

MUUGLines

The Manitoba UNIX User Group Newsletter

June 2012

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Next Meeting: June 12th, 2012

RTFM: ifconfig(8)

Feeling lost? Out of touch with your network? June's RTFM will feature the *ifconfig* command, presented by Rob Keizer.

Topic: Ubuntu mirroring

Do you have multiple Ubuntu servers in your datacenter which all need regular updates? Are you doing a lot of testing and "playing around" at home or in a lab? Are you tired of waiting for slow Ubuntu archive servers? Why not maintain your own private archive?

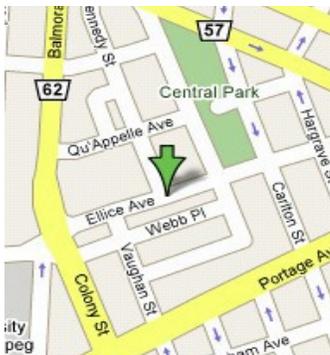


Kevin McGregor will illustrate two methods of reducing the download wait for, and bandwidth requirements of, regular Ubuntu updates.

Upcoming Meetings

September 11th, 2012:
Network Cabling for Dummies (tentative)

Where to Find the Meeting

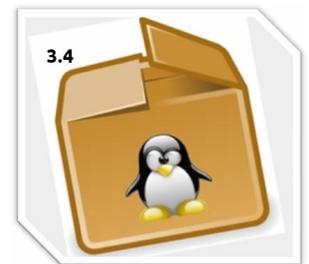


Meetings are held at the IBM offices at 400 Ellice Ave. (between Edmonton and Kennedy Streets). When you arrive, you will have to sign in at the reception desk. Please try to arrive by about 7:15pm, so the meeting can start promptly at 7:30pm.

Limited parking is available for free on the street, either on Ellice Ave. or on some of the intersecting streets. Indoor parking is also available nearby, at Portage Place, for \$5.00 for the evening. Bicycle parking is available in a bike rack under video surveillance located behind the building on Webb Place.

Linux 3.4 Debuts

Linus Torvalds works weekends. Just to reinforce that point, Torvalds released the third major kernel release of 2012 on Sunday, May 20th.



The new kernel includes a long list of new and improved features. Btrfs gets a lot of attention with improved performance by way of extents optimization. Virtualization gets a major boost as well, increasing the maximum number of virtual CPUs that can be supported (with KVM) to 160 (up from 64).

From a networking perspective, Linux 3.4 get improved output buffering for the output queue. Linux systems should also benefit from a memory management improvement contributed by Red Hat developer Rik van Riel, that could help Firefox users (among other applications).

Riel wrote in his commit message, "On my home system, after killing a leaky Firefox, it took over an hour to page just under 2GB of memory back in, slowing the virtual machines down to a crawl. This patch makes swapin readahead simply skip over holes, instead of stopping at them. This allows the system to swap things back in at rates of several MB/second, instead of a few hundred kB/second."

<http://bit.ly/McKnkw>

Fedora 17 “Beefy Miracle” Released

The newest release of the Red Hat-sponsored Fedora Linux distribution (code named Beefy Miracle) was released on May 26th.



Overall, this release contains an unusually substantial number of new features, programs and improvements, said Robyn Bergeron, Fedora project leader. “*We have a new release every six months. Sometimes there are fewer features, but I think this release has the largest number of new features we’ve ever had.*”

Fedora 17 provides a glimpse of the next generation of the JBoss version 7 application server, along with oVirt, the open-source virtualization manager, and includes a new version of the OpenStack cloud platform, code-named Essex.

It comes with the latest version of GIMP, which has a single-window mode to simplify the workspace, and on-canvas text editing. It also includes a preview release of the next version of the Eclipse IDE, code-named Juno.

Most importantly, it also includes the latest version of the controversial new Gnome interface (version 3.4) as the default user interface. Many Linux users have found the new interface difficult to use, including Linux maintainer Linus Torvalds, who called it an “*unholy mess.*” Fellow Linux distributor Canonical, has dropped Gnome in favor of its own new Unity interface and the Linux Mint Project now offers an older version 2.0-based Gnome for users who still prefer the older interface.

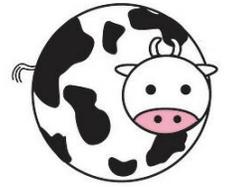
Defending the use of Gnome 3.4 as the default, Bergeron said, “*We pride ourselves in being ahead of other people in our use of Gnome. It is controversial, but I don’t think great things come from people being content.*”

Fedora also comes with a number of other desktops as alternatives, including KDE, XFCE, and LXDE.

<http://bit.ly/KxiWzo>

Fedora 18 will be “Spherical Cow”

Fedora Project Leader Robyn Bergeron also announced the results of the naming vote for Fedora 18. The poll used the range voting method and, out of a possible 3432 votes, 1359 were cast in favour of “Spherical Cow”. All in all, 429 people voted in the poll.



<http://bit.ly/NIDc6y>

Google Trumps Oracle: What Does This Mean for Patent Litigation?

Oracle Corporation of America just suffered a massive defeat at the hands of Google in its patent infringement lawsuit. A California jury decided that Google did NOT infringe on Oracle’s Java patents with its ubiquitous Android operating system. This decision has a significant impact on the future of Free Software. After this decision, will anyone dare try to shake down a FOSS-based company again?



Ultimately, I (and the author) think that the decision against Oracle is a wonderful thing for Free Software, and software in general. In my mind, software should NOT be patentable. Software represents the writer’s conceptual way of thinking: software is basically a set of ideas. The same problem can be solved an infinite number of ways. Your particular way may be copywritable – but definitely not patentable.

<http://bit.ly/K0r5bb>

An interesting follow-up post from Linus Torvalds: “*Prediction: instead of Oracle coming out and admitting they were morons about their idiotic suit against Android, they’ll come out posturing and talk about how they’ll be vindicated, and pay lawyers to take it to the next level of idiocy.*”

Sometimes I really wish I wasn’t always right. It’s a curse, I tell you.”

<http://bit.ly/M28xel>

Nasdaq Systems Had Issues Handling Facebook IPO

When Facebook's highly anticipated IPO ended on Friday, May 18th, it was a big dud, especially when backers had to prop up the stock to keep it from falling below its initial offering price. But new reports surfaced over the weekend of May 19-20 that the problems might have been related to a glitch in the NASDAQ trading system, which apparently couldn't handle the trading volume.



There was a 30 minute delay before the trading could even begin and then there was trouble catching up throughout the day, delays which might have caused some big investors to back out of buying the stock.

This is yet another lesson about making sure your systems or your web site can handle whatever the public throws at it — and in this case, Nasdaq had to be prepared for a total traffic onslaught. In fact, Nasdaq thought it could handle it, but it turned out there were problems that left the exchange embarrassed — as the Wall Street Journal and other news outlets reported.

Robert Greifeld, chief executive at Nasdaq told reporters that the Facebook IPO was not Nasdaq's finest hour, yet it wasn't for lack of pre-IPO system testing. As you would expect, Nasdaq knew this was going to be a monster day for the exchange, possibly putting more pressure on its trading systems than any single day before.

For IT Pros, this is another case of not tuning the systems to handle volume, even when you knew the volume was coming. We've certainly seen it before with web sites that have been crushed under the volume of visitors, anticipated or not.

It shows that sometimes no matter how much you test your systems, and even when you think you know what's coming, you can still get caught without the proper resources to handle whatever you are doing — whether that's launching a new web site or a huge IPO.

When your glitch is as public as this one and causes embarrassment all around, it's even worse of course. For most of you, you'll probably hear about it from your internal business resources if something goes terribly wrong, but it's not likely to be splashed across every major business and technology publication for all the world to see as this one was.

Regardless, you need to make sure something like this doesn't happen to you, so the next time you have a major launch that's going to test the very limits of your system, make sure you test those limits before the event (as Netflix does regularly with its set of "Monkey" test tools).

Sometimes, no matter what you do, things go wrong, but if you have a good pre-launch testing plan at least you can sleep better knowing you did everything within your power to make sure it went off well. If not, when things go wrong, you'll be looking for cover.

Full article: <http://bit.ly/LLnnDm>

Netflix's Monkey tools: <http://bit.ly/LaWIB6>

Apache OpenOffice - Windows Users Dominate Downloads



When Apache OpenOffice 3.4 was released May 8, 2012 (the first OpenOffice release under Apache) Sean Michael Kerner

of InternetNews.com *guessed* that it was likely a better fit for Windows and Mac users than for Linux users (see his article here: <http://bit.ly/K25pvi>).

As it turns out, after a week of availability, that's exactly the case.

The Apache OpenOffice project announced on May 17th, that after a week of availability they have had over 1 million downloads. Not a bad number, except for the fact that:

ONLY 2 PERCENT WERE ON LINUX.

87 percent of downloads were for Microsoft Windows and 11 percent for MacOS. Yes, he knows, Linux users could potentially have downloaded OpenOffice

from a different repo as opposed to just getting it from Sourceforge. Still, the numbers are telling, OpenOffice is a great alternative for Windows and Mac users to the proprietary lock-in of Microsoft.

Linux users however, know better. They know that while OpenOffice is good software, *LibreOffice is better*. Time will tell if the Linux numbers improve for OpenOffice, but he strongly suspects they won't. LibreOffice is simply faster and is now directly tied to all of the leading Linux distros, something that OpenOffice can no longer claim.

[Editors Note: juxtaposed to this article - this month's newsletter was edited with LibreOffice - on Windows 7 - ha!].

<http://bit.ly/L2Pa13>

New \$74 Android mini computer is slightly larger than a thumb drive

This little Linux box packs a 1.5GHz ARM CPU and 512MB of RAM.



The AllWinner A10 Android 4.0 mini PC from CNX Software.

Chinese retailers have started selling a miniature Linux computer that is housed in a 3.5-inch plastic case slightly larger than a USB thumb drive. Individual units are available online for \$74 (US).

The small computer has an AllWinner A10 single-core 1.5GHz ARM CPU, a Mali 400 GPU, and 512MB of RAM. An HDMI port on the exterior allows users to plug the computer into a television. It outputs at 1080p and is said to be capable of playing high-definition video.

The device also has a full-sized USB port with host support for input devices, a conventional micro-USB port, a microSD slot, and an internal 802.11 b/g WiFi antenna. The computer can boot from a microSD card and is capable of running Android 4.0 and other ARM-compatible Linux platforms.

Much like the recently launched \$35 Raspberry Pi, these relatively small and inexpensive Linux systems

offer enthusiasts a compelling platform for embedded computing projects.

<http://bit.ly/M2Kigt>

txt2pdf

By Bradford C. Vokey

Do you ever have the need to create simple textual output from your scripts and/or programs that you want to stay properly formatted upon distribution? Most email clients and text previewing programs will reformat and reflow your simple text output into an unrecognizable mess.



The solution: txt2pdf!

txt2pdf is flexible and powerful tool to convert a text file (or spooled output) into a pdf (a form, invoice, report, sale sheet, etc). It can be used alone, or you can use it from other applications to convert your text documents on the fly.

I use it to email pdf invoices from my perl scripts that won't get reformatted when opened. It also is useful to create nice looking personalized fax cover pages and letters when submitting to troublesome web based fax servers (that like to convert your text based submissions into their own inferior formatting standards).

There are many easy .cfg options for font selection, font size, page margins, page size, etc. Or you can embed the controls in the output itself.

Txt2pdf is a perl shareware program written by SANFACE Software which is free to try for 30 days. After the trial, the cost is \$49 for personal use or \$140(+) for commercial use.

Txt2pdf is way quicker and easier than outputting raw pdf code yourself!

<http://www.sanface.com/txt2pdf.html>

All the links in this newsletter can be conveniently found at this one bitly bundle: <http://bit.ly/LNmz0g>