

Jo's alternative desktop

MOUSETRAPS

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A desktop without using the mouse, with no clicking and pushing? *evilwm* is the enemy of all rodents.



Are you one of those people who value their wrists too much to want to encourage the computer workers' disease RSI ("Repetitive Strain Injury") by simultaneous clicking and pushing with the mouse? Fortunately, under Linux it is still possible to use (almost) any required program primarily with the keyboard and not the mouse. Whether it's word processing, typing e-mails, entering commands in a Bash shell or editing files in Midnight Commander – the input device of choice is usually the keyboard. High time for the mouse to throw down the gauntlet.

Pest control

No, the mouse is not just going to be done away with. But when your fingers want to stay on the keyboard, why should you move them away, just to move, close or change a window? What would be ideal is a desktop which can cope without a mouse.

Anyone who has called up his favourite editor often enough will now scarcely use the mouse to cut out or insert text. This is done much more effectively with a keyboard command. For anyone who tends to work mostly on the keyboard it could make sense to convert the desktop to keyboard operation too, instead of having constantly to switch back and forth between keyboard and rodent. Which is precisely what the window manager *evilwm* offers.

Mode of operation

This miracle weapon can obviously be found on the <http://evilwm.sourceforge.net/> site. *evilwm* is a window manager of the totally Spartan type. It has a one-pixel frame without any form of window decoration, and it is aimed at purely keyboard use. The minimal frame only serves to indicate the focus (although those with fine motor skills could manage to hit it with the mouse and thus destroy the entire concept ...).

The bonus is in terms of space-saving and makes its presence positively felt especially at lower resolutions where whatever might have previously slipped outside the visible area will now, hopefully, become visible (and if it still doesn't, the question will no longer arise any way as to how this is to be moved by means of the mouse to get to the OK button).

And yet, even in addition to missing window borders, *evilwm* still has some dirty tricks in store, or to be more precise, it simply has nothing in its baggage. With it you can neither set a desktop background or change the mouse pointer from the standard X crosshairs into something more sensible (such as an arrow). And you will search in vain, too, for a start menu, a clock, a taskbar or configuration file. Practically nothing indicates that there is even a window manager running the desktop.

Other window managers usually come with all

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Table 1: Jewels for "poor" window managers

Program	Function
xsetroot	X-Window standard tool for setting a desktop background colour –equally, an XPM graphic can be displayed instead of a colour. Also suitable for changing the cursor.
Display	Tool from the ImageMagick package, with which graphics can be positioned on the screen
qiv	Background graphics incl. fast image viewer
oclock	Time
tkgoodstuff	Program starter/Start bar –can also "swallow" small applications
panel	universally usable GNOME start bar
xosview	System monitor
gkrellm	expanded system monitor
root-tail	Logfiles on the desktop background
xndecor	smuggles programs past the window manager

kinds of built-in functions and small extra tools. Anyone who uses *evilwm* must search out these tools for themselves (but in return gets the opportunity to come closer to his ideal desktop). Table 1 can make the search a little easier.

Preparation

Happy is the man who has a captive Debian-based Linux on his hard drive: A simple *dpkg -i evilwm_0.3.11-1_i386.deb* installs the finished package. Everyone else will have to get hold of the source and compile it. The compilation in this case is almost too unspectacular (only the devel-packet for X is needed, apart from the compiler *gcc* and its helper *make*), and this procedure is followed by a bit of manual labour:

Like all other window managers, *evilwm* wants to be started in addition to an already-active X-Server. For this purpose, any user can make an X startfile in his home directory: Usually *~/.xinitrc* is used for starting from the console via *startx* and *~/.xsession* in the case of a graphical login. If no such file exists, it is easy to make one and if one already exists, it is advisable to back it up before doing the next bit of tinkering. Such a startfile could now read as follows:

```
xsetroot -solid darkslategrey
xsetroot -cursor_name top_left_arrow
xclock -digital -fg lightyellowbg2
darkslategrey -geometry -0-0 &
evilwm
```

In this example, a background colour is first set using *xsetroot* and then the mouse pointer is changed into an ordinary arrow, at which point a clock takes its place in the right, lower corner of the desktop. Last of all, the window manager starts.

evilwm also includes a few options. For example anyone who prefers to issue orders in an *aterm* rather than in an *xterm*, can say so with the suffix *-term aterm*. However, the *aterm* (just like its related X-terminal programs *wterm* and *rxvt*) requires the support of the window manager to fake transparency. In this instance, *evilwm* does not support this—so the “transparency” feature is not available in *aterm*.

The one-pixel frame is completely configurable via the call. Anyone who wants the active red window in future instead of the default golden one can achieve this with *-fg red*.

In the same way, inactive windows can be changed with *-bg black*, from the default grey to black. And those finding one measly little pixel is not enough, can multiply the frame thickness by ten with *-bg 10*.

Application

Table 2 shows the *evilwm* keyboard layout. Of elementary importance is [Ctrl-Alt-Enter] which brings up a terminal from which required programs can be started. What matters most in this case is to

Table 2: Command reference

Command	Function
[Ctrl-Alt-Enter]	open new terminal
[Ctrl-Alt-h]	move left
[Ctrl-Alt-j]	move down
[Ctrl-Alt-k]	move up
[Ctrl-Alt-l]	move right
[Ctrl-Alt-y]	move to top left corner
[Ctrl-Alt-u]	move to top right corner
[Ctrl-Alt-b]	move to bottom left corner
[Ctrl-Alt-n]	move to bottom right corner
[Ctrl-Alt-x]	maximise/normal
[Alt-Tab]	change active window
[Ctrl-Alt-Insert]	jump back to window focus list
[Ctrl-Alt-Esc]	close window
[Ctrl-Alt-i]	window information
[Ctrl-Alt-f]	attach window (take it along to another virtual desktop)
[Ctrl-Alt-1 to 8]	switch to virtual desktop 1 to 8
[Ctrl-Alt-Left]	change to the previous virtual desktop
[Ctrl-Alt-Right]	change to next virtual desktop
[Ctrl-Alt-Backspace]	end session

remember always to give a program call an & as well, without it the terminal will remain locked until the program is shut down. An & sends a program into the background.

If you have now succeeded, with this &, in conjuring a veritable jungle of windows onto the desktop, then you can escape the chaos using the key combination [Ctrl-Alt-Right] and get to the next, still empty, desktop. If you want to take a window there with you, just mark it with [Ctrl-Alt-f]. You can go back to the previous virtual desktop together with all the applications thereon with [Ctrl-Alt-Left].

If you ever get stuck, your mouse can in future still dash to your aid: First press the [Alt] key and using the left mouse button, the window can be moved, with the middle one its size can be altered and with the right one, another window can be focused.

Another speciality of *evilwm* is the shutdown. There is (why are we not surprised) simply no provision for this. The whole X-Server has to be shot down. You can do this using the key combination [Ctrl-Alt-Backspace], which goes marvellously with the other ones from Table 2.

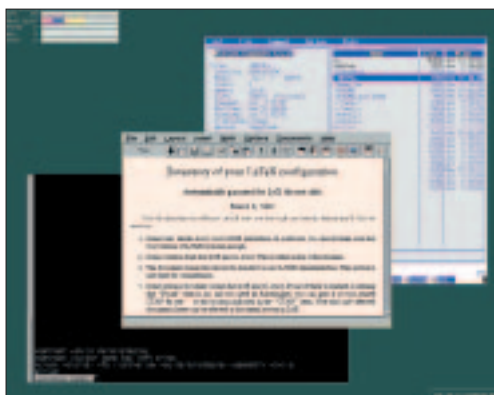


Figure1: Nothing for mice