

Re: fvwm vs. fvwm-crystal

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- *From:* Joe Hart <pobega@xxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Tue, 27 Mar 2007 10:04:01 +0200
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Michael Pobega wrote:

So tell me, Why did you decide Window Maker was better than fvwm-crystal and what about other managers like blackbox or XFCE. All of them are lightweight according to what I have read.

Well, I've tried out a lot of Window Manager, so I'll give my reviews on each (From lightest to heaviest, ending with Window Maker [Not because it's the heaviest, but because I have the most to write about for it])

Thanks. Interesting viewpoints. My turn.

Ion2: Arguably the lightest window manager available. I loved Ion2 and I'd definitely use it on a desktop, but being on a laptop I need a system tray for monitoring battery life and my WiFi networks. Therefore Ion wasn't a viable choice for me. But, as a window manager Ion is great. It runs on hotkeys (Which are completely configurable) and acts as basically an X equivalent to screen (apt-get install screen and run it from a terminal if you don't know what screen is. Also the Gentoo Wiki has an awesome tutorial for learning screen in 5 minutes).

Ratpoison: Barely touched it, but from what I was able to tell it is very similar to Ion.

Never even heard of those two, can't comment.

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Fluxbox: A nice window manager, I really only use it when I'm running DSL or FeatherLinux (But lately I've grown accustomed to SystemRescueCD, which I'll talk about later [0 for review]). Fluxbox is nice and configurable, and it has some pretty cool default hotkeys (Like Ctrl+F# for desktop switching). Fluxbox is a nice window manager for those who don't want to spend too much time configuring their window manager, but it is also good for those who want to spend tedious hours working on every last detail. There is no inbetween.

Agree, I use fluxbox on one of my really old PCs that can't handle much else (celeron 600 with 64MB RAM). jwm is also on that (thanks to DSL) but IMO, fluxbox is much better.

Fvwm: Too hard to configure for me, but from what I've seen it's an awesome window manager after reading through all of the docs. It takes a day to a week to configure how you want, but it's well worth it I've heard (From people who use it).

Fvwm-Crystal: A nice wm for those who don't want to spend hours editing configuration files. It's pretty easy to change the settings, and a nice all-around, simple window manager (Probably even simpler than Fluxbox), but I just couldn't find my groove with it; Don't ask me why.

I think it has nice eye candy, and I can see why some people would like it, but I couldn't get used to it and switched back to KDE without much delay. Every once in a while I will open another X session and play around with it, knowing that I can just come back my KDE session by pressing a few keys. I really like that I can run different WM's at the same time in different sessions and can be logged in as the same or different users on each "terminal".

IceWM: A nice, simple, barely need to edit the configuration window manager. I use it by default for my laptop's guest account, because it quickly acts just like a Windows computer; Which is very nice for people coming to my house, wanting to check their webmail and things like that (I'll admit I'm 17, so all of my friends actually check their MySpace and things when they come over. I don't have one personally, but that's a rant for another place and time). The only thing I DON'T like about IceWM is when people complain that "Linux is just trying to be like Windows", which is completely untrue (Keep in mind that it's these same people that don't understand what a window manager is, or even comprehend what GNU is!).

Hmm, I thought KDE was most like Windows. I suppose it's how you set it

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up. I think most windows managers with can be made to resemble windows by playing with their configuration. KDE even has that wizard that asks about which behavior you prefer, but I've seen distros that make gnome look like XP.

Enlightenment (E17): Beautiful, but not too functional. After hours of tinkering I couldn't get E17 to do what I wanted, so I just gave up on it.

Xfce4: I used this for a while back when I was a newbie on Xubuntu (I prefer speed against size). Xfce4 is nice and customizable, definitely better than GNOME in almost every aspect. It is GTK powered, and it's Xfwm window manager is by a longshot better than Metacity (GNOME's current window manager). In my opinion the GNOME project should adopt Xfwm as their official window manager. Anyway, Xfce4 is easy to customize, and has it's own set of tools as well. It stays pretty lightweight, but there is a limit to how lightweight a DESKTOP ENVIRONMENT can be (Keep in mind Xfce4 is a DE, not a WM)

Oh yes. I forget that. There are so many different Layers. One would think with so many layers to go through things would be slower, but for some reason they are not. I guess I just don't understand the internal structure quite well enough. Perhaps my experience with Xubuntu jaded me. I thought everything looked so poor quality that I didn't keep it long. I will have to try again loading xfce some day on my Debian box and not load the artwork from Xubuntu. Perhaps that will change my opinion.

GNOME: A nice desktop environment for newbies to GNU/Linux and experts alike, GNOME offers all kinds of things other DEs don't. GNOME is very configurable (Not near as much as Xfce though) and runs /somewhat/ quickly, but altogether the default configurations should be fine for anyone running it. I have friends who swear by it, but I personally don't like being on it; I feel like my computer is controlling me instead of me controlling it!

Exactly my beef. The KISS strategy can be taken to far.

KDE: Ah, KDE. Either you hate it or you love it. Personally I love it, if I had to choose something to use besides Window Maker it would be KDE. KDE is easy to configure (Although it takes a few hours, it's much easier than going through docs and config files in my opinion), and has tons and tons of options. If there is one problem I have with the KDE suite it would be Konqueror; I hated it as both a web and file browser. It didn't have as many options as Mozilla's Gecko powered browsers (Including the unofficial Galeon), and didn't offer the options that I needed (Like having the browser's font override the

page's).

Really. I think konqueror is KDE's killer app. It does everything including connecting to secure sites the iceweasel doesn't (well iceweasel connects, but doesn't report the site as being secure)

I suppose a lot of these preferences are what you get used to. There are so many different things to choose from! Sometimes choice can be a bad thing. For new users entering the GNU/Linux world, it can be overwhelming just to figure out which distro they should use, let alone which software on that distro. Considering that they have never heard of any of them.

Window Maker: Finally, we land on my choice. Window maker. Window maker took me about four days to set up, but once I got started I couldn't get off the addiction. Window maker has an easy to use configuration tool called "wmakerconf" (Available in the repositories) which makes configuring Window Maker a breeze. Window Maker had options for hotkeys (Which I'll explain at the bottom, the way I have it set up is so simple I'm surprised it's not enabled by default) and the way it manages windows and workspaces just makes sense. I love the Window Maker menu, because being on a laptop I got annoyed having to hold down the right click button in Fluxbox (Plus sometimes when I clicked outside of it the Fluxbox menu didn't close, which aggravated me).

Window Maker isn't a suite, so you can use any applications you want. Personally I use Aterm with Tcsh as my shell, I use Galeon/Links2 for browsing, Gaim for chatting, Pcmnfm for file browsing (When I'm not using aterm), Mutt for email and Ragle for RSS feeds. This setup, while not a "desktop suite" works efficiently well when tied together with hotkeys and quick fingers. Think Ion2 with minimal mouse movement.

Now, as for my hotkeys, here it goes:

Desktop switching is Ctrl+Alt+Left and Ctrl+Alt+Right. I have four desktops in all, and with Window Maker's clip I can easily tell which I'm on on the fly.

Ctrl+Alt+* for normal hotkeys, i.e. XMMS2 (Which I use for music), Ctrl+Alt+L for locking the screen, K for xkill, among others.

Ctrl+Q is for closing windows, which I grew accustomed to with my time in GNOME. It's just much easier than reaching for those Alt keys in my opinion.

Alt+W for minimizing, Alt+E for shading, Alt+S for toggling maximization, and Alt+Tab for window switching. This is just the

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easiest for me to remember, since the majority of my Ctrl+* and Alt+* hotkeys are left hand only.

The final hotkey, and the one that really isn't used often, is Ctrl+Shift+Button for launching apps. Example:

Ctrl+Shift+M for Mutt
Ctrl+Shift+R for Raggler/RSS
Ctrl+Shift+Z for xlinks2
Ctrl+Shift+B for Galeon
Ctrl+Sihft+F for midnight commander
Ctrl+Shift+P for Pcmamfm

This just makes the most sense to me, being that:

M is for Mail/Mutt
R is for RSS/Ragglr
Z is for ease of use
B is for browser
F is for file manager
P is for pcmamfm

I use Window Maker with 4 dockapps,

wmmixer for raising/lowering volume using my scrollbar
plock with my custom Debian graphic (If anyone wants it just ask) for analog time
wmsystray for my system tray applications (Was a bitch to get installed, it depends on Sarge X packages that aren't in X. Just install, copy the binary, remove and put the binary back in /usr/bin and it works fine)
And mountapp for automounting my media volumes

This just makes the most sense to me, runs quickly, is lightweight, and works perfectly fine alongside a few GNOME-centric programs (gnome-keyring-daemon, network-manager-gnome, gnome-power-manager, and update-notifier).

Deciding on a window manager for a laptop is a lot more work than a desktop in my opinion, because a laptop needs a bit more than a desktop; i.e. a workable, easy to access system tray.

My laptop is broken and needs a new power supply. Acer wants too much money for it, so it's a deluxe paper weight now. I don't know why I even keep it. Needless to say, I have never installed any distro on a laptop. It sounds like you have a nice setup there, that you can use efficiently and others would struggle with because they don't know the shortcuts. That can be a blessing or a curse, depending on your point of view.

[0] SystemRescueCD http://www.sysresccd.org/Main_Page

SystemRescueCD is a LiveCD that boots into a root terminal, and contains multiple programs for, well, system rescues/maintenance. It comes with Window Maker and Firefox, which I do use when I boot into the CD for non-system rescue purposes.

I got it working nicely off of my USB Thumbdrive in under 20 minutes, with less problems than DSL/FeatherLinux. And I'm currently trying to remaster it so I can add in a few programs (Gaim, for on the go IMs. Although for now I use <http://iloveim.com/>).

A good LiveCD if you need to restore systems often. Also a good, nice, light LiveCD if you like Wmaker. I've yet to find a way to save my settings, and until I do I won't do any hardcore customizing.

I don't know if you've ever checked out grml for you rescue work. IMO it is very good and it has saved my butt a few times. It uses zsh, which in itself is interesting and does some unusual things to get xsessions to work. It has a script that will install it to hd, and I think the hd can be a USB, but I never tried it. As long as you have a working grub, you should be able to boot from anywhere.

Live CDs are quite handy. I take one most everywhere I go. Never know when I might need to use one. Best place I have found are in department stores that sell computers. Pop in a live CD or DVD and reboot the computer when they're not looking. It drives salespeople nuts. Especially if you boot to ram and pop your CD out and hide it before they catch you.

Then while it's running, call their attention to the computer and show them how fast it is. Then blow their minds by showing them the internals of the PCI or the cpu flags that that computer supports. Then walk away for a while and come back. Has the computer been rebooted yet? Did the salesperson play with your OS after you left? You might have created a convert.

If one lives in a big city or travel alot you can do this all over the place :)

Joe

(I am totally hooked)

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