

The Sysadmin's Daily Grind: Webcleaner

Junk Zapper

Visual attacks by advertising banners and low to no-content animations have long found their way from porn sites to normal homepages. A powerful filter helps prevent Web surfers becoming square-eyed. **BY CHARLY KÜHNAST**



Spam does not have a monopoly on illicit advertising – a pity, some people might say. In fact, there are many websites that inundate users with junk adverts. Web pages flash and blink, reminding hapless Web surfers of Vegas by night. Although modern browsers can protect users from the most unfriendly pop-ups, and pop-unders, they typically cannot provide 100 percent protection against on-screen advertising. Enter the Webcleaner [1]. This HTTP proxy can almost arbitrarily manipulate the data stream passing through it. As a result, it restricts the whole zoo of website advertising to a minimum.

The current version 2.9 is available as a source code, Debian package, or even Windows download. You will need Python 2.3.1 or newer, the Python Imaging Library [2], the Python Cryptography Toolkit [3], Runit [4], and (surprise) GCC to compile the sources. After fulfilling all these dependencies, the build steps should be simple. Type:

```
./configure
make
```

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Controlling processes when you need more than just signals.

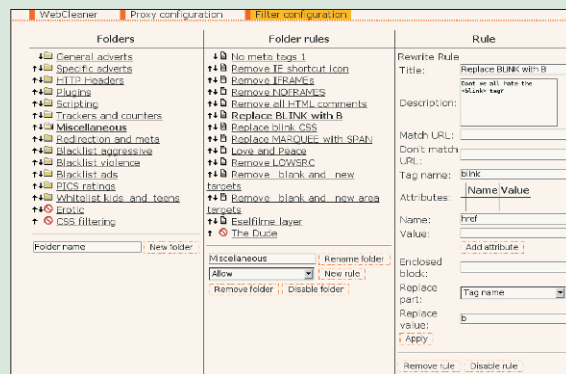


Figure 1: The highly configurable Webcleaner proxy filter separates the wheat from the chaff.

as a normal user, rather than root. This is the traditional approach to building C libraries. Then type:

```
python setup.py build
```

to compile the Python files. Followed by:

```
python setup.py ⤵
install --home $HOME
```

to complete the install. You are now ready to launch the program.

Feature-Rich

WebCleaner has such a wealth of features that it would be impossible to mention them all. The following list includes a few of the more noteworthy examples:

- Webcleaner reliably removes advertising banners. It removed genuine images only on rare occasions.
- It stops animated GIFs from fidgeting.
- If your browser does not have a pop-up filter, you will definitely appreciate this feature.

- Flash animations are more often used to polish up a website's appearance, rather than providing genuine content: "If you've got nothing to say, use Flash to say it". Webcleaner can oust Flash animations, if you say the word.
- `<blink>` and `<marquee>` both belong to the HTML from hell category. Webcleaner replaces this kind tag with something more conservative, such as ``, for example.
- Webcleaner can downscale large images – if you do not have a lot of bandwidth to play with, but do not completely want to do without images.
- The proxy can completely or partially filter meta tags, helping to protect surfers against unexpected redirects.

WebCleaner has everything you need in a departmental proxy. However, as fine-tuning the filter settings is a question of individual taste, it might be better-placed on an individual desktop. ■

INFO

- [1] Webcleaner: <http://webcleaner.sourceforge.net>
- [2] Python Imaging Library: <http://www.pythonware.com/products/pil/>
- [3] Python Cryptography Toolkit: <http://www.amk.ca/python/code/crypto.html>
- [4] Runit: <http://smarden.org/runit>

THE AUTHOR

Charly Kühnast is a Unix System Manager at the data-center in Moers, near Germany's famous River Rhine. His tasks include ensuring firewall security and availability and taking care of the DMZ (demilitarized zone).

