

LINUX VOICE YOUR LETTERS



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

LINUX VOICE STAR LETTER

THE FIRST TASTE OF FREEDOM

I remember when I finally ditched Windows. At last I'd broken free from the XP safety net, but it felt a little bit like OS freefall. Could I really manage without a corporate-backed product? Could I genuinely rely on a

community of enthusiasts when something went wrong? Would I cope without the comfort and security of a familiar brand in a new world where things weren't the same and sometimes broke? It didn't take long before my

fears were dispelled and I found that the gamble had paid off.

Then I remembered all the headaches and issues I used to have with Windows which lead me to this decision in the first place. If any of the above sounds strangely familiar territory with your latest publishing venture, then fear not. You are still among friends and we have made this journey together, for the better.

Chris Sandles

Graham says: Well said Chris. The Linux and Free Software community may be incredibly passionate and argue a lot, but it's also the most helpful community I've ever known.



Who needs Microsoft for technical support? Linux fans at user groups help for free (photo credit: <http://tinyurl.com/plz7tfp>).

ON A ROLL

I have two computers here, one of which is running Mint. I have installed every version since Maya, the LTS release, and having a separate home partition it has been no problem. But, with each install, I have had to re-download all the added programs from the repositories. Not an intuitive task for at least two people I have persuaded to try Linux.

Last year I came across SolydXK, ran the KDE version in VirtualBox, and was impressed by the way everything was updated every month. On behalf of novice users, would it be better to have a rolling release, or stick with an eighteen month-ish distribution? **Richard**

Mike says: Novices are better off with the clearly defined releases, I think. Rolling distros are good for living on the bleeding edge, but major kernel/X/ library updates can cause unexpected, hard-to-fix breakages.

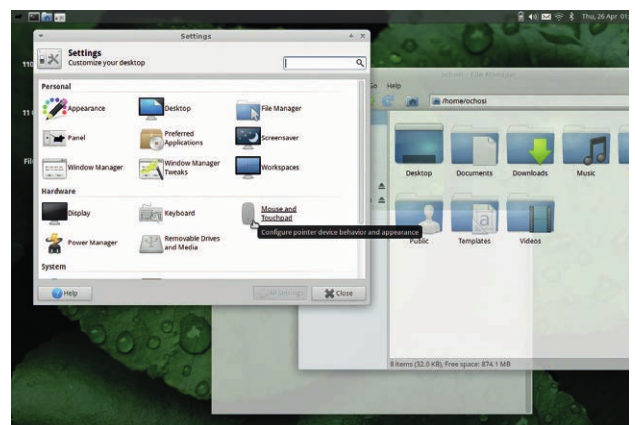
XFCELLENT

It would be great if your magazine could review a few more Xfce distributions. I noticed Xfce often gets overlooked in comparison to bigger desktop environments such as Gnome and KDE.

I was hoping you guys could do an a round up of several Xfce distributions and write a comparison for your readers. Looking forward to your magazine. I'll be getting my digital subscription soon.

Alvin Wilson

Ben says: Thanks for the feedback Alvin. You're right that Xfce doesn't get as much attention as the "big" desktops, but the times are a-changin'. We've seen a large bunch of former Gnome fans move to Xfce after the Gnome 3 redesign, as it provides a lot of what Gnome 2 used to: a familiar-looking, reliable GTK-based desktop environment. We'll keep an eye on Xfce-based distros; Xubuntu is the most notable, but we always like to hear of others. If you discover one, let us know!



Xfce has come a very long way since its days as a clunky-looking clone of CDE (the Common Desktop Environment).

BANGIN' CHOONS

I wonder if readers would like to share their favourite songs? I love anything by GNU Kids on the Block, and we should all be grateful for the contribution that Kernel Parker made to modern music, but I think my all time bests are Cliff Richard's "She's a /dev/null Woman", Buddy Holly's "Wake Up Little SUSE", Paul Young's "Wherever I Lay my Red Hat" of course, and Phil Collins' breathtakingly un-annoying "Su Sudo". In fact I like any cd.

Owain Clarke



Andrew says: All groovy beats, but let's not forget the classic "Stand by your man(page)". If anyone can somehow fit Slackware into a song title, let us know...

Stallman can sing too:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=9sJUDx7iEJw.

DISTRO HUNT

I've been using Ubuntu for quite some time, installed 13.10, and got quite disappointed. So I had to look for a new distro. After a little searching the net, I found a young KDE distro, based on Debian, inspired by Mint Debian edition, does monthly update-packs (semi-rolling releases), looks great, has the latest and greatest, comes with Firefox, Thunderbird, LibreOffice... I think I found a new home: SolydXK!

Sofie Struyve

Mike says: Wow, that's two mentions of this distro in the same letters page! SolydXK's relatively conservative approach to the rolling release model

(bundled monthly updates) may help to avoid the occasional breakage that can afflict other rolling distros. If anyone else wants to check it out, the website is www.solydxc.com.

SolydXK: not well known now, but could be a big distro soon.



THE CODE AHEAD

Just a note on Linux and FOSS in general. I made the big move about five or six years ago. Since that time I started coding again and have really started to enjoy computing again. In short, computing is fun again.

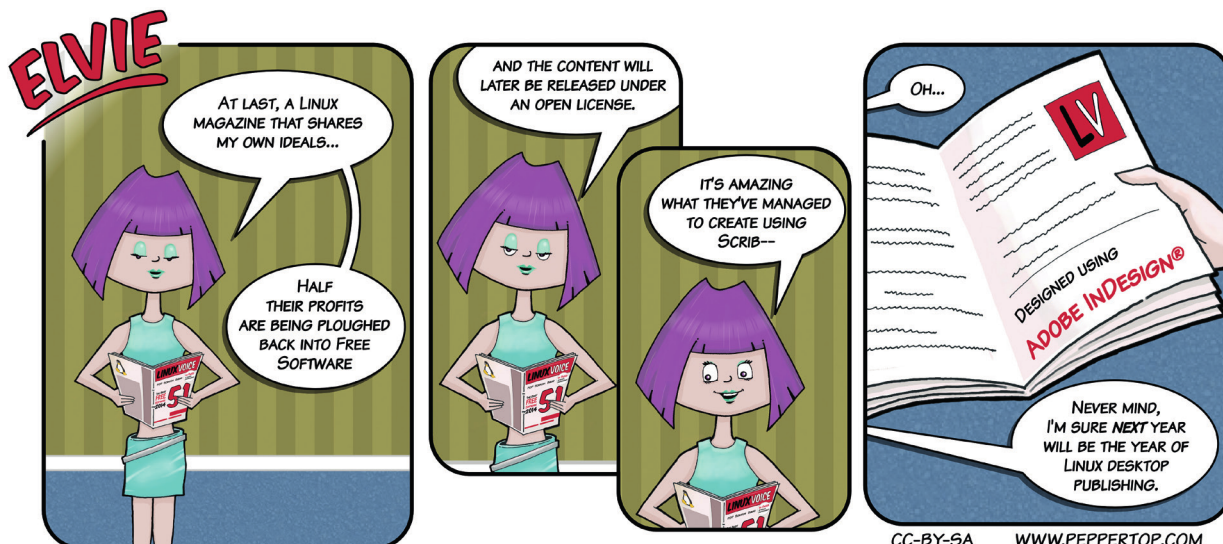
I hope that you continue with coding tutorials in Linux Voice. They are great for those who have an itch, but don't where to start, and for those of us who have a favourite language, but don't like change. We get to see how the other language is structured, which means we can then better read source from other languages.

Do keep up the good work we have all seen from you in the past.

Bill Palone

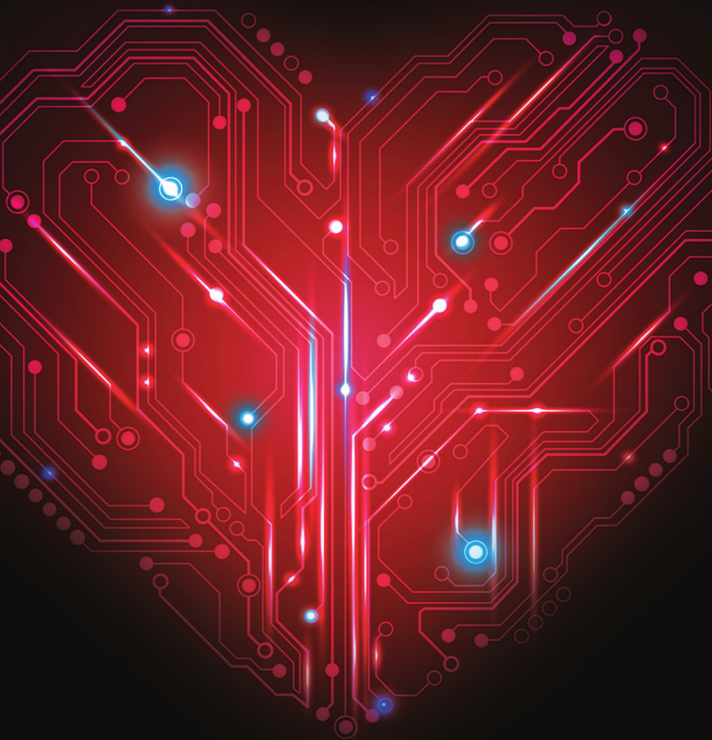
Mike says: Thanks for the feedback Bill. Hopefully you'll be glad to see a regular coding section in Linux Voice, and in next month's cover feature we'll have programming projects for newbies as well as experienced hackers.

I totally agree that coding makes computing fun, and it's great that the Raspberry Pi is encouraging kids in schools to learn the art – apart from helping kids out in the job market, programming skills help language, maths and logical thought. One of my next projects is to port MikeOS to the Pi, but given that it's all written in x86 assembly language and the Pi works on an ARM chip, that'll be a truly epic job...



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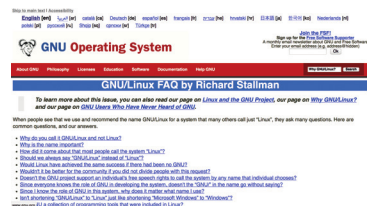
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SATNAV SIGHS

Linux Voice! I'd like to express my absolute disgust that your magazine isn't called GNU/Linux Voice. I will be writing to my MP about this very important... Only joking. Good luck with the magazine, and I hope you do give credit to the GNU project when appropriate, even though I think the naming debate is rather overblown.

Dan Konovalov

Andrew says: Rest assured, the GNU/Linux FAQ on www.gnu.org is my bedtime reading material. One day I'll get to the end... In all seriousness, GNU, Richard Stallman and the Free



The GNU/Linux naming FAQ weighs in at over 9,000 words. Nomenclature is a serious business indeed...

Software Foundation have contributed hugely to the operating system we use and love today. Big thanks to them. But there must be a prettier name (and "Lignux" isn't it).

GNU'S TALKING?

TomToms are very annoying; they may use a Linux kernel to work but to update them you require a Windows or Apple computer. Their update program just will not work with a Linux Box, even when running with Wine.

Plugging the satnav into the USB socket on my Linux Mint computer allows me to see inside the TomTom just as if it were an attached disk. This is all fine and dandy but, unless you can download the appropriate files from TomTom and then know what to do with them, it all becomes a bit pointless.

Do you have any ideas? Is there such a thing as a Linux-friendly satnav on the market in the UK? And good luck with

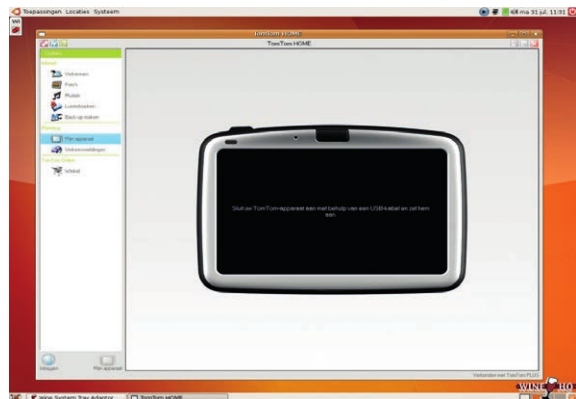
the new magazine – I'm really looking forward to the first (and subsequent) editions falling through my letter box.

Ray Woods

Mike says: I'm not au-fait with sat-nav systems, as I navigate by the moon, the stars, and ancestral memory, but maybe one of our readers can write in with a recommendation. Or you could perhaps add your name to the "Tom Tom Linux Support" petition online: www.petitiononline.com/tomlinux.

And yes, there is something very silly about devices that run Linux, but don't actually integrate well with desktop Linux installations. It seems like manufacturers are missing an opportunity for a big, easy win.

Try to run TomTom's software under Wine, and you may well get a "device not supported" message. Fail.



HAPPY HACKING

It is nice to show us some coding rules and some languages, but what I really want to learn is how to help out existing projects.

Could the following be done? Review a piece of software, and find a bug or propose a new feature. Go through the particular case for raising the issue (Launchpad, Gitorious, Bugzilla), find the bit of code that needs changing, patch it or propose how to solve it (eg "the for loop does not take into account iteration from zero and causes it to ignore the first item of a list") without actually writing any code. Or maybe correct a translation from German in MikeOS, or go over push, pull, SVN, CVS, Git or Bazaar, or improve documentation. Or take the constructive criticism nicely even if a Linus-school-of-thought lead maintainer calls you a backbirth.

Anyway, please show us how to be outstanding citizens of the free software world!

Andres

Mike says: This is a good idea. At FOSDEM I spoke to Wolfram Sang, a kernel hacker who gave a talk on improving the kernel without having to contribute any code. I'd like to write an article about this in an upcoming issue. There's also a really niggling LibreOffice bug that I plan to fix – maybe I'll document that. If I don't get totally lost in the huge codebase.



Wolfram Sang wants to make kernel development more accessible – find out more in the next few issues.

MATHS TIME

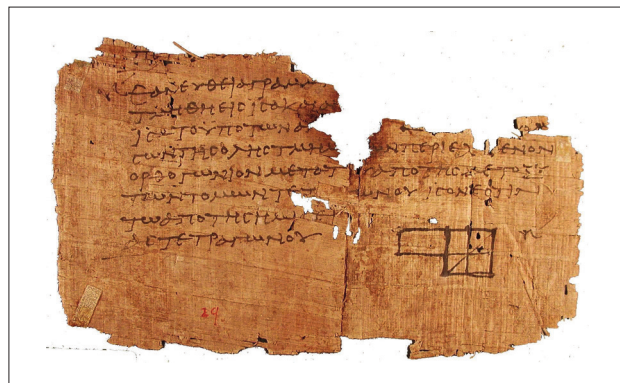
I was wondering, since as far as I understand this publication is aimed more at the intermediate user level, if you could perhaps do an extensive tutorial series on algorithms. Kind of like a comprehensive guide from the basics to advanced subjects. Algorithms are one of the most important and most fun parts of being able to program a computer, yet other publications seem to largely ignore them or devote a couple of pages to them.

Tirab

WHAT CLOUD?

I have recently bought a HP Microserver, as my concern for privacy after the Snowden stuff came to light just kept growing. My dilemma now is which self-hosted cloud storage solution to go with. The candidates are SparkleShare, Seafile, Pydio, Syncany or git-annex assistant. I'm struggling to decide and thought you may be able to do a review. It has to be open source and needs to run on Arch.

Ideally I would like to have the files stored in their normal manner, so that I can put the drives in another PC and access them should my server die, ie not encrypted or some special



Graham says: Wow – it's like your read our minds! Algorithms are a fascinating subject, so turn to page 100 for a look at Euclid's.

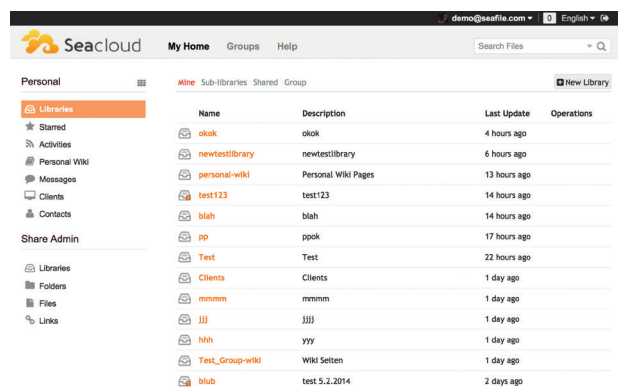
Poor Euclid didn't have access to Emacs, so he had to write his works on scraps of papyrus.

format. Versioning would also be a bonus but not essential.

Andrew Walker

Ben says: Great idea Andrew; we'll try to include it in an upcoming issue.

Seafile is an attractive and open source alternative to DropBox.

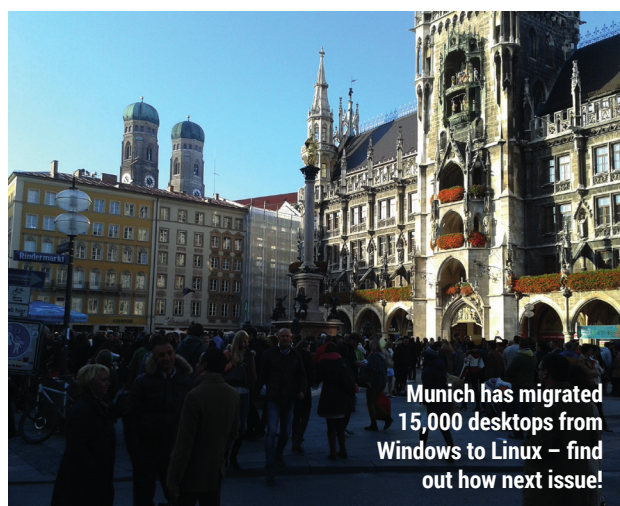


OHHH VIENNA

Mike, I wonder what you are doing in Vienna? Are you trying to change the civil service to Linux like it was done in Munich?

Martin Domanski

Mike says: Er, yes, that's right. Honest. Nothing to do with the beer and Schnitzel or anything like that. Incidentally, Graham and I went to Munich to interview the people behind the city's Linux transition, so keep an eye out for our full report next month. (And yes, we did drink Weißbier). ☑



Munich has migrated 15,000 desktops from Windows to Linux – find out how next issue!