An up-to-date look at free software and its makers

PROJECTS ON THE MOVE

Evolution and Kontact are the standard Personal Information Management applications on Linux, but many users are dissatisfied with the major players. Pimlico is a small-footprint alternative, and GDATA Provider brings Google with Mozilla calendar. **BY CARSTEN SCHNOBER**

Deadline and *appointment* are two dirty words for a lot of us. In many cases, the dates and times are not the biggest problem, but keeping track of the "to-dos" is. Many users turn to software solutions that replace the legacy day planner. Personal Information Management (PIM) covers any aspect of organizing appointments, tasks, and contact data.

Two Standards

On Linux, the PIM field has two major players, one each for the big-gun desktop environments KDE and Gnome. The KDE camp relies on Kontact [1], which bundles the KMail, KOrganizer, KAddressbook, KNotes, KNode, KPilot, and KSync applications on a common interface.

Kontact thus covers critical elements of personal information management. Besides handling your appointments and task lists, Kontact helps you synchronize handhelds and mobile phones to merge multiple data sources.
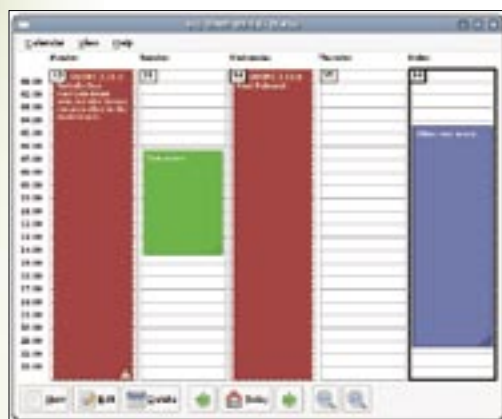
The integrated mail program handles communication with the outside world. The Gnome counterpart is Evolution [2], which also integrates the central components that any PIM solution needs.

However, Kontact and Evolution can't cater to all tastes. Although you can use Kontact without the KDE desktop, it is

Figure 1: Orgainze deadlines and appointments with Pimlico's Dates tool.

Figure 2: Sunbird is the independent calendar program by Mozilla.

definitely focused on KDE. Many users consider Evolution to be too slow, and it has a reputation of having a number of functional bugs.

If you use a mail program like Thunderbird [3], or any other mail client for that matter, you are likely to prefer a PIM solution that simply manages to-do lists and appointments.

The Personal Information Management arena still has room for improvement, which is what prompted Opened Hand [4] to launch a new open source project called Pimlico [5].

Pimlico is based on the Embedded Evolution Data Server [5], a port of the Evolution Data Server that uses D-Bus instead of Bonobo and Orbit and that runs on mobile devices because of its smaller memory requirement. GTK provides the graphical interface.

Pimlico

Pimlico comprises four separate and independent components: Dates, Tasks, Contacts, and Sync. In fact, you can even install and use the programs separately. Dates (see Figure 1) provides a simple calendar with an interface that remains easy to read without compromising critical functions. Various zoom levels take you from a detailed view to an annual overview. Users can double-click to create new entries or modify existing ones. At present, the tool lacks an alarm function.

Tasks and Contacts keep the application window simple and uncluttered.

New tasks can be added easily via a text box at the bottom of the window. Contacts accesses the Evolution address book but will import contacts from external files if needed.

The main objective of Pimlico development was to support use on any device with GTK support. Besides the desktop PC, this mainly means the Maemo [6] and OpenMoko [7] platforms, which are used by the Nokia 770 Internet Tablet [8]; its future successors, and the Neo1973 [9]; which is still in the development phase.

A working version of the fourth Pimlico component, Sync, is not available right now, and this more or less rules out the PIM suite for productive use as of this writing.

Sync is based on OpenSync [10] and will help users exchange data from Dates, Tasks, and Contacts with the Pimlico software on other devices and with other applications in the future.

Webtop PIM

Mozilla has had its own calendar for a while. Of two closely related projects, Lightning [11] is a Thunderbird extension, and the parallel project Sunbird [12] (see Figure 2) is an independent calendar.

Neither of these applications currently has a reliable function for synchronizing

Figure 3: Creating a calendar in GDATA Provider.
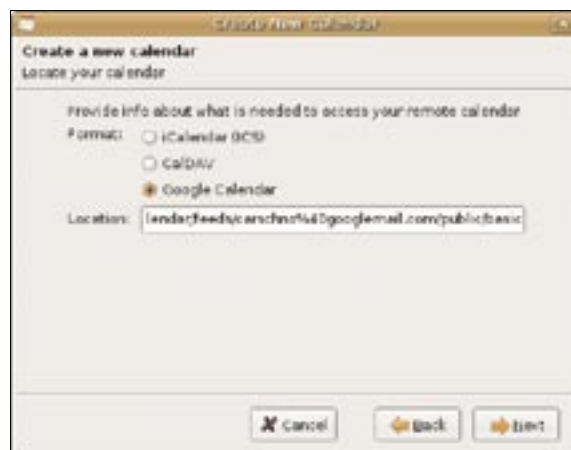
the calendars with other programs and devices.

The GDATA Provider [13] extension is looking to change this by supporting synchronization of Sunbird and Lightning with Google Calendar [14]. To allow this to happen, interfaces for the XML, iCal, and HTML formats have been developed; GDATA Provider uses the XML interface to communicate with the web service. Changes made with the web interface synchronize perfectly with Sunbird and Lightning.

Currently, you cannot use Mozilla calendar without an Internet connection because the software stores the data on the Google server.

Also, the GDATA extension is only available for the Lightning and Sunbird developer versions. This said, the current version of GDATA Provider bodes well for the future.

The extension is simple to set up: You just need to copy the URL for the XML interface and use this information to create a new Mozilla calendar (Figure 3). The software automatically synchronizes the calendar and is quite reliable, despite some teething trouble with recurring appointments.

Again, the calendar lacks an alarm function, although this is on the roadmap for future versions. ∎

INFO
[1] Kontact: *http://kontact.kde.org*
[2] Evolution: *http://www.gnome.org/ projects/evolution*
[3] Thunderbird: *http://www.mozilla.com/thunderbird*
[4] Opened Hand: *http://o-hand.com*
[5] Pimlico: *http://pimlico-project.org*
[6] Maemo: *http://maemo.org*
[7] OpenMoko: *http://openmoko.org*
[8] Nokia 770 Internet Tablet: *http://www.nokia.com/770*
[9] Neo1973: *http://wiki.openmoko.org/ wiki/Neo1973*
[10] Opensync: *http://www.opensync.org*
[11] Lightning: *http://www.mozilla.org/ projects/calendar/lightning*
[12] Sunbird: *http://www.mozilla.org/ projects/calendar/sunbird*
[13] GDATA Provider: *http://wiki.mozilla. org/Calendar:GDATA_Provider*
[14] Google Calendar: *http://calendar.google.com*