

An OPCUG Product Review

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Melding Files

by Alan German

For many years I have synchronized files between the hard drive folder that I use for downloads and a folder on a USB flash drive where I maintain an archive of the installation packages of software that I currently use or have found useful in the past. In the past I have used PC Magazine's WMatch32 utility for this purpose; however, this software is old and no longer supported. In addition, it takes an age to read and display a list of the archived files stored on my 64 GB flash drive. But, once the list is populated, the two-pane user interface allows me to view all the files in both folders or to select only those that are the same, or only those that are different. I can then easily select and copy, move, or delete one or more individual files from one of the panes.

When I mentioned that I was looking for a more modern replacement program, Chris Taylor suggested Total Commander (<https://www.ghisler.com>), his long-standing, favourite file manager. The menu item *Commands > Synchronize Dirs...* provides the desired functionality with options to display equal or unequal files, or files to be copied from either the left or right panels. However, for me, the downside of this software is that it is shareware, with a one-month trial period, and then requiring purchase for €42 (\$63). Now, while this isn't a fortune, and it does essentially purchase a perpetual licence with all future updates being free, I have very limited uses for the software so I find the paid option to be too much of a good thing.

A free alternative is Meld (<https://meld.app>). Originally, Meld was a Gnome utility built as an aid to GNU/Linux software developers to compare files, directories, and version controlled projects. It is now available for Windows and can be downloaded as an installable (msi) file. It is open-source software, licensed under the GNU General Public License Version 2.0.

I found the user interface to be a little strange. Three icons are labelled as *File*, *Folder*, and *Version Control*. Selecting *Folder* highlights this option and displays a series of drop-down menus (Figure 1). The left-hand icon allows selection of the first folder to be included in the comparison. The initial choices that are displayed are disk drives, e.g. DataDisk (D:); however, this results in selection of the entire drive and does not allow drilling down to a sub-folder. Instead, we can select *Other...* which loads a standard File Explorer dialogue box and, for example, allows D:\original to be specified as the source folder. Similarly, we can use the second drop-down menu to select E:\original as the target folder for the comparison.

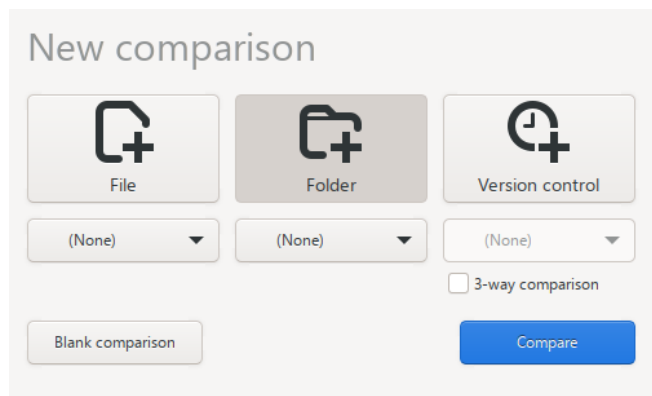


Figure 1. Initial menu with drop-down options activated

Once the two desired folders have been selected, pressing the *Compare* button causes the comparison of the file listings to be displayed (Figure 2). In find the display to be quite cluttered as it shows files that are present on one panel but not in the other. For example, files such as HDDScan.zip, LibreOffice-removeduplicatesfast-1-0-6.oxt and LibreOffice_24.8.1_Win_x86-64.msi are software packages that have been previously installed and are being retained on the archive drive should they need to be reinstalled. On the other hand, Meld-3.22.2-mingw.msi has only recently been downloaded and installed for testing and so has not (yet) been transferred to the archive.

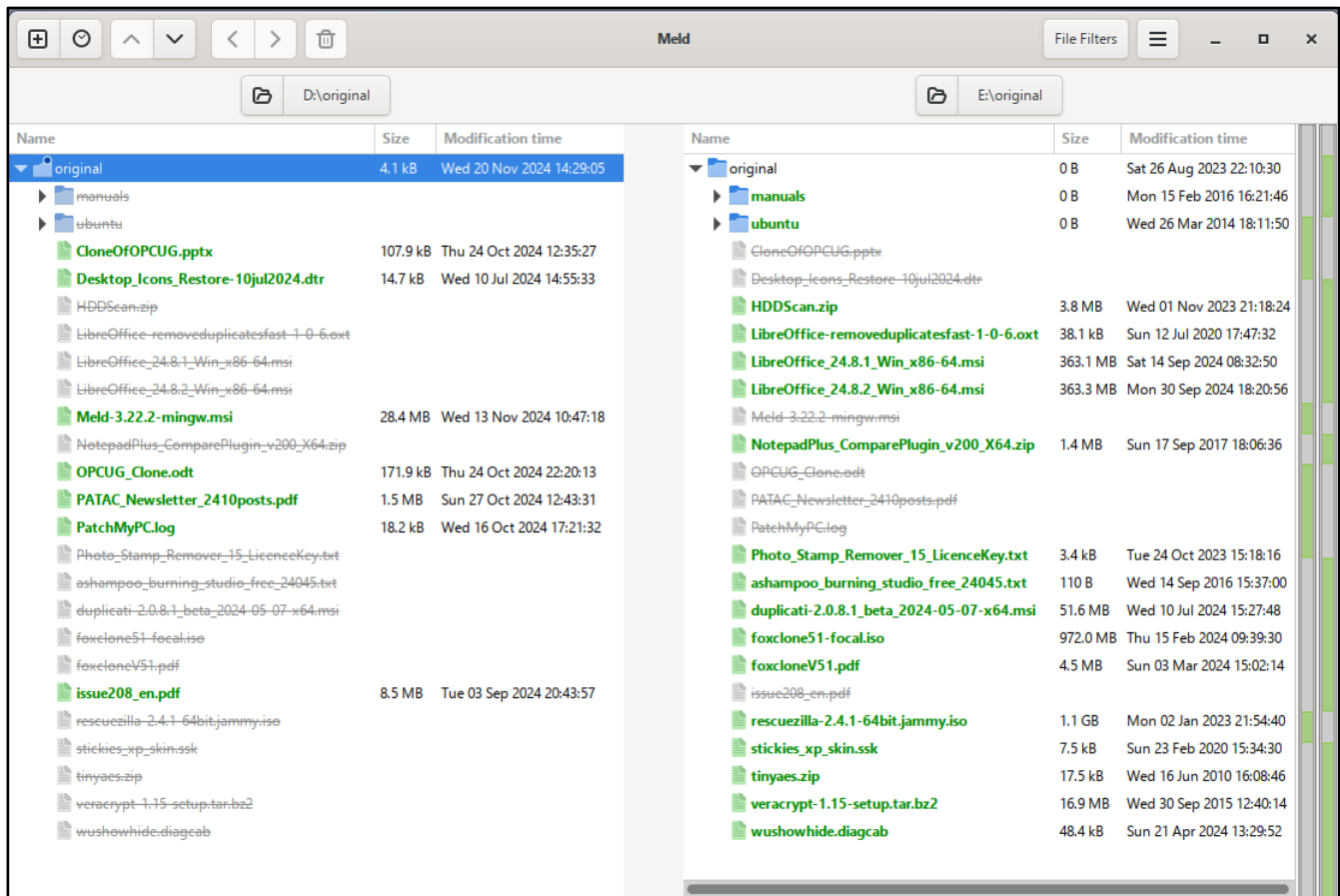


Figure 2. Display of folder comparison

There are also non-executable files present in the source folder, such as CloneOfOPCUG.pptx and OPCUG_Clone.odt, that are temporary files for items under development, and files like issue208_en.pdf and PATAc_Newsletter_2410posts.pdf that are newsletters that have not yet been read, and that will subsequently be discarded.

This default view can be modified by accessing the File Filters button on the menu bar. This provides options to view files that are the same, new (i.e. present in one folder but not in the other), or modified (i.e. different). Certain file types such as binary and media (e.g. exe, png) can be excluded from the comparison. In addition, the comparison can be set to use case-insensitive file names.

A useful setting for processing new and modified files is, therefore, to uncheck *Same* in the *File Filters*. Navigating to a specific file and taking action on that file are then accomplished by using the arrows on the menu bar. The down-arrow moves the focus to the next item in the left pane. Selecting the right-arrow causes the file to be copied to the target folder, while selecting the trash can icon results in the source file being deleted. It's also possible to select multiple files in the left pane and then activate copy or delete for all of the selected files by a single press on the appropriate control button.

The hamburger icon in the menu bar provides additional settings to control such things as the default display of file types, the file attributes that are listed, and the comparison method (e.g. file size and time/date stamp). There is also a link to an on-line *Help* file (<https://meld.app/help/>) that documents the program's operations.

A really-useful feature is that the program maintains a list of recently-conducted comparisons. So, rather than having to establish the folder pair each time the program is run, one can simply press the clock icon on the menu bar and double-click on a previous entry.

So, while there may be a short learning curve to fully understand the user interface, once this has been achieved the utility is useful in situations where there is a need to copy certain files and delete others while synchronizing files between two folders. The user interface would benefit by having more options to filter the files that are displayed but perhaps such features will be added in subsequent versions of the software. In the meantime, the program is open source and so is available free of any charge and, as such, it's well worth the cost!

Bottom Line

Meld (Open source)
Version 3.22.2
<https://meld.app>



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