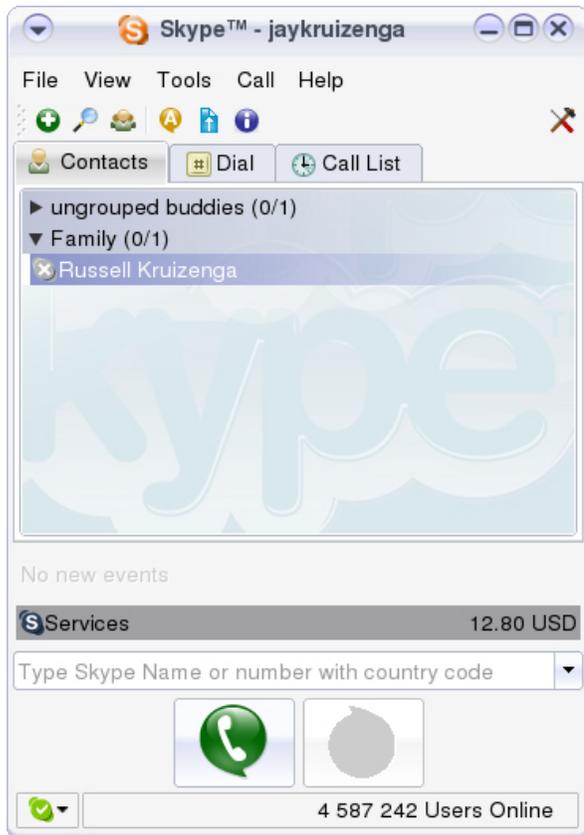


Figure 5. Click the green phone to make calls.

DOCUMENTATION

The Skype Web site has several good guides, tips and troubleshooting information. Documentation does not accompany the Skype telephony software program, but it is available from Skype by clicking Help and FAQ. Doing this automatically directs you to the How to

Use Skype documentation Web page.

Documentation Score: Good

CAPABILITY

As a small- or home-business owner, you no doubt have customers that are not local who need to call you. With Skype, you can receive calls and/or place calls to landline or mobile phones directly through your PC worldwide! SkypeOut is a paid service that lets you call any landline or mobile phone at a very low competitive cost (most places are less than two US cents per minute). We found SkypeOut to work very well, and the calls placed and/or received were of very high quality. SkypeOut minutes are prepurchased from the Skype Web site just like a calling card in \$10 US or \$25 US increments (or your country's currency). For \$10 US, you get roughly the equivalent of eight hours of calls, and for \$25 US, you get approximately 20 hours of call time.

One thing to note: minutes do expire. If you purchase minutes and fail to make any calls within 180 days, you will lose your minutes. Minutes expire 180 days after the last call you make.

For businesses needing to make long-distance phone calls, Skype is a great deal. The two-cents/minute global rate (most countries) is better than most landline phone companies. To make a SkypeOut call, you must dial the full international number from the Dial tab within Skype. So, a call placed to the US is +1 (area code) (number). Calls to the UK start with +44. If you need to know how to dial a call, the Skype Web site includes a SkypeOut dialing wizard that shows you exactly how to dial any number.

The most important non-free benefit of Skype is

SkypeIn, a paid service that allows your business to get a new Skype phone number so customers worldwide can call into your PC at their cost. This service costs a very low \$12 US for three months or \$38 US per year, and includes a free voice-mail account.

With SkypeIn, you can have up to ten purchased/rented numbers through Skype. Why would you want so many? Because the numbers you choose do not need to be in the area where your business is located. For instance, let's say your business is based out of Chicago, but it has a lot of customers in the London, England area. With SkypeIn, you can buy a London number at a low cost, which allows customers in that area to pay local charges to reach you. How cool is that? Numbers are available worldwide. The SkypeIn service works the same way as PC-to-PC calls, so calls placed at your Skype business number ring directly into your PC. To answer incoming calls, simply click the green phone.

We tried both SkypeOut and SkypeIn services, and they both performed very well. We did lose a SkypeIn number, but that was because we were on a wireless network. We found that wireless networks do not work so well with Skype. You may have different results, however, and other users may have no problems at all with wireless. Wireless does work, but it has a latency problem causing received voices to seem delayed. The Skype site recommends hardline DSL or cable hook-ups for best performance.

One final feature is conference calling, which allows up to five Skype users to converse simultaneously. We did not attempt this feature, because the Skype Web site states that conference calling may be initiated only from a Windows PC with Skype installed. We certainly hope that eBay/Skype plans to remedy this.

Unfortunately at this time, Linux users can join in on existing Skype-based conference calls, but not initiate them.

There is a special high-speed conferencing that does work with Linux, and it is a special collaboration between Skype and Vapps (another VoIP leader) that allows you to initiate a 500-person or less conference call with features that rival traditional conference-calling hosts, enabling the moderator to mute/unmute all calls and callers to mute themselves within the call. This feature costs five Euro cents per minute and is billed directly from each person's Skype account. We have not tested this service, but the tools are available. For more information, go to <http://www.highspeedconferencing.com/quick.htm>.

Finally, we must mention the Skype for Business Control Panel found at the Skype Web site. This is a new feature that allows your home- or small-business bookkeeper or administrator to take control of all Skype credit, SkypeIn numbers and Skype voice-mail accounts, allocating these to individual people within an organization. The service itself is free. Inside the Control Panel, you can select auto top-up for outgoing SkypeOut calls, so you never need to be bothered with running out of minutes.

Other Skype benefits that are beyond the scope of this article include instant messaging and file transfer from Skype. These features are fully explained via the Skype Documentation Web page.

Skype is a well-rounded, stable telepho-

ny system that can be used for inexpensive calls to and from traditional landline and/or mobile phones. It is not meant to be a complete replacement for traditional phone systems and may not be used for emergency purposes; however, as an accompaniment to these traditional systems, Skype is a great deal and benefit to home and small businesses with existing customers outside of the local area. We fully recommend Skype for the services it provides and the value found in the program itself.

A few features are unavailable to Linux that keep us from giving the Skype program full points for capability:

- Call forwarding allows Skype calls to be transferred to landline or mobile phones and works only in Windows.
- Video calling works only in Windows.
- Conference calling initiation works only in Windows.
- Skype Zones is a service that allows access to Skype and the placement of calls from more than 18,000 Internet hot spots around the world and works only with Windows.

We certainly hope and expect these shortcomings to be remedied in the near future—right Skype?

Capability Score: Good (It would be excellent if all features were made available for Linux.)

SUPPORT

Other than the previously mentioned user guide, if you need support for Skype, you can submit a support request on the Skype Web site at <http://support.skype.com>.

Support Score: Average (There's no phone support.)

CONCLUSION

Skype could be of great benefit to your home or small business due to the paid services that will save money on long-distance calls. Although all features are not yet available for Linux, there are enough features to make this telephony program useful. The Skype Web site recently published research findings that 30% of the 60-million registered users utilize Skype for work purposes. That's 18 million business users! Skype is a revolutionary program that is changing the way business is being conducted throughout the world. ■

INSTALLATION: Good

EASE OF USE: Good

DOCUMENTATION: Good

CAPABILITY: Good

SUPPORT: Average

FINAL SCORE: Good



Jay Kruizenga is a former Marine who started using computers with the Commodore 64 in the service. Dissatisfied with Windows, he started looking for viable options and discovered Linux in the late 1990s, which he now uses exclusively for the operation of a small home-based Internet business.

Gadget Guy: Into the Drink

Planning on a summer vacation at the beach? If so, you'll want to check out this month's Gadget Guy to capture those snorkeling adventures digitally. SEAN CARRUTHERS

It doesn't matter whether you're about to head into summer and its many weekends at the beach, or into winter, with your skis cutting into fresh powdered snow: if you try to use your digital camera during seasonal recreational activities, there's a good chance it's going to get wet. And as we all know—sometimes through sad experience—electronics and water do not go well together. Until now, anyhow.

For those who love to mix water with photography, there have been a number of enclosure products, allowing you to take your favourite point-and-shoot camera and lock it into a clear plastic case to protect it from the elements. The big problem is that these cases tend to be somewhat expensive and bulky, and it tended to be hard to use any functions on the camera beyond pressing the shutter, because the menu buttons were often too small for the clunky waterproofed contraptions to handle with any agility.

Now there's a new generation of cameras that are "waterproof" right out of the box, which means you don't have to worry about carting around a bulky enclosure in addition to the camera. In fact, the pair of waterproofed cameras I looked at were pretty much the same size as the rest of today's compact point-and-shoot cameras. The only noticeable difference is that with waterproofed cameras, the lens is completely enclosed in the body of the camera behind a protective panel, and all of the panels that hide memory cards, batteries and other connectors feature rubberized seals and locking mechanisms to prevent them from opening accidentally.

You may have noticed that I put waterproof in quotation marks at the beginning of the last paragraph, and that's to underscore a misconception. Waterproof doesn't mean you can use something underwater indefinitely. There are varying levels of waterproofing, measured with a rating typically labeled JIS, followed by a number, or IPX, followed by a number. This rating means the product has been certified for use underwater, but only to a certain depth and for a certain length of time—go any deeper or stay underwater any longer, and water will start to seep through the seals. The typical depth and time for a camera listed as JIS8/IPX8 is between five- to eight-feet deep for up to 30 minutes. In other words, that's enough time for a quick swim in shallow water, but not enough to take the camera on an extended swim or scuba dive.

Another word of caution for those thinking of getting a waterproofed camera is that after you leave the water, you have to wait a while before opening your camera's access doors to make sure the area around the rubberized seals is dry. If you run out of the water and immediately open up the camera's USB door so you can download your pictures to a computer or swap the battery, you're likely to cause damage to the camera when the water seeps into the electronics.

With waterproof cameras, you also want to avoid giving the camera any unnecessary shocks, like dropping it on a hard surface or hitting it against a table. Although the camera's electronics may be able to handle it, it may warp or loosen the camera's protective doors, causing them to let

water through much more quickly than usual.

If you're taking the cameras underwater often, you'll want to make sure you clean the cameras regularly with a soft cloth and soapy water. The crunge built up by salt, chlorine or dirty water can compromise the quality of your pictures or even damage the camera.

Now, with those cautions out of the way, on to the cameras. Both cameras I looked at this month are USB mass storage class devices, which means you should be able to plug them in to your Linux box and copy the images over in exactly the same way you would from an external hard drive or USB memory key. If your system already recognizes those types of devices automatically, these cameras will work just fine.

PENTAX OPTIO WPI

<http://www.pentax.com>
\$250 US

The Optio WPI is the latest waterproofed point-and-shoot model from Pentax, and it's a compact little marvel. At 105 x 51 x 24 mm, it's already smaller than a lot of other garden-variety point-and-shoot digital cameras out there. Impressively, this one manages to include a 6 megapixel image sensor and



Pentax Optio WPI

a 3x optical zoom lens. As the entirety of the lens is tucked in behind a clear protective panel, the lens components are all fairly small, and consequently the image may not be quite as crisp as images taken on 6 megapixel models with larger optics (both lens and sensor). That said, the camera still takes great images on both sides of the waterline.

The Optio WPi has 10.5MB of built-in memory, which is good for about three shots at the highest resolution, or 16 seconds of video at 320x240 resolution. You'll definitely want to invest in more memory for the camera if you're planning to use it for longer periods—and why wouldn't you want to, if you're planning to take it underwater? Luckily, the camera also accepts SecureDigital cards.

The WPi also features a really nice menu system with a lot of powerful features, especially considering the camera's modest price. Not only can you do some editing on the camera, including cropping, resizing and rotation, you also can do automatic red-eye correction on the camera. Even better, if you mistakenly delete an image, you can go into image recovery mode and get that image back, provided you haven't already recorded over it with another shot.

The spec sheet for this model says you can keep the camera underwater at a depth of five feet, for up to 30 minutes.

OLYMPUS STYLUS 720 SW

<http://www.olympusamerica.com>
\$400 US

Olympus' Stylus line of digital cameras has long featured "weather-resistant" casing, allowing you to take them outside while it's raining without having to worry too much about damaging them. Anyone that managed to dunk one of those cameras in a puddle can probably tell you that's not

the same thing as "waterproof", however. Luckily, Olympus has taken the next step and released a camera that actually can go into that puddle—or the river, the lake or pool.

The Stylus 720 SW is a bit pricier than the Pentax model, for a couple of reasons. First, it has a higher-resolution sensor (7.1 megapixels), for larger pictures. Second, it comes with a 2.5-inch LCD viewfinder on the back, making it easy to line up the shots even if you're underwater. Third, it not only comes with waterproofing, it also has shock protection that protects it for drops of up to five feet.

It's worth noting that although the camera is rated for depths of up to 10 feet, the manual doesn't list a duration; however, the camera meets the IPX-8 standard, which specifies up to 30 minutes at a depth of 8 feet, so at 10 feet it's probably a bit less than the full half hour. (Unfortunately, as I don't have the money to replace the camera, I couldn't fully test out this theory by keeping it underwater for that long.)

The Stylus also features an extensive menu system with a lot of different scene modes for proper shooting in a variety of locations. There are 24 shooting modes, including four specifically dedicated to underwater photography, scene modes dedicated for night shooting, fireworks, low light,



Olympus Stylus 720 SW



Both Cameras under Water

items behind glass, cuisine, documents, sand and snow, and more. The camera even has a digital image stabilizer, for more steady shots in low-light or high-motion situations.■



Sean Carruthers is a freelance technology journalist from Toronto. He spent six years at Canada Computer Paper, first as Products Editor at *The Computer* and later at *HUB Digital Living* magazine. As a freelancer, he has written for the *Globe and Mail*, <http://globetechnology.com>, *HUB Digital Living*, *Computer Dealer News*, *Homefront* and *CE-Biz*. Although a relative newbie with Linux (SUSE, thank you very much), he has extensive experience with tech gadgets of all sorts and is enjoying figuring out which ones are compatible with Linux.

Neverputt

Have the urge to hit the links, but Mother Nature has other plans? Why not settle for a quick round of *Neverputt*? JOHN KNIGHT

The brother of *Neverball*, *Neverputt* uses the same engine to create a game that is fundamentally different, but feels quite similar—addictive, yet infuriating! The concept of the game is fairly simple, minigolf for you or several mates, but the resulting game play is a lot more complex. With a fully 3-D environment and a real-time physics engine, both these elements are utilized to create game play concepts that basically have been nonexistent in minigolf games previously.

The controls are very simple. When it's your turn, swing the mouse around to aim, and move the mouse backward or forward to adjust the power. The simplicity ends there, as the environment is unforgiving, with plenty of complex features. Endless ramps, traps in the ground and moving objects abound—ranging from simple obstacles, to traps for throwing you into space and even moving platforms.

Often angled parts of the ground are deceptive and look quite easy, but there's usually a lot of thought put into each level, and a trap always lurks in each. The large use of ramps requires a good degree of judgment: too little power, and the ball trickles back down; too much power, and it literally flies off the course into space (going off the edge brings a one stroke penalty)!

Neverputt shares some features from *Neverball*, such as warp platforms, which instantly transport



Figure 1. Interesting Use of Triggers on a Course Designed around the Letter K

the ball to another area on the course. An interesting game play dynamic is the use of triggers, where the ball running over a pad on the ground sets off something else in the level, usually moving an obstacle or something like that. Care has to be taken with triggers, as making contact with them

more than once sets each pad off more than once. So take note of any surrounding walls, and use them to bounce the ball around the trigger.

The courses don't really follow a standard progression of difficulty. Easy presents a nice, traditional course at the beginning, and then starts to



Figure 2. The Well-Used Aspect of Angles in *Neverputt* and the Occasional Epic Setting

get wacky. Medium starts out a little crazy, but is actually bit more toned-down (though more frustrating) than the easy level. Hard is based around the alphabet, and actually isn't that much more difficult, but it is, of course, much longer with 26 holes (one for each letter), and it is probably the most interesting of the courses.

With the same engine as *Neverball*, the graphics are still quite pretty, but for some reason, the color seems subdued. The colorful blue skies, clouds and cartoony animations seem to have been done away with, making things generally more drab and functional. I'm not sure which was made first, *Neverball*

sitive as *Neverball*, you actually can get away with having a slower machine, as performance won't have a direct influence on the controls.

In the end, this game is definitely a must-try, especially for gaming masochists, because it comes straight from the gaming sadist masters! I find this game most enjoyable with a few mates and a few albums playing in the background, but single player is still enjoyable. If you already have *Neverball* installed, *Neverputt* should have come with it, and like *Neverball*, there's a chance it's already installed on your system. Have a peek through the menu, or try the

or *Neverputt*, but if *Neverputt* was made first, this would explain why the graphics in *Neverball* are much friendlier with less consideration given to *Neverputt*. A fault that *Neverputt* shares with its brother is graphical glitches like a shadow that is cast through receding platforms and some occasionally dodgy camera angles. These criticisms aside, it still looks pretty good for an open-source game.

As these two games share the same engine, they also share the same system requirements, so you need a 3-D card. Although, as the controls aren't as hypersen-

TIPS

Features

You will be repeating a course many times over, and taking the same shots. Take note of the triangular notches on the side walls and the amount of power you're using. Eventually, you should be able to repeat certain shots perfectly, by counting how many notches along the wall to aim for and rebound off, and so on.

Pixels

When lining up shots at features like flags, if you want to see whether it's straight, try looking at the jagged edges made by the pixels. Generally, you'll be able to swing the camera around so that the edge of the feature is perfectly straight, instead of blocky and jagged (running in a lower resolution should help).

Who Dares Doesn't Win

That fancy shot that you're about to take at an angle off a feature won't pay off unless you're a veteran. Play it safe to get par, then try to be fancy next game.

command `neverputt`. The *Neverputt* Web site is at <http://icculus.org/neverball> (same site as *Neverball*). Happy golfing! Fore! ■



John Knight is a 21-year-old, rock-climbing, Japan-loving megalomaniac, trying to take over the world from his bedroom via his keyboard. He spends most of his time tinkering with MPlayer and headbanging to his MP3s.