



OTTAWA

Happy New Year!

PC NEWS

Volume 31, Number 1

January 2014

Product Review

Exploring Linux – Part 26 by Alan German

Ubuntu 10.04 (Lucid Lynx), a long term support (LTS) version, reached end-of-life status on May 9, 2013 which essentially meant that there would be no further security updates for this version of the operating system. However, the good news was that Version 12.04 LTS (Precise Pangolin) was to have support through April, 2017.

My plan, therefore, was to switch my production machine to the new Precise release. In preparation, I had been running this version of Ubuntu on my development machine for the previous year, ever since its initial release on April 12, 2012. While the new OS had run in this manner without incident, installing Precise on my production machine resulted in a litany of problems, all seemingly related to incompatibilities with the AMD/ATI HD 6450 video card installed in the desktop computer.

The really interesting feature was that booting the desktop from a live-CD (actually a live-USB)

produced a stable system that performed perfectly normally. The troubles only began once I installed the new operating system to the machine's hard drive.

The first odd behaviour was after rebooting immediately following the installation procedure. The machine booted into a blank, light-purple screen – not a good sign! Using a combination of reboot and recovery options, I was eventually able to bring the screen into a “split” condition – with the left third being displayed on the right of the screen, and the right two-thirds showing on the left. Not only was the effect disconcerting, the entire display was constantly flickering, so that reading and responding to prompts in this mode was somewhat challenging!

To cut a long story short, the main fix for the non-booting/odd-display problem proved to be to install the proprietary AMD Catalyst Driver for Radeon. However, one further issue was that subsequent updates to the xserver files broke the Catalyst driver which

then had to be reinstalled, but this process did produce a more-or-less stable system.

The final straw came when, following a cold boot, a series of short black lines was left dancing across the top portion of the screen. Another user had noted this problem and his workaround was to log off the system and then immediately log back on again! Amazingly, this worked for me also; however, I didn't consider this to be a viable solution. Furthermore, the dashed lines were occasionally displayed on login – but only occasionally. So much for computers being consistent, logical devices!

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Next Meeting: **WEDNESDAY, January 8th, 2014**

January Raffle

TBA

Check the OPCUG website for updates at <http://opcug.ca>. Click on MEETINGS.

December Prize Winners

Congratulations to **Bob Walker** who won our raffle prize of a Microsoft LifeCam VX-6000, courtesy of the Microsoft MVP program, at our December 2013 meeting.

Many thanks to Microsoft for the prize donation.

Of course, Bob wasn't the only winner. Our presenter for the evening, **Edward Lee of QNX Software**, decided to play Santa. Thanks to Edward and QNX for the various items we had to choose from as door prizes as well as the QNX pens that most of the attendees got to take home.

What, with the recent announcement that Canada Post will be increasing postal rates by as much as 33% while doing away with "at the door" mail delivery ... now might be a good time to switch to electronic delivery of the OPCUG newsletter. Have a look at [page 3](#) and the [back page](#) of this issue for information on how to switch to getting your newsletter in text or PDF format.

Coming Up...

Wednesday, January 8th, 2014

Speaker: Mark Shainblum

Topic: My Word! Free, low-cost and specialized alternatives to that word processor

(subject to change):

- 1- General-purpose word processors (All free)
- 2- Online word processors (All free)
- 3- Word processors for authors and scriptwriters (Some free, some commercial)
- 4- Word processors for science and academia (Some free, some commercial)

OPCUG is seeking presenters for future meetings. Could you give a presentation, or do you know someone who could, on generalogy or video gaming? Please contact Jocelyn Doire (jocelyn.doire@opcug.ca) if you can help. ([see article page 3](#))

2014 CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and Venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, January 13 th	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the Canada Museum of Science and Technology , 1867 St. Laurent Blvd. http://www.sciencetech.technomuses.ca/english/index.cfm
Beginners' SIG	Wednesday, January 13 th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Linux / Open Source SIG	Wednesday, January 13 th	Immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting.
Beer BOF (Wing SIG East)	Wednesday, January 13 th	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).

CLUB LIFE

Postal Rate Increase

Canada Post has announced substantial increases in postal fees commencing in 2014. Even though the club purchases stamps in bulk, the new rates will mean that our expenses on postage will increase by 35%.

The vast proportion of our mailing costs relate to distributing printed copies of the newsletter to those members who have not opted to receive the electronic version (PDF or TXT). A ten-year average shows that printing and distribution costs for the hard-copy newsletter account for \$2400 or 44% of our total annual expenditures. This is a staggering amount, considering that: (a) we are a computer club and, (b) that our newsletter is readily available as an electronic file.

Consequently, your Board of Directors *strongly* encourages those members who still receive hard-copy newsletters to switch to the electronic version. The advantages of the electronic newsletter include faster delivery, full-colour, and hot links to web-based material.

It's really easy to subscribe. Just send an E-mail message to listserv@opcug.ca and in the body of the message type: subscribe newsletterpdf

Finally, and *most importantly*, send an E-mail message to the Membership Secretary (mark.cayer@opcug.ca) and tell Mark that you no longer wish to receive a copy of the newsletter by regular mail.

Presenters Needed

With the new 2013-2014 season, the OPCUG is seeking presenters for future meetings. Could you give a presentation, or do you know someone who could, on genealogy or video gaming? Please contact Jocelyn Doire (Jocelyn.Doire@opcug.ca) if you can help. The OPCUG has a proud history of over 30 years of non-stop presentations, let's keep up with that fine tradition and all make a concerted effort. We just added a new web page to the OPCUG's web site under the "Speakers" tab that has a lot information about the OPCUG, its meetings, contact info and the benefits to speakers, so don't hesitate to consult it and let any potential presenters know about it.

Thanks in advance to all.

*Jocelyn Doire,
OPCUG Meeting Coordinator*

Exploring Linux—Part 26 *(Continued from page 1)*

The bottom line turned out to be that no solution to this specific issue was forthcoming from Google searches; error reporting to both AMD and Ubuntu was both frustrating and fruitless; and dancing lines before my eyes, even only on occasion, were completely unacceptable. So, the ultimate solution was – move to a new distro!

Enter Linux Mint 13 (Maya) with the Mate user interface. Mint 13 is a derivative of Ubuntu 12.04 (Precise Pangolin) and hence is an LTS version with support through 2017. Furthermore, because it is based on Precise, it is a reasonably familiar operating system to both use and troubleshoot. In addition, Mate is interesting because it can be configured to look very much like Gnome. This is perhaps not surprising since Mate is a fork of Gnome2.

Despite nominally being based on Precise, Mint 13 installed and ran flawlessly on my desktop machine. Ah! – hints of the good old days – when successful use of a live-CD preceded an uncomplicated installation to the hard drive.

The as-installed display is somewhat different than the Gnome Classic under Ubuntu. In particular, the control panel runs along the bottom of the screen rather than across the top. The wallpaper is clearly different and, by default, on-screen icons indicate any disks that are automatically mounted at boot-up.



The good news is that the layout of the panel is customizable. It can easily be moved (Right-click – Properties – General – Orientation) to the top of the screen, or a new top panel added if so desired. In addition, a “custom menu bar” can be added to the panel that restores the familiar Applications – Places – System menu options.

The icons for the mounted disks can be eliminated by changing the desktop settings (Main Menu – System – Control Center – Desktop Settings – Mounted Volumes). Even Mint's main menu can be removed from the panel to really give the screen a truly Gnome-like appearance.

All of my favourite Linux applications, including inosync, Back In Time, BleachBit, DOSbox, Kalarm, and KeePassX work flawlessly under Mint. The default file manager, Caja, looks and feels very much like Nautilus; however, I did replace Pluma, the default text editor, with the more familiar gedit. This wasn't because Pluma functioned in any significantly different manner, it was purely that I couldn't get used to typing “pluma” instead of “gedit” in Terminal commands!

Ubuntu, with its insistence on the Unity interface, and I have been moving apart in recent years. Mint, with its Mate interface, currently seems to offer me the best of all worlds. So, for now at least, I have a new favourite Linux distro.



ARTICLE

Browsing the Library's Electronic Shelves by Alan German

I was sad when my local branch of the Ottawa Public Library (OPL) no longer had any computer magazines on the racks, and was somewhat bemused when I later discovered copies of the same publications on the shelves of another branch. However, my disappointment/joy were both short lived when, on reading the then-current issue of *PC World*, I learned that the print edition of the magazine was being discontinued.

This got me thinking. If hard copy computer magazines were becoming a thing of the past, could I access the electronic versions through the library in much the same way as is possible with certain E-books. The answer – at least for *PC Magazine* – is yes, but actually locating the E-magazine is not without its challenges.

To cut a long story – and the seemingly complex search pattern that seems to be necessary – short, the answer is to log on to OPL's web site, hover the mouse over the "Collections" graphic, and select "Magazines and online resources". Now, scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on "Zinio".

As the instructions indicate, you will be required to create a Zinio account (in addition to your library account). This consists of a valid E-mail address as the userid (and verification tool) and a user-defined password. Make a note of your login credentials. It turns out that these will be needed – often! – as we will find in due course.

Once you have received a confirmation E-mail message that your account with the E-magazine's publisher has been established, you can follow the instruction for returning users to access your now-existing Zinio account.

Rather than scrolling through the dozens of magazine titles being offered (in alphabetical order), search for "PC Magazine" and you will immediately be taken to a screen where you can select the current issue. A second link for "Back Issues Available" provides access to (at the time of writing) issues from the previous four months.

Choosing to check out a given issue of the magazine places it on your "reading list". However, be prepared to enter your login credentials – twice! – in order to reach the reading list screen that displays an image of the magazine's cover page. Click on this image and you can browse through the magazine using the system's proprietary software.

Zinio's Reader has a number of very useful features. For example, at any time, you can use control buttons to display page thumbnails, or the magazine's table of contents, in order to select specific content. Similarly, it's easy to "turn" pages forwards or backwards, and to select a desired zoom level to read an on-screen page.

At any later time, you can access magazines in your reading list by logging back in to Zinio's web

site. Once again multiple logins are necessary to reach the reading list. And now, there's a further trick – negotiating past a shopping cart!

Using the URL giving direct access to Zinio

(<http://www.rbdigital.com/ottawaon/zinio>) through OPL's subscription, an initial login screen demands your userid and password. This takes you to the magazine selection screen which you can bypass by clicking on the link marked "Go to my Checked-Out Magazines".

However, leaving this window takes you to a second login screen where you once again must enter your login credentials. Now, you reach a screen containing a shopping cart where Zinio would like you to purchase magazines. To access your selected magazines, click on the tab marked "YOUR LIBRARY" and – voila! – you have finally arrived at your reading list.

So, it's now possible for library users – with a little effort – to read at least one computer magazine directly on a home computing device. Perhaps, as interested patrons, we can persuade OPL to subscribe to other computer-related E-magazines...



OPCUG Free Software Guide—Part 44 Compiled by Alan German

Editor's Note: For those of you who didn't notice, the content of the Free Software Guide Part 44 in November was a repeat of Part 42 from September. Here is the real Part 44 with a bonus Free Software Guide on the [next page](#).

This 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.

HWMonitor

A hardware monitoring program that reads a system's main health sensors: voltages, temperatures, and fan speed. The program handles the most common sensor chips, and can read modern CPU on-die core thermal sensors. In addition it checks hard drive temperature via S.M.A.R.T. and video card GPU temperature.

Current Release: Version 1.23

Web Site: <http://www.cpubid.com/software/hwmonitor.html>



Free Video Downloader

Download videos from thousands of web sites, e.g. YouTube and Facebook. Set batch parameters for input quality, action, and destination. and this downloader will automatically rip video in accordance with your settings. MP3 files can also be downloaded.

Current Release: Version 3.5.3

Web Site: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/28hy88q>

Clonezilla

Before your hard disk crashes, taking Windows, your installed applications and – most importantly – all of your precious data files with it, use Clonezilla to make a complete system backup. Clonezilla live will let you create a bootable CD for both backup and restore functions.

Current Release: Version 2.1.2-20

Web Site: <http://clonezilla.org/>

CintaNotes

This little utility lets you quickly save any information that you come across on the web. Select any text and press the hotkey. CintaNotes automatically saves the text - and its source URL! – for later retrieval.

Current Release: Version 2.3

Web Site: <http://cintanotes.com/>

interfacelift

Refresh your desktop with new wallpaper – select from 3103 free image files that are available.

Web Site: <http://interfacelift.com/>



Photo Pos Pro Photo Editor

This powerful photo editor contains an extremely user-friendly interface and supports many file types. Import images from digital cameras or scanners and use a variety of advanced tools and functions to enhance your pictures. Special effects, layers and masks, gradients, patterns and texture, and script tools are all available.

Current Release: Version 1.89.3

Web Site: <http://preview.tinyurl.com/m3csfbl>

Balabolka

Balabolka is a Text-To-Speech (TTS) program. All computer voices installed on your system are available. The on-screen text can be saved as a WAV, MP3, MP4, OGG or WMA file.

Current Release: Version 2.8.0.553

Web Site: <http://www.cross-plus-a.com/balabolka.htm>



Lupo PenSuite

This suite of the best portable applications available on the web is optimized to be loaded on a USB flash drive for use anywhere you go. Three versions are available - the full, light, and zero packages - and you can easily customize your suite by adding portable apps from an on-line software database.

Current Release: Version 2013.04

Web Site: <http://www.lupopensuite.com/suite.htm>

OPCUG Free Software Guide—Part 45 Compiled by Alan German

This 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.

TinyWall

This free software is used to harden and control the advanced firewall built into modern Windows systems. It provides easy configuration through a simple user interface, and prevents programs from modifying firewall settings. Best of all - TinyWall lets you work while protecting you – with no annoying pop-ups.

Current Release: Version 2.1

Web Site: <http://tinywall.pados.hu/>



QTTabBar

This extension to Windows Explorer brings tabbed browsing to Microsoft's file manager, along with a host of other great features, all driven from a new toolbar, and with multiple options for customization.

Current Release: Version 1.5.0.0

Web Site: <http://sourceforge.net/projects/qttabbar/>

ResizeEnable

Turn non-resizeable windows into resizeable windows! Useful when pop-up windows aren't big enough to display all the details but Windows won't let you make them bigger. However, the authors note that "Most windows will respond correctly, but some may not!"

Web Site: <http://www.digitallis.co.uk/pc/ResizeEnable/>

Absolute Uninstaller

Do you have a program that can't be uninstalled by the Windows Add/Remove Program or have remnants of the software been left behind? To solve these problems, Absolute Uninstaller provides extra-powerful functions.

Current Release: Version 2.9

Web Site: <http://www.gларыsoft.com/absolute-uninstaller/>

Battlefield Heroes

This web-based game is mostly aimed at casual gamers or users who like funny, cartoony and not too serious game play. The game caters to players of all skill levels - it's easy to pick up but, for more serious players, it offers robust character customization. The game uses a "Play4Free" model that generates revenue through advertising and micro-transactions (optional purchases of special equipment, etc. as you play).

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



Remove Empty Directories

You would think that searching for and removing empty directories is trivial, but what if you have hundreds of them? Then, you need RED which searches for and deletes empty directories, recursively, below a given start folder. And before deleting anything, it shows you all the empty directories it found – in red text!

Current Release: Version 2.2

Web Site: <http://www.jonasjohn.de/red.htm>

Calibre

An open-source E-book library management application with a cornucopia of features including: E-book conversion, syncing to E-book readers, and a comprehensive viewer. You can even download news from the web and convert it to E-book form.

Current Release: Version 0.9.42

Web Site: <http://calibre-ebook.com/>



Pitaschio

Freeware with a whole host of tweaks for display and keyboard customization in Windows.

Current Release: Version 2.9

Web Site: <http://pitaschio.ara3.net/>

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 Science and Technology Museum, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups (SIGs) go until 10 p.m.

Parking is available at the museum for a flat fee of \$3 after 5pm. Limited street parking is available for free. Details at <http://opcug.ca/public/regmtg.htm>

OPCUG Membership Fees: \$25 per year
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Linux / Open-Source SIG (vacant)		

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subscribe newslettertxt
(to get the plain text version).

or:

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And if you decide you do not need the printed version mailed to you anymore, simply let Mark Cayer (membership chairman) know. He can be reached at general meetings, as well as by e-mail at Mark.Cayer@opcug.ca. You might want to wait until you have successfully received at least one issue electronically before opting out from the printed version.

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“Announcements” is a low volume list that the Board of Directors uses to get in touch with the membership. Subscribers can expect at least one message per month – the meeting reminder that goes out a few days in advance of the general meeting. Other than that, the only time it is used is when the Board feels there is some important news that should be brought to the attention of all members.