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DistroWatch Weekly

A weekly opinion column and a summary of events from the distribution world

DistroWatch Weekly, Issue 247, 7 April 2008

Welcome to this year's 14th issue of DistroWatch Weekly! It was down week for distributions, but developers have been quite busy. There were lots of developmental releases last week, including a Slackware 12.1 release candidate, openSUSE and Mandriva announced discontinued support, Gentoo released a beta, and a Debian developer is trying to bring back the Debian Weekly News. I took a look at the new Dreamlinux 3.0 release and while it remained pretty and added some new features, I had mixed results. All this and more in this issue of DistroWatch Weekly - happy reading!

Content:

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Featured Story

First look at Dreamlinux 3.0

Dreamlinux developers released version 3.0 of their Debian-based Linux distribution last weekend. I've looked at several versions of this distro over the years and I recall how beautiful I thought it was in the beginning. The wallpaper has been changed and the theme has been updated, but it still basically looks the same.

Now or Improved Features

This version does bring some new features. One of the first encountered is the addition of GNOME 2.20.3 to the boot options on the live CD. Dreamlinux's GNOME is as equally beautiful and features the same background, theme, dock, and selection of applications. Unfortunately, it's an either-or situation. Boot GNOME and only GNOME is available. Install from this option and only GNOME is installed.

The similar appearances and configurations shared between XFCE 4 and GNOME can be attributed to the new Flexboot architecture. Specific information on this is a bit sketchy, but apparently this is a module or set of modules written by the Dreamlinux development team and released under the LGPL to allow for congruent configuration of multiple window environments.

The hard drive installer is newly redesigned this release as well. Previously Dreamlinux used the Morphix installer, but this release brings a more user-friendly installer. Now it features a one-page configuration installer. By this I mean that all the install options, apply button, and progress report are all housed and updated within the same window. I like these one-page installers for the smaller distros with little or no advanced features and package selection. I did have a bit of trouble with it though.

I didn't have any trouble with the configuration. It was merely typing the data into the corresponding textareas and checking a radio button or two. I clicked apply and a progress percentage, task information, and activity slider appeared. Everything progressed fine for a while until it seemed to freeze at 56%. The percentage stayed at 56% so long that I was just about to give up when I saw it jump to 91% and the task information read that it was installing GRUB. I had checked the radio button to have it installed onto the root partition. So I sat there and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited. The system seemed fully installed, but the GRUB menu still was empty. I manually added my main GRUB to point to this fresh to Dreamlinux's boot directory and I was able to boot. The system in complete and functional, but a new comer might have wiped out their main GRUB file leaving a very bad impression.

When using CompizFusion, the AWN-Dock takes the launcher duties over from Engage. It appears very much the same as the Engage dock at first glance, but it is much more fun. AWN has an end-user graphical configuration and a lot of great plug-ins to expand its functionality. You can add application launchers and apply other customizations through the AWN Manager found in the Dreamlinux Control Panel. Some of the handy applet plugins include a weather applet, BlingSwitcher (pager with effects), and CPU monitor.

Dreamlinux 3.0 GNOME with DCP and AWN Manager under CompizFusion
(full image size: 534KB, screen resolution: 1280x800 pixels)

The Dreamlinux Control Panel is a container for lots of handy utilities and configuration tools. Some of these include Services - run/end configuration, Power Manager - laptop power options, Theme Switcher - allows the user to choose a theme, Wireless Drivers - allows loading of Windows wireless drivers, and EnvDesktop/ CompizFusion. A couple of the more interesting elements are the Hardinfo and Upgrade Wizard. Hardinfo lists hardware information and also includes options to perform some system benchmarks. The Upgrade Wizard doesn't actually upgrade anything. It backs-up (or restores) your system before applying/after applying through Synaptic or some external program working.

Another interesting container is the Easy Install. It houses launchers to install some popular apps, proprietary drivers and programs, and multimedia codecs and libraries not found in the Debian repositories. Most will actually launch an installer, but when clicking for the NVIDIA drivers the user is given commandline instructions.

The software line-up remains mostly unchanged. Some graphic applications include Inkscape, gThumb, and GIMPShop (which crashed quite often). Multimedia enjoyment can be had through Rhythmbox, MPlayer, Gxine, and Sound Juicer. Installing the codecs and the DVD decryption libraries through Easy-Install will give more complete support. Disk creation can be handled by Brasero.

Internet apps include Iceweasel (which crashed a few times), Thunderbird, Pidgin, and Check-Gmail. Office tasks can be tackled with OpenOffice.org and Orage.

Some accessories include Conky, Calculator, and Dictionary. Some system tools are DCP-Control Panel, Easy-Install, Engage Admin, Menu Item Creator, and the Pen-Drive DL installer. Some items found in the Settings menu are ADSL and PPP connection apps, Encryption Preferences, and printer setups.

The system defaults are very good for a single-user setup. The install is complete and functional, including all major development and full package management and Debian repositories already configured. Synaptic, a nice APT gui, is included as well.

Hardware Support

Basic hardware support is good. Dreamlinux features SMP Powernative Linux-2.6.23.12-dream, Xorg-server 1.3.0, and Xorg 7.2. Both the live CD and installed system detected my graphics accurately and rendered the optimal 1280x800 screen resolution. My touchpad, USB mouse, and keyboard were responsive and accurate. Even the volume buttons worked. Sound and wired ethernet worked out-of-the-box. Remote media and auto-mounted.

Another disappointment came when I didn't see an easy way to invoke suspend or hibernate. Some files and scripts were installed, but I just didn't see any options to use them. There were no such items listed within the menu, battery applet, logout dialog, or GDM.

Dreamlinux 3.0 XFCE 4 with DCP and About
(full image size: 852KB, screen resolution: 1280x800 pixels)

Conclusion

Dreamlinux is still beautiful and now that the look has been recreated for a GNOME version and in the implementation of CompizFusion, it should appeal to a larger audience. It very well could be a viable alternative to Ubuntu.

Overall, Dreamlinux was a fairly solid release. I had issues with the installer, wireless and suspend support, and some applications were a bit crashy. But it looks good, comes with some good application choices (except Iceweasel that I find buggy), and the Dreamlinux tools were nice. If you have mixed feelings, I don't feel comfortable recommending it across the board. If you like the appearance, features, and software stack, then perhaps it's best to try it on your hardware to see if it's for you.

UPDATE: Dreamlinux 3.1 was released Saturday, April 5 to address the installer issues.

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Miscellaneous News

Mandriva 2007.0 and SUSE 10.1 discontinued support, Let's resurrect Debian Weekly News, Gentoo 2008.0 Beta 1

Contrary to growing concerns, Gentoo is alive and well. Developers proved it last week by releasing beta 1 of the upcoming 2008.0 on April Fool's Day. The news headline reassured skeptical users that it was no joke, as if that would have been the presumption. Another beta is planned once testing and bug fixes on Beta 1 are complete. Some handbook updates followed shortly after the beta release.

In other Gentoo news, Roy Bamford, the newly elected President of the Gentoo Foundation's trustees, was interviewed by linuxcrazy.com. He states that he enjoys working on Gentoo and hopes to heal the division between the foundation members, the developers, and the users. A transcript has been published here.

Vincent Damen has written (a german) users that the end-of-life for Mandriva 2007.0 came on March 13. Mandriva Linux 2007.0 will no longer be supported and will be removed from actively-supported mirror directories. Starting on that same date, Mandriva Linux 2007.1 will only be receiving security updates and only on the system core and networking packages. It will reach its end-of-life on October 15, 2008. Mark your calendars.

Alexander Schmehl this week suggested that perhaps the Debian Weekly News should be resurrected. The last issue was published on July 03, 2007 and many people have since been left out of the loop. Towards that end, Alexander is now soliciting volunteers for editor, proof readers, and translators. Those interested in these positions should subscribe to the debian-publicity mailing list. They also want to hear about anything you've seen online about or are doing with Debian. So, Debian users, get involved. After all, Debian is the roots for so many popular distributions today - help promote yours!

In other Debian news, time is running out to vote in Debian Project Leader Elections 2008. The choices are Steve McIntyre, Raphael Hertzog, or Marc Brockschmidt. Voting ends April 12, so cast your ballot today. See this post for more information on that.

The SUSE Security team has announced the end-of-life for SUSE Linux 10.1. After May 13, 2008, no more fixes will be planted and the last updates should become available on May 30, 2008. SUSE releases are usually supported for two years, while enterprise versions have a longer life span.

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Released Last Week

Dreamlinux 3.0

The Dreamlinux development team has announced the final release of Dreamlinux 3.0: "Dreamlinux 3.0 is a complete redesign of the distribution, now supporting an independent architecture named Flexboot, based on overlaid modules. This feature allows the co-existence of two (or more) separate window managers (currently GNOME and Xfce), sharing the same customized appearance. Both working environment share all the applications available. Packaging the best office, image, design and multimedia open-source software, DreamLinux 3.0 allows for running professional quality contents." Dreamlinux 3.0 features new hard disk and USB pen-drive installers, an option to reinstall the live CD, and full support for many popular media codecs. For more information please read the release announcement.

GoboLinux 014.01

Carlo Calica has announced the availability of a minor point release of GoboLinux, version 014.01: "We are very happy to introduce GoboLinux 014.01, the new release of GoboLinux, the Linux distribution with an alternative file system structure. This release is our first 'point release', providing a stability update for our latest major version, GoboLinux 014, which was released three months ago. Overview: the CD serves both as an installation medium and a live CD, with a complete graphical desktop featuring KDE 3.5.8, OpenOffice.org 2.3.1 and a host of applications; it features an installer that works on both text and graphical mode; features a udev-based hardware detection system." Read the rest of the release notes for a detailed list of features and changes.

Musix GNU+Linux 2.0

After five test versions, Marcos Guglielmetti announced the release of Musix GNU+Linux 2.0, a Debian-based distribution containing a comprehensive collection of free software for musicians: "It's a 100% free multimedia operating system intended for music production, graphic design, audio and video edition, and all kind of tasks. It contains an enormous collection of free (as in freedom) programs that can replace Windows or Mac OS X. Musix GNU+Linux 1.0 RC Stable Live-CD was produced on the basis of the stable version 1.0 R2 and the reports about prior test versions. Musix 1.0 is based on Knoppix and Debian 3.1/Sarge, while version 2.0 is based on Knoppix 5.1.1 and Debian Etch. This new version has powerful Apple hardware support. MusixUSB-Music-Music Remix in English is now the default boot language and not Kanotix/Knoppix scripts are used to detect hardware. The user interface, logos and other new functionalities were added, for instance: automount of CDs, DVDs and USB memories, the 'install' boot argument, or the 'noimag' add on for KDE." Read the release announcement for additional information.

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Development, unannounced and minor bug-fix releases

* GParted Live 0.3.8-0
* Clonezilla 1.0.9-2
* Gentoo 2008.0 Beta 1, the release announcement
* Garnix Scout x 081-2
* GoboLinux 014.01, the release announcement
* Hurton Cluster 1.1.7-B2
* Litrix Linux 7.0
* Mandriva Linux 2008.1 RC2, the announcement
* MoviX 2.0, a release announcement
* Mythbuntu 8.04 RC
* Nebula 3.1
* Pie R Squared LiveCD 0.9.2.3
* PUD 0.4.8.6 LiveDE Edition
* SolusOS-Distro 0.2.9
* Slackware Linux 12.1 RC1
* STUX GNU/Linux 2.1
* SuperOS 3.71
* VidaLinux 2008-beta2

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Upcoming Releases and Announcements

Summary of expected upcoming releases

* 2008-04-08: openSUSE 11.0 Alpha 3 (see roadmap)
* 2008-04-09: Mandriva Linux 2008.1 (see release plan)
* 2008-04-10: Fedora 9 Preview
* 2008-04-14: openSUSE 11.0 Beta 1
* 2008-04-15: Granular Linux 1.0 Beta 1
* 2008-04-17: Ubuntu 8.04 "Hardy Heron"
* 2008-04-22: Fedora 9 Release Candidate 1
* 2008-04-24: Ubuntu 8.04 (see release schedule)
* 2008-04-28: openSUSE 11.0 Beta 2
* 2008-05-01: Elive 2.0 (see release plan)
* 2008-05-02: openSUSE 11.0 Beta 2
* 2008-05-13: Ubuntu 8.04.1 "Hardy Heron" (see roadmap)
* 2008-05-13: Fedora 9 (see release schedule)
* 2008-05-14: Frugalware Linux 0.9 (see roadmap)
* 2008-05-17: Debian GNU/Linux 5.0 (see release schedule)
* 2008-06-05: Mandriva Linux 2008.1 "Spring" (mid)
* 2008-06-09: Musix GNU+Linux 2.0 (see roadmap)

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DistroWatch.com News

Those of you who visited DistroWatch on April 1st might have noticed many strange and unusual names in the Page Hit Ranking table on the main page. Karamad Linux (the most popular distro? Followed by ROSLAN and Dzonghka Linux, a distribution from Bhutan? How did that happen? This was, of course, nothing more than a fool's day prank, a "poisson d'avril", or whatever it is called in your language. I didn't think many people would fall for it, but boy, was I wrong! I barely finished uploading the file when I received the first email notification about "something being wrong with the page hit rankings". More followed throughout the day. After disabling the cache at certain point, I received several emails with excessive panic, warning people to check their computers, thinking that their databases must have been compromised, and blaming their distros for it all. The prank clearly backfired on several distros and demanding that I take immediate action to correct the error! It was fun to read them and thank you to all that participated.

Interestingly, the Karamad Linux page received a total of 5,464 unique visits on that day. This was followed by Dzonghka Linux which had 2,999 visits. The second item on the page for much of the day) with 3,362 unique visits and ROSLAN with 2,483 page views. For comparison, the Ubuntu page was visited 1,615 times while the PCLinuxOS page was only visited by 375 unique visitors. This seems to confirm what some readers suggested before - a top-ranked distro, especially one that is relatively unknown, is likely to attract a large number of curious clicks.

But as always, don't take any of the page hit ranking statistics too seriously. They serve as a fun way of gauging the interest of DistroWatch visitors in different distributions and they most certainly don't correlate to market share, installation numbers, or product quality.

March 2008 donation: cURL receives US$300.00

We are pleased to announce that the recipient of the March 2008 DistroWatch.com donation is cURL. The project receives US$300.00 in cash.

cURL is a command line utility for download files, similar to wget. According to the project's web site, "cURL is free and open software that compiles and runs under a wide variety of operating systems. cURL is a command line tool for transferring files with URL syntax, supporting FTP, FTPS, HTTP, HTTPS, SCP, SFTP, TFTP, TELNET, DICT, LDAP, LDAPS and FILE. cURL supports SSL certificates, HTTP POST, HTTP PUT, FTP uploading, HTTP form based upload, proxies, cookies, user+password authentication (Basic, Digest, NTLM, Negotiate, Kerberos...), file transfer resume, proxy tunneling and a busload of other useful tricks."

As always, the monthly donations programme is a joint initiative between DistroWatch and two online shops selling low-cost CDs and DVDs with Linux, BSD and other open source software - LinuxCD.org and OSDisc.com. These vendor contribute US$50.00 each towards the month's donation to open source software project. Here is the list of projects that received a DistroWatch donation since the launch of the programme (figures in US dollars):

* 2004: GnuCash ($250), Quanta Plus ($200), PCLinuxOS ($300), The GIMP ($300), LinDsys ($200), Fluxbox ($200), K3b ($350), Arch Linux ($300), Kile KDE LaTeX Editor ($100) and UNICEF - Tsunami Relief Operation ($340)
* 2005: Vim ($250), AbiWord ($220), BitTorrent ($300), NdisWrapper ($250), Audacity ($250), Debian GNU/Linux ($420), GNOME ($425), Enlightenment ($295), MPlayer ($400), Amarok ($300), KANOTIX ($270) and Cacti ($100)
* 2006: Gentoo ($500), Knoppix ($250), Digikam ($548), doxygen ($500), Gnumeric ($400), LinuxQuestions.org ($250), WildMidi ($250), GParted ($300), Blender ($250), Fedora ($230), Mandriva ($200), GNewSense ($800) and Mozilla ($300)
* 2007: GParted ($300), lighttpd ($300), Clam AntiVirus ($300), Liferea ($300), NASM ($300), FreeNAS ($300), lighttpd ($400), Damn Small Linux ($400), NimbleX ($450), wxWidgets ($500), Zenwalk Linux ($300) and KDE ($400)
* 2008: MPlayer ($300), VLC ($350), Linux From Scratch ($350)

Since the launch of the Donations Programme in March 2004, DistroWatch has donated a total of US$16,561 to various open source software projects.

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DistroWatch database statistics

* Number of all distributions in the database: 566
* Number of active distributions in the database: 353
* Number of discontinued distributions: 129
* Number of distributions on the waiting list: 178

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And this concludes the latest issue of DistroWatch Weekly. The next installment will be published on Monday, 14 April 2008.

Susan Linton

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Tip of the Day

If you've enjoyed this week's issue of DistroWatch Weekly, please consider sending us a tip.
(Tips this week: 0, value: US$0.00)