

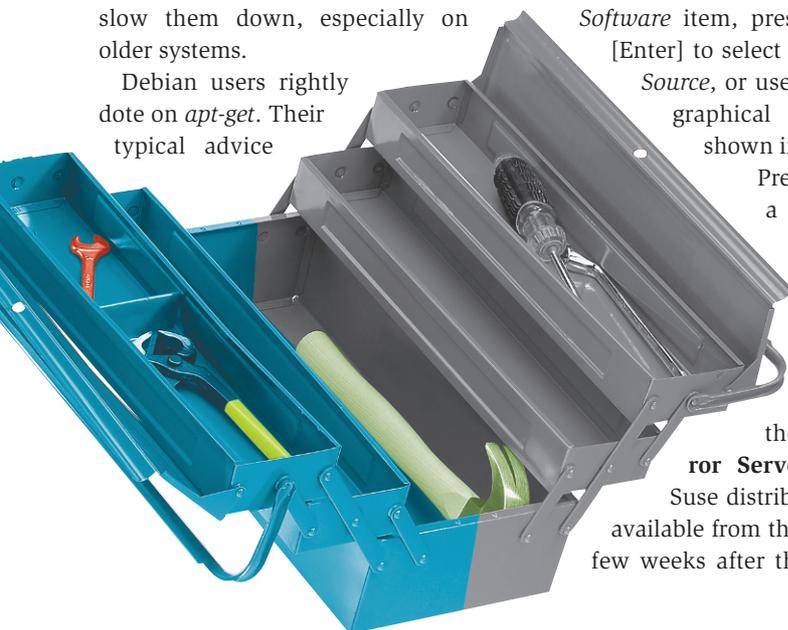
Like it or hate it. The Suse distribution tends to polarize, and one of the reasons for this is the distribution-specific system maintenance tool. YaST is a laconic comment and stands for “Yet Another Setup Tool”. Fans love it, but its license has been a source of irritation to Open Source purists (Suse’s new owner, Novell, has reacted to this criticism by announcing its intention to remove the source of this contention by placing YaST under the GPL this year) [1]), and many refuse to use the tool as it is too powerful, claiming that Suse users may learn how to manage a Suse Linux system, but not a Linux system.

YaST offers users who are leery of configuration files the ability to manage a Linux system without the obstacles that typically implies. This said, YaST is not specifically targeted at newbies. The dialogs will not mean much to users without appropriate IT and Linux skills. YaST’s tasks now include configuring most system components, ranging from user management, to setting up the network, configuring the GUI-based X-Window system, or adding peripheral devices.

Experienced Suse users appreciate YaST’s flexibility and prefer its text mode as an alternative to the GUI. Both interfaces uses the same accelerator keys, while the GUI also supports a mouse.

The thing that makes text mode so interesting is the speed with which it can handle tasks, once you get used to it (see Figure 1). Text mode appeals to users wanting to just install a new piece of software, as the YaST GUI can really slow them down, especially on older systems.

Debian users rightly dote on *apt-get*. Their typical advice



YaST in the command line

The Other Side

The Suse installation and configuration tool, YaST, has developed into a powerful utility over the years. Unfortunately, some of its useful features are so obscure that they are hardly used. **BY NICO LUMMA**

is: “Just type *apt-get install package-name!*” and Suse fans can actually do something like this. This implies that *Apt4RPM* [2] is the “Advanced Package Tool”. However, it is simply “apt” that is the “Advanced Package Tool”.

Before you take this option, you might just like to look into the option of using YaST more effectively. To do so, launch the program as the *root* user by typing *yast* in the command line.

Software Sources

When installing software, YaST assumes by default that you will want to access the media from which you originally installed the system. If you do not want to pile up the CDs or DVDs next to your computer and also have a quick Internet connection, can move the arrow key down to the *Software* item, press [Enter], and hit [Enter] to select *Change Installation Source*, or use the icons from the graphical YaST version as shown in Figure 2.

Pressing [Alt-H] opens a menu where you can use the arrow keys, and then hit [Enter], to select an alternative installation source, including the *ftp.suse.com Mirror Servers* (see Table 1). Suse distributions are typically available from the FTP servers just a few weeks after the release. You can

thus select *FTP...*, type *ftp.gwdg.de* as the *Server name*, and press [Tab] to move to the *Directory on this server* item. When you get there add *pub/linux/suse/ftp.suse.com/suse/* (without a leading /!)

Table 1: Mirror servers for *ftp.suse.com*

Protocol	Server name	Directory on server (for Suse Linux 9.0)
FTP	ftp.mirror.ac.uk	sites/ftp.suse.com/pub/
FTP	ftp.plig.org	pub/suse/
FTP	ftp.heanet.ie	mirrors/ftp.suse.com/pub/suse/
FTP	ftp.esat.net	mirrors/ftp.suse.com/pub/suse/
FTP	mirror.pacific.net.au	linux/suse/
FTP	ftp.mirror.nl	pub/mirror/suse/
FTP	mirrors.usc.edu	pub/linux/distributions/suse/
FTP	mirror.mcs.anl.gov	pub/suse/
FTP	mirror.storagetek.com	pub/systems/suse/
FTP	ftp-linux.cc.gatech.edu	pub/suse/suse/

to select the directory for your computer architecture (this is *i386/* for PCs) and the distribution version (such as *9.0*). Then press the [Tab] key again and hit [Enter] to confirm that you will be using the *Anonymous* user account (assuming that you do not have an account on the server). [Alt-O] adds the new installation source to the list.

If that does not keep you happy, you can always download a copy of the distribution to a server of your own and then use NFS, FTP, HTTP, or Samba to access the copy. To quit the dialog, press the [Tab] to access [Quit] and again press [Enter].

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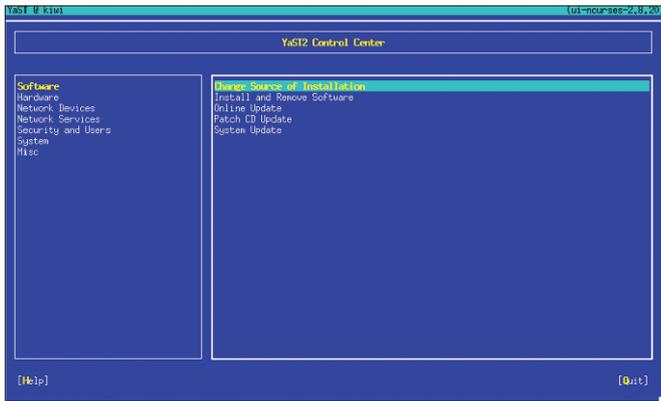


Figure 1: Not pretty, but a lot quicker – YaST in text mode.

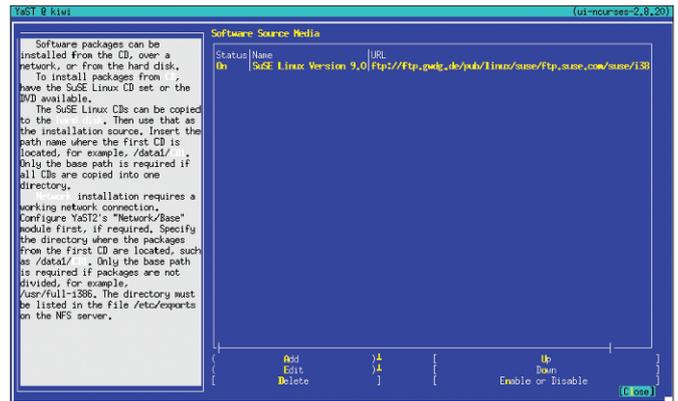


Figure 2: Adding a FTP server as an installation source.

Online Update

Users wanting to keep their systems up to date, both from a security point of view and in general, definitely need Internet access. There is a tool for this task: “YaST Online Update” (YOU), which is configurable below *Software | Online Update*. You need to select a mirror from the list provided by YaST below *Installation source* (see Figure 3).

Users with leased lines might like to hit [Tab] to move to *[Configure fully automatic update.]*, where they can configure YOU to tell YaST to automatically look for updates at a specific time every day.

Your other option is to select *[Continue]* in the dialog box shown in Figure 3 to perform a manual online update (see Figure 4). The command line version of *you* provides an even quicker way of doing this, but Suse 9.0 only has a GUI-based version of this tool.

New Software!

If YaST has details of an installation source, the *Software | Install or remove software* item allows you to select new packages, resolve dependencies, and add packages to your system. However, having said that, the procedure is slightly over the top, if you only need to install a single application.

There is a quicker way of doing this in the command line:

```
yast -i packagename
```

GLOSSARY

Mirror server: A computer that has a 1:1 mirror copy of the data on another server (*ftp.suse.com* in our example), and can thus load balance the main server.

In contrast to *rpm -i*, this command automatically resolves dependencies and, if needed, launches *SuSEConfig* to configure the package after the install.

yast -i is quick and it delivers the goods, but it is also error-prone. If the RPM package name is not spelt exactly right, nothing happens. A small, but extremely useful tool called *pin* can help. As the tool is included with the distribution, you can enter *yast -i pin* to install it, and then copy the *ARCHIVES.gz* file from

the mirror server, or your installation media, to the */var/lib/pin* directory.

Whenever you need to install a program (such as the file searching tool *locate*) without knowing the package that contains the program, you can ask *pin*, as shown in Listing 1. This example finds the *findutils-locate* package. You can then type *yast -i findutils-locate* to install the tool.

If the software you need is located in a messy package with dependencies that

Listing 1: *pin* finds software

```
01 kiwi:/home/nico # pin locate
02 pin 0.29 - package info for locate
03
04 -----
05 *** no rpm named locate installed
06 -----
07
08 -----
09 *** zgrep locate /var/lib/pin/ARCHIVES.gz
10 -----
11
12 --> ./CD1/suse/i586/findutils-locate-4.1.7-748.i586.rpm
```

Box 1: The alternative update tool – *fou4s*

If you do not like YOU, check out the “Fast Online Update for Suse”, an alternative tool. Although this is a “simple” shell script, the installation and application are extremely straightforward. That makes it well worth a try.

To use *fou4s*, first install the current RPM, which is available from <http://fou4s.gaugus.ch/> by typing *yast -i fou4s-0.x.y-z.noarch.rpm*. After you have completed this step, *fou4s --server* will output a list of the mirror servers, allowing you to choose a different server (if you are not happy with the default mirror at

ftp.gwdg.de).

fou4s -u --checkfou4s downloads the list of patches for the distribution, and at the same searches for *fou4s* updates. *fou4s -e* does a test run of the update, without downloading or installing anything. You need to run *fou4s -i* (as root) to update your system for real.

You can then copy the */usr/share/doc/packages/fou4s/fou4s-crontab* file to */etc/cron.d*. This configures a cronjob that regularly searches for updates and automatically installs them.

