



Jon Masters is a UK-based embedded Linux developer, writer, and consultant. He has been actively involved with the Linux community since starting his first degree at age 13. Jon is currently a member of more than 50 Linux User Groups around the world.

July is upon us! It's amazing really how fast time flies when you're having fun (or suffering from one too many book deadlines!). This month marks the beginning of the annual conference circuit, kicking off with the UKUUG summer conference in Brighton, UK and numerous other events around the world that will happen between now and September (check out the side bar for some links).

For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere experiencing summer, it'll soon be time for local group summer parties, BBQs, and other gatherings. Most major Linux user groups around the world have a summer gathering of some kind, so be sure to check your local LUG list, and turn up if you can.

If you can't turn up to the next big event in person, don't forget to show

Community Notes

SOCIAL NETWORKING

some appreciation for the folks behind the Gnome Meeting project, which turned 5 years old recently. Thanks to Gnome Meeting (now Ekiga) and the other video conferencing tools that have followed, it's becoming easier and easier for Linux geeks around the world to communicate, no matter what the distance.

Many of the major conferences are now streamed over the Internet and a growing number of local LUGs are getting in on the act – the most famous example perhaps being LUG Radio <http://www.lugradio.org/>.

Women's Summer Outreach Program

I'm not one to plug my friends at every opportunity, but I would like to make a special mention of the fine work that Chris Ball, Hanna Wallach, and Vincent Untz of the Gnome Project have done in helping to make the Gnome Women's Summer Outreach Program a reality. The WSOP program builds upon the Gnome project's involvement in Google's Summer of Code but specifically targets women only. Those of us in the Linux community are painfully aware of the imbalance in numbers between men and women, so it's great to see projects such as the WSOP program trying to draw interest.

WSOP is not, of course, the first program aimed at bringing more women into Linux development communities. The Debian project in particular (thanks in part to the hard work of Hanna Wallach) has been trying to encourage more female Debian Developers (DDs) over the past few years. Unfortunately, it's still possible to count the number of female DDs on one (or maybe two by now) hands. The Debian project is certainly a community that would like to

encourage more women to get involved in computing, but there's still a long way left to go.

For more information about the WSOP program and a description of ongoing efforts to attract more women to Gnome, as well as a list of recent WSOP winners, visit <http://www.gnome.org/projects/wsop/>.

United Kingdom

Most of the traffic on the major UK LUGs was pretty uneventful over the past month. In the absence of a major distribution release or other earth shattering event – and I don't think Microsoft agreeing to support the OpenDocument Format quite gets filed under "earth shattering" – and with the unexpected heatwave we've been enjoying, who could blame them? Still, one person who was bothered this month came from the Yorkshire Linux User Group. The poster mailed to say that they'd just been to their copy shop and noticed the amazingly complex rigmarole necessary for the folks in the store to open and virus scan a USB pen drive.

Aside from a little carefully placed Linux advocacy, the poster raised the larger issue of the lack of a central resource targeted at local businesses to

Signal to Noise

This month was pretty quiet in terms of highly controversial topics of international Linux community concern. Consequently, many of the groups around the world confined themselves to more mundane topics: locating disks, dealing with updates, routing – the usual suspects. I regularly track more than 50 Linux user groups around the world on a monthly basis, but if you'd like to see your local group featured, send me an email and I'll see if I can help.

advocate and educate about Linux and FLOSS (Free, Libre, and Open Source Software). There are already groups such as OpenAdvantage advocating for Open Source, but they only operate in a specific part of the Midlands region. They do a good job, using European funding, but they don't cover other regions, so it would seem that there's a track record for running such an enterprise if a sufficiently large group of enthusiastic volunteers can be found.

United States

Like many of the younger Linux enthusiasts, students at Oregon State University (OSU) were busily taking finals and organizing last minute meetings to get a few hours away from study. As of this writing, the folks at Oregon State and their counterparts in Eugene and Portland are preparing for the forthcoming 2006 OSCON conference in Portland, Oregon.

OSCON is one of the major O'Reilly conferences held each year, and it is certainly a blast. Last year's OSCON confer-

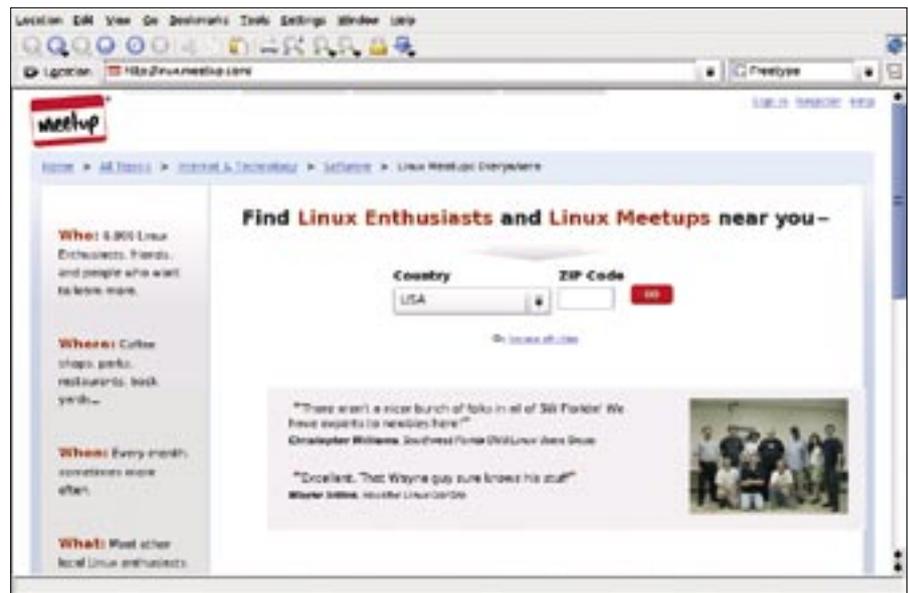


Figure 1: Meetup lets you search for Linux groups by country or postal code.

ence featured such silliness as BSD devils riding around on Segway's and exploding balloons with lasers, alongside a serious conference program and numerous simultaneous local community events.

Meanwhile, on the Boulder (Colorado, USA) LUG, Dan Ferris posted a favorable review of the Acer Travelmate 4674. This powerhouse of a laptop comes with a 2GHz Intel Core Duo processor, 2GB of RAM, 80GB hard drive, and the usual

advertisement

array of graphics and connectivity options.

Most impressive of all, though, was the claim that Linux (in this case, apparently a version of Fedora Core) supported all of the hardware out of the box. According to Dan, this is the “first laptop I ever got all the hardware working on (wireless still not perfect though).” I have to admit that I am increasingly impressed by stories like this one. Even my own Powerbooks aren’t badly supported.

The Iraqi Linux User Group

Perhaps one of the most interesting Linux user groups I’ve encountered in recent times was the Iraqi Linux User Group <http://www.iraqilinux.org/>. This LUG was formed by an enthusiastic group of people both inside Iraq and in the international community. One of the goals of the Iraqi Linux user group is to “educate Iraqis and Iraqi business on the principals and benefits of Open Source.” The group’s English-based website (there’s an explanation for the choice of English on the site) hosts several discussion boards where recent debate has covered current topics such as Linux certification, wearable Linux, and moving house.

Social Networking with Linux

This month, I want to draw your attention to the rapidly growing numbers of Linux communities that have sprung up through the range of social networking sites now available online. We’ve read and heard a lot about social networking sites over the past few years as the phenomenon has pervaded many different strata of society and well and truly entered the mainstream.

You don’t have to be a geek to appreciate the value of meeting people and forming somewhat arbitrary online communities through sites such as the ever popular (and occasionally controversial) *myspace.com*. But many members of the Linux community do use these sites to form a new generation of LUG.

Just a few years ago, most Linux user groups were formed by die-hard fans with resources to host their own websites, meetings, and so forth. Often, LUGs sprang up out of academic institutions and were run by student communi-

ties with some external involvement from the local geographic area. But as the Linux install base has become larger and begun to include many more converts, these people have reached out to find other Linux users through MySpace, Meetup.com, and other sites that the existing LUG community has largely ignored.

If you visit Meetup.com today, you’ll probably find a group of Linux enthusiasts from your local area who are totally uninvolved or unconnected with a lot of the existing community but are still getting a lot of value out of their own interaction.

In the following sections, I’ll look at two different types of social networking – Meetup and Myspace – but there are literally dozens more social networking sites out there with fresh Linux enthusiasts.

Meetup.com

Meetup <http://www.meetup.com> is what it sounds like. It’s a commercially run website that aims to make running meetings for local interest groups as easy as possible.

Meetup is free to join, and there is a fee for hosting a group. You’ll find the full range of activities – everything from needlework to foreign languages – but also a large selection of Linux enthusiasts. These aren’t just general enthusiasts either. Often, groups form around a specific distribution or even the use of Linux in a particular field, such as finance and commerce. There are also groups discussing particular issues, from copyright and patent legislation to general advocacy.

MySpace.com

Unless you’ve been living under a rock for the past year or so, you will likely



Figure 2: MySpace is popular with some Linux followers who may not be watching the local LUG lists.

have heard of MySpace <http://www.myspace.com> and the success it’s having in spurring all kinds of debate.

MySpace is free to join and free for the host also. Revenue comes from the ads on the site. Some schools and employers have banned their employees from getting involved with MySpace simply because of the pervasive nature of the site, and the fact that anything you might list about yourself in a MySpace will suddenly be visible to the world. But that’s a general point to remember about anything you post anywhere on the the Internet. (Don’t publish something you don’t want other people around the world to see!)

MySpace hosts a growing number of Linux-focused groups with over 50 members, drawn from all over the world. The Myspace website is popular with a younger crowd, and that certainly shows in some of the discussion topics, but in many ways, these groups can be more interesting than your conventional LUG simply because the barrier to entry is very low.

You don’t need to set up a website and run your own mailing list when you can do it with the click of a mouse. A delightful side effect of this is that there is often less of a clique feeling about these groups than some of the conventional LUGs. ■