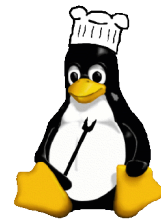


# The Open Pitt



What's cooking in Linux and Open Source in Western Pennsylvania

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## Switching to Open Source on the Desktop, Part 1 *by Carl Benedict*

Whether you are just thinking about making the switch to Linux or are already a long-time user, it's not always easy to switch completely to open source. This article will cover some of the challenges of taking the plunge into the Windows-free world. In this month's part, we'll look at some common software applications so that you have an idea of what's out there. We'll assume you've researched the available Linux distributions and selected one for this undertaking.

### Begin at the Beginning

First things first. What applications will you need? What environment will you be operating in? The first order of business will be to identify the applications and tools that you use on a day-to-day basis. To help lead you through this step, we'll use my transition process as an example.

### Application Overview

During my transition to a Linux desktop, I had a fairly typical set of requirements. Let's take a look at what I chose to handle common tasks. We'll also list alternatives for each.

**Web Browser:** *Mozilla* has become a well-used browser in the open-source world. It supports common plug-ins like Java and Flash and has built-in pop-up blocking. The full

suite has an e-mail and newsgroups client, IRC client, HTML editor, and address book. Other choices are *Konqueror*, *Galeon*, *Firefox*, and *Opera*.

**Office Suite:** *OpenOffice.org* is a suite of applications comparable to Microsoft Office. It includes word processing, spreadsheet, presentation, and drawing software. It can read and write many common Microsoft file formats. Other good picks are *KOffice*, *AbiWord*, and *Gnumeric*.

**Music Player:** *XMMS*—The X MultiMedia System is a music player modeled after WinAmp. It plays many popular music file formats and can be extended to handle others through plug-ins. Another choice is *Rhythmbox*.

**Movie Player:** *Mplayer* works with most video formats. Related applications are *Xine* and *Realplayer*.

**E-mail Client:** *Evolution* is an e-mail client, contact manager, and task scheduler all in one. The interface is much like Microsoft Outlook. Alternatives include *Mozilla Mail*, *KMail*, *Thunderbird*, and *Balsa*.

**Instant Messaging:** *Gaim* supports the most popular IM networks, including AOL IM, ICQ, Yahoo!, and MSN. Other choices are *Kopete* and *naim*.

**Graphic Editor:** Often described as the first “killer app” for Linux, *the GIMP* supports a wide array of raster

graphics formats, and also reads Adobe Photoshop project (PSD) files. Other options include *Sodipodi* and *Moonlight/3d*.

**CD Burning:** *X-CD-Roast* is a graphical front-end to the *cdrecord* package. Also good choices are *K3b* and *GNOME Toaster*.

Most of these applications are already included with the major Linux distributions.

### Other Choices

Of course, the list above is not comprehensive. What if you need an application for a specific task I haven't covered? First and foremost, check SourceForge. It is home to a large number of open source projects. Freshmeat is also a great place to search. The URLs are:

<<http://sourceforge.net/>>  
<<http://www.freshmeat.net/>>

### Stay Tuned...

Next month, I'll cover concerns about interoperability with other systems and how to obtain support.

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## June Roundup

*Jun. 5 General User Meeting:* **Bryan Mills** and **David Watson** of **Cobind** demonstrated their web-based tools for building customized Linux distributions. They also previewed their new Cobind Desktop 0.2 and graphical front-end for the YUM package manager. Their distribution was released on June 23 and highlights their

Cobind Desktop - <<http://cobind.com/desktop.html>>  
Tutorial - <[http://www.wplug.org/meetings/one-meeting?wp\\_meeting\\_id=3006](http://www.wplug.org/meetings/one-meeting?wp_meeting_id=3006)>

philosophy of a lightweight, simplified desktop system.

*Jun. 12 New User Tutorial:* **Beth Lynn Eicher** presented an introduction to the basics of using Linux, from choosing a distribution to installation to essential commands. Her slides are available online.

## Coming Events

**Jul. 10:** Installfest. 10AM to 5PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

**Jul. 17:** General User Meeting, Topic: Cheesy Backups with *rsync*. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

**Aug. 8:** 3rd Annual WPLUG Open Source Picnic. 1PM to 6PM, Snyder Park, Whitehall

**Aug. 14:** General User Meeting. 10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

*The public is welcome at all events*

## From the Editors: Why Linux is Unstoppable

The past few years have seen more and more Linux use. It is already a top choice on the server. Embedded device makers are increasingly turning away from proprietary alternatives. And the first large-scale desktop deployments are hitting the news.

But there is other news as well. The SCO Group has brought several lawsuits around the country and is trying to collect fees from Linux users. Microsoft is assembling a huge patent portfolio that some think will be used as a weapon against Open Source.

If there is a strategy to destroy Linux, it is doomed to fail. The basic reason is that Open Source software puts control into the hands of users.

Back in days of yore, computers were giant expensive beasts guarded by a priesthood of programmers and operators. Mainframes generally worked only with hardware sold by the same manufacturer.

The personal computer changed all that. Users now had direct contact with machines. The IBM PC's standard interfaces meant that you could mix and match hardware, adapting it to your exact needs. New manufacturers sprang up like weeds. The motherboard itself was cloned by Compaq and others. A true revolution had begun; the hardware market now responded to the users' desires, not the dictates of the big manufacturers.

Microsoft's Bill Gates realized just how important this was. In 1985, he

wrote a strategy memo to John Sculley and Jean-Louis Gassée of Apple, trying to convince them to license the Macintosh to other companies:

Any deficiencies in the IBM architecture are quickly eliminated... The closed architecture prevents similar independent investment in the Macintosh. The IBM architecture, when compared to the Macintosh, probably has more than 100 times the engineering resources applied to it when investment of compatible manufacturers is included. The ratio becomes even greater when the manufacturers of expansion cards are included.

—from *Apple* by Jim Carlton

Apple chose not to take this advice, and the IBM PC took the lion's share of the market. Heavy-duty tasks once reserved for mainframes and mini-computers are now done by clusters of PCs. The open architecture won.

What Gates did not admit then or now is that the same lesson can apply to software. Linux and other Open Source software benefits from the contributions of people all over the world, assembling resources that dwarf even Microsoft's. (In an ironic twist, Apple's Mac OS X has open-source BSD at its core.)

Best of all, Open Source licensing guarantees that each user is forever free to adapt the software to his or her own needs. That freedom will carry Open Source through any obstacles, be they technical, legal, or political.

## Novell, IBM Sponsor Workshops by Beth Lynn Eicher

Riverhead Training in downtown Pittsburgh hosted four introductory Linux workshops sponsored by Novell and IBM. The first of these was attended by over 100 people from Pittsburgh, Western Pennsylvania, Boston, and Cleveland. Each attendee received a 202-page Linux training book and Novell SUSE Linux Standard Server 8 CD-ROM.

Topics covered included SUSE Linux installation and desktop basics,

Novell on Linux - <http://www.novell.com/linux/>

Linux at IBM - <http://www.ibm.com/linux/>

Riverhead Training - <http://www.riverheadtraining.com/>

system administration fundamentals, and a preview of Novell's Nterprise management tools. Novell and Riverhead promise that this is only the beginning of their investment in Linux here in Pittsburgh. Look for more advanced Linux classes and certification offerings this summer.

Riverhead Training currently provides courses in Novell Nterprise Linux Services and CompTIA Linux+ preparation.

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<http://www.wplug.org/top/>

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Vance Kochenderfer

### What is Linux?

Linux is a *kernel*, the core of a computer operating system, created by Linus Torvalds. It is typically packaged as a *distribution*, which includes the extra programs necessary to make a computer functional and useful. Since 1991, it has grown from a one-man project which ran on one computer to one with thousands of contributors running on everything from personal organizers to million-dollar supercomputers.

### What are Open Source and Free Software?

Open Source and Free Software provide you, the user, with the opportunity to see the source code of the programs you use. You are free to use it, share it with others, and even make changes to it if you wish. While the Free Software and Open Source communities differ in their philosophical approach, in practical terms they share nearly identical goals. Learn more at <http://www.opensource.org/> and <http://www.gnu.org/>.

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## Quick Tip

Running `man hier` on most UNIX-like systems will display the filesystem hierarchy and where you can expect to find various types of files.

## Save the Date

August 8, 1 to 6pm

WPLUG will hold its third annual Open Source Picnic at Snyder Park in Whitehall Borough (in the South Hills).

The reason why we call it "Open Source" because everyone who attends is to contribute by bringing food, helping out, or organizing activities. It will be as good as the community makes it!

Check the mailing list for updates or to suggest activities. Plan to bring the whole family!