Malware fanfare

The Linux community has been taking quite a lot of jabs from the Windows-leaning press lately, over this compromised UnrealIRC application that went undetected for nine months. “Windows’ malware monopoly is over” headlines were followed by numerous “Is Linux secure?” articles. I think either those writers just don’t know what they’re talking about or they wanted to ignore the facts.

First, if Microsoft found and fixed any of its vulnerabilities in nine months, it’d be a miracle. Secondly, this is an application – not the Linux kernel or some crucial part of the system, such as GCC, but third-party software. It’d have to be downloaded and compiled by the user because no distro includes it in their shipping version. Finally, it’s so obscure that nobody even uses it! That’s how it went undetected for nine months – hardly anyone ran it. Linux is not immune. Vulnerabilities are found, but they’re fixed fairly rapidly. Few offer any real danger to the average user. The fact that we’ve found some trojan in a piece of third-party software is no reflection on Linux itself. OS security is affected by user activity: Windows can be locked down and Linux can be made more vulnerable, depending on what you do.

Ubuntu Software Centre will give developers a chance to earn revenue.

Ubuntu Software Centre has some new features in store for users and developers. One of which is giving developers a chance to earn revenue from their applications – and all the implications that come with that, such as a billing system and application serial numbers. Hoping to avoid ‘being Apple’ and having too much bureaucracy Ubuntu is planning for only a few apps each week to be approved, creating a more consistent process. The interface itself is being tweaked, and one of the latest developments is an animated ‘featured application’ bar, in which sets of applications are cycled automatically. A donation option and faster general operation are slated for 11.04.

Also in the Ubuntu Software Centre is a new category called “What’s New”. This will feature new applications for a given version that were not in Universe or Main repositories when that version was released. This will take some pressure off developers in the event that their application isn’t quite ready for release. It will also afford users a chance to find new applications without searching individual PPA directories, as is the case now.

There are quite a few to-do items on the Ubuntu installer blueprint. Lots of great features are planned, such as the option to install the Ubuntu restricted extras and the ability to take a photo using an attached webcam for user accounts if desired. Besides those, smaller things such as making the installer automatically reboot; automatic detection of keyboard; time zone; language; and creating a wireless network configuration page are also slated for 10.10. Lots of appearance tweaking and some new widgets are also on the table. All in all, it sounds like seeing the installer alone will be worth a fresh install.

Some other developmental odds and ends include compiling for the i686 architecture, implementing Grub 2 framebuffer for a flicker-free and pretty graphical boot splash, and lots more work on Upstart. In addition, the rootless X server is shaping up quite well too.
Say hi to Squeeze

Debian 6.0 The long-awaited release takes a step closer to reality.

The long overdue Debian 6.0 seems to be heading into the home stretch according to recent announcements made on its development list and insider blogs. Adam Barrat announced that once system updates for Python 2.6, have been completed, the 6.0 code will be frozen. He estimates this should occur in August.

By then, changes in Glibc, desktops, and applications should be well in place. This release will bring Gnome 2.30 and KDE 4.4.3. In addition, work on the new `Start up`, Debian's `Upstart`-based initialisation system that will run scripts in parallel for faster boots, is pretty much completed. If all goes well, we might see release by December. String freeze on the installer went into effect on 4 July, but users are warned not to be surprised if 6.0 isn't released until early 2011. There are still quite a few urgent RC bugs to squash.

Debian project leader Stefano Zacchiroli has begun a contest to find artwork for 6.0. The new boot and desktop theme will be chosen from user contributions and it’s still not too late to get yours submitted. See the wiki at [www.debian.org](http://www.debian.org) for more information.

Torsten Werner has published the results of a community user poll focusing on uses and hopes for the Debian project. He found that 50% of users had been using Debian for six or more years. He also found that 80% didn’t want paid-for components removed and that 73% preferred the “release when ready” philosophy over scheduled releases. See more at [http://twerner.blogspot.com](http://twerner.blogspot.com). [www.debian.org](http://www.debian.org)

Hats off

Fedora 14 Accepted features begin to populate for new release.

The Fedora Project is hammering out some of the new features for its upcoming version 14 release. Most work is still under the bonnet, but a theme concept wiki is getting quite a few submissions for prospective artwork.

There’s an interesting change from `gasp` to `LZMA` compression for software packages, enabling more use of live images while still providing fast decompression. Early tests show an 8.7% size reduction using `LZMA`.

Another exciting development is the replacement of `libjpeg` with `libjpeg-turbo`, which contains lots of performance enhancements to the stock `libjpeg`, and delivers at least twice as fast compression of JPEGs on MMX and SSE processors and 25% on others. And, best of all, it has the same API/ABI as `libjpeg`, so no other packages have to be rebuilt.

Fedora is planning on providing the MeeGo Netbook UX in version 14, offering technologies like Clutter, GUPnP and libsocialweb.

The Fedora Anaconda installer is getting some updates, including multipath installation. This will enable users to install on those multipath devices that were previously problematic. Multipath devices are connected to two or more physical cables, buses or ports, providing a performance boost and fault protection.

Fedora is switching to `systemd`, a drop-in replacement for `SysVinit`, for this release. Its main advantage for users is the ability to provide parallel starting of processes when booting, which translates to faster bootups. [http://fedoraproject.org](http://fedoraproject.org)

On the Radar

Ubuntu Unity interface

Unity is the new default interface for Ubuntu Netbook Edition. It’s designed to boot quickly, use fewer resources and maximise the available space on those smaller netbook screens. It takes advantage of the upper panel as much as possible to save space and loses the lower panel, but the main component is the side launcher. Multimedia capabilities, the ability to connect to printers, and the ability to read and write to removable media are also on the feature list, but Unity has been designed to be a web device interface first and foremost.

Since its introduction, development has been hot and heavy. Making sure that access to software is as easy as possible and the installation process are currently in the works. The apps interface was demonstrated recently by David Siegel in a mock-up, which is pictured here. It shows the new Dash bar, with the entry All

Applications in front of Internet, Media, and System buttons. It does just as the name implies — shows all applications installed. File browsing is also coming along. All in all, the interface is shaping up nicely and looks well tailored for smaller screens.

The updated version of the interface is available to those already testing Unity and new testers can add the PPA repository [canonical-dx-team/une](https://launchpad.net/canonical-dx-team%5C/une) and install or see the instructions at [https://wiki.ubuntu.com/DesktopTeam/Unity](https://wiki.ubuntu.com/DesktopTeam/Unity)

Hit list

The 10 most visited distro pages on DistroWatch.com, 22 June–22 July (average hits per day)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distro</th>
<th>Number of hits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OpenSUSE</td>
<td>1687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ubuntu</td>
<td>1637</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fedora</td>
<td>1180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linux Mint</td>
<td>1139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debian</td>
<td>1011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandriva</td>
<td>979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCLinuxOS</td>
<td>921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabayon</td>
<td>690</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arch</td>
<td>618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peppermint</td>
<td>571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DistroWatch.com monitors the popularity of distributions based on the number of visits to each of its distro-specific pages. While these figures don’t represent the actual install base, they’re an indicator of which distros were hot during each specific time period.