

Skype 4

Graham Morrison swipes those flying pigs from the sky whilst playing with the latest release from Microsoft.

In brief...

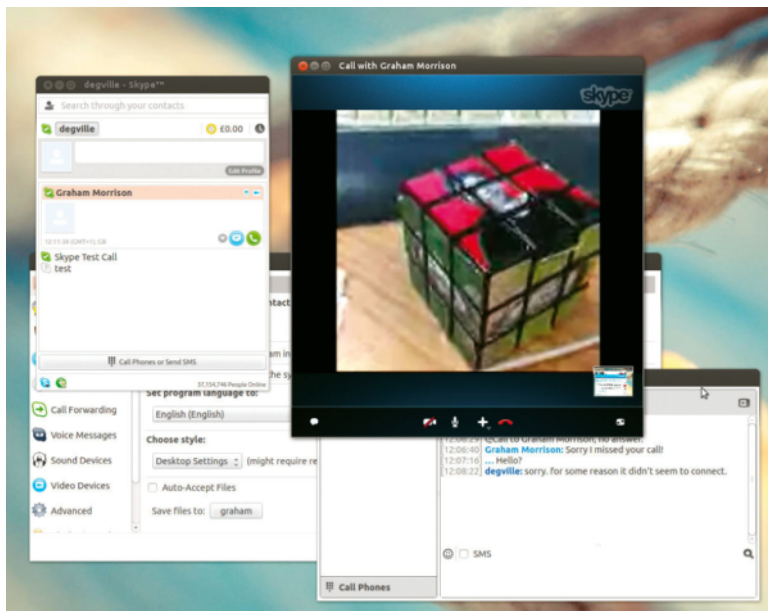
» Send and receive voice and video calls to other *Skype* and landline users around the world. Also consider: a free SIP service.

Back in 2011, when we heard that Microsoft was going to buy the famed video and voice communications company Skype, we thought it would be the end of the Linux client. It had been a while since a Linux release, and *Skype* on Linux had become increasingly flaky. Many people thought the end of Linux *Skype* might not be a bad thing: its proprietary codecs and closed development model didn't resonate well with the open source philosophy, and recent stories about *Skype* allowing government surveillance haven't helped, especially when there are open alternatives. But for others, *Skype* is the best choice simply because it works, and there are bold claims it's a service now responsible for around 20% of all international calls. Which is why we were all pleasantly surprised when *Skype 4* for Linux was announced.

Version 4 comes years after the last stable release and a year after beta 2.2, which we found terribly unstable. And while version 4 is still a whole version number behind our OS X and Windows cousins, a native version of 4 does bring us in line with Android and iOS clients. In fact, most of our testing was against the Android client, and the two together seemed to work perfectly. We installed *Skype 4* into our Ubuntu 12.04 machine

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using the 10.04 packages provided by *Skype*. This anomaly in version numbers seems to be because of *Skype*'s modest requirements rather than its update policy, as you can also get a 64-bit version for Ubuntu and Debian, 32-bit versions for Fedora 16 and OpenSUSE 12.1, plus dynamic and statically-linked versions. This suggests the *Skype* Linux team understands the Linux demographic. We can also report that *Skype* defaulted to our USB headset for both input and output without any further configuration,



» Impress your friends on the other side of the world with *Skype*'s Video function.

thanks to it accepting *PulseAudio*'s desktop configuration. After entering a username and connecting, we were making and accepting calls within seconds of installation.

Audio upgrade

Audio quality has improved, and while we noticed this change according to network quality, the transition between high and low bitrates was smooth enough to not affect conversation. With a decent connection, *Skype* sounds better than landline calls within the UK. Video from Android phones also worked well, and the new Video window makes handling these kinds of calls prettier, with a small window for your local view and a larger one for the remote view.

Our Logitech webcam worked fine, and this release promises much better camera compatibility with a wider range of hardware. We could also send a view of our desktop, which is going to help for those forgotten password moments with the in-laws. The Messenger view looks better, and the response time when sending messages to other *Skype* contacts was impressive, especially if they happened to be connected with a mobile using nothing more than 3G. Most importantly, we didn't experience

a single crash or dropped connection.

This might be one of those reviews where we say *Skype* just worked. But this is all you need from a telephony service. *Skype*'s network has been around long enough that you can rely on it as your primary form of communication, and it's great to see an update to the Linux client. However, this is still a client that protects against decompiling, and produces encrypted traffic – even when you're not in a call. This and the surveillance claims means the decision for or against *Skype* comes down to freedom versus function. But at least we have the choice. **LXF**

LINUX Verdict

Skype 4

Developer: Microsoft Skype
Web: www.skype.com
Price: Free to Skype

Features	7/10
Performance	8/10
Ease of use	7/10
Value	7/10

» Great for staying in touch, but not so great for freedom.

Rating 7/10