

# LINUX VOICE YOUR LETTERS



Got something to say? An idea for a new magazine feature? Or a great discovery? Email us: [letters@linuxvoice.com](mailto:letters@linuxvoice.com)

## LINUX VOICE STAR LETTER

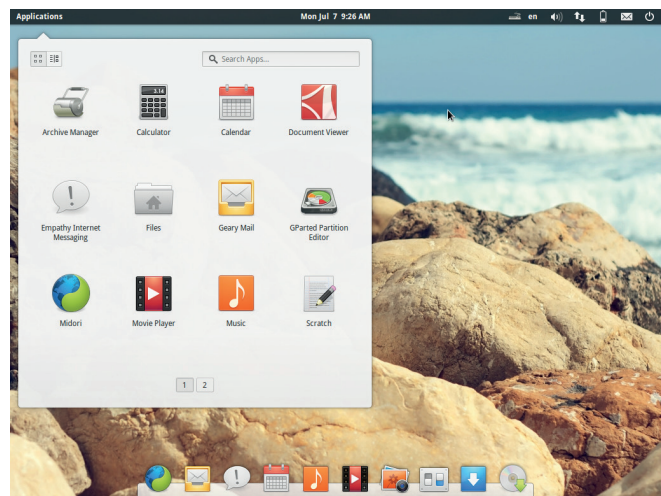
### STUCK IN A RUT

I've been messing about with different kinds of Linux for a while now – I started with Ubuntu, then Kubuntu, which was the easiest way to try KDE, then Mageia, because I figured that it was built for KDE, rather than having KDE bolted on to it like Kubuntu. But now I'm stuck. I know that there's loads of choice out there, but sometimes I feel like using the dread phrase: "There is too much choice". Truly, getting

information from the internet is at times like drinking water out of a fire hose. So come on, Linux Voice – spare me the flame wars and let me know what I should try next.

**David Jahović, Melbourne**

**Andrew says:** We've had a few emails in this vein, so we're planning a distro comparison for next issue. Until then, give Elementary OS a try. It's pretty, it's fast, and we love it!



Elementary OS provides a fresh new spin to the Linux desktop.

### I ALWAYS FEEL LIKE SOMEBODY'S WATCHING ME

I wonder if the seeming lack of privacy and security on the internet due to either breaches or even government agencies peeking into every corner will slowly destroy all the benefits the internet has brought us? How do I use the internet and still maintain my privacy? As an example, I love that way that I can put an event in my calendar and have it remind me on my computer and phone for things even as simple as a birthday. I used to use it to remind me of an eye, medical, or dental appointment, but I use it very seldom now for my own privacy and security. If I use one of the popular calendars like Google calendar, who is seeing or could see all of my personal daily life?

Is there such a thing as a secure calendar? What reasonable

methods can I use to protect my online life?

I think all this falls into a larger category such as even being able to use cloud storage and protect the data. Especially true since encryption can be called into question just with the recent events relating to Truecrypt.

Has anyone looked into Penango, which is supposed to allow you to encrypt your Gmail in a browser (free accounts get free encryption) and allow you to use a key you have stored on your computer rather than having to give them access to it if I understand it correctly?

**Steve Cox**

**Andrew says:** It's a safe assumption that the data you put into Google Calendar is being shared with anyone



The only way to be sure that you're not being spied on is to use free software. There is no other way.

who wants to pay for it, or who can produce a warrant for it.

The only way to guarantee your data is safe is to use your own software – OwnCloud, for example, provides a calendaring service that you know for sure won't be shared by any nefarious third parties.

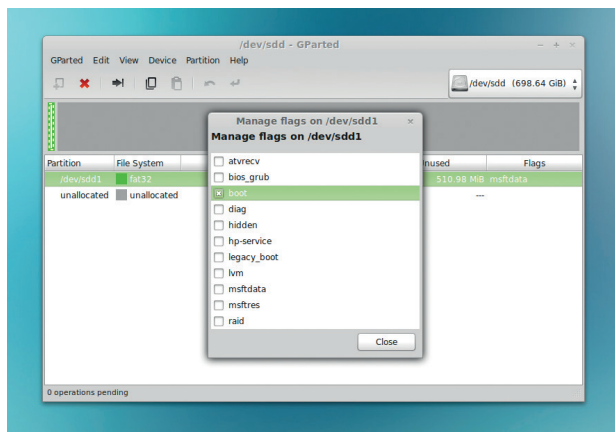
## UEFI

I am in the process of building a home-use PC, just to see if I can. Hopefully I will learn a lot in the process. At the moment I am looking at the UEFI issue. I think the general census is that it's here and we need to work with it.

UEFI is, apparently, built by 'The Unified EFI Forum', which consists of AMD, American Megatrends, Apple, Dell, HP, IBM, Insyde Software, Intel, Lenovo, Microsoft, and Phoenix Technologies working on a non-profit basis. High-powered groups there then. It seems UEFI is about 100MB of information that sits on its own partition and is in effect a self-updating OS at boot. Can I assume that all those benign interests will have direct access to this bootloader?

It's a vast improvement on BIOS as it offers finer tuning and tweaking for the user as well as greater security, since every bit of code has to be signed and ratified. Some Linuxy OSes already work with this 'signing' process, and others recommend turning off the security feature. UEFI also offers BIOS as an option.

So, if I am building my own PC and given that the only time I have used the BIOS is to change the boot sequence; then I turn off signing, what is left of UEFI for me, the user?



My question is, if I have a motherboard with a UEFI loading disk, do I have to use it? For a home builder, it looks like the only reason to load this thing up is to give the 'Unified EFI Forum' unfettered access to my home PC. Is this security – and if so, whose?

I know this topic is in flux and there is so much discussion it's reaching 'groan' status but I am on a learning curve and would very much appreciate any pointers.

**Steve Taylor**

**Ben says:** We think UEFI is enough of an improvement over the BIOS that we'd go with UEFI. The BIOS won't be around for much longer. Early reports of Microsoft's SecureBoot hegemony have failed to materialise, and we're almost certain you'll still always have the choice of disabling it. UEFI can be tricky to install, but it's also a good opportunity to learn something new.

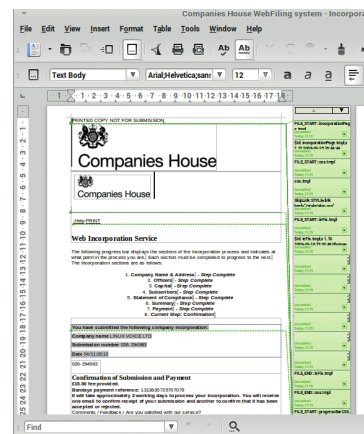
If you want to know more about UEFI bootloader installation, check out our tutorial in issue 2.

## DOC FORMATTING

Here's a tip I learned recently which might be of use to people. Someone sends you a doc file and you're not sure if it is formatting properly in LibreOffice (yes, it happens sometimes). Upload the file to your Google Drive, then right-click and select "open with Google Docs", then "Download as PDF". Hey presto, you can see the correct formatting for the document.

**Owain Clarke, Hampshire**

**Mike says:** Cheers Owain! Though as I seem to spend so much of my time hanging out with the LibreOffice developers now I have to challenge you to a duel for implying that it ever works less than perfectly.



LibreOffice is so good that it's rare for a file to ever open with messed up formatting, but it does happen.



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IMPORT.



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knowledge to  
improve yours.

100% of our clients rate our PostgreSQL training courses as excellent. Book your place and gain access to unrivalled knowledge of the core code.

## AMAZING GRACE

I just picked up my first copy of Linux Voice (May issue) last week. What a great mag. I was particularly impressed with the article on Grace Hopper. "We stand on the shoulders of giants", and this is another great example. I have the utmost respect and admiration for our predecessors in all fields.

I have been playing with computers since before the Commodore 64, and have enjoyed programming in various languages, including Basic, Pascal, VBA and C++. I really like the coding theme in your mag. The building a Pi-based arcade machine was another item that made me pick up my first issue.

Congratulations on a great mag. I'm waiting to see the next issue at my newsagents.

**Andrew says:** We do indeed stand on the shoulder of giants, and we're only too happy to pay homage to them in these pages. Alan Turing, for example, made such an impression that we've



Distribution shenanigans have meant that issue 2 spread across the USA slowly, but normal service should have resumed by now.

had to include another four pages in this issue to look at the post-work he did with the Manchester Small Scale Experimental Machine, better known as Baby, and the Manchester Mark I.

These old code tutorials seem to have gone down well – maybe we should turn them into a book. Readers, what do you think?

## THERE'S A PLACE FOR US

Thanks very much to Liz Hardwick for mentioning my talk at Manchester Girl Geeks Barcamp as one of her personal favourites (LV005 LUGs on tour) – however I should maybe be less shy about what the name of my project is! It's our Open Tech Calendar – we list tech events around the UK. Anyone can add events, all edits are versioned for safety like a wiki and our open data is already reused by many others. To top it all off, we're open

source and hosted and developed on Debian and Ubuntu at <http://opentechcalendar.co.uk>. It's our 2nd birthday in July and we're looking forwards to the next year.

Hopefully see you at a tech event around the UK soon,  
**James Baster, Edinburgh**

**Graham says:** Open Tech Calendar, so good we've mentioned it twice. Turn to page 16 for more on this brilliantly simple idea.

Leeds Code Dojo: The Dojo Opens!

This will be a practical coding session in the classic dojo style, where we pick a simple programming problem, then work on it together using the eXtreme Programming practices of TDD and Pair Programming.

Although we will be working on a problem, the main focus is on improving our coding by focusing on these practices, and learning from each other.

Doors are open from 18:00, and the night will kick off at 18:30 with coffee and socialising. We'll get started on the coding at 19:00, kicking off with a brief overview of the techniques we'll be using and the problem we'll be looking at. We'll code in pairs, using whatever languages people have available - so bring your laptop, if you have one, with your language of choice installed. Please ensure you have some way of running unit tests. One important point to note is that

"WE HAVE NO INTERNET!"

So whatever you have installed is what you'll have to get by

Find tech events in Leeds and further afield with Open Tech Calendar.

## NOM DE MINT

I don't like the fact that my freshly installed Mint 16 system lists all of the non system users at the login screen. This seems a little insecure to me, and I prefer the users to have to enter their own username as well as their password.

I know that Chris Brown did a short piece on one occasion in that other magazine, which told me how to get rid of this on my previous Mint install but I have forgotten how to do it. It was a very simple tweak – all the stuff on the web seems much more complicated.

Can anyone help or even, now that he is writing for you as well, ask Chris Brown to write the piece again. I have just become a subscriber by the way – keep up the excellent work.

**John Paton**

**Andrew says:** Thanks for subscribing John – we appreciate it. To add an extra bit of security to your Mint login screen, you would think that you could just go to Administration > Login



This machine is proclaiming to all and sundry that there's a user called Andrew, so crackers have one thing less to guess – that's not great for security.

Window. This gives you a dialog with three tabs, which purports to be the login window preferences manager. However, it turns out that this just lets you change superficial things (like the way we've changed the welcome message to 'Enter, stranger').

To do what you ask, you have to open up the configuration file of MDM, the Mint Display Manager. In

a terminal, type **sudo caja** and your root password to open a new file browser window as root, then navigate to **etc/mdm/mdm.conf**. Click to open the file as root in Pluma, Mint's text editor, and in the **[greeter]** section of the configuration file, add the line **Exclude=Andrew**. Restart your machine, and where the login used to say Andrew, it will now say 'nobody'.

## DIGITAL LV

A couple of months ago there was a letter about online subscriptions and taking advantage of the apps we have on tablets these days. There are better ways to read the mag than a PDF viewer!

An experience I would like to relate: I recently decided to ditch the paper and take an online subscription to a magazine. I was given a variety of subscription methods; none were PDF-related, and the best for me seemed to be Google Play Newsstand, so I took that option.

The "newsstand" experience makes electronically reading the magazine a pleasure. However, I normally store electronic copies on my server. When I looked for the "download" button, errr, there wasn't one. This ain't a PDF.

How about the subscribers' section? Well, as a Google

(Amazon/Apple) subscriber you don't get make it that far. So, I am renting the magazine in question, but only as long as I have the relevant device handy.

Now I am quite confident you folks will do the right thing by the subscriber and provide the best service possible. Still, I thought it was worth mentioning the pitfalls before the pit opens up

**Tim Lloyd**

**Graham says:** If you've bought Linux

Voice, no matter whether that's print or digital, it's yours. There is no question of us introducing DRM, nor of us restricting what device you choose to read it on. The current dispute between Hachette and Amazon over DRM and ebooks is fascinating, but what's more amazing to us that it ever reached the current state in the first place – DRM is, and has always been, a Very Bad Idea, so we can't really sympathise with publishers who are finding themselves caught out by this practice.

If someone else controls what you can do with a book or magazine that you've bought, you don't really own it, and that's not fair.