Discussion comments by Andy Pepperdine

This document will cover a number of disparate items we discussed, not in any real depth.

Appearance options

One member of the group had changed some options on her desktop in order to increase the size of text so she could read it. She reported that it also changed her desktop icons from colour to black – and-white. Later, she set it back to normal, but the icons remained in B&W.

I was unable to confirm this effect, perhaps because I was using a different window manager. However, the relevant options for Cinnamon (Linux Mint 19.3) to control what the desktop looks like are in the control centre under Accessibility and under Appearance.

The Accessibility settings can enable larger text to allow those with poorer eyesight to read the text. There are also options to change contrast there, too.

Under the Appearance section, the Fonts allows you to change the font for various aspects of the windows, and also the size of the font, either individually or via a percentage scaling factor. In addition, you can change the way colour hints are done, although this is for fonts only.

There are a number of themes available and you could try a few of those to see whether you like them better.

As with all these options, it is worth noting what the values were set to BEFORE changing them, so you know what they should be set back to if you do not like them.

News

Mozilla, the people who manage and issue the Firefox web browser, have announced that their VPN (Virtual Private Network) is now available in the UK. Some information is here:
https://vpn.mozilla.org/

We discussed the pros and cons of a VPN, and if you are security conscious, then when accessing the Internet from a public wifi like a coffee bar or hotel, then you might think it worthwhile. But it is not free, so you would need to balance the security risks with your wallet and how frequently you will use it.

Keybase

Keybase is an application that will allow you to access your files from any machine by keeping them securely encrypted on their servers. All the encryption keys are held locally, so Keybase themselves cannot read the data.

They supply this as a free service and give you access to 250 GB of space. However, the speed of uploading and downloading is not fast enough to make it attractive for large amounts of data. It can

be used for backups where only the changes are sent each time and the total amount of data is fairly limited, say less than 1 GB in all.

Their website is here: https://keybase.io/

Thunderbird and its Mail Files

Talking of backups led onto a mention of where Thunderbird stores all its files.

Locally in the home directory, it saves information about the accounts and how to access the mail servers. This information is reproducible should you wish to re-install everything, so there is no real need to back this up except perhaps once.

The Local Folders, where you keep all your mail files locally on your machine, can however be placed somewhere other than your home directory, say in another partition, or on another disk. In that way you can arrange to back these files up separately.

To see where they are now, in TB, go to Edit → Account Settings → Local Folders → Local Directory.

By default, they are saved under the .thunderbird directory, but there is an option under the Account Settings for Local Folders to enable you to place them somewhere else. Of course you will have to move them from their present location to the new one before switching. And it would be worthwhile switching TB to work offline and then closing it down while you are doing it. On start up, change the location for the mail messages, and then switch again to working online.

All mail saved under a single folder will be stored in a single (large) file. So splitting up the folders into as many as is sensible will benefit both access to the files, and the ability to back up incrementally quickly.

Upgrading Linux Mint to version 20

One of our number had a problem after upgrading his Linux Mint to version 20 (Ulyana), when he found he could no longer boot the machine. He found a fix by using the advanced option of the boot repair program available on every Ubuntu live USB.

The method of upgrading to follow is here:
https://linuxmint-user-guide.readthedocs.io/en/latest/upgrade-to-mint-20.html#notes

For anyone doing this, Chromium is no longer in the repositories, and will have to be re-installed some other way. The method we recommend is to use the Debian repositories, and restrict it to supplying only Chromium and nothing else. This means adding two extra files to the sources list and updating your indexes.

Here are the details: https://linuxmint-user-guide.readthedocs.io/en/latest/chromium.html from which you can cut the relevant contents and paste into an editor to make the needed files.

Grub menu

If the only systems available on a machine are Linux, then Grub will, by default, not show the menu of systems to select from. If you want to see what they are every time, then you will need to add a file (or modify the file if you already have one) and then re-make the grub configuration.

If the installation of Linux finds a Windows system present, then by default it automatically shows the menu to give you the option of selecting what you want to do.

If you want the option to always see the menu, then details are here: https://linuxmint-user-guide.readthedocs.io/en/latest/grub.html

Warpinator

Linux Mint have announced that version 20 contains a means of transferring files from one machine easily to another. But the description to my mind looks like yet another protocol that needs to be set up with no real advantage over what can be done at the moment. Perhaps I am missing the point, and others can find a good use for it.

It was announced here: https://www.omgubuntu.co.uk/2020/03/linux-mint-network-file-sending-tool

References

The press release for the additions for Linux Mint 20 are here: https://www.linuxmint.com/rel_ulyana_cinnamon_whatsnew.php