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Current issues IN THE LINUX GARDEN



It's been a hectic time recently with the release of the new kernel (now up to version 2.4.1-pre8), Gimp making it to version 1.2, and KDE 2 becoming available. As things are appearing to get better on the desktop front and with more hardware manufacturers realising Linux is emerging from the obscure techie's system to a more mainstream function, the future is rosy. Or is it? Always in the background is the possibility that some ground breaking new technology that you just have to own will be proprietary and so kill the whole movement. Such a thing is rearing its very ugly head right now.

Recently there has been a meeting of the ATA standards committee. As you might know, these are the industry people who decide what the standards will be for future hard disks and storage media. No problem, you might have thought – just make them bigger and faster to cope with ever increasing files! After all, digital camera pictures are getting bigger as resolutions improve, and my collection of MP3s grows larger every day. I'm always running out of space. But it's here that the problem lies. ATA just do not like the fact that I can copy MP3s or other file formats that may be copyright. Their latest proposal is that encryption should be employed at the hardware level. This would mean a file is spread across the hard disk and an encryption key would be needed to access it.

So you could easily copy a text file to disk but MP3 files would be rejected, making it a streaming-only technology. The record industry could finally collect all those hard earned revenues that they should rightfully make but this also means that I won't be able to copy the self made MP3 of my daughter laughing. By making the encryption at hardware level it will also be a fact that certain OSes would be allowed coding information – those that are considered legitimate. It's not known whether Linux would make this list. Direct disk access would not be possible so RAID systems that use IDE disks would no longer work, for example.

Andre Hedrick, the 'ATA Linux dude' on the committee, is having some success organising the counter offensive. So all is not lost. It may be that the encryption is only put on removable media such as Flashcards, memory sticks and microdrives.

The future still looks rosy although perhaps with the occasional thorn. Happy coding!

John Southern
 Editor

GUARANTEE We pride ourselves on the origins of our magazine which come from the very start of the Linux revolution. We have been involved with Linux market for six years now through our sister European-based titles Linux Magazine (aimed at professionals) and Linux User (for hobbyists), and through seminars, conferences and events.

By purchasing this magazine you are joining an information network that enjoys the benefit of all the knowledge and technical expertise of all the major Linux professionals and enthusiasts. No other UK Linux magazine can offer that pedigree or such close links with the Linux Community. We're not simply reporting on the Linux and open source movement - we're part of it.