

Jo's alternative desktop

DESKTOP- FILE-MANAGER

BY JO MOSKALEWSKI



Only you can decide how your Linux desktop looks. With desktopia we regularly take you with us on a journey into the land of window managers and desktop environments, presenting the useful and the colourful, viewers and pretty toys. Now that various window managers have been presented here, it's time to add to these with a feature that is important to many people: Desktop icons.

Window-Manager: *The main task of this is to equip applications with frames and then to manage these on the desktop. They sit on an active X-server, which provides the graphical output. KDE and GNOME are so-called environments, which take care of all sorts of more or less interchangeable ingredients of the window manager.*

BASH script: *BASH is the standard text console under Linux. You can create so-called scripts for this, whose content will be interpreted as a list of instructions and executed line by line.*

You can certainly use the icon functions of these environments even without a started environment – provided KDE or GNOME in addition to the implemented **Window-Manager** are already on your hard disk. The KDE icons appear after the first retrieval of the file manager *kfm*. This alone is not the end of it – KDE has a manager of its own, which extends these icons by the corresponding configuration menu: *krootwm*. The action of this manager is unfortunately unnoticed by most people, because it needs both the middle and the right hand mouse button, which in general, a window manager can use at least equally efficiently.

Second attempt

Just as in KDE, the file manager in GNOME also holds main responsibility for the function of the desktop icons, called up via *gmc —nowindows*. But here again, one soon comes up against the limitations of this variant (which depend upon the window manager being used). The right mouse button, together with a GNOME-compatible window manager, is necessary to manage the icons on the desktop. And so in both cases, it is usually only icons that are already configured which can be clicked on. The considerable trouble of adding new ones cannot be justified. And yet, this is where your own attempts can be successful.

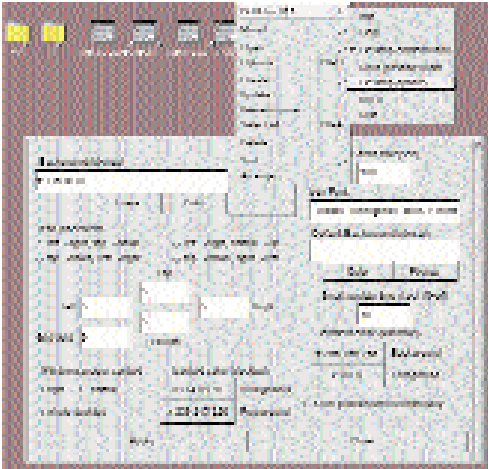
All good things come in threes

Following tradition, here is one more file manager, which is dedicated to this task: DFM, the "Desktop File Manager". This is usually already included on CDs from distributors. But anyone who would like a more up-to-date version can find it at <http://dfm.online.de/dfm.html> or on the attached coverdisc. DFM was not developed for a specific environment such as KDE or GNOME, which is why it manages to solve the problem of peaceful co-existence with a window manager much more elegantly. Instead of wanting to take complete possession of a mouse button, this one works with one or more transparent windows, in the defined areas of which any window manager assigns mouse actions to the application (and thus to our DFM) instead of itself.

The little manpage

Regardless of the "big" Manpage (*man dfm*) the basics of DFM are a piece of cake. It answers to the command *dfm*, and when this is called up for the first time a standard configuration is undertaken. From now on a double click on an icon is rewarded by the start of the respective program. Pressing the right mouse button once, brings up the context menu (see also Figure 1).

Opening a folder will immediately take you back to the file manager. As one would expect, this supports Drag and Drop, (the picking up and dropping of icons). Those who don't like the yellow



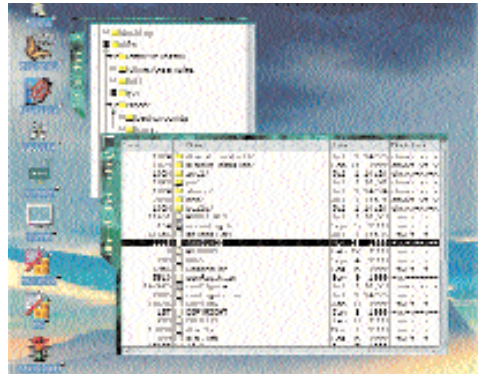
folder can simply replace it with a more attractive one. The nice thing about this is that DFM does not need icons of a specific size. Whether 16x16 pixel or 60x60 pixel, it still co-operates (even if no optical gain can be expected with such differences). Not so nice, on the other hand, is that all the graphics used in DFM have to be present in the "xpm" format. But the conversion of other graphics into this format should not pose too high a hurdle – the recently introduced packet "ImageMagick" deals with this with a simple `convert graphic.jpg graphic.xpm`.

Forever and ever

Now that the program has emerged from its chrysalis and is suitable for everyday use, it should now grace the desktop permanently. Now let's rig up, following the best example of KDE, what amounts to almost a new window manager. It consists of a simple **BASH script**, in which we will first set the environment variable, then start DFM, and only then allow a window manager to come into play:

```
#!/bin/sh
LC_ALL="de_DE"; export LC_ALL
dfm &
my_windowmanager
```

Stored under `dfmdesktop`, this file must still be marked as executable – a `chmod 777 dfmdesktop` covers that satisfactorily. The ideal location for home made of this type is the directory `/usr/local/bin`, into which the "User" root ought now to move the file:



[Left]
Fig. 1:
DFM and its
basic configuration
[Right]
Fig. 2:
File manager
with desktop icons

`mv dfmdesktop /usr/local/bin/`. This simple script can be called up instead of the window manager from now on. Our window manager will in future appear, together with icons on the desktop.

Gone fishing ...

The catch? Of course there's a catch. Drag and Drop is certainly very nice, but of course that does not work here. On the other hand, it is possible, from file manager, to drag a file onto the desktop, or a text file onto an editor icon (or an HTML file onto a browser icon), to be opened immediately.

Some people will be amazed to discover that their window manager does not react in the usual way to mouse clicks in the open desktop. The remedy for this is to deactivate the `desktop context menu` – found not in the options, but under the menu item `DFM for X11` immediately above the options. To save this setting, it has to be explicitly saved again in the same menu.

Anyone who has, (because of high screen resolution) reset the X-server to 100dpi characters, will not find the configuration interface so tidy as the one shown in Figure 1. The texts no longer fit in because of the font size and have to be estimated. But this should neither cause any problem nor interfere with the implementation of the program. ■

```
jo@planet ~> su -
Password:
root@planet:~> tar -xvzf dfm-0.99.7.tar.gz
root@planet:~> cd dfm
root@planet:~/dfm> ./configure
root@planet:~/dfm> make
root@planet:~/dfm> make install
root@planet:~/dfm> logout
jo@planet ~>
```



dfm 0.99.7
LinuxMagazin/desktopia

About the author

Jo Moskalewski ekes out his living as a tiling foreman and stumbled across computers by way of a miraculous conception. When he is not sizing up his next loudspeaker cabinets, he is either sitting around with friends, or accepting constructive criticism at the editorial address redaktion@linux-magazin.de.

DFM for home-workers

If DFM cannot be found on your distribution's CD as a finished packet (or you would prefer the latest version) you will have to make do with the tar.gz archive attached to this magazine. But this too, is easily installed: In addition to the packets usually required for compiling (make, gcc, xdevl) the Devel-packets of GTK+ and libXpm are required. All are included with the usual distributions. If these are already installed, the archive is unpacked as "User" root, at which point a .configure checks the system and a so-called "Makefile" is created. With the help of this the tool make then compiles a program which is ready to run. All that remains to be done is to copy (install) the newly-created files made during compilation, and to set the necessary file rights – which a make install does for us: