

## The Evince document viewer

# VERSATILE VIEWER



Evince is quickly becoming Gnome's standard viewer for PDF and other document formats. **BY MATTHIAS WARKUS**

Like other visions of the future, the paperless office is taking much longer than anyone expected. The heaps of paper on office desks just don't seem to get any smaller. On a brighter note, some books – especially technical documentation – are now available in electronic format, alternatively or exclusively, as the case may be. Documents in the Portable Document Format (PDF) [2], an Adobe [1] development, look the same no matter what operating system you use, and this means extending genuine cross-platform compatibility to document design.

In the world of Unix and Linux, other formats such as PostScript and DVI play important roles. There are any number of Linux-based document viewers. Gnome now includes Evince (Figure 1) [3], a useful all-rounder, as the standard

viewer for these file types. Evince can also handle graphic formats such as TIFF and DjVu, which are typically the result of scanning text documents.

## The Program

If you are using Evince as a viewer, it is more common to launch the program in the context of the file you need to view, so you are likely to launch Evince by clicking in a file manager, rather than by entering *evince*, followed by the filename, at the command line.

Evince tries to meet usability requirements by performing its tasks conveniently and efficiently, rather than by confusing the user with an overdose of options. In the program window, there is a toolbox below the menu with buttons that allow users to scroll through the file or zoom the display. The document fills most of the program window. A column on the left margin of the screen gives you a thumbnail-based overview of the pages in the document (Figure 2).

If necessary, the sidebar can display the document structure as an expandable tree. Both options assume that the document actually contains this information.

You can disable the overview to have more space for the main window. Disabling the overview is particularly useful if you are displaying a double-page spread. Additionally, full-screen mode gives you a full set of controls, with the exception of scroll

## THE AUTHOR

After serving as a translator with the Gnome Project, Matthias Warkus found a niche for himself in public relations. The editor of the official Gnome 2 developer manual started studying philosophy two years ago.

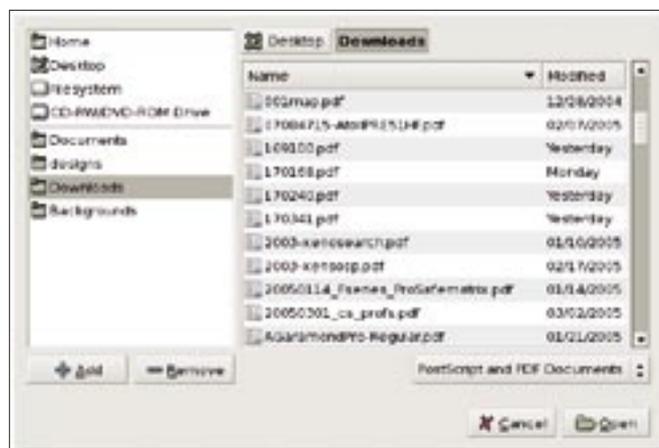


Figure 1: The Evince GUI gives users the bare necessities.

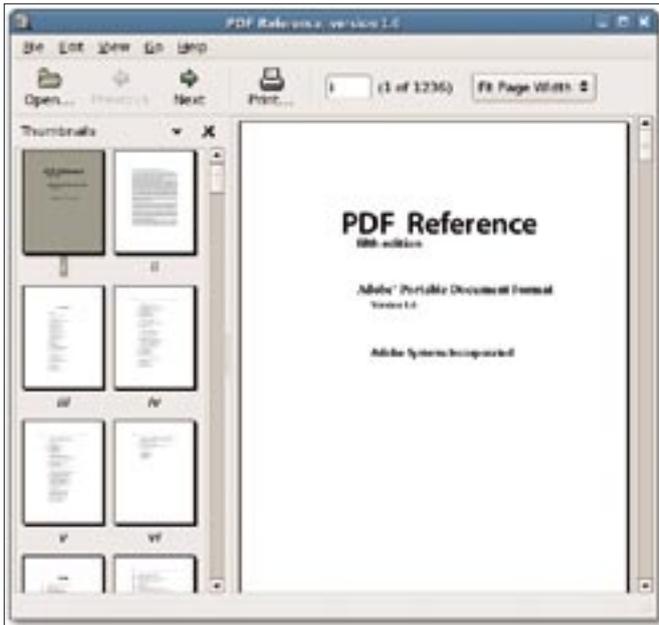


Figure 2: Evince displaying thumbnails for the document pages..

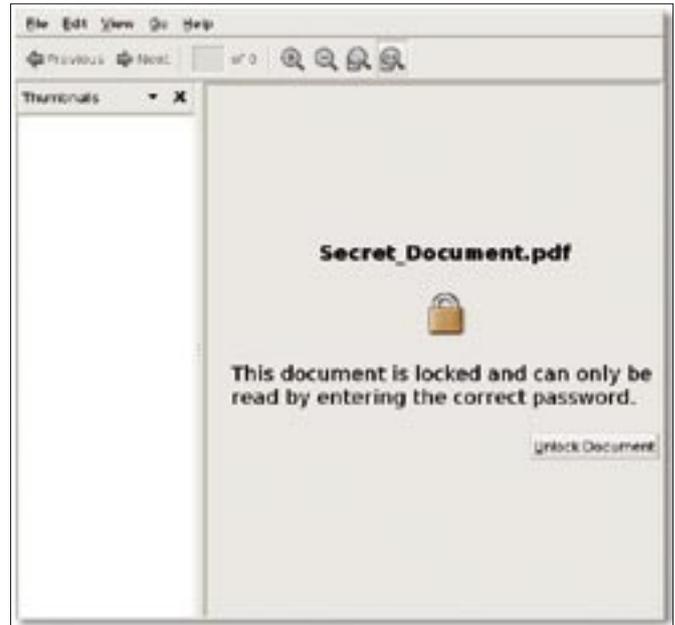


Figure 4: Evince supports PDF features such as password protection.

boxes. Navigational aids are hidden completely in presentation mode, where the pages appear on a black background and only keyboard controls remain.

Evince recently introduced the ability to display simple presentations in Power-Point format.

No matter which mode you are working in, Evince scrolls and zooms even graphically oriented documents quickly. The display quality can easily hold sway with Adobe's proprietary Adobe Reader tool. Evince uses the standard Gnome printing interface for hard copies, and this means that you can use printer settings and functions (such as duplex

mode) without any trouble. Evince does not give you a print preview, as the print-out should be exactly what a pixel perfect viewer shows on screen.

## Tools

Although most PDF files are typically text-oriented, the pixel-based display makes it difficult to search for words or strings. Despite this, Evince has a search function comparable to the function in Adobe Reader. The Search dialog does not pop up a window but displays a box at the bottom of the screen, in a similar fashion to the Firefox Browser (Figure 3). This variant is in line with the

Gnome usability guidelines, which all Gnome applications will be expected to adhere to in the future.

The toolbox is another fine example of user friendliness. The toolbox editor displays all the icons that you can add to the toolbox using drag & drop. To discard a button, just drag it out of the toolbox with your mouse. Again, direct manipulation – as

this kind of feature is referred to – is part of the Gnome guidelines.

## Conclusion

Finally, Gnome has a useful document viewer that integrates seamlessly with the desktop. Evince is the designated successor of Ggv (Gnome Ghostview) for PostScript, Gpdf for PDF-formatted files, and Eog (Eye of Gnome) for images.

Evince has a number of advantages in comparison to Adobe Reader: it launches far more quickly and is more intuitive. At the same time, Evince needs just five Mbytes of memory – compare this with the massive 100 MByte footprint for the Adobe Reader. The programs are about on par when it comes to displaying documents, however, if you need specialized PDF functions, such as editable forms or annotations, you have no alternative but to go for the more complicated Adobe Reader.

There is some debate as to the role that Evince will play in the future. Some developers would like to see Evince display MS Word and OpenOffice Writer files, thus eliminating the need for the user to launch a large office suite just to view a single document. ■

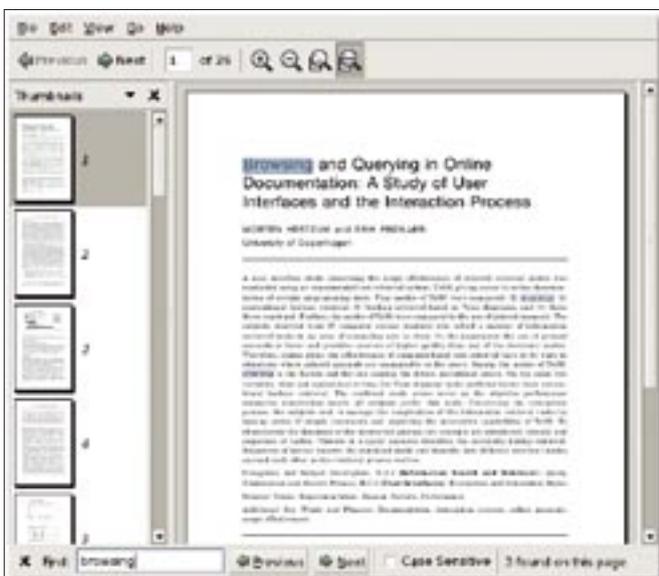


Figure 3: Like Firefox, Evince has an integrated search box at the bottom of the screen.

## INFO

[1] Adobe: <http://www.adobe.com>

[2] PDF: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PDF>

[3] Evince: <http://www.gnome.org/projects/evince/>