

Freemind IDEAS TAKE SHAPE

MindMap tools are currently enjoying enormous popularity, since they allow collected data to be shown and edited in a tree structure. Thanks to Freemind, Linux users need no longer be left in the cold. Sebastian Eschweiler finds out why

On the CD
Freemind is included on the coverdisc.

Following installation of the Java toolkit for Linux previously mentioned, it now seems like a good idea to test them. Since Freemind is a Java program, this brief article thus does two jobs at once: firstly it shows how Java programs can be made to run, and secondly an interesting and useful tool is introduced.

Installation

Freemind can be found at <http://freemind.sourceforge.net>. Downloads can be obtained as either a tar.gz or zip archives. Once the package has landed on your hard disk, the rest of the installation can be completed in just a few steps. You will need a JRE of at least version 1.2 on your computer. If you have, then all you will need is to create a directory and to unpack the Freemind archive to it. Care should be taken here, as the archive does not create its own directory automatically. So you should only perform the unpacking in a subdirectory you have created for this purpose.

```
mkdir freemind
mv freemind-bin-0_4.tar.gz freemind
cd freemind
tar xvzf freemind-bin-0_4.tar.gz
```

(The zip archive is unpacked in the same way with "unzip ...".) After these few steps the program is ready to go and can be invoked using the command

```
java -jar ./lib/freemind.jar &
```

Alternatively, the shell script *freemind.sh* can also be used, which contains the same command.

Usage

The program is very simple to use and largely intuitive. After making a new MindMap, you will first see a central root element with the wording "New MindMap". Starting from this node, you can now start to build your own personal MindMap. This is simplest if you use the pop-down menu of the node which you wish to edit/extend. The pop-down menu contains four sub-items: "Node", "Branch", "Edge" and "Patterns".

In the Node submenu you will find all the settings relating to the individual nodes. Here you can add new nodes and navigate in the structure of the existing elements. Branch offers you all relevant settings for formatting the text style of the individual nodes – so for example you can select bold or italic highlighting. The Edge submenu defines the formatting of the individual node connections, and finally, in Patterns you will find defined formatting templates, which can be applied directly to the various nodes.

Since the project is still at an early stage of development, there are still a few bugs in it, such as the fact that selected formatting is not always displayed or applied directly. This will surely improve in the subsequent versions. The print function still has a few bugs, too, and does not always deliver perfect results.

What the future holds

Apart from getting rid of the individual bugs, many additional features are planned for future versions. So a complete file browser will be integrated, an HTML/XML editor developed and an applet to display the MindMaps in the browser will be added. There are also plans to develop a MindMap server, so that it will be possible to work together with several users on a MindMap over a network. All in all, it can be said that Freemind, with all the planned features, is a highly promising project.

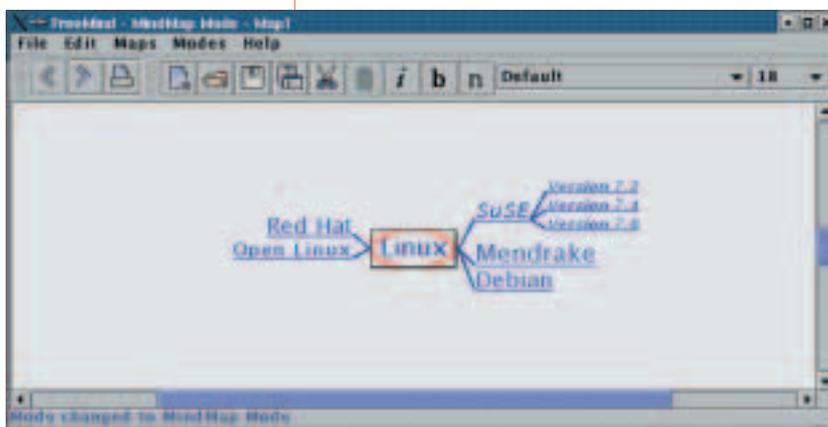


Figure 1: Illustration of a simple MindMap