Your photos, your way: Hosting photos with Piwigo

Photo Op

Control your content by hosting your own photo gallery and publishing photos on your own server with Piwigo. *By Dmitri Popov*

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Photo sharing services are a dime a dozen nowadays, but there are still plenty of reasons to host your own photo gallery.

By publishing photos on your own server, you can retain full control of your content, you can tweak the photo software to your liking, and you don't have to pay additional money for premium features.

Of course, to publish and manage photos on your own server, you need software that can handle the job – and you can't go wrong by choosing Piwigo photo gallery software for the web [1].

This photo-sharing application offers a vast array of features, and it's supremely easy to use and administrate.

Piwigo runs on the Apache/PHP/MySQL stack, so you will need a machine with these components installed and configured.

Alternatively, you can choose the XAMPP package [2], which includes Apache, PHP, and MySQL – all preconfigured and ready to go.

Installing Piwigo and Adding Photos

Before you proceed with the installation, you should create a MySQL database for use with Piwigo. Once you've done that, grab the `piwigo-netinstall.php` installer script from the project's website and copy it to the document root of your server. Then, point your browser to the installer script (e.g., `http://127.0.0.1/piwigo-netinstall.php` to kick off the installation procedure (Figure 1). Now, choose the language you want, specify the directory for the Piwigo installation, and hit the *Retrieve and unzip Piwigo* button. Once the installer script has fetched the latest version of the software, press the *Install Piwigo now* button, provide the required database connection and administrator account info, and press *Start Installation*.

The first thing you might want to do once Piwigo is up and running is populate it with photos, and Piwigo conveniently offers that service. Just click the *I want to add photos* link to jump to the photo uploading interface (Figure 2). In the *Drop into category* section, enter the name for a new album (or category in Piwigo's terminology) in the *Category name* field, then press the *Browse* button and select the photos you want to add. To upload the selected photos to the specified category in Piwigo, hit the *Upload* button.

If you happen to use digiKam as your preferred photo management desktop application, you can use the Piwigo export Kipi plugin to upload photos to Piwigo directly from digiKam (Figure 3). Before you can upload photos to Piwigo, you will have to create at least one category. To do this, log in to Piwigo as an administrator, navigate to *Administration | Categories | Manage*, and create a new category. Then, switch to digiKam, select the photos you want to upload, and choose *Export | Export to Piwigo*. After you specify the required connection settings and press *OK*, you can upload the selected photos by pressing the *Add Selected Photos* button.

Don't fancy digiKam? You can use the pLoader utility [3] to transfer photos from your machine to Piwigo. In fact, pLoader has a few handy features that

make it the best tool for shifting photos from your desktop to Piwigo. For example, you can configure pLoader to add captions to the photos you want to upload, to autorotate, resize, and even watermark them. To configure these features, press the *Preferences* button in the main toolbar and tweak the settings in the appropriate sections (Figure 4).

When using pLoader to upload photos, you have an option to upload two versions of each photo: a resized version that Piwigo uses for display and a high-resolution version (called high-definition version in Piwigo) linked to it. This approach helps Piwigo render photos much faster while allowing users to view high-res versions of the photos. Although nothing stops you from uploading photos in their original sizes, the low-res/hi-res approach makes more sense. To configure pLoader for that, press the *Preferences* button and switch to the *Photo size* section. Then, select the *Use resized original* item from the *Web sized* drop-down list and specify the desired dimensions and image quality under *Options*. Next, you can select the *Yes, use a copy of the original photo* item from the *High Definition* drop-down list. Press *Close* to save the settings and close the window.

Configuring Piwigo

Your Piwigo gallery is almost ready, but before you show it to the world, you should tweak a few settings. To begin, log in to Piwigo as administrator and switch to the administration interface by clicking the *Administration* link in the Identification navigation section. Here you can adjust the settings for the existing user accounts. For example, if you uploaded photos to Piwigo without resizing them, you might want to specify the maximum display dimension settings; otherwise, Piwigo will display the photos at their original size, which can be problematic with large images.

To specify the maximum display dimensions for a specific user account, select the account, scroll down to *Preferences,* enter the desired values into the *Pictures maximum width* and *Pictures maximum height* fields (800x600 works well in most cases), and press *Submit*. To apply the specified settings to all existing user accounts in one fell swoop, select the *all* option before hitting *Submit*. While you're at it, you can configure other settings like the number of images per row and number of rows per page, change privacy settings, and change the user status. And, you can add new users as well as delete existing ones.

Piwigo offers a flexible and powerful user privilege system, wherein each user is assigned a specific status, and each status has a set of default access rights. For example, the *Webmaster* status grants the user full access to all Piwigo's features, whereas the *Guest* status gives only limited access to the system (Figure 5). Additionally, you can
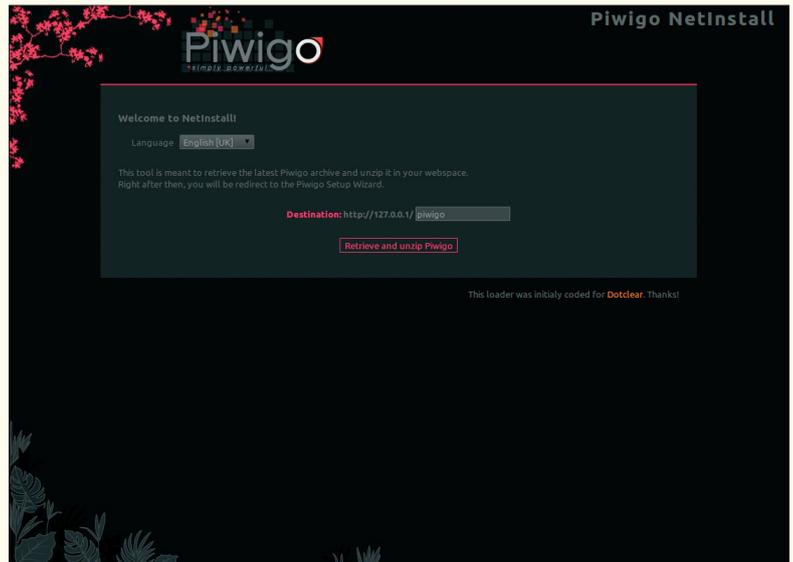

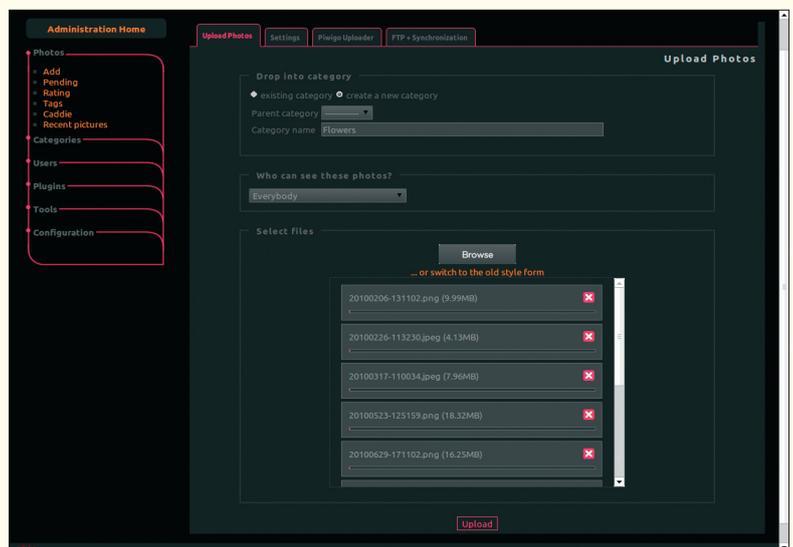**Figure 1: The NetInstall script makes it ridiculously easy to install Piwigo.**

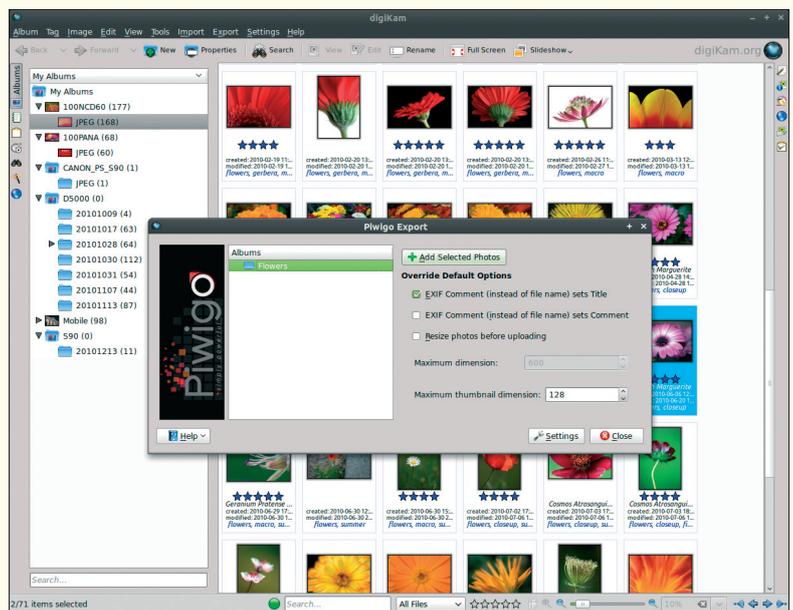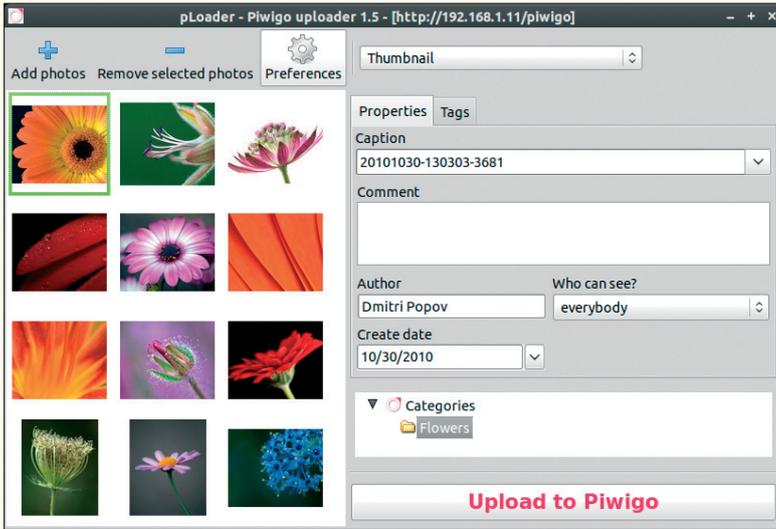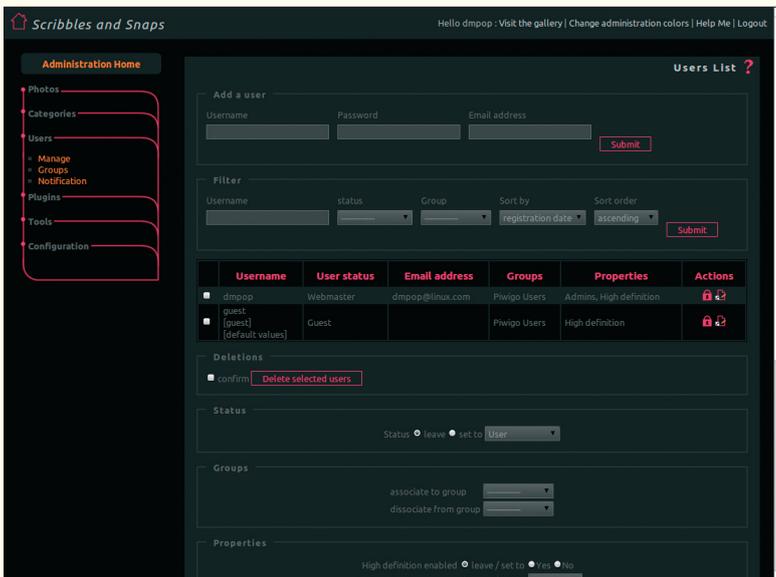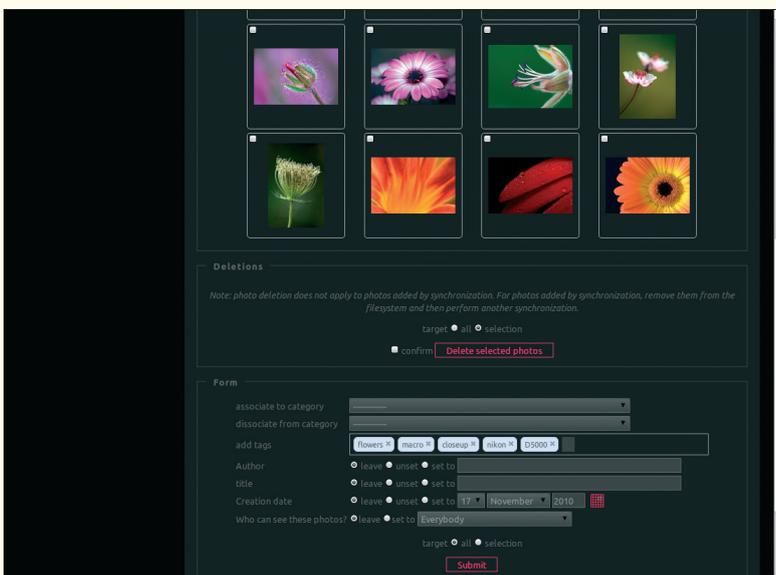**Figure 2: Piwigo sports its own web-based photo uploader.**

Figure 3: You can upload photos from digiKam straight to Piwigo.

Figure 4: pLoader is a standalone tool for uploading photos from your machine to Piwigo.

Figure 5: Managing user accounts in Piwigo.

Figure 6: Tagging photos in Piwigo.

specify a privacy level for each user, and you can choose between the *Contacts*, *Friends*, *Family*, and *Admins* levels. Then, you can set a privacy level for each photo, so it can be viewed only by users who have the appropriate privacy level.

Instead of configuring access privileges for each individual photo, you can set up groups to give users access to specific private categories. For example, say you want to create a group called *Flower Friends* and give its members access to the *Flowers*, *Petals*, and *Stamens* private categories. To begin, you need to create these categories, which is done in the *Categories | Manage* section. Once the categories have been created, set their access type to *private*. To do so, click the *Edit* icon next to the category, select the *private* option in the *Options* section, and press *Submit*. Next, navigate to the *Users | Groups* section, create the *Flower Friends* group, click the *Permissions* icon, and add the created private categories to the *Authorized* list. Finally, switch to the *Users | Manage* section, select the users you want to add to the *Flower Friends* group, select the group from the *associate to group* drop-down list, and press *Submit*.

As does any photo-sharing application worth its salt, Piwigo supports tagging, and you might want to tag the uploaded photos right from the start. To do this, you can navigate to the *Categories | Manage* section and click the *Manage category elements* icon next to the category containing the photos you want to tag. Now you can scroll down to the *Form* section (Figure 6), enter your tags in the *add tags* field, select the *all* option, and press *Submit* This action applies the specified tags to all photos in the category. Of course, you can tag only certain photos in the category. To do this, mark the photos you want to tag, add the tags, select the *selection* option, and press *Submit*. In the *Form* section, you can also perform other batch actions, such as assign an author to your photos or set the desired privacy level.

Finally, in the *Configuration | Options* section, you can tweak Piwigo's general settings. Under the *Main* tab, you can replace the default gallery name and title with your own, turn on or off the rating feature, and enable user registration. In the *Display* subsection, you can enable or disable individual display and browsing features. Here, you can specify which features users can access on the main page and which properties should be displayed for each individual photo. To manage comments more efficiently and to fight comment spam, it's worth tweaking the comment settings available under the *Comments* tab. For example, you can hold comments for moderation by ticking the *Validation* checkbox, and you can configure comment notification options so you and other administrators can stay abreast of comment activities. Under the *Upload* tab, you can specify who has access to the photo uploading functionality, whereas the *Guest*
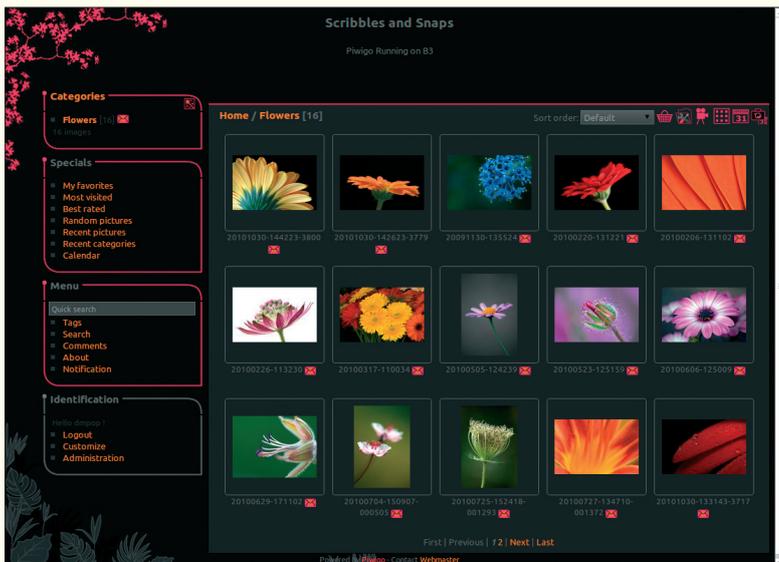
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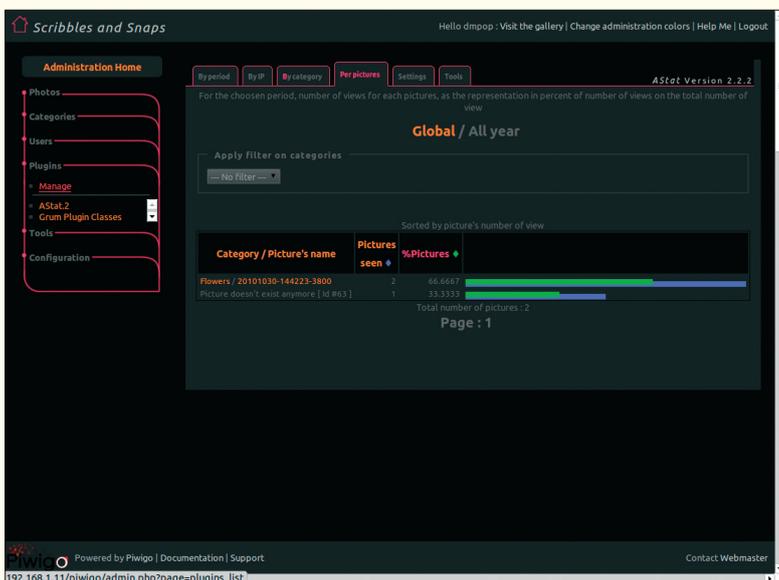angeliefert

Figure 7: Piwigo in all its beauty.

Figure 8: AStat plugin lets you collect and analyze Piwigo stats.

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[1] Piwigo: *http://piwigo.org*

[2] XAMPP:
http://www.apachefriends.org

[3] pLoader: *http://piwigo.org/ext/
extension_view.php?eid=269*

[4] Piwigo plugin repository:
http://piwigo.org/ext/

[5] RV Akismet plugin: *http://piwigo.org/
ext/extension_view.php?eid=192*

[6] AStat plugin: *http://piwigo.org/ext/
extension_view.php?eid=172*

settings subsection lets you tweak the guest account preferences.

Using Piwigo

Piwigo sports a rather intuitive interface that is straightforward to use. Piwigo's landing page provides a list of all categories, and you can access all available commands in the navigation sections to the left (Figure 7). The *Specials* section, for example, contains commands that let you view photos marked as favorite, highest rated, and most viewed images, as well the most recent additions. The *Menu* section contains commands that let you find photos with a specific tag quickly and perform advanced searches.

In the top-right corner of Piwigo's interface, you'll find a set of icons that let you switch between different viewing modes. For example, you can switch to the Calendar view, which groups and displays the photos by their creation or upload dates. When viewing a photo, you can rate it and add comments, as well as mark it as a favorite and examine its metadata. Because Piwigo's interface is not overloaded with features, it doesn't stand in your way, allowing you to explore the photos with a minimum of fuss.

Extending Piwigo

Piwigo's default functionality can be extended with the use of plugins, and the official Piwigo plugin repository [4] has quite a few modules to choose from. Installing plugins in Piwigo happens in two ways: manually and via Piwigo's Administration interface. To install a plugin via the Administration interface, switch to the *Plugins | Manage* section and click the *Other plugins available* tab to view a list of all available Piwigo plugins. Find the plugin you want and click the *Install* link next to it, then click the *Plugin list* tab, and again press the *Install* link next to the plugin. Finally, click the *Activate* link to enable the plugin. Alternatively, you can install plugins manually by grabbing the specific plugin you want from the plugin repository and unpacking it into the `plugins` directory inside your Piwigo installation. Then navigate to the *Plugs | Manage* section to install and activate the plugin.

Which plugins you want to install depends, of course, on your specific needs, but you might find at least two modules handy: RV Akismet [5] and AStat [6]. RV Akismet lets you use the excellent Akismet service to deal with spam comments in your Piwigo installation. To enable the plugin, you need to obtain and add a free Akismet API key. Using the AStat plugin, you can collect and analyze Piwigo stats, including the number of views for individual categories and photos, as well as visitors' IP addresses (Figure 8).

Final Word

If you choose to host your own photo-sharing solution, going with Piwigo makes a lot of sense. This application strikes a perfect balance between functionality and ease of use, and its default feature set can be extended by plugins. Additionally, Piwigo offers several ways to upload photos, and the application sports a flexible privilege control system. In other words, Piwigo has pretty much all you need to host photos on your own server. ▬▬▬