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What we can learn from Plasma telemetry

Since Plasma 5.18, about 7 months ago, Plasma has shipped with a telemetry system. Opt in (i.e off by default) it requires users to go to choose if (and how much) data to send to us.
No private or identifying information is sent, and everything is stored inline with our privacy policy.

Currently we have hit just shy of 100,000 updates!

We have started off requesting very little information. Versions, GPU info and some basic screen information. However the library powering this is extremely powerful and capable of so much more that we can try and build on in the future to try and identify weak areas and areas we need to invest time and effort and also to identify features or platforms that maybe are under utilised and can be dropped.

I have recently been trying to improve on how we can extract and visaulise data from the data collected and draw some conclusions. I want to present some of the aggregated metrics.

What we can learn from Plasma statistics

Used Plasma Versions

To explain our numerical versioning additons.
.80 = git master before the next version, up until the beta
.90 = after the stable branch forks for release up until the next.0 release.

LTS

The biggest surprise is that LTS is currently only used by around 5% of people with 93% of reporting users on the lastest stable (5.19)

At the current rate it does make me question whether the LTS is worth it. Maybe LTS will only gain traction when the next LTS distro gets a release which could come later?

Obviously any decision will only be made as the result of a discussion with all stakeholders, but this is definitely raising questions.

Testing

Right now about 1.5% of people run master, I had expected those users to be the most into helping with the telemetry and skew this further.
The bigger surprise is the number of people running master seems to fluctuate. Weekly users can go between 30-60. I had expected this to be constant.

It is comforting to see that betas do get more users, going up to 2.5% of our reporting userbase.

Interesting observations

There is one person who is still activitly using Plasma 5.18 beta. Not 5.18, the beta for 5.18.. which was 8 months ago.
I have so many questions.

Screens

800x600 resolution setups are still a thing we need to support, even if they are just VMs they're still used. This is very relevant as we often get commits blindly setting a minimum size hint of a window to be bigger because it "looks nicer". I now know I do still need to ensure in review that we don't break these setups.

We also see that ultrawide monitors are surprisingly unpopular despite clearly being the best monitor setup possible.

Graphic drivers

The graph is pretty self-explanatory, Intel has the most, but the Nvidia proprietory driver comes in at ~1/4 of the total users.
It makes it an important target to support as best as we can even if it comes with its share of problems.

My personal setup doesn't match your conclusions!

The reason we want to use telemetrics is to drive decisions with real data.

As a user you are more than welcome to choose to opt into the statistics or not, we understand privacy is important which is why everything is opt-in only.
However, real decisions will ultimately be based on the data we have available, if you want your usecases to be noted, please do consider submitting to the telemetry to us.
To enable telemetry please go to "System Settings" and select the "User Feedback" tab.

Posted on September 11, 2020Author davidCategories kde

38 thoughts on “What we can learn from Plasma telemetry”

1. **makosol** says:

September 11, 2020 at 1:29 pm

A new user must find this feature in a complex options. It would be better I think to have a window opened when the user first log into the session, proposing to activate the telemetry. I think it would make this feature more visible, and the more the data the best the information which can be extracted from (sorry for my english, not my first language).

Reply

1. **david** says:
   September 11, 2020 at 2:20 pm

   You are absolutely right.

   Ultimately we need to find a good balance between encouragement and not being annoying.

   Reply

   1. **someone** says:
      September 12, 2020 at 2:42 am

      The 0ad project has a good balance between intrusiveness and telemetry encouragement. They are also very clear about what data is being sent, you can see and modify it.

      Reply

2. **Eike Hein** says:
   September 11, 2020 at 1:49 pm

   LTS would most likely have an audience in e.g. corporate deployments where the IT department may well make sure telemetry cannot be enabled or communicate, though, or the user would be shy to enable it.

   Reply

   1. **Francisco t.** says:
      September 11, 2020 at 5:55 pm

      Where are the AMD drivers? Only intel and Nvidia?

      Reply

      1. **david** says:
         September 11, 2020 at 11:17 pm

         Vendor is Xorg for some reason

         Reply

3. **Carlo** says:

September 11, 2020 at 3:30 pm

> The biggest surprise is that LTS is currently only used by around 5% of people with 93% of reporting users on the lastest stable (5.19)

Come on. The anwser to this question ist almost trivial. Mostly private users, who are very interested in this desktop solution – I didn't drop the term fanboy – did I!? – ever turn this telemetry service on. Everyone else either doesn't know about it or won't ever enable it (coporate or anyone else caring about her or his privacy).

This dataset is inherently skewed.

Reply

4. **Ernesto Manriquez** says:
September 11, 2020 at 4:19 pm

Hey, thanks for making this fully opt-in instead of opt-out. Of course I opted all the way in, and I hope everyone does the same, simply because you can be trusted.

Reply

5. **Daniele Mte90 Scasciafratte** says:
September 11, 2020 at 5:01 pm

Wondering on how to turn on this telemetry as I didn't remember that I did…

Reply

6. **uewa** says:
September 11, 2020 at 5:05 pm

What if Plasma enables telemetry by default?. Showing a clear notification after Plasma installation, where you click and it explains you why it is enabled, how it collects the data and how to disable it (or/and add a button to disable it). And when people choose disable it, ask them if the reason is being a corporate deployment or privacy concerns and collect just if it is an LTS version.

Reply

    1. **Matthew** says:
    September 12, 2020 at 9:59 am

    I am strongly opposed to an opt-out solution and I am certain that this would be a no-go for most users. If you want opt-out you may go to Google, Microsoft, etc. ?

Making it more discoverable and as transparent as possible is the right way to go.

Reply

1. **uewa** says:
   September 12, 2020 at 1:50 pm

   Ok, most of you don like opt-in solution. I trust KDE thats why I suggested an opt-out solution, in a very clear and transparent way.

   Nevermind, I agree with you on "Making it more discoverable and as transparent as possible is the right way to go."

   Reply

   1. **uewa** says:
      September 12, 2020 at 1:52 pm

      *dont like opt-out…

      Reply
2. **Juan** says:
   September 12, 2020 at 11:13 pm

   Are you comparing KDE with Google or Microsoft about privacy?
   Com'on

   Reply

2. **Anonymous** says:
   September 13, 2020 at 8:47 am

   As soon as it becomes opt-out I'm going to move from KDE to basically anything else faster than you can say "oops".

   Reply

7. **Jan** says:
   September 11, 2020 at 9:53 pm

   Reading your blog post motivated me to look how I can turn on telemetry on my system, and I learned that KUserFeedback unfortunately seems not to be included at all in Kubuntu 20.04 (with Plasma 5.18).
   So I think data of users of Kubuntu will be lacking in the feedback collected so far?

   Reply

8. **Shane S.** says:
   September 11, 2020 at 10:41 pm

   I'm all for opt-in telemetry – sadly, I can't seem to find the "User Feedback" section in System Settings on Kubuntu 20.04 LTS. Since I upgraded from 19.10 using the release upgrader, it could be possible a package got missed.

   Otherwise, I agree with the points made above – those who are likely to use an LTS probably aren't the sort to actively seek out and enable this. I think a gentle prompt (perhaps akin to the Plasma Browser Integration notification) would go a long way. Just make sure it's unobtrusive and dismissable – and perhaps also wait a few days (1 week?) after first run before showing the notification, so users aren't bombarded the moment they try out KDE.

   Reply

   1. **YoYo** says:
      September 12, 2020 at 7:39 am

      I think the installer would be a better place? Though most probably only realizable on kde specific distros such as kubuntu / neon?
      Right at the end, either when it shows the "slideshow" of features (though on some installs that's not there for a long time ? or maybe on the "finished" screen.

      Reply

   2. **Nicolas** says:
      September 15, 2020 at 8:32 pm

      Ubuntu made the decision for you and disabled telemetry in a way you can't turn it back on.

      Reply

9. **stephen** says:
   September 12, 2020 at 3:23 am

   I turned on telemetry some time ago after reading another KDE article similar to this one. I also turned on telemetry on several other KDE programs as well. It would be nice to see all the KDE world of apps centralize this functionality in the System Settings page. A one stop shop for enabling and disabling telemetry for all the apps making it easier to find, use, and less cumbersome for the user to hunt through each app looking for this option.

   Thanks and keep up the good work!

Reply

1. **uewa** says:
   September 12, 2020 at 11:05 am

   I like your idea.

   Reply

10. **YoYo** says:
    September 12, 2020 at 7:11 am

    > To enable telemetry please go to “System Settings” and select the “User Feedback” tab.

    Can’t find anything like that here (Kubuntu 20.04, plasma 5.18.5). System settings don’t have any tabs (maybe had before the ui change? I don’t remember anymore ;), searching for feedback gives only launch feedback, configuration for the app itself only has the icon/sidebar view switch…

    Reply

    1. **YoYo** says:
       September 12, 2020 at 7:25 am

       Should reload before posting ;-).

       Is there a way to install it, or is it just not compiled in?

       Reply

       1. **Rik Mills** says:
          September 12, 2020 at 9:22 am

          It is not compiled in, and needs to be to work.

          Reply

       2. **Juan** says:
          September 12, 2020 at 11:22 pm

          I also want to enable the option in 20.04, but I can’t find it. I hope it appears in Kubuntu 20.04.2 or maybe in KDE 18.5.6.

          Reply

11. **Lucardus** says:
    September 12, 2020 at 4:06 pm

    Hi,
    I wonder, what values KMail is sending here about my screen setup. While my setup is actually a 3840×2160 and 1280×1024 screen the “show raw data” button on the lower right corner shows this:

“screens”: [
{
“dpi”: 109,
“height”: 1440,
“width”: 2560
},
{
“dpi”: 58,
“height”: 683,
“width”: 853
}

What unit is kuserfeedback using here? Or is this a bug elswhere, as KMail is doing strange things here on my dual display setup. Unfortunately I have no such button for the plasma user feedback.

Reply

1. **david** says:
   September 12, 2020 at 7:38 pm

   Sounds weird. File a bug on kuserfeedback and let’s take a look.

   Reply

   1. **Lucardus** says:
      September 13, 2020 at 10:09 am

      Thanks for the quick reply. Bug report filed! (https://bugs.kde.org/show_bug.cgi?id=426470)

      Reply

12. **Martin Sandsmark** says:
    September 12, 2020 at 7:09 pm

    I’m a bit late to the party, but if I understand correctly the telemetry just sends “plain” information?

    One interesting thing would be to use RAPPOR (e. g. https://github.com/sandsmark/qt-rappor-client), which basically sends random values that are biased towards what is actually measured on the system.

    It allows for gathering very detailed though sensitive information (i. e. time used in which parts of the UI, or buttons clicked) without being able to say anything about any individual user.

    One downside is that since it doesn’t collect actual data from the users you have to know before you ship what you want to know, and you

need a statistically significant number of users to have it on (otherwise you get just noise, though that also means it's more robust against malicious actors trying to influence the data).

I don't know if Mozilla still uses this, but I know they used to, and Google uses it in Chromium, Android, Fuchsia, etc.

Reply

1. **david** says:
   September 13, 2020 at 4:56 pm

   That's right

   That link is super interesting. If it had been floated a year ago when kuserfeedback went into KDE it'd definitely have been worth considering. I'm not sure it's "better" as we have this other conflicting goal of maximum transparency so we're trying to make it super clear to the user what data is being sent.

   Reply

13. **B** says:
    September 12, 2020 at 11:23 pm

    I'm on 5.14.5 (Debian stable). Even Debian unstable is still on 5.17.5. If telemetry just shipped with 5.18, you haven't heard from anyone using Debian KDE packages at all.

    Reply

14. **gumb** says:
    September 13, 2020 at 9:58 pm

    I'm on the LTS version, the default in a current distro, but I won't be counted because…

    it's 5.12LTS, on openSUSE 15.1 which is still receiving updates despite 15.2 being out for a while.

    So anybody else still using the 5.12LTS release obviously won't be counted since the telemetry service wasn't included. I'd say it's too early to draw conclusions about the usefulness of LTS releases.

    Reply

15. **Luca** says:
    September 14, 2020 at 8:05 pm

    On my Manjaro system, telemetry was active on the "Basic system information and usage statistics" level. As far as I can remember, I have not opted in, thus I think the default configuration of Manjaro

(and perhaps Arch Linux) enables telemetry. This may explain why so many users are using the latest version, and not the LTS.

Reply

16. **Terrance** says:
September 17, 2020 at 6:10 pm

Really glad to see such a data driven approach. I opted in straight away on my Arch install.

I do wish that Kubuntu would include the User Feedback module in their iso as I'm sure there are plenty of everyday users that could contribute some useful data to the project if promoted.

Reply

17. **Andy** says:
September 18, 2020 at 10:49 am

I'm on Kubuntu 20.04, but cannot see where to enable telemetry.

Reply

18. **Dan** says:
September 19, 2020 at 10:33 am

Maybe you should explain it again to the Manjaro users and devs that's there's no "spying" happening…

https://forum.manjaro.org/t/manjaro-20-1-mikah-got-released/24173/30

> Unless you (or someone else) already tried, you need to target the source of the privacy problem. Thus address the issue at the KDE developers. If the request lands on deaf ears, I think it's indeed time to resolve the problem at distro-level by compiling it without kuserfeedback or add a new XDG-AutoStart-entry which removes those privacy records at startup.

> Otherwise you could also demotivate the spying KDE developers by sending garbage as feedback

Reply

1. **david** says:
September 21, 2020 at 10:21 am

I hate this meme that we collect data when we're disabled.

It all comes from someone misreading the code, and starting a rumor that continues to spread. I don't know how to fix it.

Reply

19. **Saeed** says:
September 20, 2020 at 11:28 pm

It's been mentioned in other comments already, but I'm on Kubuntu 20.04 and can't see any User Feedback option to enable telemetry (I guess the Kubuntu devs removed it).

I think this means the data is going to be skewed. I would guess that Kubuntu is one of the most popular KDE distros. If you're not getting data from any Kubuntu users, the #people using LTS is going to be severely under-reported.

Reply

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