

Schedulers for the desktop

# ORDER OUT OF CHAOS

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**Your colleagues and family are giving you a very sour reception because once again you've simply forgotten an important date – perhaps your own mother's birthday or an important business dinner – due to your lack of organisation. It's high time to bring some order into your chaotic daily schedule. Alongside the conventional solution of going into a stationer's shop once a year to buy an up-to-date appointments calendar made of paper, in this age of the microchip, there is of course, an electronic alternative.**

Once you have made the decision that your Linux PC will henceforth be in charge of any dates which occur, the question arises as to which desktop program is best suited to this purpose. Linux Magazine presents to you schedulers, calendars and organisers for the X11 desktop.

## Mobile assistants

Anyone who travels a lot may well want to acquire a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) or even a keyboard handheld PC. These mobile dwarves really can perform miracles now, but this does not mean they are ready to replace the classic stand-alone computer, not by a long chalk. It is rather that they normally act as a sort of extended arm for home desktop applications, thus in our case, schedule management software under Linux.

## PIMs or groupware?

Schedulers do not usually come as isolated applications, but are normally an integral part of a collection of electronic help tools for more efficient organisation of the day-to-day running of the

office. If such an office bundle consists of applications best suited to the better organisation of the private and professional life of an individual, these are often referred to as Personal Information Managers.

Such PIMs usually consist of programs for managing appointments and tasks, an address database and (more rarely) an e-mail client program. If on the other hand the application has been designed so that entire organisations or other groups of people who frequently interact can co-ordinate better with each other, then the term groupware is usually used. In this article we are deliberately limiting ourselves to presenting a few PIMs which can bring order to your home Linux desktop.

## Desktop, server or WWW?

Historically, Linux has been regarded as a child of the Internet, designed right from the start for network compatibility. Unlike the worlds of Windows or Mac, many developers of Linux applications still assume even today that Linux will be used primarily in a network environment.

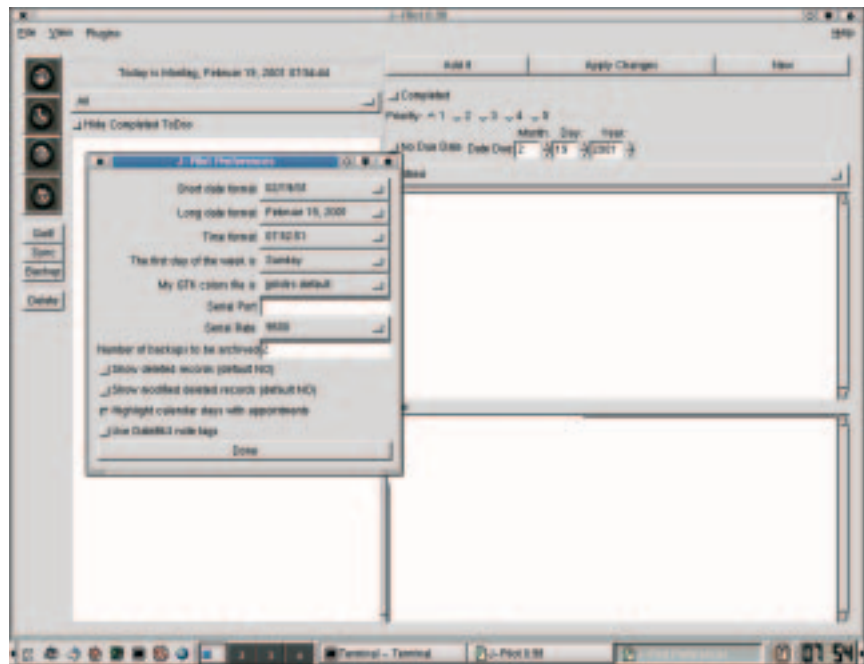
Accordingly, there is at present a relatively large range of network-based client-server solutions under Linux for every imaginable type of application. Desktop applications still need to mature somewhat. So don't be surprised if at the moment under Linux it is easier to find a groupware solution which can be synchronised with any and every PDA, than a corresponding universal desktop solution. There are also schedulers, which after a corresponding registration – similar to some e-mail and fax providers – can sometimes even be used as a free service on the Web (e.g. in the case of Yahoo or Netscape). It is of course entirely up to you whether or not you wish to share your personal appointments and notes with the operators of such Web sites.

### Standard formats

In the Windows world, in recent years it is MS Outlook and the Lotus Organiser in particular which have established themselves as the de facto standards in the PIM domain. Since it is only recently that Linux has come into the picture as a desktop operating system, there is as yet no comparable standard here. The developers of the latest PIMs (KDE-PIM or gnome-pim), though, now appear to be adhering to the Open Source philosophy of using open file standards, too, wherever possible. The Internet Mail Consortium, a world-wide committee to which the leading IT companies such as AOL, HP, IBM, Nokia and even Microsoft belong, has published two standard specifications for personal data interchange (PDI) at <http://www.imc.org/pdi/>: vCard and vCalendar. In particular the latter specification is intended to ensure that - obviously, only if the developers of a PIM or groupware also comply 100% with the specification requirements - the interchange of data between electronic calendars, schedulers and address bases from various manufacturers runs smoothly.

### Synchronisation required?

If you own a PalmPilot made by the company 3Com and would like to synchronise your Palm appointments with your PC schedule management program, then, at least for the time being, your choice of the right scheduler is extremely restricted under Linux. Apart from the two PIMs presented in the overview, StarOffice Schedule 5.2 and J-Pilot, there are certainly a few other feasible solutions (such as the scheduler CorelCentral 9 in Corel's Wordperfect Office 2000, not presented here). The installation and configuration of the Palm synchronisation software is, however, not all that simple, but sometimes requires quite a bit of skill. But rescue is in sight: the PIM developers of KDE and GNOME are already hard at work on a corresponding Palm interface for KOrganizer and gnomecal.



Pision devotees, unfortunately, have been dealt a poorer hand at the moment under Linux, because they must either settle for the options and limitations of a range of command line tools (psiconv) or keep a look-out for the few groupware solutions under Linux, which also enable a corresponding Pision synchronisation (e.g. the Cyberscheduler from the firm Envicon).

### Integrated and forward compatible

If you see no need, at least for the moment, for PDA synchronisation and are chiefly looking for an electronic scheduler for your own private use, then the two up-and-coming PIMs from KDE and GNOME would seem to be ideal. KOrganizer

[top]  
J-pilot handles  
synchronisation with  
the PalmPilot

[above]  
Simple but powerful  
–the plan scheduler

