

# SuSE training START AT THE BEGINNING

I've you ever wondered what goes on at Linux training courses then wonder no longer. Lesley Dixon fills us in on what goes on behind closed doors

As a relative newcomer to Linux it was with some trepidation that I enrolled on the SuSE Linux For Users course at Computer Park Ltd. This is a three-day course with the aim of introducing the beginner to Linux, including applications such as word processing, spreadsheets and presentation packages, and to give an insight into file and directory structures on both local and networked systems.

No previous knowledge is required for this course although some experience of using a personal computer is obviously helpful.

The company also offers a general Linux For Beginners one-day course, which covers the basic use of the programs, but I felt that this might not give me the time or practice I needed to come to grips with an entire operating system.

Computer Park Ltd. has been running courses since 1982 and so has plenty of experience in training. They do courses covering standard

PC applications, such as Excel and general personnel skills such as time management, as well as the Linux-based courses.

Although the course is specifically tailored to SuSE Linux most of the content can be applied to other distributions and so the course is worth considering even if you have decided not to use SuSE.

The site, at Broughton Grange near Kettering, is picturesque, if a little off the beaten track. Lunch and coffee breaks are taken in a large conservatory with stunning views over the countryside – perfect to relax in after a morning struggling with programming. Lunch was also excellent though I had to be careful not to eat too much and fall asleep in the afternoon session!



## Absolute beginners

The course opened with a brief overview and history of Linux and then moved on to the file structure and how to login to a session. Much of the course concentrated on the command line and only covered the graphical interface as a specific topic. This was quite a shock to my system as the last time I can remember typing commands was in the late 1980s



an a BBC computer at school. Although the tutor was very helpful it did strengthen my conviction to stick to a system with a good graphical interface and not to go wandering off into the realms of more command-led programming.

Having started us off gently enough we then dived into the filesystem, learning how to navigate directories, how to create files and how to change permissions to enable others to read them (or not). Once we could create files we were shown the use of vi, as an example of a text editor, and learned how to generate text files. Other text editors were only touched upon briefly, due to the pressures of time, but I was not left a convert to vi! At the end of each topic we were given time to work through the exercises given in the course manual, so we were able to practice what we had learned – something I find necessary to prevent information from going in one ear and out the other.

### A little variety

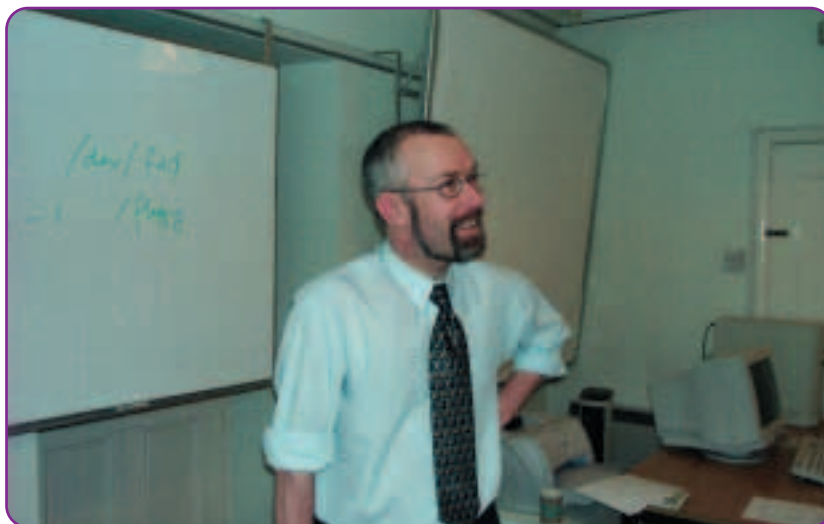
Over the next couple of days we went on to cover a wide range of subjects, many using the networked computers to send files to each other. We learned how to search files, print them, redirect them and work on a remote computer. We also learned about printers, CD-ROMs and floppy drives.

Various applications were covered for word processing, spreadsheets and presentations, Due to the small number of people on the course we were able to deviate from the manual from time to time and concentrate on a topic which one of us considered to be useful to them. In my case we were shown how to transfer files to and from a Windows system and how the various applications compared to their Windows equivalents. With a different set of students they could cover quite different questions depending on their particular needs.

Although I was very happy with what was taught on the course I was slightly disappointed not to have more practice in Xwindows, as that's what I will probably be using. However I do realise that it is necessary to understand the underlying processes before taking the easy option. I would have liked to have used GNOME and been shown around that and similar programs but I realise that would be a course in itself.

### Waving, not drowning

The topics covered were dealt with in enough detail to give us confidence but not so much that we were swamped with unnecessary detail. Once or twice we strayed onto subjects that the tutor admitted were from the systems administrator course but he felt it was necessary for us to understand the background and it was relevant to the work that some of the students were doing. A few times I felt my eyes glazing over as the topics became very technical, but



fortunately we soon returned to subjects on my level and I did not feel as if I was drowning for very long.

All of the subjects were covered in sufficient detail that we felt confident in them by the time the course was over. There was enough time allowed in the course that we could take the time to practice what we needed. Fortunately because of the small number of students there was ample time to spend on whatever we needed to and we were able to finish early every day, which would be a help if you were commuting daily as Kettering is a fair drive from most places. I stayed overnight and was able to find a very comfortable B&B.

The number of people on the course is kept small so that individual needs can be met. The staff at Computer Park are very friendly and happy to help whenever necessary. They will also tailor-make courses for companies if they do not already do a suitable one. The set of networked computers runs the latest version of SuSE, in this case 7.3, which had only just been released. This led to a few problems when the files needed to demonstrate functions had been moved to different locations and so had been omitted from the install. My advice would be to try not to go on the course just after a major version update but to let it sort itself out first and find all the bugs before hand. These teething troubles aside, the course was competently run with an effort to maintain interest for the full three days. Time and effort was spent on ensuring that we were all happy with what we had learned. At the end of the course I felt confident that I would be able to navigate my way around SuSE – and by way of extension, any version of Linux. Although I was disappointed not to have used Xwindows more I was ready and eager to go home and put my newfound skills to the test.

As an introduction to using Linux the course is to be recommended and if you have not already committed to a distribution then you will be converted to SuSE by its breadth of coverage and value for money.

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