

An interview with the founder of the Ubuntu Project

FEISTY FAWN

Mark Shuttleworth talks to Linux Magazine contributing editor Mathias Huber about the upcoming Ubuntu release Feisty Fawn and Ubuntu Live.

Ubuntu's newest release offers a preset Windows migration tool so that users who are setting up a dual-boot machine won't get caught in the headlights.

LM What's next for Ubuntu?

MS We have a new release coming up, the Feisty Fawn, and that is a very excit-

ing release, which, I think will definitely be our best release ever. It has a lot of new work from upstream – there's been a tremendous amount of activity in the desktop space upstream – which is exciting. And there's also a whole bunch of things that are unique to Ubuntu. There's the Windows migration tool, which means that people who are installing Ubuntu on a Windows machine

will get the opportunity to move things like Firefox favorites and Internet Explorer bookmarks, instant messaging contacts, and so on into their new Ubuntu setup. It is a preset for people who are setting up a dual-boot machine and starting with something that has Windows installed. I'm sure other distros will follow suit, but I think Ubuntu is the first to do that, and that's exciting. Another thing is something that is very popular with people who are using Linux as a platform for multimedia, and that is making it a lot easier to install various codecs. Now, you may be aware of the fact that it is a very complex landscape out there in terms of which codecs are possible to distribute and which aren't, depending on nationality and patent system and various complicated features. Unfortunately, the default Ubuntu configuration, as with any free software distribution, is quite limited in terms of proprietary codecs that can be supported. We have really good support for things like Ogg, but for most proprietary formats it's tricky. So what we've done in the next release is recognize when people are trying to play content that requires specific codecs and try to make it easy for them to decide whether or not they can legally install that software and continue.

LM What kernel version will ship with Feisty Fawn?

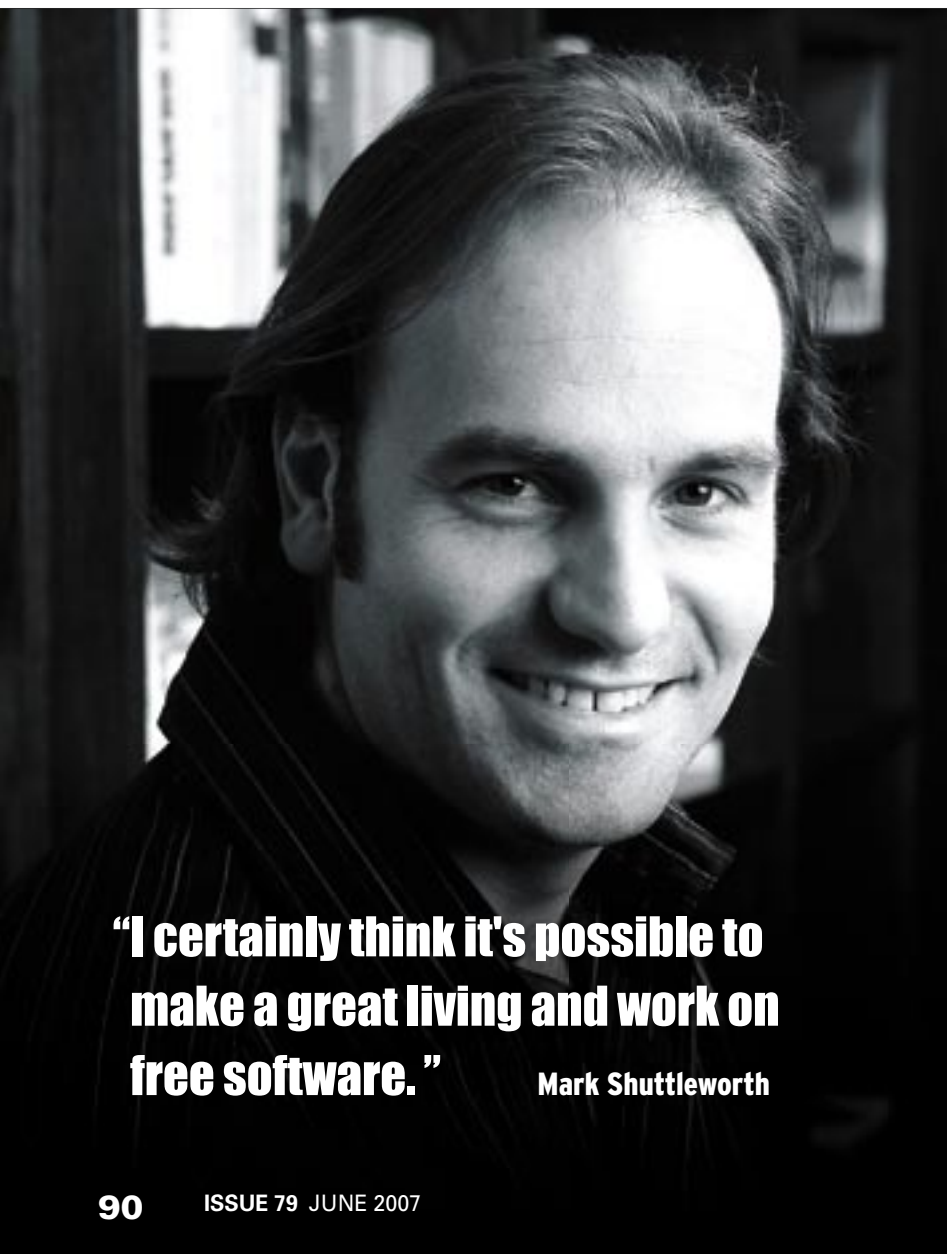
MS 2.6.20.

LM What is the largest Ubuntu installation that you are aware of?

MS We are seeing very nice adoption of Ubuntu on the server. Obviously, the server guys, being more conservative, are more interested in our long-term releases. The last one of those was June of last year. We've just started to look at the road map for the next LTS release.

LM When is that going to be?

MS My own sense is that it would be wrong to wait more than another 18 months. So we don't want to go more than three years after the last LTS, and we probably also don't want to go less than a year and a half after the last LTS. It's almost certainly not going to be



“I certainly think it's possible to make a great living and work on free software.”
Mark Shuttleworth

Feisty + 1 – it may be Feisty + 2 or Feisty + 3.

LM What about people running LTS? Will they be stuck with old software while Ubuntu progresses, or will there be backports of new features and packages to LTS?

MS There is already a community-driven backports team. They do a really good job. Obviously it's not as predictable as when the next release will be, because it's really driven by their willingness to do the backport and make it available. And we don't support the backports. On extremely rare occasions we will do a backport and push that out to all users, but those cases are very, very rare, because we've made a commitment to people in terms of stability and predictability. For a lot of people who have chosen an LTS release, the bugs that they know about are much more manageable than the bugs that they don't know about and that they might get in a brand new version.

LM What's the Ubuntu Live Event?

MS It's the first global conference focused on users, and businesses in particular, who are deploying Ubuntu. It is a prolonged conference with keynotes and tracks, speakers, and BoFs. It's being organized by O'Reilly in the days just before OSCON in the same venue. So quite a few people who are going to OSCON are also going to be there. It will be the first opportunity that we have to have an open forum with partners and customers speaking. Until now, our events have been very developer-oriented, so this is kind of a new exercise for us.

LM Will there be Ubuntu Live events in Europe, Africa, Asia?

MS I can certainly see us doing a European event in due course, because Ubuntu software is very popular there, and we'd expand that based on market demand. So whether we move to having one event a year that alternates between Europe and the U.S. or whether we have two Events – one in Europe, one in the U.S. – I don't know. We'll see how it goes. It's organized by O'Reilly, so they will take a very careful view on where

there is sufficient demand for a conference like that.

LM What are your future goals?

MS Think of the Ubuntu project as an overall philosophy, and that is to make free software easy to use and supportable, maintainable in either a completely free or in a commercial, enterprise kind of fashion. Initially we applied that philosophy to the Gnome desktop, then we also applied it to the KDE desktop, and then we applied it to the server as well. I imagine there will be other areas where people want to see that philosophy – something that is of very high quality that's designed to be easily used, which is freely available and where you can get commercial support. Our philosophy is to take free software, make it widely available, make it easy to use, and offer commercial support for it.

LM I've looked up some of the development goals for Feisty on the website, and it said: KDE 4!

MS The KDE team is doing amazing stuff with KDE 4. I don't think KDE 4 is going to ship in Feisty. But Feisty is a good development platform for the guys working on KDE 4. There's quite a bit of collaboration between the guys working on Kubuntu Feisty and the guys working on KDE 4, and that's great. Unless you have to pick a winner between Gnome and KDE, I think they both have a superb environment with strong qualities and people who are passionate about them. And Ubuntu is about creating space for each of those communities to collaborate where they want to collaborate, but also to stand out and differentiate themselves where they want to do so.

LM Is Feisty going to ship with a 3D desktop?

MS It's going to ship with it, just turned off by default.

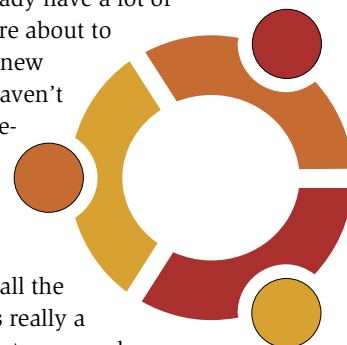
LM Which window manager?

MS At this stage, Compiz, and Beryl will be available as a download option. I would like the Beryl guys to give the patches, so that we can have Beryl there

by default and that you can choose, as opposed to downloading extra packages.

LM What audience is Feisty for? What audience is Dapper for?

MS At this stage, you would be installing Dapper on a server or in a place where you already have a lot of Dapper. If you're about to install a brand new machine and haven't used Ubuntu before, I would rather install the Feisty Beta or wait two weeks and install the Feisty final. It's really a question of what your goals are. But at this stage, for new installs, Dapper is really focused on the server.



LM Do you have any advice for the open source enthusiast who also wants to make a living?

MS The first place I would start to look is the growing list of companies that use free software very heavily internally. It takes time for companies to learn new ways of working, and free software is very much a new way of working, you know. It's sharing with your competitors, which for old companies is a terrifying idea. So the first thing a lot of companies do is, they start using open source, but they don't want to contribute back to open source. But now, more and more, I'm seeing large companies that say, "Well, we've learned the hard way that it's most efficient for us to have our employees actually being open contributors to open source" – not trying to take, but rather to share and collaborate. I would encourage young guys who are passionate about open source, when they go to interviews with companies, to ask them the question, "How do you use open source, and what's your policy on employee contributions to open source, and what restrictions will be placed on my ability to participate and share work that's done internally on projects which are themselves open source?" Those are good questions to ask of any company that you are going to join. I certainly think it's possible to make a great living and work on free software. ■