

# Desktop customisation: part 2

# TAILOR-MADE DESKTOP

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**Working with a graphical user interface only really starts being fun once the settings have been adapted to your own preferences.**

Under Windows, the principal configuration options for the desktop can be found in the Control Panel. KDE, probably the most commonly used Linux graphical interface, takes a very similar approach: you will find the important options for customising your work environment in the KDE Control Center.

In this workshop we will show you in KDE how to adapt the settings for mouse and keyboard, date and time, screen resolution and colour depth and other personalised settings you will know from the Windows Control Panel. We will also introduce you to the KDE login manager. We will be referring to Windows 98 SE & Me and SuSE Linux 7.1 with KDE

2.0.1. All but the details describing screen resolution will be relevant to those using Linux distributions other than SuSE.

The mouse and the keyboard each have their own section in the Windows Control Panel. The KDE Control Center combines both under the *Peripherals* menu item. This hides a tempting setting for anyone changing from Windows to Linux/KDE: Linux graphical interfaces are pre-set to allow you to open files and directories and to start programs with a single click. This is convenient, but can almost drive dyed-in-the-wool Windows users mad. So if you cannot live without the double-click,

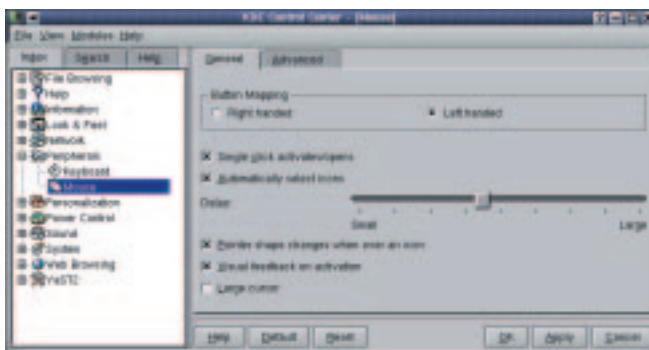


Figure 1: To single or to double-click, that is the question

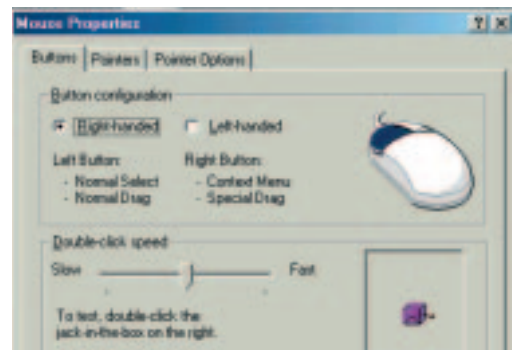


Figure 3: The folder options are well hidden within Explorer or My Computer

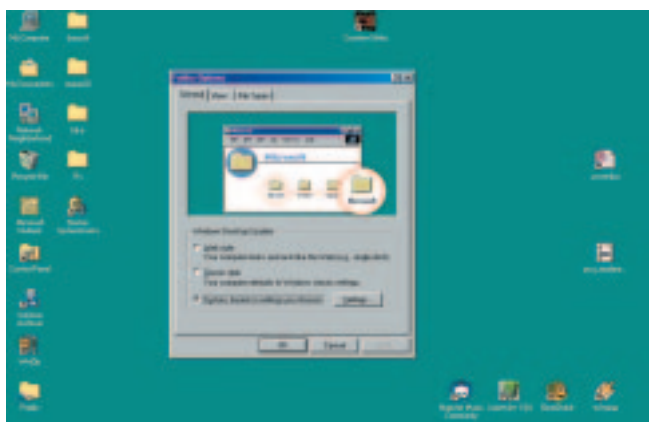


Figure 2: The Windows 98 Control Panel only understands the double-click

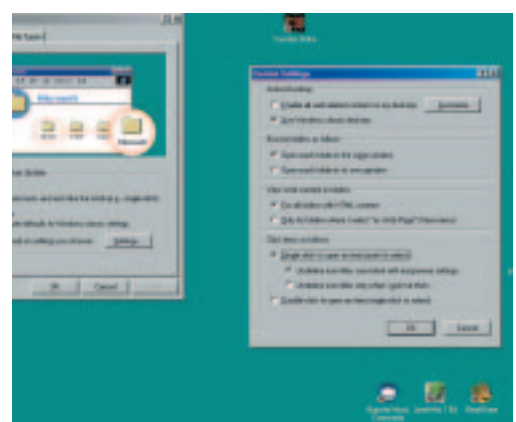


Figure 4: How to save thousands of mouse clicks under Windows

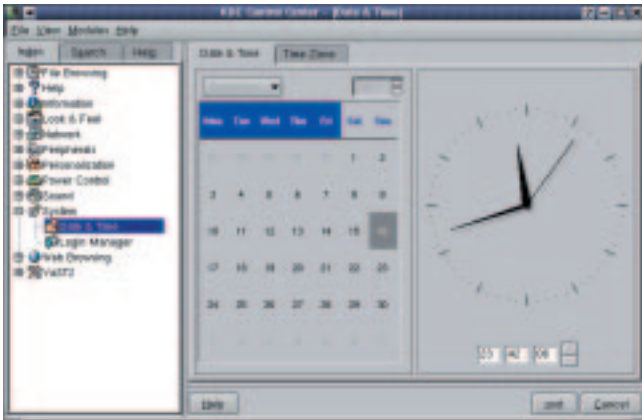


Figure 5: Date and time are concealed within System

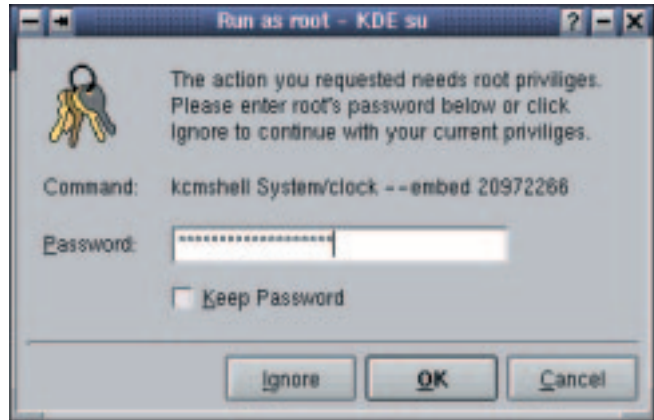


Figure 6: Some things can only be done by the Superuser root

disable the option *Single click activates/opens* on the *General* tab under *Mouse*. Now KDE will also expect a double-click.

But perhaps you should try it the other way around: after you get used to the single click in KDE, change the setting in Windows. For Windows 2000 this is done via *Control Panel/Mouse*. On the *Keys* tab you can enable the option *Open with single click (point to select)*. Windows 98 SE has hidden the single-click facility in the folder options. Open the menu *View/Folder Options* in *My Computer* or in *Explorer*. On the *General* tab enable the option "Custom, based on settings you choose" and click on *Settings*. There, in the section "Click items as follows" select the option "Single-click to open an item (point to select)" and confirm with *OK*.

Back to the mouse in the KDE Control Center. The ability to *Automatically select icons* means that files and directories whose icons come into contact with the mouse pointer are selected without clicking. Use the slider to specify how long the time delay between contact and selection should be. Even if you have enabled single click it is still possible to activate an icon without opening it if you press the *Ctrl* key at the same time.

No need for the left handers out there to despair either, both KDE and Gnome let you swap the

mouse button assignment. Under *Advanced* you can adjust mouse settings using sliders: pointer acceleration, pointer threshold, double-click interval, as well as start time and start distance for dragging with the mouse.

## Timing

Just as the mouse is hiding within the *Peripherals* menu, the date and time settings are concealed under *System* in the left column of the Control Center. This is where you can change the day, the month, the year and the time. There is nothing for normal users to configure on the *Time Zone* tab. Only the system administrator *root* can activate the time zone selection list. If you click on the *root* button, you are prompted for his password. The same applies for *System/Login Manager* – this can also only be manipulated by the Superuser *root*.

## Login

To work with Linux, whether text-based at the console or using a graphical interface, and irrespective of whether your computer is part of a network or a single machine, you must log on to the system. You can design the appearance of the

**root:** One of the differences between Windows and Linux that the migrating user is faced with immediately is the system login. The reason: Linux is a multiuser system whether it is implemented as a network with many machines or as a single computer for home use. Only the system administrator "root" possesses all rights and opportunities of amending the operating system. During the installation of Linux at least one normal user must be set up in addition to the system administrator. For day-to-day work with Linux you should always log in as a normal user, because if your rights are limited you cannot damage the system through carelessness or inexperience.

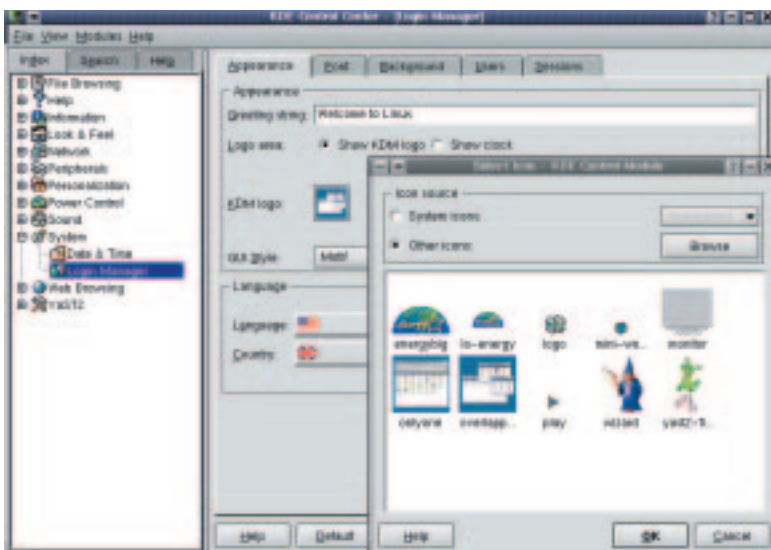


Figure 7: A welcome from Kandalf, the wizard

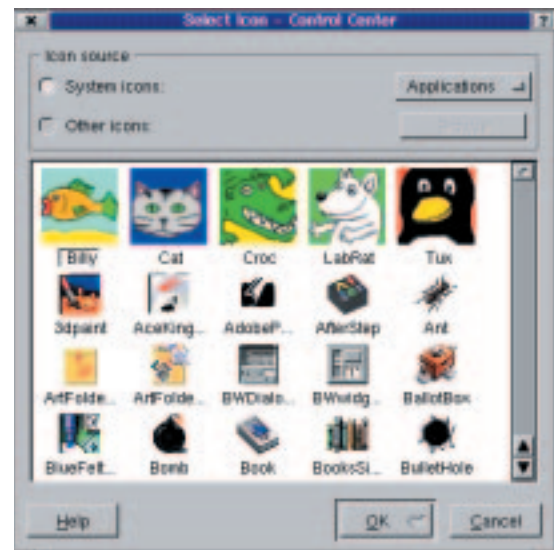


Figure 8: An ample choice of icons

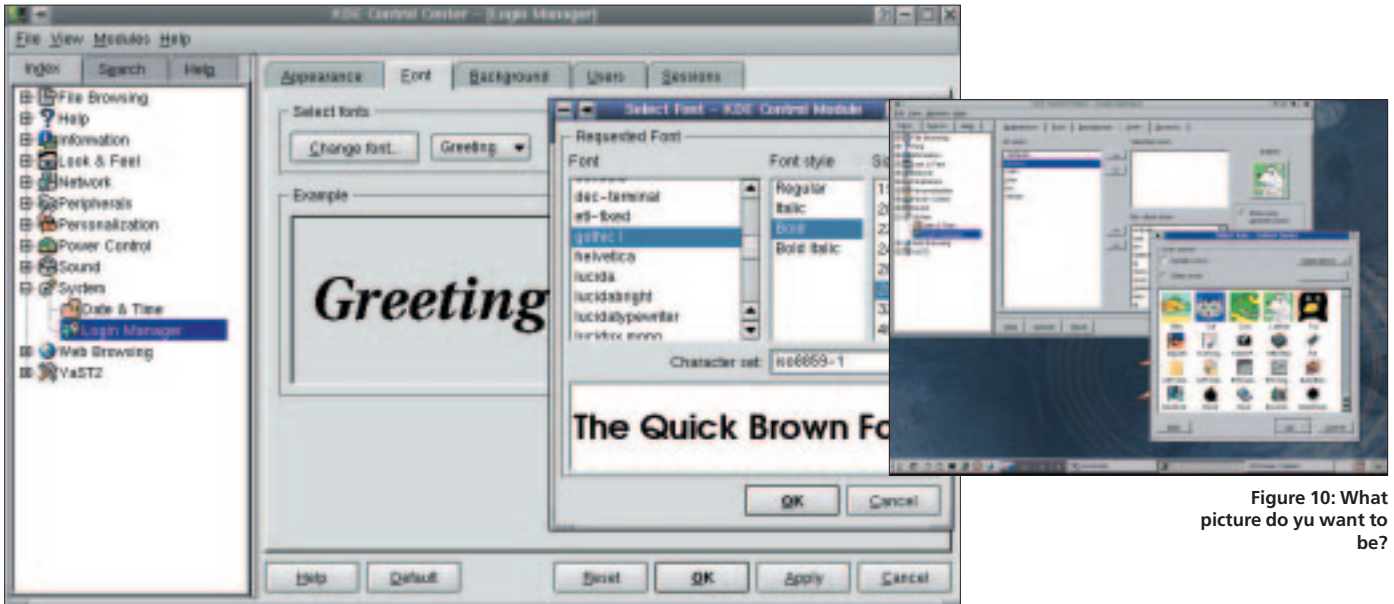


Figure 10: What picture do you want to be?

Figure 9: Write your own greeting

graphical login using the *Login Manager*.

By default, a clock appears in the left hand part of the login window. Alternatively, this could be an application, action or device icon. In order to change this, select *Show KDM logo* in the logo section and click on the button with the logo. Choose a logo from the dialog window that is now open, for example Kandalf, the wizard. You can find him under *Other icons* (Figure 8). Confirm with *Apply/OK*.

The greeting above the small pictures or icons in the login manager can be changed using the *Greeting string* text box. Since we are talking about the graphical login the individual images for different users should be 48x48 pixel *png* files. Name them according to the respective users and save the image files in */opt/kde2/share/apps/kdm/pics/users*. They will then appear automatically during the next graphical login, and by clicking on the picture the name of the user is inserted into the *User* text box.

The remaining login manager tabs are used to specify the font and size of the greeting and to design the login background.

This works in the same way as designing the background for the KDE desktop (see Workshop

part 1, Linux Magazine 13). The tab *System/Login Manager/Users* allows you to select users who should not appear with a picture or icon during graphical login. All users who do not have an individual login image assigned to them are represented by the default icon of a black head in profile. This can be changed as well. Click on the image and select a different one in the dialog window *Select icon*.

Under *Sessions* you can specify who is allowed to shut down the computer (alternatively all users or only the system administrator *root*) or whether shutdown is only possible using the text-based console.

Confirm all settings with *Apply/OK*, log out and have a look at the result of your entries.

### Let's get personal

A number of important settings that are contained in the Windows Control Panel are combined under the menu item *Personalization* in the Control Center:

- The entries under *Email* refer to the configuration of an email account in Outlook Express or Outlook. We will be dealing with this in

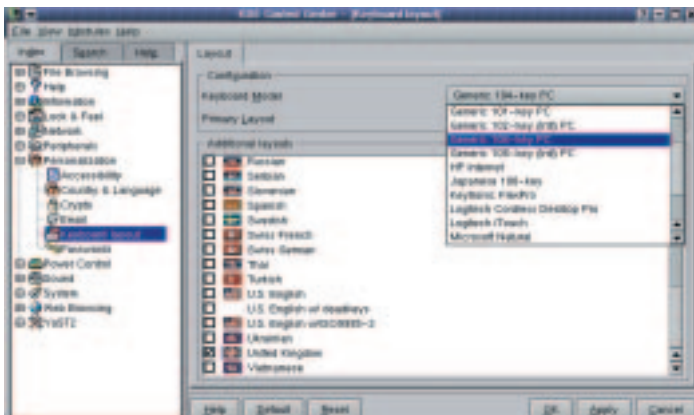


Figure 11: Set up new keyboard

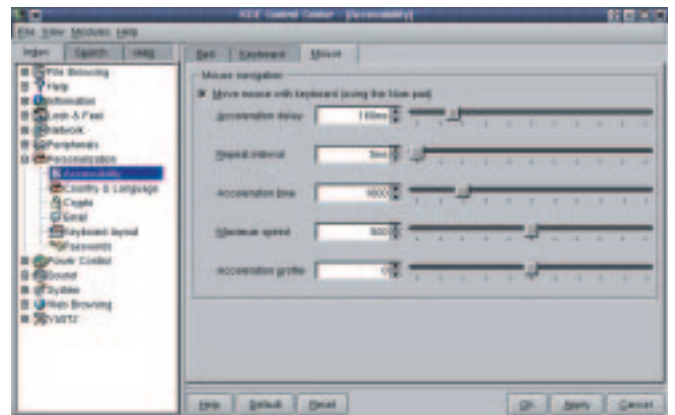


Figure 12: Navigating the mouse pointer via the keyboard





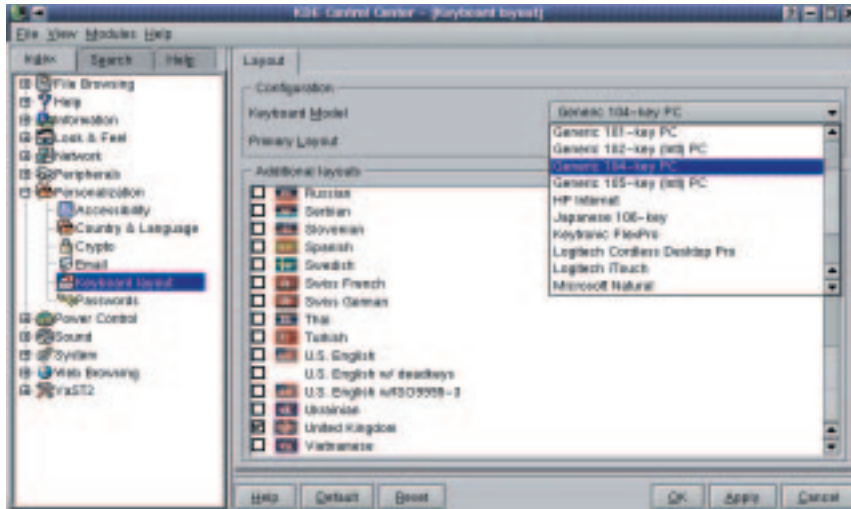


Figure 17: Everything is neatly sorted in the drop-down menus

stands for **SuSE Advanced X Configuration Tool**. The window manager (for example KDE) together with the X-Server, which sits directly on the graphics card, is responsible for making the Linux **X-Window** interface work. If your system uses Xfree86 4.0 you must use SaX2 for the configuration.

You will find both of these tools under *KISuSE/Administration/Configuration/SaX* or *SaX2*.

If you are not logged in as *root*, you will be prompted to enter the root password. It takes a while for the tool to start, as it reads in the data of the existing configuration first.

As you are going to change an existing configuration, namely the screen resolution and colour depth, select *Use/change existing configuration* in the first step.

SaX or SaX2 can also be used to adjust mouse, keyboard and graphics card settings. Click on *Next* until you reach the *Desktop Settings*. There, click on *Color* or *Resolution* and then on the *Settings* button.

In the next dialog window you will find the properties you require on the *Colors* tab. Let's assume you would like to increase the resolution

**X Window System:** An X window system, normally abbreviated to X, consists of an X server, X clients and a window manager. These components provide the user with a graphical user interface. Most Linux distributions allow the configuration of the X window system during the installation. An X window system is network enabled, which means the X server does not have to be running on the same machine as the window manager and the clients, thus saving on resources. For Linux on home computers all modules are running on the same machine. The X server administers the hardware and is therefore attached directly to the graphics card. An X client, say a program which wants to display something on the screen, passes its information to the X server, which in turn passes it to the window manager. KDE, Gnome, Windowmaker and others are above all window managers. They control the appearance and behaviour of the windows and allow the creation and design of virtual desktops.

from 1024x768 to 1152x864 pixels: first of all, consult your monitor's manual to see whether it can cope with the resolution that you are planning to use. If you are intending to change the settings for the horizontal and vertical frequency ranges you must comply with the instructions in the manual, otherwise the device can be damaged irreparably. This is especially true of very old monitors; newer ones tend to simply switch off when receiving wrong signals.

Open the resolution drop-down menu and activate the desired one with a mouse click (Figure 16).

The textbox now contains the new resolution. Confirm with *OK* and *Finish*. Before saving, and thereby setting the new configuration, you ought to test it. Click on *Start* (Figure 18).

The test screen may seem familiar from the installation of the SuSE distribution. Use the small arrows to the right of the text box to select the required resolution. The tool always offers the lowest resolution as well. Move the test graphic to its optimum position using the arrow buttons so that the grey boxes at the corners of the desktop are visible. To finish, click on *Save configuration*. You can now exit SaX or adjust more settings.

The X window system configuration is held in the file */etc/X11/XF86Config*. Root is able to change those settings manually there.

### More Migration

Part 1 of this workshop can be found in Linux Magazine 13, page 48.

This series will continued to bring you helpful information on the migration from Windows to Linux on a regular basis.

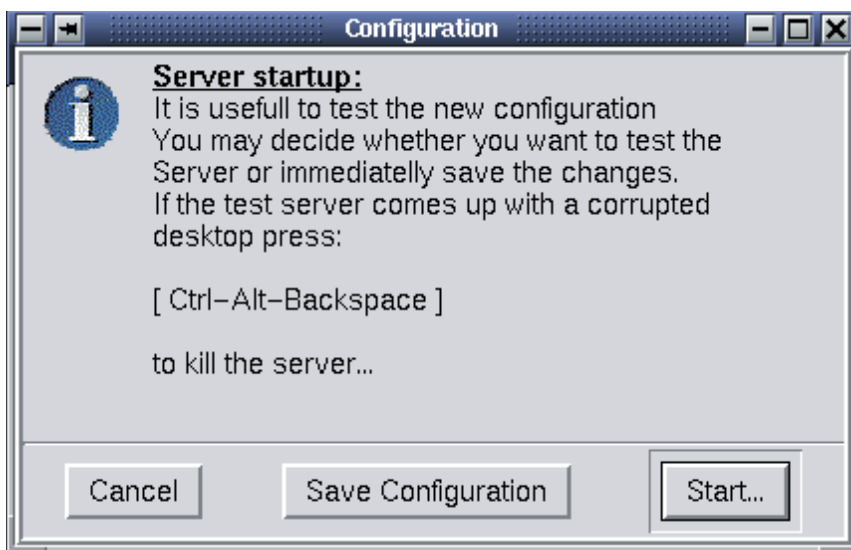


Figure 18: A new configuration should always be tested before it is saved