Sunny Indoors

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

I had been reading a recent article in the Economist that was explaining about Open Source and how it could possibly be applied to other activities and spheres beyond software. Within the article it said that "most open-source software merely imitates existing commercial products". At this point I realized that the writer was not that familiar with all the different Linux projects. The rest of the article seemed quite good and informed, showing that it was not just copied from the back of a Microsoft PR statement.

This one sentence, however, bothered me.

Because we use Open Source, we are familiar with a huge variety of applications, architectures, and different ways to solve similar problems. Even something as fundamental these days as the desktop has a great range of possibilities. This is before you attempt to customize in any way the backgrounds, themes and actions. Although KDE and GNOME are the two most well know, the actual list of desktop environments is bigger than you might expect. That is in addition to the range of window managers that we can also choose.

If you are stuck with just a fixed corporate system, then I can understand your choice might be limited and that the range of products seems to just copy other popular commercial versions.

Where Open Source has a strength is that we have the freedom to choose other options. Yes, many versions and variations of commercial programs exist. We also have many thousands of unique programs that have no commercial counterpart. They may one day, they may not. It all depends on just how successful they are. Having the code means we can change things, be different, attempt a unique solution. True the majority do not work and fade into obscurity, but the potential for someone to create a perfect answer does exist, and we should all try to ensure that this is not lost amongst all the other projects.

It is a fine summer's evening. One of those days where not only was the sky cloudless, but it seemed as though all those fantastic childhood summers were rolled into one. A day when I should have been outside enjoying the weather rather than inside playing with another computer. However, the day has not been wasted. I cannot remember a day when I have had so much fun on a computer. The reason for this is that I have been playing with two new distributions. The first is called Dyne:bolic and is a live CD style system. What makes this so good it that the author has thought about the collection of applications. It acts as a complete multimedia studio along with all the usual tools and gems that you need. It has been such fun that I am now willing to devote a complete new machine to it.

If that is not enough, I have also discovered the joys of Feather Linux. At under 64MBytes in size, it easily fits onto a USB memory stick leaving room for personal files and programs. Although it is tiny, I cannot believe just how many applications have been hidden within it. It is a shame that the author does not list them all on the project's homepage.

The evening sun is calling to go outside with a good glass of wine and some excellent food, but I have just found another directory of applications so it looks like I may be staying indoors for a while longer.

Happy summer coding!

John Southern
Editor