Pidgin: Instant

Still running loads of different instant messaging clients? Don't know what instant messaging is? Let **Andy Channelle** enhance your life with Pidgin.

Our expert

Andy Channelle
Andy seems to have been taking his first steps in Linux software forever, and has been interested in technology since the advent of the Dragon 32.

Even as some migrate their instant messaging (IM) habits to Facebook – which is blessedly cross-platform – many people still persist with their Yahoo, MSN and Google Talk accounts. And if your friends are waiting at the end of these networks for a message, it makes sense to be able to send one. However, Linux users don't have to keep a large number of IM clients on their computers, as *Pidgin* can deal with all of the most popular chat protocols, meaning you can talk to the whole world without stressing your PC's processor.

Pidgin (**www.pidgin.im**) is a multi-protocol IM client capable of working with everything from AIM and MSN to IRC and MySpaceIM. The latest version is 2.5.2, and is available for a number of Linux distributions as well as Windows and OS X. In the

› *Pidgin* can speak in all of the currently popular IM protocols, which means no more app swapping.

latest version of Ubuntu (Intrepid Ibex), this version is available via the *Synaptic* package manager, and packages will also it will also be available for most other common distributions.

This tutorial will work with most recent versions of *Pidgin* (everything after 2.4) and we'll assume that you have the software installed and have a working internet connection, preferably broadband. The application is likely to be housed under the Internet section of your applications menu.

On first run, a wizard will launch to enable you to configure your first account. On the first screen, select Add to create a new account; this will launch the configuration screen. What you see on here will depend upon which protocol/service you select from the first drop-down list. For example, if you select AIM there will be options for a username and password only, but if Google Talk is selected (which is where we're going) a few more options are available. In this case, we'll need to provide a username, password, a domain and a Resource name.

It's good to talk

When using Google Talk, the username should be every part of your Google account name before the **@** symbol, and the domain section would be everything after the **@**. If you're using an account that doesn't have a Google email account associated with it, use gmail.com for the domain. If you're using an older version of *Pidgin*, you may find that there's no Google Talk option. In this case, select XMPP from the protocol list then go into the Advanced tab and set Connect Port to 5222 and Connect Server to talk.google.com.

The Resource can be left with the default 'Home' setting and, depending on your security needs, the password can be added to the appropriate space. Leaving the password space blank will mean you're asked to provide the password every time you connect, which is the best option if you're in a shared environment and other people might abuse your IM account.

The Local Alias section, which is available in all accounts, defines how you're seen on your own screen (ie 'Eddie' or 'Me'), but will not effect how others see your screen name. Finally, select the option for mail notifications if you'd like a visual sign when an email arrives at your Gmail account.

It's also possible to set a 'Buddy' icon specifically for this account. When selecting a buddy icon, choose something small and uncomplicated that won't look silly replicated a hundred times on a long conversation thread.

Once all the detail has been added to the sections, click the Save button. The dialog box will disappear and the Buddy list for this particular account will appear on the desktop. *Pidgin* will extract information from your account and any contacts who are online will appear in the list alongside their own Buddy icons.

If no contact names appear, it may be that no-one on your list is online. Select the Buddies menu option and choose Show > Offline Buddies to get a list of everyone associated with that

» **Last month** We got the best out of the Dolphin file manager and KDE 4.

messaging
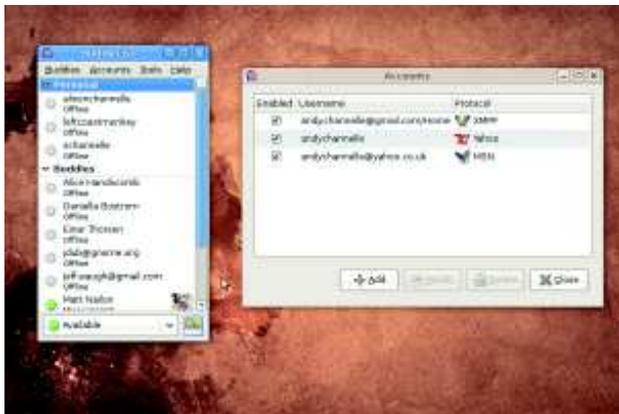
❭ **You can switch accounts on and off in** *Pidgin* **using the Manage Accounts option.**

account. When you've found someone who's online you can double-click on the contact's name to launch a chat session. A new window will appear divided into two sections. At the top is the conversation thread, where each message will appear, and at the bottom is the chat window where you type in messages before hitting the Return key to send the message.

Once you've finished a conversation, simply close down the main window so only the Buddy List is available. If you've been discussing some important issues and you'd like a record of the conversation, select Conversation > Save As to save a text file of the thread, which can then be opened up in any text editor.

Status anxiety

You can add new accounts to the software by using the Accounts > Manage Accounts menu or pressing Ctrl+A and following the procedure above, but with the appropriate credentials for other sites. All active accounts will appear in the Buddy List window and contacts associated with each account can be viewed or hidden by clicking the disclosure icon next to each account name.
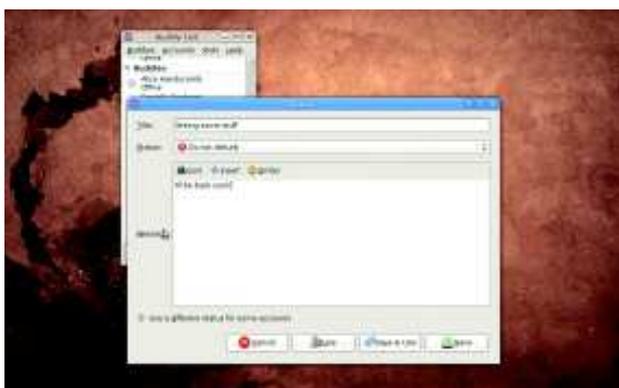
Just as important as knowing who is available is letting other know your availability. By default, you'll be listed as 'Available', which lets your contacts know you're waiting for contact. Use the drop-down list at the bottom of the Buddy List window to select from a selection of pre-made status options such as Chatty or Away. The Invisible option allows you to stay connected to your network, and hence available for chats, but invisible to other users.

At the bottom of the status options is a New Status entry, which can be used to create bespoke status options (Gone Dancing, Sleeping, etc) which can then be selected from the list. To do this, select the New Status option, then provide the text that will appear in the list, an icon (from the Available, Away, Do Not Disturb, etc selection) and a message to go alongside the status. Then click on Save to add the option to the list, or Save And Use to make it your current status. Contacts will then see this next to your name in their own Buddy lists. If you're using a recent version of Gnome, this status can also be set from the system tray (in the top-right of the screen) and, in the latest Ubuntu, from the Username system tray object, which is also used to log out and shut down the computer.

Pidgin + Facebook?

While *Pidgin* ships with a number of IM protocols, its plugin system makes it possible for developers to add more options. One of the most popular plugins at the moment is the Facebook chat option, which enables users to chat with Facebook friends without going to Facebook. The plugin is available from **http://code.google.com/p/pidgin-facebookchat** as a Deb a tarball or a Windows EXE file, and installation merely involves double-clicking the file, following instructions and then restarting *Pidgin*.

Now when you go to the Manage Accounts option and select Add, Facebook Chat will be available in the list of supported protocols. This can be selected and configured with your email address and password, and then should allow you to chat to your Facebook friends. As a bonus, there is also an option that will link your *Pidgin* status to Facebook, meaning you can update your Facebook status without having to leave your conversations. »

❭ **Bespoke status messages can be piped to your Facebook account with the help of the Facebook plugin.**

❭ **Adjust the emoticons to suit your mood. There are hundreds of themes available on the internet.**

» **If you missed last issue** Call 0870 837 4773 or +44 1858 438795.

Scribus: Mark

Cheap printers and free software mean no more expensive card buying. Woot!

Scribus is a free, open source desktop publishing package that is the perfect application for those moments when *OpenOffice.org* just doesn't cut it in the design stakes. In this short project we're going to create a card that could be printed out and sent off around the world for birthdays, Christmas or any occasion. In fact, with a little modification, this design could be turned into an invitation, ticket, gift tag or flyer, making it an ideal starting point for tons of projects.

Working in *Scribus* is quite simple, though the sheer number of options available can seem a little overwhelming. The user interface is easily split into the toolbars and menus, a Properties inspector and the work area. The toolbars and menus are where you select things to add to the page. For example, under the Insert menu you'll find the two tools we'll use most often here: the Text and Image Frame tools. Selecting one of these (or their toolbar equivalent) enables us to define a space on the page that is going to contain, respectively, a piece of text or a picture. The power of this type of software is that once an area has been defined and filled, it can be re-edited quite easily just by dragging stuff around with the mouse.

Object manipulation

Use the Select Item tool (the black arrow) to move and resize objects on the page. When you click on an object such as an image or text frame, handles will appear on the edges and corners of the box, and these can be used to resize or reshape the object to fit the page. You can also use the Properties inspector to change various elements of the frame: look under the Shape section to see a corner radius option, which can be used to add rounded corners to any type of frame; or look under X, Y, Z to resize and reposition the object using numerical values rather than the mouse.

You'll also find in this section the always-useful Rotation value, which can be used to put text or pictures at jaunty angles. Below the rotation value is an icon which defines the base point for the

❯ *Scribus* **allows objects to be rotated with the mouse or numerically via the Properties inspector.**
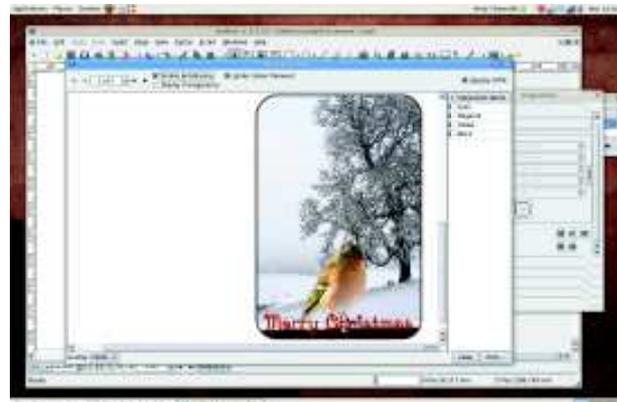
❯ **In the final card, we've added a border to the main image, dropped in a robin and given the main text a drop shadow.**

rotation. By default, this is set to the top-left of the object, but it's easier to reset it to the centre.

There's also a second rotation option, which can be used to dynamically rotate an object, on the toolbar next to the zoom option. Select this and the resize handles on a selected object will become rotate handles. Click, drag and note that the rotation value in the properties inspector changes with your movement.

Once you've finished dragging stuff around, there are various elements that can be edited using the Properties inspector. For instance, if you have a piece of text on the page, select it using the text selection tool from the toolbar (it has a large A on it) and then select the Text tab from the Properties inspector. In here you'll find options to set the font, font size and leading (the space between lines of text), colour, alignment (left, right, centre), the number of columns for the text to flow down and many other characteristics.

Page setup

The top page of our pair will be the front and back of a folded card, and the second page is the inside. To make this work, we'll be creating content on the right side of both pages so that when they're printed back to back, cut and folded, the elements of the card will all appear in the appropriate places. Modifying the project to create a double-sided invite would involve making sure the front and back elements coincide when printed, so parts on the left of the first page would need a counterpart on the right of the second, and vice versa. In addition to this, we've set the margins at 10mm all around and used a series of guides to mark out the same margins for the 'logical spaces' for the cards. We could have defined the page itself as a landscape A5 (or even a pair of A6 pages) and then positioned these as part of the print process, but at this stage it's easier to create a single A4 page and divide it up. This also saves paper when it comes to the final print.

The real beauty of creating cards in this way is that they can be as simple, extravagant, personal or generic as you like; you're in complete control.
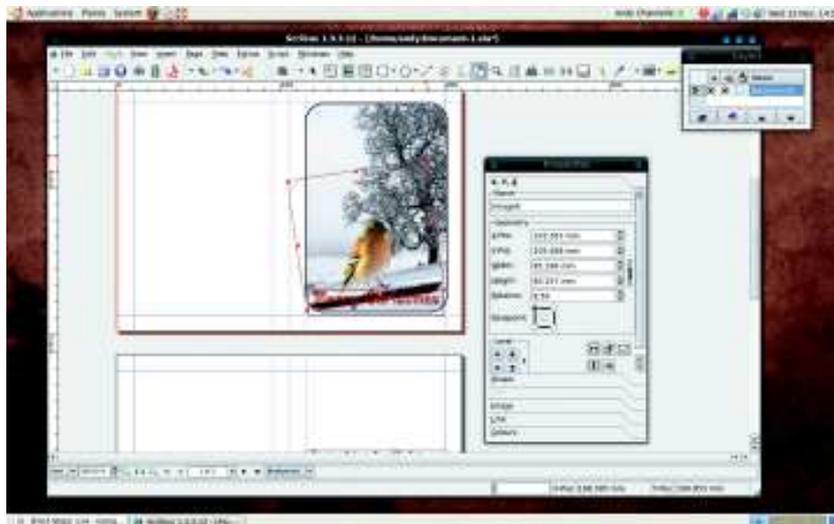
❯ **Never miss another issue** Subscribe to the #1 source for Linux on page 52.

your cards

LINUX FORMAT On the DVD
» Pidgin 2.5.2

## Step by step: Make a greetings card in Scribus
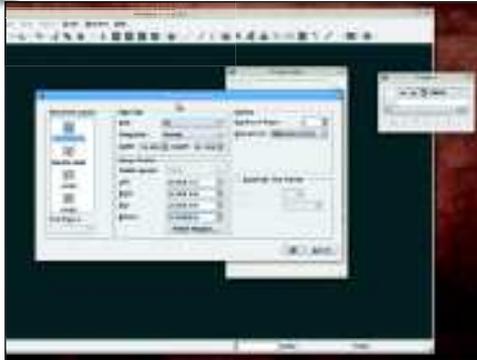
1 Choose paper size

Select File > New to launch the page definition window. Select A4 as the page size and then, under options, select 2 for the number of pages and change the default measurement unit to millimetres (mm). Set the page margins to 10mm all round and ensure 'Single Page' is selected from the list on the left of the window. Hit OK to create the page and dismiss this window.
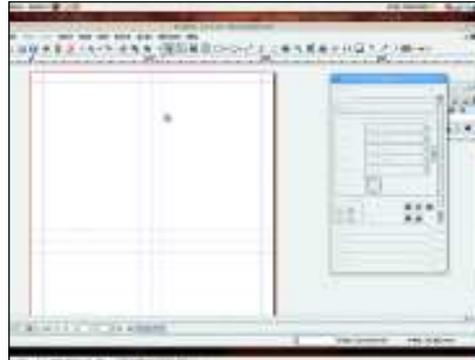

2 Set the guides

Click inside the horizontal ruler (at the top of the screen) and drag out three guides to the following locations: 138mm, 148mm and 158mm. Do the same on the vertical rulers and drag guides out to 95mm, 105mm and 115mm. This divides the page up into four sections. Once printed, we could cut along the vertical centre of the page and fold along the horizontal to create two cards.
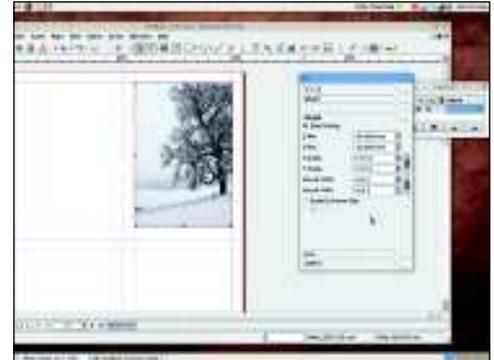

3 Add a main image

Do Insert > Image Frame and draw a new image frame covering one of the right-hand sections following the guides. With this frame selected, do File > Import > Get Image and navigate to a suitable picture. We have a Creative Commons image from Flickr by WhiteTiger8370. Select Image from the Properties box and scale the image using the X and Y values. They are linked by default, so the image will retain its proportions.
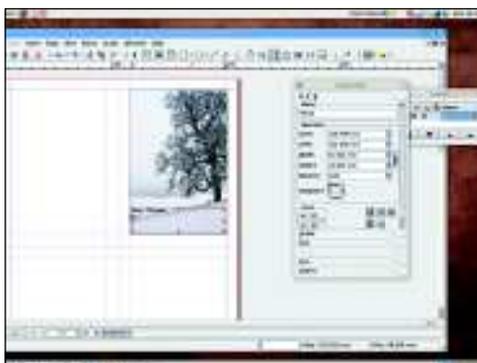

4 Add text

Select Insert > Text Frame and then draw a new frame above one section of the image. Choose a part of the image that is relatively consistent in colour, so the text can be made to show up well. Once the frame is drawn, select the Text icon (it's the ninth one in from the right on the toolbar), select the text frame and type out your message in the default font.
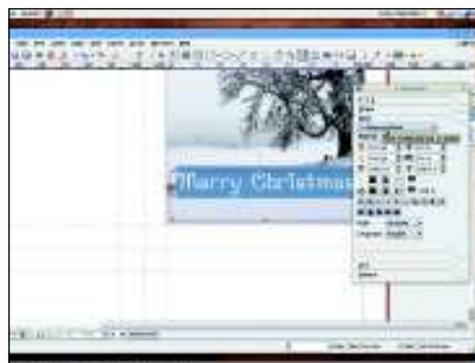
5 Find a font...

Select the text, then choose the Text option from the Properties box. Select a different font from the list, then adjust the size using the Font Size option. Now go into the second page and create a text box on the right-hand portion of the page and add a seasonal message and format the text in the appropriate way.
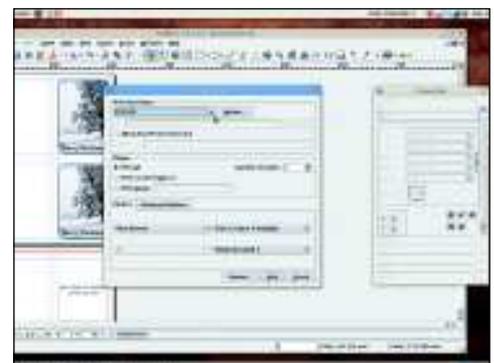
6 And we're done!

We've added rounded corners using the Shape section, and a border using Line and Line Colour (all in the Properties box), and then copied everything to the lower section (marquee select then copy/paste). Finally, go into File > Print and print the document on to some decent card. Now cut them up, shove them in an envelope and send them to your lucky loved ones. **LXF**

» **Next month** Take Scribus to the next level and simple photo fixes with F-Spot.