



Jon 'maddog' Hall writes about the community

MEET THE MADDOG

Jon 'maddog' Hall introduces himself and rolls out the first installment in his new monthly community-focused column.

BY JON 'MADDOG' HALL

own products – Digital Unix, in particular – I also started talking about Linux, free software, and the Free Software Foundation.

Looking Ahead

What should you expect from my column? “Everything Free and Open Source Software” – from discussions around licensing and patent issues, to environmentally friendly computing and how it can save you money.

At heart, I am a capitalist, so I will also write about business cases in which people have either made or saved money with free software.

I also speak at conferences around the world. As I write this column, I am on an airplane flying to Mexico City for a conference, and then I’m off to Bogotá, Colombia for a Campus Party event [1]. In August, I’m attending the DebConf conference in Argentina [2]; some LinuxPark events in Brasília, Curitiba, and Belo Horizonte [3]; and Jornadas Regionales de Software Libre 2008 [4] in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and I plan to write about those events.

Projects

You might think that this hectic travel schedule would leave me little time for “real work,” but I am also heavily involved in environmentally friendly computing and trying to bridge the “Digital Divide,” which some people prefer to think of as “Digital Inclusion.” This focus accesses the more technical side of my nature, and when I find interesting topics in this area, I will also write about them.

Sometimes you will read something I write and you might think that it is obvious because I’ll occasionally discuss topics of interest to people who are new to the open source community. Also, I might help explain a particular concept to people who are not programmers, which might also help you explain it to your boss, spouse, or legislator. Often, I will use stories from the history of computers to help explain these concepts because I have been lucky enough to have met some of the great programmers and computer scientists, and some of my conversations with them are worth passing on to readers.

All Bark, No Bite

Finally, this is your column, too. If you have something you would like me to discuss, send me email at pawprints@linux-magazine.com and I will try to address your request. Also, you can read my Linux Magazine blog at: <http://www.linux-magazine.com/pawprints>. If you see me at a conference or event, feel free to talk to me – although I bark a lot, I hardly ever bite. ■

INFO

- [1] Campus Party (in Spanish): <http://www.campus-party.org/>
- [2] DebConf: <http://www.debconf.org/>
- [3] LinuxPark (in Portuguese): <http://www.linuxpark.com.br/lp/>
- [4] Jornadas Regionales de Software Libre 2008: <http://jornadas.cafelug.org.ar/8/es/home.php>
- [5] maddog's blog: <http://www.linux-magazine.com/pawprints>

For the first installment of my new monthly column in Linux Magazine, I decided to write an introduction and tell you a little about myself.

Background

I started programming in 1969, moving from being an electrical engineering student into the relatively new world of software. Since that time, I have worked as a programmer, systems administrator, quality engineer, product manager, and technical marketing manager. While in this last role, I met Linus Torvalds in May of 1994 and recognized that Linux had a commercial future. I orchestrated the effort to get Linus an Alpha processor from Digital Equipment Corporation, and I helped put together a team to do the port of Linux to the Alpha, which also formally moved Linux from being a 32-bit system to a 64-bit system, and – through the restructuring of the source code tree – made it easier to port to other platforms.

Although I had been using “free software” – what we used to just call “software” – for a long time and had even helped publish collections of it for Digital’s customers, meeting Linus Torvalds and being introduced to the Linux community is what made me start thinking about the implications of free software on the world’s stage. From that point on, as I continued to talk about Digital’s