

The Computer Club

Providing Computing Assistance for All

InfoBytes



Issue 26 - Feb 2002

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Adrian's Ramblings

Hi there folks - and yet again it is time for me to sit down and arrange the electrons on the screen to form words for you (well, I can hardly say "put pen to paper" now, can I?). Let me start by saying "Happy New Year" to everybody out there reading this, and also, to those not at the January meeting - "Happy Birthday" to the club. Believe it or not the club has been going for 6 years now! And we are still finding things to talk about - amazing;-)



Congratulations to those members that have been around since the beginning - that's Gwen (our wonderful Editor - have to get that in to make sure I don't get resignation threats this time), Frank, Mike and of course myself -you're sure to let me know if I have missed you out. A commendation to go to Tony for sticking with us since meeting 3 - well we are now at meeting 73 (February 2002 - one meeting was missed in 2000 while I took exams). I have been present at 72 of those!

Anyway... enough about the past! This newsletter will be a little different to the previous ones, in that my articles will all be about Linux, first introduced to the club at the January meeting - there seemed to be a bit of interest, so here we go. To prove that Linux really is now usable, I will create all of my articles in Linux (as I am with this one) - I will use the Linux version of Sun Staroffice 5.2 for this (also available free for Windows - we will look at it at a meeting later in the year). This has an advantage over many of the other Linux wordprocessors in that it will output MS Word files (ready for Gwen to put into the Publisher template).

Bye for now.
Adrian

Club News

Nothing to note this time - except, of course that we have just celebrated our sixth birthday.

Congratulations everyone!



Diary Dates:

8th February - We have the Power! (Powerpoint H/O)

8th March - An alternative view: Star Office (H/O)

12th April - Spring Cleaning

10th May - Hardware upgrades

14th June - General

12th July - TBA

9th August - TBA

13th September - Annual General Meeting

11th October - TBA

8th November - TBA

13th December - General/Christmas Party

More suggestions for meetings are needed - the list (as always) isn't set in stone and alterations can easily be made.



Software News

Can't think of anything much! Windows XP is still growing in acceptance with the PC manufacturers, but also have more bugs reported.

Oh - Linux was 10 years old at the end of 2001.

Hardware News

This month sees the first glimpse of the new Apple iMac - Apple have managed to create a computer resembling a table lamp:



As far as I know the mouse and keyboard will use a radio link - all the computer components (DVD-RW etc) are stored in the hemispherical base - naturally it has a flat screen!



GWEN'S CORNER

Christmas is a distant memory, the year 2002 is well underway, and it is once again time for the newsletter. But first I need to write my article. I start up my computer, open up a brand new document in Word and – nothing! I can't think of a thing to write about! And this is only my eighth newsletter! Adrian has written umpteen. No wonder his articles are sometimes late.

Usually, when faced with 'writer's block' I doodle. With pen and paper, this takes the form of boxes, Christmas trees and matchstick men racing across the page. With the computer I click on the tool bar, opening up every instruction in search of inspiration. It's quite educational actually, as normally I'm so impatient to get started on whatever document I have in hand that I never bother much with tools except for a few basic ones. Now I have discovered that, when I accidentally hit the 'caps lock' and end up with a large portion of the article in upper case – I don't need to delete it and start again, but just click on Format – Change case – and – hey presto, all is perfect again. Oh, and that's where the Thesaurus is hiding, click Tools – Language – Thesaurus. Did you know that another word for Inspiration is Proclivity? It's surprising what these computers teach us! And, of course, if you go into View – Toolbars you can doodle around with this for hours.

I've decided that, not only are computers a marvellous invention to make our work easier and quicker, they are also wonderful time-wasters!

But now down to the serious business. I'm sure I speak for all our members when I say Congratulations to our Chairman for maintaining our interest in computers and the club for the last 6 years. You're doing an excellent job, Adrian. May the club flourish for the next six years – at least!

Finally, before abandoning this article completely in favour of a cup of tea, I would like to thank all those of you who have contributed to our 'Favourite Website' series. This seems to be working well, giving others a chance to try sites they may not have previously discovered. So please keep them coming in.

Happy computing

Gwen

SURFING THE WEB

I have been often asked which is my favourite Internet site. The answer must surely be the BBC. I find it a no-nonsense, clear, well laid out series of web sites. It is not subject to that irritating Internet problem of unrequested material, which I find so distracting and annoying, and, of course, expensive. And it is so easy to navigate around. Of course it is packed with information such as local 5-day weather forecasts and up to date, unbiased local, national, and international news. Also it is not tainted with American voices, again a breath of fresh air – I often wonder how continental Countries (non English speaking) fare. Do they have French speaking American? So you see I'm a simple minded Anglophile who enjoys quality.

Try it - www.bbc.co.uk

Colin Heywood



WHAT IS LINUX?



Those of you that were present at the last club meeting, I apologise, you will have heard a lot of this before. On that night I said quite a lot about linux – well, this is my attempt to get what I said written down...

In the 1970's, bigger, more powerful computer systems started to become commonplace (well, you know what I mean) and the “computer network” really started to take off. During this time the UNIX operating system was developed, based on a set of standards known as POSIX (I don't know what it stands for). UNIX was developed with networks in mind, and provided seamless shared resources. UNIX still forms the heart of most large networks, as it is stable and secure. Almost all of the Internet is supported on UNIX based computers.

However, there was then a revolution in the computing industry, leading to the production of DOS based PCs, and of course the Apple Macintosh – and Microsoft's hold on the industry. PCs developed their own ways of working, ignoring a lot of what had already been developed. Even the latest Microsoft operating systems are not very secure, and have a variable stability (probably get one to stay running for a few months – UNIX systems can be measured in YEARS!), and are only just beginning to provide full network sharing. Though those only ever using Windows will not notice this.

In the early 1990's Linus Torvealds (think it's spelt like that) was a student, and wanted to work on a UNIX type system of his own, on an Intel based PC, rather than on dedicated hardware (dedicated Unix systems made generally by Sun, DEC/Digital/Compaq/HP [whatever their name is now] and cost many thousands of pounds). Eventually he put together

the first “kernel” – the heart of the operating system, and called it Linux (pronounced with a short “i”) – a POSIX based O/S for the PC. The code for this was released at the end of 1991. From that time, the linux kernel code has been freely available, and has been modified and adapted by many people across the world – graphical interfaces have been produced, and there is now a large userbase and supply of software (though don’t expect to buy it off the shelf in Dixons). Now, after it’s 10th birthday, Linux is finally ready for the desktop.

Throughout it’s history Linux has been very popular with large businesses, because they have had knowledge of Unix systems. Now it’s stability and low cost (see my other article about licencing) have made it a popular choice for home users as well. As an example of the widespread usage of linux, it is estimated that about 60% of ALL websites are run using the Apache web server software, running on Linux/Unix machines (or “boxes” as they are usually known); so all the competition, Microsoft included, can only manage the remaining 40%.

Many people are now turning to Linux and the “open source” software to break free from the never ending Microsoft update cycle. But more later....

AMH



GENDER BENDER

Computers are male
because they are impossible to figure out
and there’s never enough memory.

Eye halve a spelling chequer

I halve a spelling checker.
It came with my pea sea.
It plane lee marks four my revue
Miss steaks aye can knot sea.

Eye ran this poem threw it,
Your sure reel glad two no.
Its vary polished in it's weigh.
My checker tolled me sew.

A checker is a bless sing,
It freeze yew lodes of thyme.
It helps me right awl stiles two reed,
And aides me when I rime.

Each frays come posed up on my screen
eye trussed too bee a joule.
The checker pours o'er every word
To cheque sum spelling rule.

Bee fore a veiling checker's Hour
spelling mite decline,
And if we're lacks oar have a laps,
We wood bee maid too wine.

Butt now bee cause my spelling
Is checked with such grate flair,
Their are no fault's with in my cite,
Of nun eye am a ware.

Now spelling does knot phase me,
It does knot bring a tier.
My pay purrs awl due glad den
With wrapped word's fare as hear.



To rite with care is quite a feet
Of witch won should be proud,
And wee mused dew the best wee can,
Sew flaw's are knot aloud.

Sow ewe can sea why aye dew prays,
Such soft wear four pea seas,
And why eye brake in two averse
Buy righting too pleas.

-- Sæce Unknown

LONGER RECORDING

Windows contains a useful little program called Sound Recorder (Start Menu, Programs, Accessories, Entertainment, or Line-in socket.) The Sound Recorder program will only allow you to record 60 seconds at a time, but there is a way around it. Before you've plugged a source into your sound card, record 60 seconds of silence then give the File a name. Then record another 60 seconds of silence. When a further 60 seconds has elapsed, go to Edit and click Mix with File to increase the total time to 120 seconds. Zero the slider. It should be possible to obtain a total time of 180 seconds.

Now, if you want to record a whole song, open Sound Recorder, then open your blank file and record over it.

Give it a new name, then save.

Roy Orchard



GNU Public License – Open Source Software



You may well have heard about open source software, or the GNU (pronounced guh-NEW, meaning GNUs not Unix – yes it's a recursive one) Public license, and wondered exactly what it means. Well, here goes!

All of the central Linux operating system has been released under this agreement, the full text of which is quoted below (taken from <http://www.gnu.org>) – have a read, it will save me a lot of explaining!

GNU GENERAL PUBLIC LICENSE Version 2, June 1991

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Preamble

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Also, for each author's protection and ours, we want to make certain that everyone understands that there is no warranty for this free software. If the software is modified by someone else and passed on, we want its recipients to know that what they have is not the original, so that any problems introduced by others will not reflect on the original authors' reputations.

Finally, any free program is threatened constantly by software patents. We wish to avoid the danger that redistributors of a free program will individually obtain patent licenses, in effect making the program proprietary. To prevent this, we have

made it clear that any patent must be licensed for everyone's free use or not licensed at all.

The precise terms and conditions for copying, distribution and modification follow.

Well, they do on the website – I think that is probably enough for here!

So, the open source agreement states that if you write a piece of software and distribute it under the agreement that you must make the code available, so that anyone can modify it as they wish. The software doesn't have to be supplied free of charge (but a lot of the Linux software is – people are writing it because they enjoy it and want to, not to make money). The open source strategy has produced a lot a very stable programs – because so many people can be involved in testing and changing the code – compare this to Microsoft who have NEVER made any of their code available for others to look at!

The open source philosophy has also now made it's way into books! A lot of Linux books and manuals are now being written in much the same way, so if you think you can explain something better, just write it down and send it to the publishers, you may make it into the next edition;-).

So Linux is not just another operating system – it's a complete change in the way that the computer industry works. Rather than having to pay hundreds of pounds for a Microsoft licence for each computer, a company can download, free of charge the operating system from one of many suppliers, and use it on all of their computers – and do the same with most of the rest of the software that they routinely use.

So, our next step must be to have a look at Linux – that's elsewhere in this newsletter!

AMH

SURFING MORE WEB SITES



I don't use the Internet very much but the two sites that I have found useful are -

1. www.7dayshop.com I buy genuine Epson inkjet printer 660 cartridges from them, mainly because they seem to be far cheaper than other sources. My type of cartridge costs £10.90 for black and £13.25 for colour. They are cheaper in packs of 3, so I buy 3 black + 1 colour for about £44. This requires only one charge for postage (£1.95). Other sites may make no apparent charge for postage but the charge is included in the price which is consequently higher. The prices in shops such as Dixons, PC World, etc. are horrendous in comparison - around £18 – 20.

2. www.thetrainline.com I find this useful for booking tickets, especially to London. There are trains from Bath Spa direct to London Waterloo for £16 for a day return, including a reserved seat for both journeys. You have to travel off-peak, of course, and it is cheaper to book at least a week in advance (Apex or similar). You have to pay by credit card but the tickets arrive by next day's post. A day's outing starting at 8.58 am, arrives in London at about 11.10 am and returns at about 7.15 pm, although there is some choice of trains. Car parking in Bath is, of course, a problem, but I've found that it's best to book from Bradford-on-Avon where the station car park is cheap and large enough for all.

I haven't used these trains since last summer, so they would have to be checked.

Derick Alliban.



WHAT IS THE WEB?

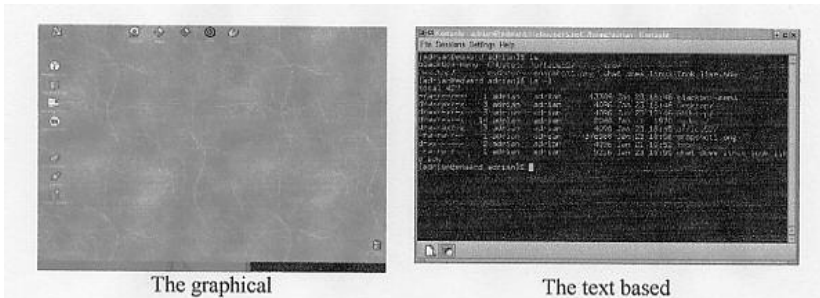
Spiders have web sites
What we have is a hard-to-locate
electronic page of irrelevant information!



What does Linux look like?

So, we have discussed Linux a bit now, and you've read my article on licensing, but what does Linux actually look like when in use? This is actually a very complicated question to answer - because so many people have contributed towards Linux there are many different "file managers". If you buy a boxed distribution of Linux (eg Red Hat, Mandrake, SuSe, Debian etc - I am using Mandrake 8.1 here) you will probably be supplied with several (I've got about a dozen). The most usable for windows users are KDE or Gnome systems - I prefer KDE, so that is what the screenshots below have come from. If you don't want to use a graphical system, there is a full Unix type text based system underneath (the text based is generally a lot more powerful - but a lot harder to get into).

So, we have 2 different faces for linux:



Now, I don't expect you will actually be able to see anything in either of those screens, but I made the effort!

The KDE desktop is totally configurable, and has a menu listing most of the available software, that appears by clicking the "K" in the bottom left hand corner, or by pressing the "Windows" key on your keyboard - so there is a lot of similarity with Windows operating systems.

One thing I should point out at this stage is that no PC software will run under Linux - due to the differences in the

of which many are supplied with distribution, ranging from card games, to the excellent Tuxracer (Tux being the Linux mascot - the penguin hopefully gracing the cover of the newsletter), in which you have to steer Tux down ski slopes collecting fish on the way (trust me, it's very addictive).

Anyway, I digress! For those wanting to use the internet, linux is a lot more secure than Windows, and there's fewer viruses (something like 25, compared to 70,000+ for Windows). You obviously won't be able to use Internet Explorer, but Netscape is available, and is a more than adequate replacement. Almost everything you can do under Windows you can now do under Linux - the exceptions for me being Scanning (always dodgy in Linux), and using my access databases and Publisher files - both of these are Microsoft formats that very few programs can actually use. Not that there aren't perfectly good database and desktop publishing suits available for Linux, I just would like to be able to use my existing files.

For those really into computers, Linux gives you the room to play around that you don't get with Windows, with C compilers built in (Windows was written in C) so you can program yourself, or set yourself up a webserver, or mailserver (for these to be of much use you would need to leave your computer on permanently and have an "always on" internet connection - but that's not the point!). Sometimes it's just fun to play around in the guts of the computer...

To sum up, using Linux is currently not for an absolute computer beginner, but if you know a bit about computers, and aren't afraid to learn something new, then it has a lot to offer. If you've got room on your hard drive, and aren't afraid to partition it (OK, better write something about that as well, hold on Gwen!) then why not give it a go, it doesn't need to cost you anything!

AMH

URGENT – INPUT REQUIRED



During the summer months Adrian is going to be busy with other projects and the time he can give to writing articles for the next 2 newsletters will be drastically curtailed. Therefore, if you don't want to see the disappearance of your favourite magazine, please could we have some contributions for the May and August issues.

Have you bought any new software lately? If so what, why and how? Was it easy to install/use? How does it operate? Have you found it helpful or disappointing? Which piece of software do you use most often? Again what – why and how? Adrian would be happy to check any article for technical correctness, so don't let that put you off.

Is there any software (or any other subject) that you would like someone else to write about? As you can see from my letter on page 6, it is much easier to write an article once you have a subject to work on – it's thinking up the subject that is the hardest part. And this is something everyone can help us on.

Perhaps we could restart the questions and answers corner. Even printing questions that Adrian has already given you the answers to. Others would be interesting in knowing them. The odd comic piece wouldn't come amiss either.

And, of course, please keep the website articles coming in. Also any comments from people who have since tried these sites.

Arian puts in a lot of work to keep this club running. Don't forget he still has to prepare work for the monthly meetings. So please, lads and lasses, let's rally round and help him out.

Don't forget – any contributions will be gratefully received – either by E-mail or hard copy.

Gwen

The “MESSIAH” according to farmer, Bill Jones

Bill Jones went from his little Yorkshire village in West Riding to hear a performance of Handel's 'Messiah' at Huddersfield Town Hall for the first time. These are a few of his comments to his pals afterwards!



The Town Hall were crowded - and all them singers took up half the gallery - but I managed to squeeze in somehow. There was a chap larkin' about on't organ, he weren't playing nowt in particular, just runnin' his fingers up and down like our Martha when she started to learn the pianner.

Well after a bit, a lot o' chaps came in carrying fiddles, then they brought in the Messiah. Well that's what I took it to be. It were the biggest instrument on't platform and it were covered in a big green bag. Anyroad, they took the bag off it and then a chap rubbed its stomach wi' a stick and you should have heard it groan. It were something like the last expiring moan of a dying cow.

I were thinking of going, when a little chap come on, all dolled up in white waistcoat wi' a flower in his buttonhole and everything went dead quiet. You could have heard a pin drop. He had a stick in his hand and started wavin' it about - and all the singers stared at him! I reckon they were wonderin' what were the matter wi him

Then they started to sing; first one side said they were King o' Glory then t'other side said they were - and they went at it hammer and tongs but it fizzled out so I've no idea who won. Then there was a bit a' bother about some sheep that were lost. I don't know who they belonged to but they must have been some champion twisters and turners judgin' by the words and the fancy music. One lot of singers must have been very fond of mutton because they kept singing "all we like sheep."

Then a lot o' women stood up after that and all of 'em looked as if they were - well gettin' on a bit. Some of 'em must have been 65 if they were a day! They sang, 'Unto us a child is born' and the chaps shouted back, "Wonderful!" And I thought, "Wonderful - it's a bloomin' miracle!

After that they all sobered down a bit and sang about a lass called Joyce Greatly. I've never heard of her meself but the chaps had, 'cause they all looked mighty pleased about it! Then some chap got up and said he were King o' Kings and another

got up and said he were - and they started arguin' 'bout that. I was gettin' pretty fed up and then everybody in the place stood up to see what were the matter and they suddenly shouted 'Halleluia! - its goin' to rain for ever and ever!'. Well at that I jumped up and made straight for the door. I'd had me money's worth, and besides I was thinkin' that if it were goin' to rain for ever and ever, I'd better get home before the floods came. I hope they find them sheep.

Apologies for digressing from the 'computer' theme but I thought this was worth including as light entertainment.
Gwen

Answers to the Puzzles in November's Infobytes

1. Show that, if the top 26 cards of an ordinary shuffled pack of cards contain more red cards than there are black cards in the bottom 26, then there must be, somewhere in the pack, at least 3 consecutive cards of the same colour.

Answer

Suppose there are 14 red cards in the top half. This means 12 black in the top half. The bottom half must then have 12 red cards and 14 blacks.

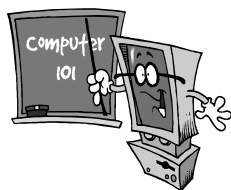
So, the top half always contains the SAME NUMBER of red cards as there are black cards in the bottom half and the number of consecutive cards doesn't arise.

2. Two cyclists, a mile apart, are approaching each other, one at 8 mph and the other at 12 mph. A fly travels at 30 mph from one cyclist to the other repeatedly.

How far does the fly travel until the two cyclists meet?

Answer

The cyclists are approaching at a combined speed of 20 mph. They travel 1 mile in 3 minutes. The fly moving at 30 mph for 3 minutes travels 1.5 miles



Derick Alliban

A Review of E-mail addresses

Adrian's

Club stuff: - chair@thecompclub.org.uk

Personal: - adrian@thecompclub.org.uk

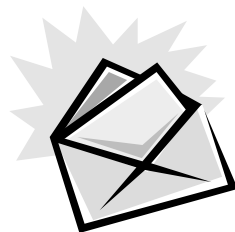
thecompclub@hotmail.com

adrian_Hooper@bigfoot.com

"Dodgy": - mail@thecompclub.org.uk (suspect e-mails, viruses etc)

Web page: - webmaster@thecompclub.org.uk

Mailing list: - list@thecompclub.org.uk



The "Dodgy" account is for people to send suspect e-mails/files etc for me to check - it also seems to be the account that attracts junk mail. Anything sent to that address is treated with caution.

Gwen's

editor@thecompclub.org.uk

gwen.hoskins@ukgateway.net

For Sale or Wanted

There are no computer items offered for sale this month, although there are still a few **Somer Scribes** Writers Circle's **Books** available, at £1 each.

Don't forget—if you have anything you wish to sell, or happen to be looking for, please fill in the form on the opposite page and hand it to either myself or Adrian.

Gwen



Items for Sale/Wanted

If you have an item for sale/wanted, please fill in the section below (or write the same information on a separate piece of paper) and send it to me, or hand it to me at a meeting .

Name:

Telephone:

E-mail:

Is the item for sale, or wanted (please delete)?:

FOR SALE / WANTED

Description:

Price wanted/Willing to pay: £ _____

Date: _____

