

Mastering Linux, part 6

The Linux equivalents of frequently used Windows programs are surprisingly familiar, as *Jarrod Spiga* explains.

At this stage of the Mastering Linux series, you should be familiar enough with the basics to start tackling slightly more advanced tasks. This instalment looks at some Linux equivalents of frequently used Windows applications.

SUGAR-FREE SUITE

The strength of Microsoft Office is one of the main reasons for Windows' continuing popularity. The Office suite won't run under alternative OSes such as Linux, making many users hesitant to switch.

OpenOffice (www.openoffice.org) is an open source alternative to Office, with applications that do much the same thing and look strikingly similar.

Applications included in OpenOffice are:

- OpenOffice Writer — a word processor.
- OpenOffice Calc — a spreadsheet program.
- OpenOffice Impress — a presentation application similar to Microsoft PowerPoint.
- OpenOffice Draw — an image manipulation application for creating diagrams and illustrations.
- OpenOffice Math — an equation editor.

LAUNCHING

Quick launch buttons for the three most frequently used OpenOffice apps (Writer, Calc and Impress) are located on the default Fedora desktop. If you can't find what you're looking for, click on the GNOME button to reveal a program group containing all of OpenOffice's applications.

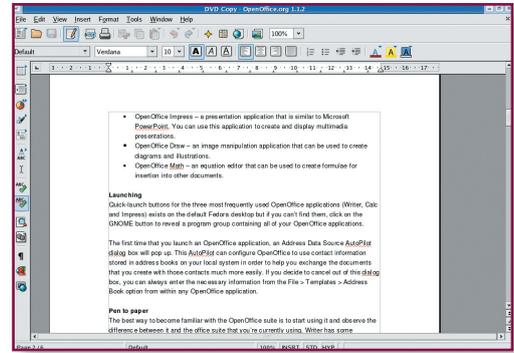
The first time an OpenOffice program is launched, the Address Data Source AutoPilot dialog box pops up. Here, you can configure OpenOffice to use address book information to exchange documents with those contacts. Alternatively, enter the necessary information in any OpenOffice app from the File > Templates > Address Book option.

PEN TO PAPER

The best way to become familiar with OpenOffice is to start using it. Writer has some differences to Microsoft Word that you'll notice right away. For instance, one of the toolbars appears on the left of the screen and a Paragraph Styles child window floats over your document.

The Paragraph Styles window is useful for formatting larger documents, but if the window gets in the way, press F11 to toggle its display status.

Many of Microsoft Word's features are found in Writer. Spelling and grammar mistakes are underlined and can be corrected by right-clicking the mouse. Working with tables in Writer is often



Word up! Using OpenOffice Writer is just as easy as using Microsoft Word.

easier than fiddling with them in Word. Adding comments is as simple as highlighting the affected text and selecting the function.

FONT SUBSTITUTION

Although the fonts are the same as Microsoft Word, most have different names under Linux. Writer's default font is called Nimbus Roman, the Linux equivalent of the Times New Roman serif font. Others (including Courier and Bookman) are identical to their Windows-based namesakes.

The X Windows GUI uses its own libraries, but you can still use your favourite Windows fonts. The Corefonts project (<http://corefonts.sourceforge.net>) is one utility which allows you to do so. Detailed instructions for implementing it are on the site, though the building process covers a number of topics that will be addressed later in this guide.

BRING OUT THE GIMP

You're not restricted to just creating Office documents in Linux. The GIMP (www.gimp.org) lets you create or edit images with professional-looking results. Launch it from Applications > Graphics.

The first time the GIMP loads, the main toolbox window appears. It contains the primary set of menus for the application and several icons representing the various tools at your disposal. To open an image or create a new one, click on the File menu and pick the desired option.

The relatively large space under the tool icons is reserved for the various options associated with each tool. For instance, when the rectangle select tool is used, its options are displayed.

When an image is opened or created, a second window pops up. Every image appears in its own window, allowing you to easily compare or share data between them. The maximum number of images which can be viewed simultaneously depends on your system specification.

Skill level

Beginner

Requirements

An installation of Linux (Fedora Core 3 was used for this article).

Time to complete

3 hours (approx)

LAYERS AND LAYOUT

Adobe Photoshop users know that one of its best features is the Layers Palette. The good news is that the GIMP also supports layers. Make a Layers dialog appear by selecting Dialogs > Layers, or by hitting Ctrl+L. Numerous other dialog windows are available, and can be managed via window docking — a single window that holds multiple dialog windows, with the contents of each dialog window accessible via a tab.

To create a window dock, select File > Dialogs > Create New Dock > Layers, Channels and Paths. A single window containing those three dialogs will appear. Additional tabs can be attached by clicking on the Tab menu button (the icon looks like an audio “Play” symbol) followed by Add Tab. From there, select the dialog windows you’d like to attach.

DEVELOPMENT

Even if you’re not into development, the number of development tools automatically installed on a Linux system is staggering. Surprisingly, you’ll use some of them when installing various applications.

Rather than under the GNOME menu, the development tools are buried in the file system, ready for use at the command line. With most of these tools, you’ll only need to find them when they’re required.

The only other thing that’s needed for development is a text editor. The vi and emacs editors were covered in part 5 of this series (APC April, page 116), but a simple text editor is also included under the GNOME menu, in the Accessories group.

ALL WORK AND NO PLAY...

Fedora Core 3 ships with a number of games, a number of which can be played from the

desktop. A few action titles are also included.

It’s also possible to get a number of Windows-based games running under Linux including the recently released Doom III (instructions on how to get it running can be found at <http://zerowing.idsoftware.com/linux/doom>). Tux Games (www.tuxgames.com) is an online store where you can purchase a number of retail gaming titles plus their Linux wrappers/clients.

Alternatively, try The Linux Game Tome (www.happypenguin.org) or Linuxgames (www.linuxgames.com).

BACK TO THE INSTALLATION

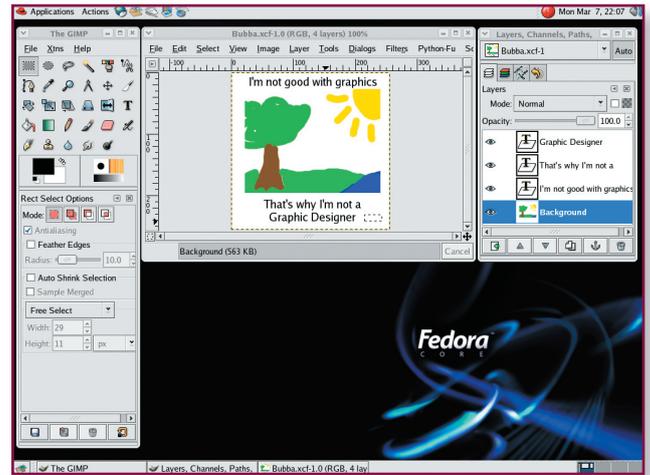
Fedora Core 3 (see APC January, page 98), offers the option of performing a Server or Personal Desktop installation. The Server option installs different applications and components to those included in a Personal Desktop installation.

Depending on which option you chose, it’s possible some of the programs described here may not be installed. However, adding or removing apps from Fedora is fairly simple.

First, navigate to GNOME > System Settings > Add/Remove Applications. If you aren’t logged in with root privileges, you’ll be asked to enter the required credentials.

The Fedora Core 3 optical media contains hundreds of different applications. To make things easier to find, all apps are classified into a number of package groups. Each group contains a number of prerequisite applications that must be installed in order to install the optional programs. Installing or uninstalling the prerequisites is as simple as ticking or unticking the box next to the name of the program group. To select the optional components of a program group, click on the Details link for that group. Then choose the apps you’d like to install from the list.

For instance, the GIMP is classified under the Graphics



Easy to use: the GIMP is simple, yet powerful enough to create “masterpieces” like this.

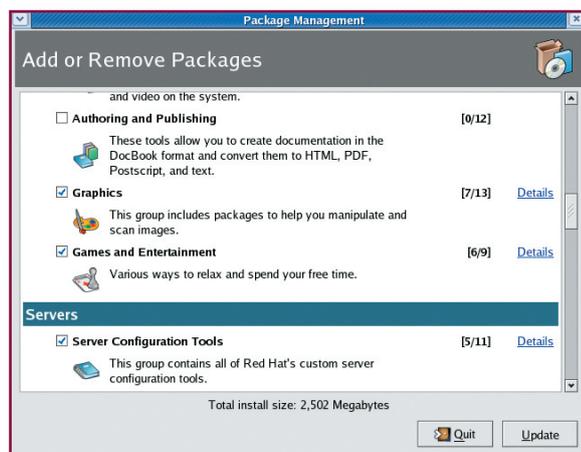
program group. To install it, tick the box next to this program group and select Details. The Details window shows there are no prerequisite packages, and allows you to select optional components. From here, select the GIMP packages you want to install.

All the OpenOffice programs listed here can be installed from the Office/Productivity group. Development tools are located under various groups depending on the nature of the work (including Development Tools and X Software Development). Games can be found in Games and Entertainment.

WHAT’S MISSING?

The biggest stumbling block you’re likely to encounter when switching to Linux is that acquiring quality software in some categories seems impossible. Take accounting packages, for instance. There are a number of programs suitable for straightforward home finances, but there’s nothing robust enough to fulfil the requirements of small business, let alone medium to large enterprises.

The good news is that most of these gaps are only in highly specialised areas, such as graphic design and CAD. As Linux use increases, the demand for these applications will also increase. And when that happens, some clever developer will fill those gaps and make these software packages available. And with any luck, they’ll be open source too. **ETIC**



A place for everything: Fedora categorises all applications into one of a number of different program groups.

Next month . . .
 Next month’s Mastering Linux guide will look at the TCP/IP networking side of Linux from the command line, tricks that can also be used on a Windows PC.