

Question and Answer

In June 2012 the question and answer session became more speculation on where we thought Linux was heading in the future. Some technical issues were commented on, but not as many as usual.

The following summaries are not in the order in which they were discussed.

FOSS Exhibition

In October 2012, the U3A in Bath is putting on an exhibition and we talked about what type of thing our audience may be interested in. When this was done previously, we had some posters, and most of what was said then is still applicable, eg. When Windows XP is no longer supported, what will you do with your old machine? Do you want to spend more money buying a new one, or try to continue with the old, saving money in the process?

So far as we can see, the whole area of computing is changing rapidly at the moment, especially with the advent of mobile devices like tablets and pads. If all you want is access to a browser, keeping e-mail on a web server somewhere, then these new devices will do the job, and access to extra software will be unnecessary. However, if more is required, then there will still be a need to install applications to do what you want. One possible outcome is that people in general will use devices as though they were appliances with a limited number of features, and will be content with that. If that is the case, then buying something that does all that they want will be sufficient, so long as they understand where all the data (e.g. photographs) that they are accumulating is being held.

Some suggestions were:

- 1) Give a list of do's and don't's when moving to Linux
- 2) Have demonstrations of FOSS applications running on Windows
- 3) Offer to provide Linux on a USB stick for someone to try, and show it live
- 4) Mention some of the differences, eg. in file systems

Use of the Cloud

A few brief comments were made about the use of the cloud for synchronisation, especially of bookmarks and passwords in browsers. Both Chrome and Firefox have such features, where the crucial items are held on external servers, to which you can upload your settings, and later synchronise with them on another PC.

The October 2011 edition of Linux Format (149) had an article by Mayank Sharma on how to best use the cloud for various activities. There article can also be found freely available online at <http://www.techradar.com/news/software/applications/how-to-create-your-own-cloud-with-linux-1027159>

Another option is to set up one you own yourself using Tonido and access your home computers through your router. More information is here: http://www.tonido.com/software_what.html although it does not say how it knows where your machine is, especially if you do not have a fixed IP address – the normal situation for UK ISPs for domestic traffic.

Also, they do not talk about speed of access across a relatively slow domestic uplink.

Re-use of older machines

It is becoming more difficult to find suitable distributions for the everyday user when presented with older machines, usually due to the lack of advanced graphics capabilities, or the significantly different appearance of a desktop when compared to current Windows systems. One suggestion is to try Mint 13 + Mate, instead of Ubuntu, but even that will not revitalise ancient machines.

Future machines

We will be watching the introduction of UEFI (Unified Extensible Firmware Interface) during the boot process when a machine is switched on. This is of concern because it will prevent easy trials of Linux by the average person. Some machines may not even be able to be used for Linux if UEFI cannot be turned off or modified.

Servers will certainly be available for general use as they are loaded with all sorts of specially modified software, so if the worst happens, then server cpus will be bought for the use of Linux fans at home.

Adobe's Flash and other video issues

Adobe are phasing out Flash, which is a common format for delivering video content from a website. Linux is the first to lose support, and we find that often *gnash* is suggested as a replacement. However, *gnash* is not up to scratch when it comes to things like the BBC iPlayer. Probably some codecs are missing.

At the moment, the most practical answer is to use Google's (gratis, but non-freedom-free) Chrome for these purposes. Hopefully, HTML5 will take off faster as Adobe have announced they will not support the ARM cpu used in most of the mobile devices, especially phones. However, there is unfinished business there as there is no accepted codec to be used with HTML5.

The DRM (Digital Rights/Restrictions Management) wars continue and will do so for the foreseeable future, leaving free software in danger of being trampled on by elephants.

Internet access while moving

The question arose how one could keep internet access while chugging gently along a canal. Modern smart phones very often have the ability to act as a Wireless Access Point (WAP) for any wifi enabled device to connect. A search among the networking options should identify how that could be done. The contract must allow data access across the phone network, and the data rate may depend on the strength of the signal.

An alternative is to use a portable specialised device, but these do not appear to be readily available any more as smart phones have the ability built-in.