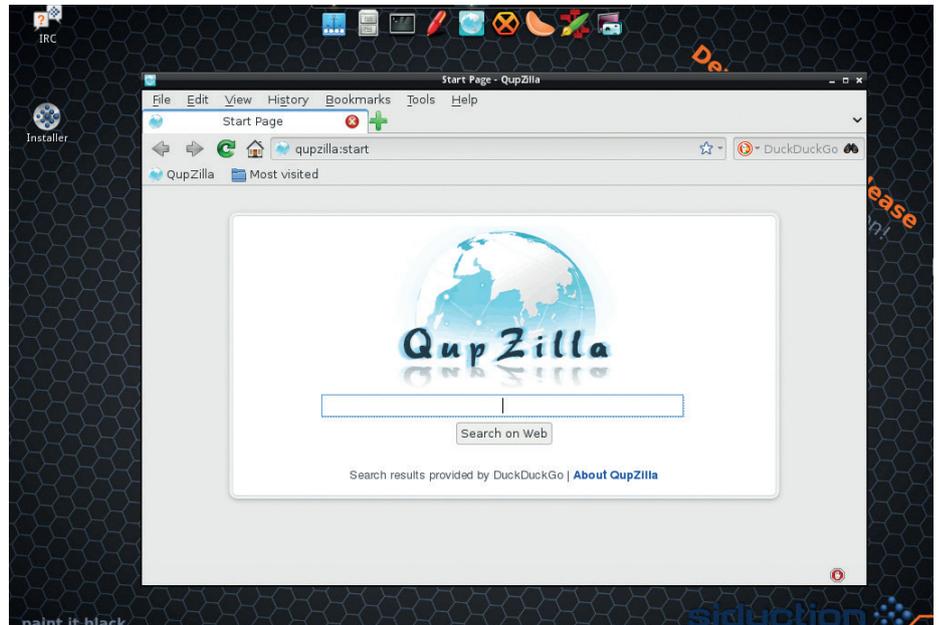# DISTRO**HOPPER**

We've tapped GCHQ's communications to find out what's going on in distro land.

Siduction LXQT

Showcasing a new desktop.

Many, many words have been written about the shift from Gnome 2 to Gnome 3, and we won't add more here. However, as well as the desktop shifting, the *GTK* toolkit also shifted, and a lot of other desktop environments relied on that *GTK 2*. LXDE was one of those environments, and they weren't happy with the direction *GTK 3* was taking, so the developers have decided to make a clean break and switch to the *Qt* toolkit that's most famously used in KDE.

This new desktop environment, known as LXQT, is still in development, so not many distros have included it yet, but Siduction has. At first it feels a little strange, because some parts are reminiscent of KDE, such as the control centre and the notifications area. However, on the whole, it's a very different desktop environment. There's far less eye candy, no glow behind the window, no

cashew, and none of the KDE apps are included. *PCManFM* is still the file manager (like the desktop, it's made the transition to *QT*), and *Qupzilla* is chosen as the web

browser. Despite the new toolkit, it still retains the no-nonsense feel of LXDE, and we suspect it will retain its popularity in low-end desktops.

Siduction was also one of the first distros to feature *Razor-qt*, another *Qt*-based desktop.

Zorin 9

Can Zorin 9 help Linux attract new users from Windows?

Zorin pitches itself as the gateway to Linux, a tagline that sums up its goal of being a distro for non-technical users new to Linux. As far as we can see, this claim is mostly made based on the fact that it's themed to look like Windows.

Zorin gives the user three themes to choose from to customise its look and feel (though we can't tell the difference between Dark and Blue), and three looks (based on Windows 7, Windows XP and Gnome 2). That makes a total of nine (or six) different visual appearances you can have. If one of them isn't to your taste, go find another distro. This might seem an anathema to the mantra 'Linux is about choice', and it

probably is, but that mantra isn't central to Linux (see **http://islinuxaboutchoice.com**).

Zorin is aimed squarely at new users, and new users don't always want lots of options to endlessly tweak the interface. They want a few choices so they can find a look and feel that somewhat approaches their natural style. For these people, Zorin provides a natural choice.

The easy option
If you're thinking that this GUI only alters some config files that you could go in and change to tweak this or that element of the interface, you're probably correct – but again, Zorin is not the distro for you.
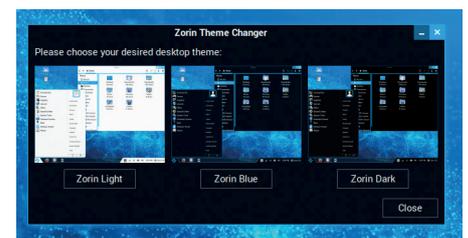
The Zorin Theme Changer gives a simple way to tweak the look and feel of the desktop.

Underneath, Zorin is based on Ubuntu 14.04 which makes a solid, if unremarkable, base.

Zorin is probably the best Windows-alike distro, but we're becoming less and less convinced that Windows-alike distros are really necessary. We've found that even lifelong Windows users take to interfaces like Mate or Cinnamon without too much trouble, but for those who can't cope with the change, there's always Zorin.
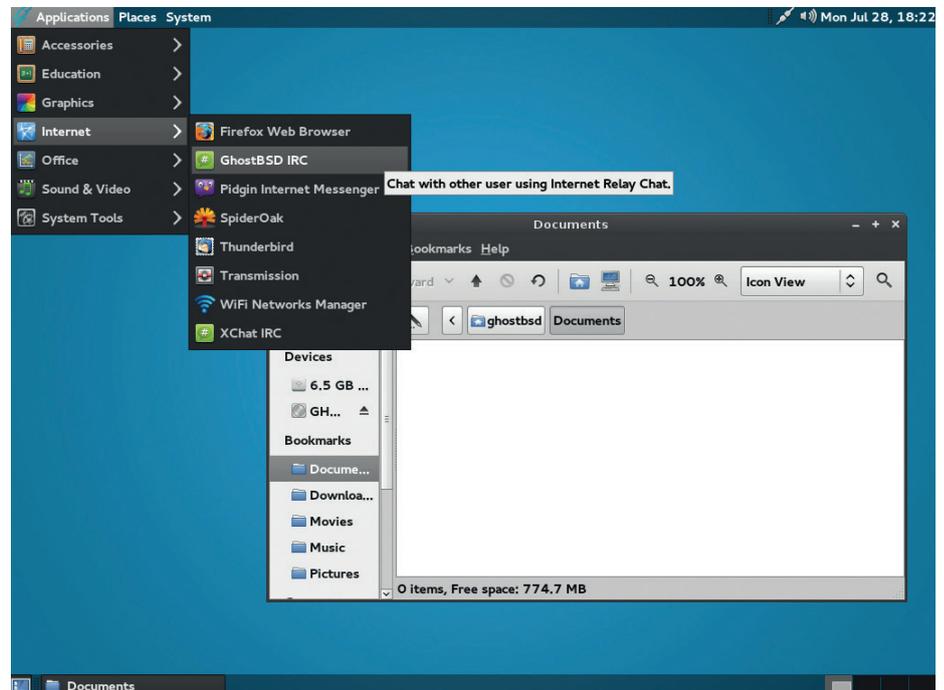
GhostBSD 4.0

FreeBSD + Mate = an easy introduction to the mysterious world of BSD.

GhostBSD is a project that builds on FreeBSD with the aim of making it a bit more palatable for desktop users. To this end, it comes with the Mate desktop environment and a set of tools geared towards desktops rather than servers.

The basic install leaves you with a fairly minimal system, but there's nothing essential missed out. It's got *LibreOffice*, *Firefox* and a few other tools, but depending on what you hope to use it for, you'll probably need to install a bit of software to get a useful desktop. This is quite a surprise, since the ISO comes in at a fairly large 1.2GB, but shouldn't cause any problems.

Privacy enthusiasts will be pleased to see that *SpiderOak* is included by default. This is a cloud file backup service similar to *Dropbox*, but the files are encrypted on your device before uploading, which makes it far more secure. This backup software has gained a bit of popularity recently thanks to a public endorsement by Edward Snowden.

Another slightly unusual program is *Fish* as the default shell (others are available). This works in basically the same way as *Bash* (the default shell environment in almost all Linux distributions), but comes with far more graphical niceties, which can come as a bit of a shock to people used to simpler shells.

GhostBSD comes with an IRC client that will connect you straight to a GhostBSD channel – perfect for when you're having a little trouble and just can't find the solution.

GhostBSD is relatively easy to use, though not quite as beginner-friendly as some Linux distros. It also has a smaller user base than common Linuxes, so you're not likely to find as much help online should you get stuck (the Ubuntu and Mint forums are still the best place to get answers to most questions that beginners may have). That said, it's not hard to use, and anyone with a basic knowledge of Unix-like systems who is comfortable on the command-line shouldn't have too much trouble.

OpenElec 4.1.1 Time to take advantage of the new audio on the Raspberry Pi B+

It's never been a secret that the Raspberry Pi makes a good media player. In fact, the SoC (system-on-chip) at its heart was originally intended for set-top boxes. However, up until now, it's been let down by the poor quality of its analogue audio. This hasn't been a problem for people plugging Raspberry Pis into TVs, since the HDMI audio has always been good. However, Pis have been almost useless for anyone wanting to plug them into stereos.

With the improved sound on the new model B+, the situation is a lot better. There's also a new version of the OpenElec media player distro, and we took this as a sign that we should hook our Pi up to our stereo and rock out in the name of investigative journalism.

Installing was simply a case of downloading a tarball and running a script that sets everything up. This is a touch more complex than the Noobs install method (which is also possible for OpenElec). Once this is done, you just need to pop the SD card in your Pi and start the machine. For the initial setup (entering Wi-Fi passwords, etc), you'll need a monitor and mouse, though once set up, these aren't needed any longer. Just connect the audio out into your sound system's line in, and you're ready to go.

You can control *XBMC* (the media player upon which OpenElec is based) using a smart phone app. There are several options available for most types of smartphones including an official one created by the *XBMC* team. (XBMC is more commonly used as a video player, and OpenElec performs admirably at this as well).

The SD card has a partition that mounts at **/storage** and contains all the media. Adding new music is just a case of using the **scp** command to copy it from another computer to this location on the Pi.

The whole setup took us less than half an hour, and then we had a smartphone controlled sound system.

We found the *XBMC* remote by Music Pump to be a little easier to use without a screen than the official app from the *XBMC* team, but it's not open source.