Question and Answer

Several different topics were covered this time.

How to get an address list out of Thunderbird

It is harder than it should be to get what you might want, here. First pull up the Address book to get the list of addresses. To select the ones you want to export, first create a new list and transfer them into it. A good way to do this is first use Ctrl+click to select all the addresses you wish to incorporate into the new list, and then hit the New List icon to open that dialog. Give the list a name.

Next you can click and drag all the selected addresses into the new list dialog to transfer them all in one go across to the list. Then you can hit OK to make the new list. Back in the address book, slect the list you have just made.

Then go to Tools → Export and select the relevant format. For conversion to some other random device, the comma separated list (.csv) is probably best, so select that at the bottom from the drop down list. Give the new file a name and select an appropriate directory, and save the file.

All the contacts will be there, but whether they are in a format that is immediately usable depends on the target device or use.

If you want them in a spreadsheet, then open a file browser. Navigate to the .csv file you created with the list and a right click on it will show it will open with Calc. If not then choose Open with … and find Calc somewhere in the lists. When it reads it and shows a partial window of what it will look like hit OK. And you will find all the fields are now in columns with suitable headers, so you can extract what you want from there, save as you like, etc.

What to do if everything freezes

Occasionally, everything stops dead – nothing seems to have any effect. Not often, and if it happens frequently, it usually means that something else is amiss. But if it does happen, then the best thing is to close down safely and reboot. So how can this be done if the keyboard does not respond?

There is way to get into the kernel itself to give commands to safely save all the current files.

First locate the Control key, the Alt key and a key, usually at the top right somewhere on the keyboard labelled either SysRq (Sys Req) or Print Screen, or may be both. You will need to hold down these three keys (I always do them in that order) and then while holding them all down hit the following keys as well in the following order, one by one: R E I S U B

These will flush and save the file buffers, unmount safely all file systems, and generally ensure things are tidied up and applications forced to close. Take you time over this to make sure everything is done before proceeding to the next key.

The final B will reboot the system, so you can stop pressing the keys.

As a mnemonic, note that the keys spell out the word “busier” backwards.

If this does not work, then powering off is the only remaining resource.

Transferring files from Linux to Android devices

To get files from your Linux machine onto an Android device can be done easily if the right apps and add-ons have been installed. The method that was demonstrated is suitable across a local Wifi network, and uses FTP (File Transfer Protocol) to perform the transfer. The initial setup may take a little time, but after that it is easy each time you want to use it.

What you need:

On the Android device install an app that creates an FTP server. I used WifiFTP from the Google store. You should then start this up and define a username (any will do) and a password. These will be used to authenticate any attempt to access the device via FTP. The default port it uses is 2121 and there is no need to change that.

On Firefox on the Linux machine install the Add-on FireFTP. Access to this add-on is via the menu (three lines at top right) and under the Developer icon a list will appear that includes FireFTP near the bottom. Selecting that will bring up a two-pane tab in Firefox.

At the top left you can define servers you can connect to, so set up one for the android device, giving it the user name and password you defined on the Android device. Under Host, give it an arbitrary local address, like “192.168.0.1” until you know what it should be. Under the Connection tab, change the port to 2121. Leave the security as None (see note below).

Now make sure your Android is connected to the same wifi network as your Linux machine. Then hit the WifiFTP icon and start the service. It will respond with the actual IP address it has found for you to use.

Then go back to Firefox and change the connection URL to the same that the Android has told you it has.

You are now ready to hit Connect in Firefox and it should then show you in the right hand pane the Android file system that the App can see. Error messages and progress information are displayed in the box below.

Select the files on one side, and open the directory in the other, then use the central arrows to move one way or the other. Right clicks can allow you to make directories. Selecting files and dragging them to another directory can be accomplished just as easily within one device.

When you've finished, disconnect Firefox, stop the service on the Android, and you're done.

NOTE. This is safe enough on your own local wifi, password protected and encrypted transfer. It is not safe across the Internet as simple FTP sends passwords in cleartext. There are alternative security models, but the server must support them. If you are transferring to a website with FireFTP, and the site allows encrypted FTP (SFTP), then the Account can be created with the appropriate security defined in the Connection tab of FireFTP.

References

None this month.