

xpad

# Note This!

The invasion of little sticky yellow notes began in 1980. This was the year that the ubiquitous Post-it notes began to conquer company and home offices.

Now, Xpad brings sticky notes to the desktop. **BY ANDREA MÜLLER**

**A**ppointments, route plans, addresses, phone call transcripts – there are all kinds of uses for these practical, sticky notes. They are available in lots of different colors now, and turn up in all the usual – and some unusual places: on monitors, desks, and even lampshades, waiting patiently for someone to take pity and dispatch them to the trash can.

A success story in real life, virtual sticky notes are a useful addition to the computer desktop. At least that's what Michael Terry thought, when he launched the *xpad* project (<http://xpad.sourceforge.net/>) with the aim of creating a virtual alternative to the sticky note. In contrast to their role model, xpad notes neither conceal your view of your com-

puter display, nor will disposing of them cause environmental hassles.

## Putting Xpad on Your Hard Disk

Users of Mandrake Linux can simply install the xpad RPM package. Users of other distros can try their luck with the Mandrake RPM, which installed without any complaint on Red Hat Linux 9.0. Failing that, you can always build the program from the source code.

If you intend to compile the source code, you will need the libraries and developer packages for *gtk 2*, *XFree86*, and *libgdk-pixbuf*. Developer packages are typically recognizable by a suffix such as *-devel* or *-dev*. After installing the required software, type the following command to unpack the source code:

```
tar -xjf xpad-1.13.tar.bz2
```

Change to the *xpad-1.13* directory that this step creates. After doing so, launch *./configure* and *make* to configure and compile the software. Then ensure that you are *root*, and enter *make install-strip* to install the program in the directory tree below */usr/local*.

## Post-its for your Desktop

Xpad is a program that will work with more or less any window manager. The first time you launch the program by typing *xpad &*, you are offered a quick guide (see Figure 1) that explains the basic steps. When you close the guide, xpad immediately creates a 200 by 200 pixel sticky note on your desktop.



The virtual notes are windows that can be moved just like any other window. When you access an xpad window, a toolbar appears at the bottom of the window. Hold down the left mouse button to drag the window around your desktop. The tab in the lower right corner allows you to scale the xpad note (see Figure 2).

If another window conceals the toolbar, you can click on the xpad note and hold down the [Ctrl] key to drag the note to another position. To scale the window, again press [Ctrl], but use the right mouse button this time. The [Alt] key can be used instead of [Ctrl].

Use the xpad window just like any other editor to type in notes on your keyboard. Virtual xpad notes do not run out of space. If you need to write more text than will fit in the window, the program displays scroll boxes, however, this does mean losing the advantage of instant readability.

Adding another note is probably a better approach. To do so, click the icon on the left-hand side of the toolbar. If you are having trouble finding a specific note, possibly because another window is hiding it, right-click any xpad window, and select *Notes / Show All*, to display all your notes in the foreground.

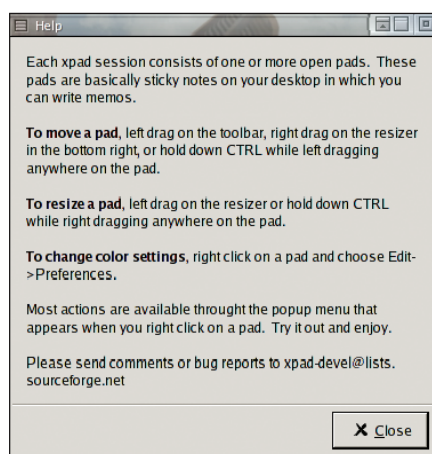


Figure 1: Xpad displays this info window to welcome first time users.

## Desktopia

Only you can decide how your desktop looks. With deskTOPia we regularly take you with us on a journey into the land of window managers and desktop environments, presenting the useful and the colorful viewers and pretty toys.

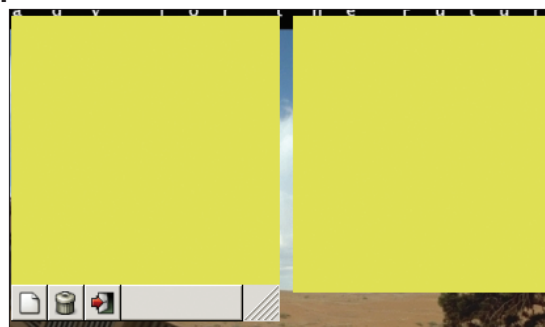


Figure 2: When the focus switches to an xpad window, the program immediately displays a toolbar.

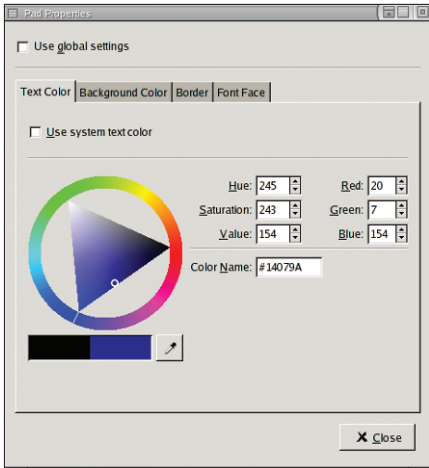


Figure 3: Using the configuration dialog to select the color and font for a note.

You can trash xpad notes by clicking the trashcan icon. The icon on the right of the toolbar quits xpad.

### Xpad Archives

To provide a genuine alternative to the real thing, xpad needs to store your notes when you quit the program. To do so, xpad stores the size, position, and content of any active notes, and writes these details to files below `~/.xpad`. Files with the *info* prefix contain data on the appearance and size of your sticky notes; files that start with *content* store your notes.

The next time you launch xpad, the program restores the state of your last session. The program has a useful mechanism to protect itself against data loss in case of a crash: it saves your notes while you are working, and not just when you quit the program.

### One for the Show

You can help really important notes stand out from the crowd by changing their appearance. Xpad provides a configuration dialog for each sticky note. To access the menu, select *Pad / Properties* in any xpad window. Disable *Use global settings* (see Figure 3) to tell the program not use the default settings for this note.

Four tabs allow you to define the appearance of a note. Use a color disk to select the *Text Color*. The *Background*

*Color* is set in the same way. The *Font Face* tab allows you to change the font type or size. You can also select *Border* to define a frame's color and width.

Again, you can use the color wheel to select a color. Select *Border width* to define the frame width in pixels. The *Padding* field specifies the distance between the text content and the window border. Xpad immediately applies your changes, allowing you to view the results while changing the configuration, and ensuring good readability (see Figure 4).

### Changing the Configuration

The traditional yellow color is not to everyone's liking, and the default font could do with being a bit larger for users with higher screen resolutions. Instead of changing each note, simply change the defaults to suit your requirements. Select *Edit / Preferences* in the dropdown menu to access the configuration options in the xpad control center.

The first four tabs: *Text Color*, *Background Color*, *Border*, and *Font Face* should be familiar from the configuration dialog for individual notes referred to earlier.

The *Options* tab allows you to change a number of general options. Check *Pads start sticky* to display any new notes on all your virtual desktops. Select *Pad / Sticky* to do this for a single note.

Disabling *Allow scrollbars* will prevent the program from adding scroll boxes. This allows the xpad note to

grow, if you enter more text than the default window size can display. *Allow window manager decorations* will apply the window decorations provided by the window manager to xpad windows.

*Window Manager Close Action* allows you to specify whether clicking on a close button in an xpad window will automatically quit xpad (*Close and save all pads*), simply close the current note (*Close and save pad*), or trash the note without prompting (*Destroy pad (no confirmation)*)).

The *Toolbar* tab provides access to the toolbar preferences. You can uncheck the *Auto-hide Toolbar* checkbox to display the toolbar at all times. If you prefer to do without the toolbar, you can instead uncheck *Enable toolbar*; the functions are still available in the dropdown menu.

The *Toolbar-Buttons* section allows you to specify the buttons displayed by xpad. Xpad displays tool tips on mouse over (see Figure 5). The brush icon, which allows you to click and delete the contents of a note, is extremely useful.

The hammer and screwdriver icons provide quick access to the configuration dialog. You can drag the buttons below *Unused Buttons* and drop them in the *Used Buttons* section of the toolbar. Use the same procedure to change the button order or remove individual buttons.

Clicking the button with the green down arrow reveals a special goodie for KDE users. It drops all your notes into the kicker area on the desktop (see Figure 6). You can then click on a note to reinstate it on the desktop.

Gnome versions 2.2 and 2.4 caused xpad no end of trouble in our labs. The xpad windows disappeared as they were supposed to, but failed to reappear. Gnome continued to display yellow xpad icons in the panel window list. Unfortunately, clicking on the icons did nothing at all, and the xpad notes simply refused to come out of hiding.



Figure 6: Xpad icons in the KDE kicker.



Figure 4: An xpad window with an orange background, a big blue font, and a border width of 7 pixels.

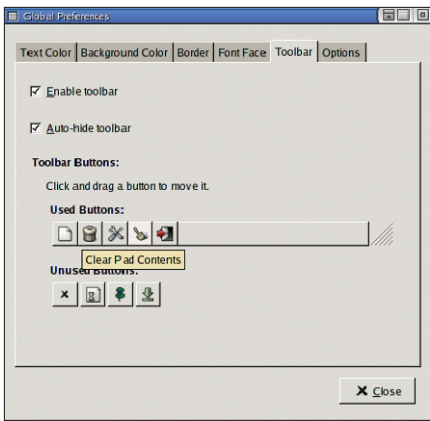


Figure 5: Select the buttons to be displayed in the toolbar.

### GLOSSARY

**strip:** A program that removes debugging symbols from libraries and programs, thus reducing the size of the target files. Many Makefiles offer an install-strip option besides the simple install to take care of this task while installing the program.