

Re: Using Linux on a Family PC

Source: <http://linux.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/Debian/2004-07/0894.html>

From: Felix C. Stegerman (*quix_at_free.fr*)

Date: 07/07/04

Date: Wed, 07 Jul 2004 16:21:43 +0200

To: debian-user@lists.debian.org

Jacob S. wrote:

> *On Tue, 06 Jul 2004 18:32:57 -0500*

> *Kent West <westk@acu.edu> wrote:*

>

>

>>*Felix C. Stegerman wrote:*

>>

>>

>>>*I've recently acquired a 2nd hand PC I want to use as replacement*

>>>*for our (windows 98) family PC.*

>>>*That means my mother, stepfather and little sister (5 years old)*

>>>*will (have to be able to) use it.*

>>>

>>>*Of course, I want to use Debian as the OS, if I can.*

>>>

>>>*Specifications:*

>>> *CPU: 466MHz Celeron*

>>> *RAM: 2x 64MB DDR PC100*

>>> *NIC: 3Com 10/100*

>>> *Drives:*

>>> *hda: 8.4 GB Seagate*

>>> *hdb: 8.4 GB Seagate*

>>> *fd0: 1.44MB 3.5" Floppy Drive*

>>>

'DDR PC100' should be 'SDRAM DIMM pc100'

And I can use the cdrom drive from the old PC.

>>>*Internet access: ADSL (416 Kbit/sec up, 2240 Kbit/sec down)*

>>>

>>>*My mother and stepfather will need to use the following types of*

>>>*applications:*

>>>- *Browser & E-mail (POP3) client*

>>>- *Word processor*

>>>- *Spreadsheet program?*

>>>- *Image manipulation program?*

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>>>
>>>*My little sister plays about 3 different Windows games (some have a*
>>>*Mac version too I believe) that she'll want to be able to play on*
>>>*the new PC too.*
>>>*I've thought of using WINE, but I have no experience with it.*
>>>*I've also thought of dual–booting, but would prefer not to use*
>>>*windows at all.*
>>>
>>
>>*WINE, if the games will play in it. If not, win4lin, or VMWare*
>>*(cha–ching\$), both of which will also require a Windows license; but*
>>*you won't have to reboot between OSES.*
>
>
>*Not on a 466Mhz machine. I don't know of anything that will let Windows*
>*games play on a machine that old at any kind of useable speed.*
>

They are rather simple children's games.
The highest recommendations on the boxes are:

- Windows 95 or higher
- Pentium 133
- 24MB ram
- 20MB free space
- 8X cd–rom
- SVGA
- 8–bit sound card

That doesn't seem too demanding.

And the games don't seem to require high speed.

But, as I've said (written), I have almost no experience with wine etc.

>>>*As for word processing, they're used to MS Word and Corel*
>>>*Wordperfect 8. OpenOffice is also installed on the current PC, but*
>>>*as far as I know they've never used it.*
>>
>>*Unless they're writing complex documents, they'll adjust quickly*
>>*enough.*
>
>
>*Unfortunately, even OOo is going to be slow for them. Upgrade the ram to*
>*at least 256MB, if you can.*

I'd like to, but I doubt my budget allows me to.

But I'll ask them whether they're willing to pay for more speed.

>
>>>*I hardly ever use a word processor myself, since I prefer plain*
>>>*text, so I don't know what would be good replacements for*
>>>*Word/Wordperfect and Excel.*
>>
>>*Nothing replaces WordPerfect. How I'd dearly love to see a Free clone*

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>>of WP. As it is, I've learned to accept OOo. OOo and Abiword both
>>>would probably suffice to replace Word; OOo and Gnumeric both would
>>probably suffice to replace Excel (except for VB scripting).
>
>
> Very true, unfortunately.

I remember WP 5.1. That was fast. I haven't used it for a long time though, so I can't really remember much of the advanced functionality. My dad (note that my real dad and stepdad are different people, and my real dad does know a lot about computers since he's a sysadmin) still uses WP 5.1 regularly. Unfortunately he doesn't use Linux, but his company does use (dare I say this?) SCO UNIX. (which I believe they bought before SCO was taken over by Caldera though).

I doubt VB scripting is going to be a problem.
I haven't seen them do any word processing for months anyway.
Lately it's just been my sister playing games and my mother browsing and discovering the web.

>
>>>Any suggestions, with arguments of course, on which apps to use are
>>>welcome.
>>
>>Google and the Debian–User archives have all sorts of opinions on the
>>matter.
>>
>>
>>>Image manipulation is something my mother would like to do, but has
>>>not done before, so I'll try to get her to use The GIMP. Any other
>>>suggestions are welcome.
>>
>>GIMP's what you want.
>
>
> Definitely GIMP. Very nice tool.

I second that!

>
>>>Another matter is which version of Debian to use.
>>>I'd say unstable would be the best choice, but if anyone thinks
>>>otherwise please let me know.
>>
>>I'd go with unstable, assuming you're willing to put up with the
>>little kinks that arise every now and then. The kinks are less painful
>>than the archaic packages in stable, and for me, unstable is more
>>usable than testing (because bugs get ironed out more quickly due to
>>the constant flux of unstable).

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Exactly.

I use unstable on my desktop PC (Athlon XP 2100+), which works perfectly. Since I started to use Debian about 2 years ago, starting with woody but upgrading to unstable after 2 months partly because the version of XFree86 in unstable did support my GeForce 4 Ti 4200 whereas the one in woody didn't, I've never been more content with my PC.

Thanks to Debian, installing, updating and removing software is very easy and clear.

And apart from the great stability (even in `unstable`), I really love the configurability and finally being able to use a REAL shell (bash) after having had to put up with Windows for years.

And Debian is, of course, a very good OS for programming (which is my hobby).

>

> *Testing/Unstable's OOo seems quite a bit faster than the regular install*
> *you can download from OOo's site, too. Not sure what the Debian*
> *maintainers did to it, but they did a _great_job.*

That's interesting.

>

>>>– *What desktop manager/environment do I use?*

>>

>>*Arggh–gh, I hate to say it . . . but KDE. Better yet, install KDM*
>>*along with several window managers / environments, and they'll be able*
>>*to pick which environment they want to use each time they log in.*

>

>

> *Good idea. Over time, they may find they like something like IceWM best,*
> *as it runs so much faster than KDE.*

I prefer XFCE myself. (also because I've gotten used to it)

>

>>>– *What file–management program(s) should I use?*

>>

>>*Konqueror, or Nautilus. If they use something other than KDE or Gnome,*

>>

>>*there are other FMs out there, including manual manipulation at the*
>>*command line, but these two are what will be most familiar to them I'd*
>>*think.*

They hardly ever use a file–manager on windows, so they should be able to deal with konqueror/nautilus.

>>

>>>– *How much administration (updating etc.) should I do?*

>>

>>*I usually do an "apt–get update && apt–get dist–upgrade" about once a*
>>*week. Just depends on what you're comfortable with. If there are any*

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>>major security announcements, maybe then as well.

>

> Just watch out for packages held back and especially packages to be
> removed. This can be a sign that you don't really want to upgrade at
> this time, as something might be broken. (Not always, so you'll have to
> investigate, watch this list, and/or use your favorite method of
> watching out for problems.)

I update my desktop PC almost every day, but I agree that once a week should suffice for the family PC.

I haven't used SSH much, but I expect I can administer the system remotely with SSH, right?

>

>>>– What do I have to think of regarding security?

>>

>>If you're behind a firewall, and take normal reasonable precautions
>>(don't run as root all the time, don't install an ftp server and leave
>>it wide open, use ssh instead of telnet, etc), you probably won't have
>>to worry too much about things. Of course, more security is always
>>better than less, but just by getting rid of Windows and replacing it
>>with Debian is a huge improvement.

That's why I want to use Debian. I was getting tired of having to stay up-to-date with the latest windows virus warnings. (and Debian is just so much easier to work with, in my opinion anyway)

The PC is behind 2 routers and I'll use a iptables firewall like firewall–easy on my desktop PC. Running as root is something I always try to avoid. And they don't need to know the root password (or even that such a user exists).

Does anyone have any recommendations on a good iptables firewall frontend? firewall–easy works for me but I'd like something that's easier to configure (doesn't have to be graphical though).

>>

>>>– What do I set–up regarding permissions and limiting their options
>>>for breaking anything, like deleting their important files, etc.?

>>

>>Give each one an account. When asked during installation of Debian if
>>you want world–readable home directories, answer "No".

>>

>>Then configure KDM to start four instances of X/login, and teach them
>>that Dad is on Ctrl–Alt–F7, Mom is on Ctrl–Alt–F8, etc, so that each
>>person has their own X session. Configure their screensaver to be
>>password protected, and that's probably all the security a
>>(non–psychotic) family needs. My family doesn't even need the
>>password–protected screensaver.

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What I was referring to was preventing them from deleting THEIR OWN important files. My step-dad almost killed the windows '98 PC by randomly using drag & drop in windows explorer.

I thought of some kind of cron job that backups their important files to the second HD or something like that. Any ideas?

Separate logins are a good idea though.

> *Great idea, but I'm not sure I would try this on a 466Mhz machine. I notice it too much to have 2 sessions running on a 233Mhz w/128MB of ram. Just giving them each their own account and showing them how to log off/log in using kdm should be pretty good, IMO. (It's also very similar in functionality to how Windows XP works.)*

I agree. One X session should be sufficient.

>
>>>- *How do I make everyting as user-friendly as possible/nessecary?*
>>
>>*This question is way too big to be addressed here.*
>>
>>
>>>- *Do you have any additional tips?*
>>>
>>
>>*Re: your old Win98 PC; it might be suitable for a thin-client as a second Debian machine.*
>
>
> *Or a file server, or a firewall, or a webservice, etc. :-)*
>
> *Jacob*
>

I'll see.

Thank you both for confirming what I already thought would be the best set-up.

Regards,

Felix

--
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