The Sysadmin's Daily Grind: Dailystrips

Laugh Along with Tux

Staff contentment is a benefit for any site. A Perl program called Dailystrips automatically retrieves comics from the Internet and helps keep that smile on your face. **BY CHARLY KÜHNAST**

Reading comics is one of the few pleasures I take time for every day. As an admin, I have an untiring creative drive to discover steps I can potentially automate, and this time my search turned up an extremely neat tool called Dailystrips [1].

This Perl software program locates no less than 300 daily comic strips. And Dailystrips is very undemanding, expecting only a more-or-less up-to-date Perl version with the HTTP::Request, LWP::UserAgent, and Date::Time Perl modules. If you do not have these modules, you can surf to CPAN [2] and download them. After fulfilling these requirements, unpack the tarball and simply call *install.pl* to set things up. RPMs are also available from [1], should you require them. Typing:

```
dailystrips --list
```

provides an overview of the available comics. The list never fails to impress. So let's look at the current offerings in the popular "User Friendly" comic strip. The following command:

```
dailystrips --output uf.html ↗
userfriendly
```

creates a link to your comic strip of the day in the *uf.html* file. The HTML file is

not exactly overloaded by default, but for the purists among you, there is an option to make it even leaner with the *--lite* switch.

Groups Provide Variety

That worked really well. But if I want to define my own comic selection, I will need to modify the *strips.def* file; this is where groups are defined. Let's add the following lines to the start of the file:

```
group charly
  desc Charly's daily ↗
comic strips
  include userfriendly dilbert ↗
calvinandhobbes
  include garfield gpf non-funny
end
```
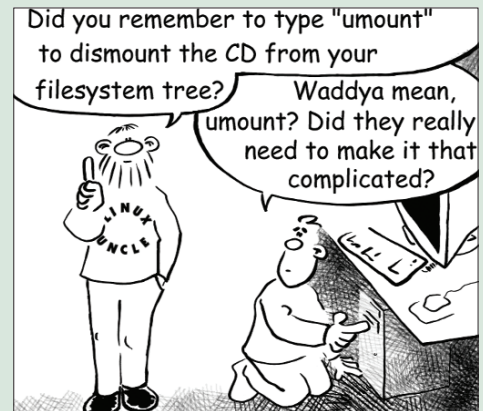
The two lines starting with *include* contain the comics I would like to read. I spread them across two lines to improve readability, although a single *include* line would in fact have done the job just as well. I can now type:

```
dailystrips --output ↗
charlys_comics.html @charly
```

to output a page with links to the comics specified in the group definition. You can download comic strips instead of just links to save bandwidth. This makes sense if you will be re-reading your selection of comics, or if several users in the same network typically read them. The command for doing this is:

```
dailystrips --local @charly
```

After loading the graphics files, Dalystrips creates a file called *dailystrips-*

YYYY.MM.DD.html in your current directory and a symlink, *index.html*, that points to that file.

Is This Legal?

On a more somber note, what about the copyright? I would not expect any issues to arise from using Dailystrips on your own private network, as the HTMLs are not accessible from outside that network.

But placing your Dailystrips comic selection on a publicly accessible server – even unintentionally – is asking for trouble with the copyright owners; and this is understandable. So make sure that you keep to the rules, to avoid legal issues spoiling your daily fun with Dailystrips. ∎

INFO

[1] Dailystrips: *http://dailystrips.sourceforge.net*

[2] CPAN: *http://www.cpan.org*

THE AUTHOR

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