



# OTTAWA MERRY CHRISTMAS PC NEWS

Volume 25, Number 10

December 2008

## PRODUCT REVIEW

### Exploring Linux—Part 11 *by Alan German*

Over the past few months I have been using Ubuntu 8.04 in a dual-boot environment with Windows Vista. Ubuntu and its embedded applications, notably the Firefox web browser, the Evolution mailer, and the Open Office suite have served my needs admirably. True, there is some Windows' software, such as a proprietary GPS mapping program, that I can't run under Linux (not even by using WINE – but that's another story), hence the Vista partition on my hard disk. But, otherwise, Linux has the tools to do everything I need.

Ubuntu 8.04 is also a version with long term support (LTS), meaning that it will be supported for the next three years, i.e. until 2011. So, why did I need to download and try Version 8.10 that was released at the end of October? The answer, of course, is because 8.10 is a new version. And, because every recent version of Ubuntu Linux has provided some new key features, the latest kid on the block has to be worth a look. Or is it?

Downloading the software was no problem. The `wget` command, used to obtain Version 8.04 (see: [http://www.opcug.ca/public/Reviews/linux\\_part10.htm](http://www.opcug.ca/public/Reviews/linux_part10.htm)), proved equally capable of fetching its new cousin, this time from a server at the University of Waterloo.

I then created a bootable CD-ROM with the Brasero Disc Burning utility. This CD burner first came with Ubuntu 8.04 but, since I have always used Roxio's Media Creator on my Windows' plat-

form, I hadn't previously tried this Linux program. It turns out that Brasero is extremely easy to use. The user interface sports just five options: audio, video and data file projects, copying a disk, and burning an image. After putting a blank disk in the drive, and selecting burn an image, the setup dialogue automatically selects the blank CD, and allows browsing for the ISO image file to be used as the data source. Click burn, and the disk creation process proceeds, with a final option to verify the burn. Making a bootable CD with Brasero? Nothing could be simpler. This is one slick little utility.

The Live-CD duly booted Ubuntu Version 8.10 on my desktop machine. But, this is my wife's lifeline to the world wide web. A friend jokingly refers to the machine as the "Toaster". It's an E-mail and web browser "appliance". It just has to work. It can't go wrong. Nothing must happen that might affect its functionality. Consequently, making any change whatsoever to this machine is strictly verboten. So, I'm a huge fan of LTS versions of Ubuntu, and the Toaster is running Ubuntu 8.04. (But, don't tell my wife that the machine does receive regular software updates – i.e. changes! – as part of this process.)

Now, life for some of us would be boring if we were stuck with essentially the same software for three years. So, we obviously must have a laptop tucked away somewhere that regularly gets used as a test bed for new stuff. So what if we overwrite the master boot

record by installing a new operating system? Who cares if a new program consistently crashes the system? We just reload a backup image of the disk and we're back in business in minutes. Well, usually it only takes minutes. Sometimes... but, that too is another story.

So, no problem trying out Ubuntu 8.10. Stuff the CD into the laptop's drive and boot the machine. Except that the laptop won't boot from the CD. The process starts off fine. The installer asks if I want to try Ubuntu without making any changes to my hard disk, which is usually a safe bet. But then the display reads: "invalid compressed format (err=1) – System halted". Clearly, this CD is not going to be loading Version 8.10 into memory any time soon!

Then I recalled a similar problem that had occurred previously, and the sage advice from Morris Turpin to burn the CD more slowly. Back to Brasero, look at the properties of the "Select a disk to write to" option, and find that maximum

*(Continued on page 4)*

#### Inside this issue:

<i>Calendar / Coming Up / Raffle</i>	2
<i>Review: Exploring Linux—Part 11</i>	1, 4
<i>Review Update: Notepad++ Plug-in</i>	3
<i>OPCUG's Outreach Programme</i>	3
<i>OPCUG Free Software Guide—Part 1</i>	5
<i>Contact Information</i>	6

Next Meeting: **WEDNESDAY, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008**

# December Raffle

Our speaker, Harley Bloom of Bloom MicroTech (<http://www.bmtnet.com/>), will generously provide the raffle prize at the December meeting. Harley is keeping it a secret, and since he will be bringing a Santa bag full of goodies for his presentation, the raffle prize promises not to be disappointing. So why not come by and see if you can win yourself a Christmas gift?

Tickets are still only \$1 for one, \$2 for three, or \$5 for ten.



## Coming Up...

On December 10th, Harley Bloom will present his 10th annual Christmas gift show. Harley and some of his staff from Bloom MicroTech (<http://www.bmtnet.com/>) will be showing some of the computing gear that should be on your shopping list, ranging from stocking stuffers to full systems for home office or gaming.

Always a really big hit, don't be surprised if Harley gives us a sneak preview of a few holiday specials.

### Prize Winners

At our November meeting, the door prize winner of McAfee Internet Security Suite was **Gail Eagen**.

January 14: **Speaker:** Rick Claus, IT Pro Advisor, Microsoft Canada **Topic:** Microsoft PhotoSynth

February 11: **Speaker:** TBA **Topic:** Tax Software

May 13: **Speaker:** Chris Taylor, OPCUG **Topic:** "How the Web Works"

June 10: **Pizza night, Speaker** Roger Wambolt, Corel Corporation **Topic:** Video Editing

## 2008 CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and Venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, December 10 <sup>th</sup>	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the <b>Canada Museum of Science and Technology</b> , 1867 St. Laurent Blvd. <a href="http://www.science-tech.nmstc.ca/english/index.cfm">http://www.science-tech.nmstc.ca/english/index.cfm</a>
Beginners' SIG	Wednesday, December 10 <sup>th</sup>	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Linux SIG	Wednesday, December 10 <sup>th</sup>	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
PIG SIG (Wing SIG West)	Wednesday, December 10 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 p.m. (after all other SIGs) at Chances "R" restaurant, Baseline Rd. at Woodroffe Ave. (College Square Shopping Centre)
Beer BOF (Wing SIG East)	Wednesday, December 10 <sup>th</sup>	10:00 p.m. (after all other SIGs) at Liam Maguire's, St. Laurent Blvd. at Innes Rd.

Please note that unless otherwise noted, SIGs meet at 9:00 p.m. (immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting).

## REVIEW UPDATE

### Another Plus for Notepad++ *by Alan German*

**W**hen I wrote about Notepad++ (<http://www.opcug.ca/public/Reviews/notepadplus.htm>) as an alternative to Windows' Notepad, I noted that one drawback of the latter was the lack of a spell checker. However, what I failed to mention was that, although Notepad++ has an icon for spell checking, and an associated menu item under Plugins, you have to install the spell checking add-on in order to make this function work.

In fact, when you click on spell check, a pop-up dialogue box indicates that "GNU Aspell and/or dictionaries are missing", with a note that the files can be downloaded from <http://aspell.net/win32/>. This link takes you to a web page that has both the main GNU Aspell program and a variety of dictionaries in different languages.

Getting the spell checker to run is simply a matter of downloading the program installer and one of the dictionaries (e.g. English), both of which are executable files, and then running the main setup file followed by the dictionary file. Now, when you click on spell check in Notepad++, a dialogue box will open up showing any misspelled words in your document, or indicating that the spell check has successfully completed.

One minor issue I have with Aspell is that it creates a TmpInstall directory under the directory that holds the installation files, and doesn't clean this up once the installation has completed. No big deal in these days of huge hard drives, but an untidy outcome for what should be a straightforward process.

#### Bottom Line

Notepad++ Version 5.0.3 (Open source)

Don Ho

<http://notepad-plus.sourceforge.net>

GNU Aspell for Windows Version 0.50.3 (Open source)

Kevin Atkinson and Thorsten Maerz

<http://aspell.net/win32/>

---

## OPCUG's Outreach Programme

**A**s you may be aware, OPCUG did not hold a fall workshop in 2008. Instead, we have been providing presentations on a variety of computer-related topics at branches of the Ottawa Public Library. To date, Chris Taylor and Alan German have given talks on computer security, Linux, digital cameras, wireless networking, HTML coding, and Vista.

The Board of Directors is looking for additional speakers. Do you have a presentation that you would like to give? Also, some of our past presentations are "ready to go" as finished PowerPoint files. You would be welcome to use this material if we have a topic that interests you. We could also use some volunteers to act as backup speakers just in case one of our main presenters is indisposed. So, take a look at our list of past presentations at <http://opcug.ca/public/history/Presentations.htm> and see if anything appeals.

The presentations themselves are not too onerous. The audience tends to be around 10-20 individuals, most of whom are at a novice level and eager to obtain information. The sessions are scheduled for 90 minutes, usually starting at 7 p.m. The library can provide a laptop computer and an LCD projector to display PowerPoint presentations. We also have a few final slides providing an overview of OPCUG, and promotional brochures as free handouts.

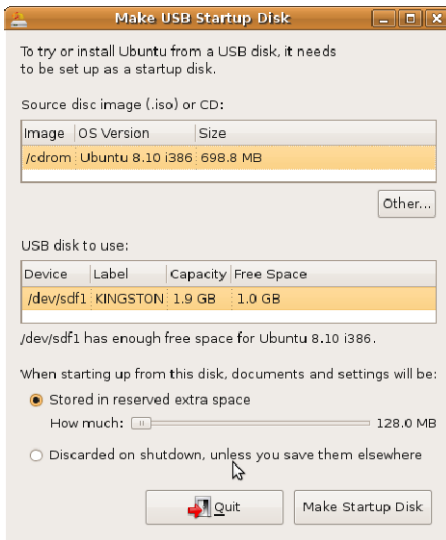
If you are interested in participating in our club's current outreach programme, contact any member of the Board or send an E-mail to: [chris.taylor@opcug.ca](mailto:chris.taylor@opcug.ca)

## Linux—Part 11 *(Continued from page 1)*

speed is set as the default for burning speed. Change this to 4.0x (CD), the lowest available speed, and burn a new CD. The second CD shows no errors when the disk integrity is checked, and the laptop boots into Ubuntu 8.10. Success!

Now, that little glitch could have been a show stopper. But it turns out that there is yet another workaround, and one that provides a new and very useful option for Ubuntu Linux users. While sifting through the Linux menus, on the Live-CD version that was running (happily) on the Toaster, I came across System – Administration – Create a USB Startup Disk. Ubuntu 8.10 now features a utility to install the Linux distro onto a USB memory stick.

Plug in a blank USBkey, run the above-noted menu option, and the installer's



dialogue box pops up. All you have to do is to select the ISO file as the source, and the USBkey where the startup system is to be created. The utility will issue a warning if there is insufficient space available on the memory stick.

Since the Ubuntu distro comes loaded with a host of ready-to-go applications, such as OpenOffice, the installer also wants to know what it should do with files produced by the up-coming Live-USB system. By default, you can reserve 128 MB, or more, on the USBkey as a storage area for such files, or you can have them discarded when Linux is

shut down. Once you have made this selection, and pressed the Make Startup Disk button, files are transferred to the USBkey and, in less than four minutes, you have a bootable USB disk.

Ubuntu 8.10 boots from the USBkey, just as it would from a CD. (And, yes, my laptop would boot from my USBkey, so this could also have saved the day!) You get the option to try the new system from the Live-USB, and you can install it onto the hard drive from an icon on the desktop. You also have a complete Linux system, with all the regular applications, on a USB memory stick. You can boot from this USB on a machine that isn't yours, use the Linux apps on the stick, and save your data files back onto the USB disk in the reserved memory space. A completely self-contained, portable Linux system. Neat trick!

So, apart from being able to create a bootable USBkey, what else is new in Ubuntu 8.10? Well, OpenOffice is a bit of a disappointment. It would appear that Version 3 was released too late to make the cut for the current distro and the version provided is actually 2.4.1. No big deal, since there doesn't seem to be a lot of difference in any of the recent versions of OpenOffice, at least not unless you need support for Microsoft's new (Word 2007) docx file format, which is a feature of OpenOffice 3.

But, on the other hand, there is a shiny new release - Version 2.6 - of the GIMP image editor (<http://gimp.org/release-notes/gimp-2.6.html>). A quick look suggests that there may be a bit of a learning curve involved here. Two more-or-less familiar toolbars, one for actions like rectangle select, the pencil and brush tools, and a second for attributes such as the size, shape and colour of a brush, snap to the left and right sides of the screen respectively, while a main menu window (File, Edit...) opens up in the centre of the screen. The "Acquire" menu option, previously useful for running a scanner or acting as a screen image grabber, is nowhere in plain sight. Yup, this one is going to need a bit of work.

Otherwise, at first blush, apart from a somewhat darker-brown main screen,

with a highly stylized Ibex (the current release is named Imperial Ibex), Ubuntu 8.10 looks a lot like its predecessor. But time, and a lot more use, will show if there are any must-have features in the new software.

Certainly, if you visit Ubuntu's web site (<http://www.ubuntu.com/news/ubuntu-8.10-desktop>) and look at the press release relating to the new version, you will find more features listed. These include improvements to the network manager to detect and connect to 3G networks; guest sessions allowing you to lock down a session so that someone else can use your system without compromising your programs or data; access to on-line video, radio and podcasts from the BBC; and Gnome 2.24, the newest version of this desktop environment.

So, the latest version of Ubuntu is now available. One new feature that may be useful to a number of users is the ability to create a bootable version of the operating system, and its associated applications, on a USB memory stick. If you want the newest version of OpenOffice, you will have to wait for an update, or download and install Version 3 of this suite yourself. But, you do get a new version of the GIMP, with a somewhat modified user interface to get used to. Hey – no complaints – life would be boring if we didn't have the odd new toy to play with!

### Bottom Line

Ubuntu 8.10 (Open source)  
Canonical Ltd.  
<http://www.ubuntu.com/>



*Imperial Ibex desktop*

# OPCUG Free Software Guide—Part 1

Compiled by Alan German

**T**his guide features an annotated list of free computer programs. The software mentioned has not been reviewed (except where noted) nor have any tests necessarily been conducted. Consequently, no guarantees are provided that the individual programs will perform as described. Rather the list of available software is provided for the information of our members who may find one or more of the programs useful. If you try one of the listed items, you are encouraged to share your experience, good or bad, by providing a brief review of the program for a future issue of the newsletter.

## WinDirStat (Windows Directory Statistics)

WinDirStat is a disk usage statistics viewer and cleanup tool for all versions of Microsoft Windows. It shows disk, file and directory sizes in a treelist, as well as graphically in a treemap, much like KdirStat (Linux/Unix) or SequoiaView (Windows). WinDirStat is free software published under the GNU General Public License (GPL).

Current Release: Version 1.1.2 (Sep-07).

Web Site: <http://windirstat.info>

## IrfanView

IrfanView is a graphic file viewer for Windows. It's small, very fast, and is released as freeware for non-commercial use. Some of its many features include support for multiple file formats (e.g. GIF, JPG, RAW), thumbnail previews, image editing, batch processing and slideshows.

Current Release: Version 4.20 (Jul-08).

Web Site: <http://www.irfanview.com/>

Previous reviews: IRFANVIEW32 Graphics Utility, Dave Burnside, <http://opcug.ca/public/Reviews/Irfanview32.html>

## Defraggler

From Piriform, the company that brought you CCleaner, Defraggler is a file defragmentation tool. It differs from other defrag tools on the market, by enabling you to quickly and simply defrag the files you want to, without having to process the whole drive. Defraggler is completely free for both corporate and individual use.

Current Release: Version 1.02.085 (Aug-08)

Web Site: <http://www.defraggler.com/>

## VirtuaWin (The Virtual Desktop Manager)

Tired of Linux geeks boasting about their multiple desktops? Now you can have the same functionality under Windows. VirtuaWin is a virtual desktop manager that lets you organize applications over several virtual desktops (workspaces). VirtuaWin is a freely distributed program and is licensed under the GNU GPL.

Current Release: Version 4.0.1 (Apr-08).

Web Site: <http://virtuawin.sourceforge.net/>

## ZoneAlarm

ZoneAlarm Free Firewall blocks hackers from infiltrating your home PC by hiding your computer from unsolicited network traffic. By detecting and preventing intrusions, the firewall keeps your PC free from viruses that slow down performance, and spyware that steals your personal information, passwords, and financial data. ZoneAlarm Free Firewall is free for individual use.

Current Release: Version 7.1.254.000 (Aug-08)

Web Site: [http://www.zonealarm.com/store/content/catalog/products/zonealarm\\_free\\_firewall.jsp](http://www.zonealarm.com/store/content/catalog/products/zonealarm_free_firewall.jsp)

Previous reviews: Personal Firewalls Revisited, Chris Taylor, <http://www.opcug.ca/public/Reviews/zonealar.htm>

## CDBurnerXP

CDBurnerXP is a free application to burn CD's and DVD's, including Blu-Ray and HD-DVD's. It also includes the ability to burn and create ISO's, as well as having a multi-language interface. Everyone, even companies, can use it for free. It does not include adware or similar malicious components.

Current Release: Version 4.2.1.919 (Aug-08)

Web Site: <http://www.cdburnerxp.se/>

## EditPad Lite

EditPad Lite is a general-purpose text editor, designed to be small and compact, yet offer all the functionality you expect from a basic text editor. EditPad Lite works with Windows NT4, 98, 2000, ME, XP and Vista. The program is free for non-commercial use.

Current Release: Version 6.4.3 (Aug-08)

Web Site: <http://www.editpadpro.com/editpadlite.html>

## VLC Media Player

VLC media player is a highly portable multimedia player for audio and video files, and various streaming protocols. It supports a large number of formats (including MPEG-1, MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DivX, and MP3, as well as DVD's, VCD's) without the need for additional codecs. VLC media player is open source software released under the GNU GPL.

Current Release: Version 0.8.6i (Jul-08)

Web Site: <http://www.videolan.org/>



# OTTAWA PC NEWS

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and August. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members.

Member participation is encouraged. If you would like to contribute an article to Ottawa PC News, please submit it to the newsletter editor (contact info below). Deadline for submissions is three Sundays before the next General Meeting.

## Group Meetings

OPCUG meets on the second Wednesday in the month, except July and August, at the Canada Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups go until 10 p.m.

<b>Fees:</b>	OPCUG membership:	\$25 per year
<b>Mailing Address:</b>	3 Thatcher St., Nepean, Ontario, K2G 1S6	
<b>Web address:</b>	<a href="http://opcug.ca">http://opcug.ca</a>	
<b>Bulletin board</b> — PUB II (BBS)	<a href="http://opcug.ca/default.htm">http://opcug.ca/default.htm</a>	

President and System Administrator	<b>Chris Taylor</b>	<a href="mailto:chris.taylor@opcug.ca">chris.taylor@opcug.ca</a>	613-727-5453
Meeting Coordinator	<b>Bob Gowan</b>	<a href="mailto:bob.gowan@opcug.ca">bob.gowan@opcug.ca</a>	
Treasurer	<b>Alan German</b>	<a href="mailto:alan.german@opcug.ca">alan.german@opcug.ca</a>	
Secretary	<b>Gail Eagen</b>	<a href="mailto:gail.eagen@opcug.ca">gail.eagen@opcug.ca</a>	
Membership Chairman	<b>Mark Cayer</b>	<a href="mailto:mark.cayer@opcug.ca">mark.cayer@opcug.ca</a>	613-823-0354
Newsletter	<b>Brigitte Lord</b> (editor/layout) <b>(Mr.) Jocelyn Doire</b> (e-mail distribution)	<a href="mailto:brigitte.lord@opcug.ca">brigitte.lord@opcug.ca</a> <a href="mailto:jocelyn.doire@opcug.ca">jocelyn.doire@opcug.ca</a>	
Public Relations	<b>Morris Turpin</b>	<a href="mailto:PR@opcug.ca">PR@opcug.ca</a>	613-729-6955
Facilities	<b>Bob Walker</b>		613-489-2084
Webmaster	<b>Brigitte Lord</b>	<a href="mailto:opcug-webmaster@opcug.ca">opcug-webmaster@opcug.ca</a>	
Privacy Director	<b>Wayne Houston</b>	<a href="mailto:privacy@opcug.ca">privacy@opcug.ca</a>	
Director without Portfolio	<b>Don Chiasson</b>		
Beginners' SIG	<b>Chris Taylor</b>	<a href="mailto:chris.taylor@opcug.ca">chris.taylor@opcug.ca</a>	613-727-5453
IT-Pro SIG	<b>Vacant</b>		
Linux / Open-Source Software SIG	<b>Don Chiasson</b>		
Special Events Coordinator	<b>Don Chiasson</b>		

© OPCUG 2008.

Reprint permission is granted\* to non-profit organizations, provided credit is given to the author and *The Ottawa PC News*. OPCUG requests a copy of the newsletter in which reprints appear.

\*Permission is granted only for articles written by OPCUG members, and which are not copyrighted by the author.



## Reduce, Re-use, Recycle

**B**ring your old computer books, software, hardware, and paraphernalia you want to GIVE AWAY to the General Meetings, and leave them at the table near the auditorium's entrance. Please limit magazines to publication dates of less than two years old.

You may TAKE AWAY any items of use to you. Stuff left over at the end of the meeting will be sent to... the recycle bin.

