LINUXVOICE YOUR LETTERS

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Or a great discovery? Email us: letters@linuxvoice.com

LINUX VOICE STAR LETTER

MIGRATION HERO

I found it interesting listening to various podcast discussions regarding installing Linux for other users of Windows and would like to share my experiences.

I have installed Linux on behalf of about 12 users in an attempt to spread the good word. I usually install Mint (Cinnamon), Mint (Mate) or Xubuntu, all LTS versions, depending on the computer type, power of machine and if there are any installation difficulties.
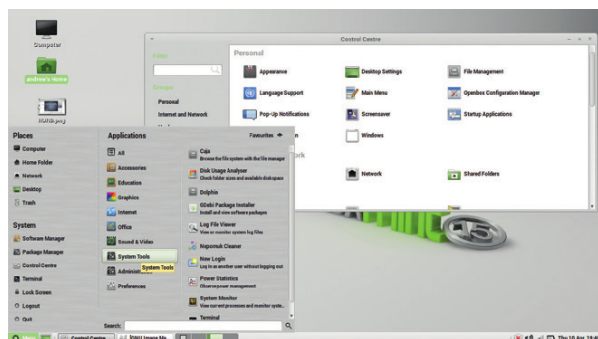
Linux Mint (in Cinnamon or Mate) makes a great desktop system for users who just want to do the basics with their computer.

It is important to check with the user as to their expectations and requirements – Linux is not the best for syncing iTunes! I always put the programs I think the user will use on the desktop along with a ReadMe file detailing the Linux equivalents of the Windows software, how to find and install software, update the computer and details of where and how to look for help should they need it. I like to run through the setup with them so that they know how to connect to the internet etc, and this gives them the opportunity to ask any questions.

Once I have packed them off home, I have been surprised by the total lack of support that has been requested, the only exception being the odd printing issue but once that's resolved I get nothing. I ask them how's it going only to be told that it's all fine and how much quicker it is now. It just does what they need. I get far more cries for help from Windows users than Linux ones.

My point is that should anybody be deciding whether or not to install Linux for a family member or friend and is worried that the user will need constant support my experience indicates the exact opposite, just make sure you do your homework first.
Charlie Ogier, Guernsey

Andrew says: As Roy Keane once said: "Failure to prepare is preparing to fail." You're completely right to ask what your users want out of their Linux boxes, and we salute you for your work.

I'M STICKING WITH YOU

I've just got a copy of Linux Voice issue 2. You are rightfully receiving many plaudits for the work you have done to set up this magazine, however, one thing seems to have been missed in the congratulations – it is the glue. You have managed to get a glue that firmly holds the DVD to the magazine, but when you take the DVD off, the remnants of the glue roll off nicely leaving no residue at all. This is a fantastic achievement, keep up the good work.

Charles Barnwel, Birmingham, UK

Andrew says: Like penicillin and WD-40, sometime the best things are discovered by accident. We can't claim that Mike has been working on a secret formula for the perfect glue; it's just what we were given by default by our distributors. Things do seem to be working out well so far, but if anyone has feedback about the magazine or the physical quality of the magazine please do get in touch.

When there's a great distro, we'll put it on the DVD; when there aren't any big releases, we won't bother with the DVD.

UNSOUND

I am by no means a newbie since I have been using Linux as my operating system of choice since 2000, but sound always seems to be a problem. Banshee and other players work OK and hide the difficulties from you but if you ever step outside the music player area it is a nightmare. Sound settings in PulseAudio and ALSA are arcane.

Despite this I thought I would try Ubuntu Studio as a dual boot option on my main PC. I assumed that the good folks at Canonical would have everything set up just so... I started Audacity and tried recording my voice. Selecting an input device proved to be the first problem. Audacity listed 26 input devices, and when I decided to Rescan Audio Devices the list of input devices increased to 36. I have no idea which of these options refer to the microphone I plugged into the sound card.

I can eliminate the USB options since I suspect that they refer to my webcam and I could try each of the other options till I find which one gets a response on the meter but life is short, especially when you get to my advanced years. And then I would have to do the same with the output devices.

I doubt if you can sort the problem but it would be nice to have some sort of guidance on

how to know which 'device' corresponds to which piece of hardware.
John Paton

Graham says: We have a lot of sympathy for your situation, John. One of our audio devices is a Focusrite Saffire Pro 40, and this lists 20 separate inputs and 20 separate outputs, with no indication of which channel does what or goes where. The only solution is trial and error.

The reason for this is lack of manufacturer support – many Linux drivers are created blind by developers trying their best to bring as wide hardware compatibility as possible. This is wonderful, but they often don't even have access to the hardware they're writing drivers for. What's needed, we think, is some way to create sensible default configurations for hardware. And perhaps that's something we, as a community, could help with.

Some audio apps, such as Bitwig, are fantastic – it's the underlying sound architecture in Linux that causes the problems.

GEDIT

I very much enjoyed the text editor comparison in the May issue. However, I have an addition and an objection.

The objection first: take a look at TextAdept. You are really missing a nice cross-platform editor. I use it on Linux and MacOS and I always have the installer ready in the event that I need to work on a Windows machine. It's open, free and completely extensible. What more do you want?

The addition: I really like Gedit. In fact, I used the text editor control to learn Python. I got a nice clone with additional features I missed. I was even thinking of embedding the Evince viewer in order to have a clone for TexWorks. It should not be that difficult, being as there is a lot of code floating around. That could be an idea for a Python programming tutorial that produces useful tools along the road...
Pedro A Aranda, Madrid

Ben says: Hi Pedro! We did include one cross-platform application in the shape of Sublime Text, which is a superbly polished piece of software and could easily have been declared the Group Test winner. As for Gedit, we like it too. We're just spoiled for choice when it comes to text editors.
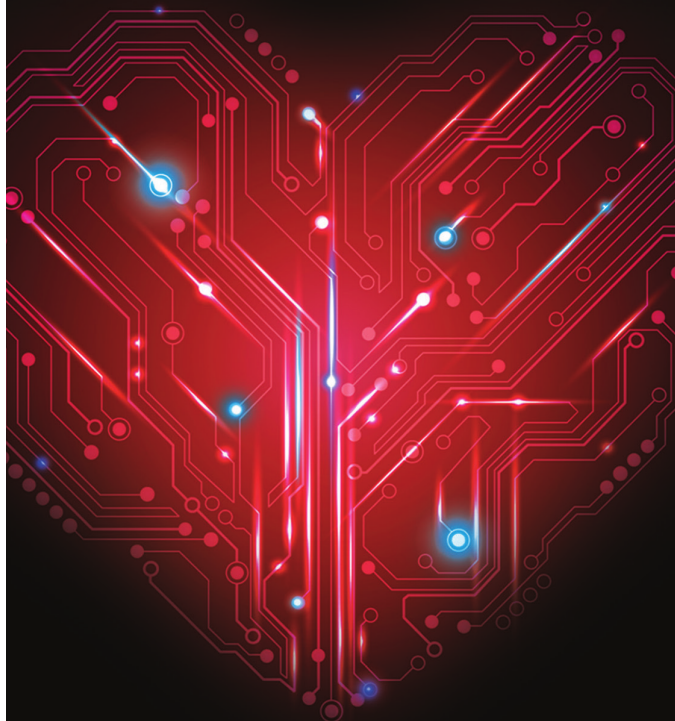
PLAIN TEXT PASSWORDS

Congratulations on your second issue; you seem to have the contents about right for the greatest number of readers.

I would just like to mention that, although an excellent piece of software in many respects, Filezilla does have a potential security problem for some users. The login information that is entered into the Site Manager is stored in an XML file in **~/.filezilla** as plain text, including any passwords. Probably not a problem for a home user, but something others may need to be aware of.
Chris Whelan
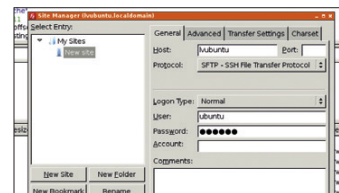
Security concern aside, FileZilla is a fantastic FTP tool.

Ben says: For home users, as you say, this isn't such a big deal, but it does serve as yet another reminder not to use the same password on multiple sites, because it only takes one to leak and you're compromised all over the place.

WHAT NAS BOX?

Having just read the article from issue 2 on "Filing Effective Bug Reports," I thought I'd comment on how you're striking quite a nice balance between newb-friendly content and more advanced stuff. The bug report article has probably assuaged many readers' fears on the topic and it might have done many open source projects quite a nice favour.

Speaking of newb-friendly content, I have a question: Over the couple of years that I've been messing around with Linux, I've seen a few articles on NAS, often on FreeBSD and how to set up an NAS device. For me, this begs that question, what is the difference between using, say, a 2TB box and putting NAS4Free on it, vice putting a full-fledged distro like Debian on it? In both cases, can't the box be used for exactly the same thing, network storage? Wouldn't the difference just be in setting up the Debian distro as a file server?

Congratulations on the magazine, and keep the great content coming.
Roy Birk, Maryland, USA

Andrew says: Debian is an excellent OS for a NAS, and it's even used by some commercial products. NAS4Free is based on FreeBSD, so it's the best way to get the advanced ZFS filesystem. You can't go wrong with either – just make sure to uninstall any services you're not using, as each one is a potential vulnerability.

Debian running without a graphical server is a perfect choice for a netword attached storage (NAS) box.

MANY IDEAS

You have mentioned in both magazines about running linux on MAC. Just wondering if you will throw a tutorial in for installing Linux on the late 2013 macbook pro(11,1) in an upcoming issue? I'd really like to get Linux up and running on my new laptop and use it as my main OS. Any help would be greatly appreciated.
Brian Meyers

Andrew says: I'm a big fan of the construction quality of Apple hardware, in particularly the battery life of the laptops. Linus Torvalds uses a Macbook running Fedora, Mike uses one running Xubuntu, and all the geeks at OSCON seem to have a shiny Apple device running some sort of Linux. It would be remiss of us not to try sone sort of dual-booting tutorial, so look out for it soon.

MORE IDEAS!

It's amazing to look at the historical code tutorials and understand exactly what's going on. But after Ada Lovelace in LV001, Grace Hopper in LV002: who's next?
Brian Meyers

Andrew says: Alan Turing's next, that's who, but as the Bletchley Park stuff isn't all that hands-on we've moved him into the features section this issue; he'll be reinstated to the tutorials when Juliet gets onto the work he did around prime numbers. There's also Von Neumann and Konrad Zuse in the pipeline, so stay tuned.

If you've ever dabbled in Assembly language, Ada Lovelace's code for the Analytical Engine should look familiar – even though she wrote it in the 1840s.

PAST AGES

For the first time in my life I am writing to a magazine, which is mind blowing considering I've been collecting various mags since the late 80s when my parents opted to give me pocket money. While my friends bought sweets I saved mine and bought Metal Hammer Magazine or some other publication in that vein. but as I plod my way through my 30s I've started collecting magazines once more. I literally started buying them again last month with Linux Voice as previously I just used the internet for all my needs from the mid 2000s to now.

The last publication on Linux I bought was Linux Format back in September 2005. While I don't have that magazine I recently found the DVD that came with it in an old box of odds and sods that I found at my parents' place. I include a picture of the DVD cover for no real reason other than nostalgia. In short your magazine is so good it has rekindled my interest in Linux and got me buying magazines again.

I had an idea for a long-term tutorial that could be covered from issue to issue where you detail the building of a Linux distribution, using Linux From Scratch. Each month you dedicate a few pages (maybe 10 or so) to building the Linux Voice Distro (or whatever you want to call it). This could be really cool as a tutorial for everyone and get a lot of people involved in creating the distro. It could be a real community project and the timing is good with the release of Ubuntu 14.04 imminent, so there's a nice fresh LTS Distro to fork from.

The tutorial could cover a lot of issues and really generate interest among the Linux Voice reader base, as learning how to build an OS from nothing is something I'm sure everyone would like to know how to do.I'm sure you would also see a jump in users on the forums.

Think about it. How cool would it be to put your own distro out on a future DVD release and also to see it on Distrowatch.com?
Well I hope you take the time to read this and would love if you ran with my idea and did it.
PJ

Ben says: That's an awesome idea, thanks PJ. We'll think of you when we've taken over the world and we're drinking fresh mango juice.

Ah, the Debian flying pig. A joke devised by our esteemed Mr Nick Veitch, who now dwells on page 114.

ILLITERACY

Issue 2 is great. But oh no – there's a gaffe on page 27!

The author of *A Computer Called LEO* is Georgina Ferry However, on the front cover, at the bottom, there's a quote by a Brenda Maddox. Keep Ben off of the cider this month! I shall not be cancelling my subscription however as I consider it money well spent!
John Evans