

Re: Fedora Desktop future– RedHat moves

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 - *Date:* Sun, 27 Apr 2008 21:51:19 +1000
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On Sat, 2008-04-26 at 09:24 -0700, Les wrote:

CLI has an advantage because of the ability to express compound and unique capabilities using small tools. That particular capability has not made it to the "drag and click" crowd, not because it cannot be done, but because of a lack of vision in understanding what they are missing. The closest equivalent is the ability to create compound database relationships in Microsoft SQL with the GUI, but even there it is not well implemented. And you still have to use the keyboard to express some aspects of the process. And this is the major strength of UNIX, small programs that do one thing well, coupled with the ability to combine them with pipes, scripts and redirection to accomplish complex tasks with a minimum of effort. That is why most admins with experience in all kinds of systems generally support them via a CLI of one form or another. Additionally many of the tools and techniques of UNIX and other CLI systems have been expressed on other systems simply because they give the user that power.

Point and click is faster for things you do repetitively on single items, CLI scripting, piping and redirection work better in a more flexible way to perform complex operations on a one time unique basis across a number of similar items, or for a really difficult complex task that must be done repetitively. These last two describe most of the Admin tasks. The first most user tasks. Additionally GUI's restrict input to only effective operations and minimize errors of entry, so they are making inroads to Admin tasks for things done less often that are prone to input errors, such as the add-user add-group and other occasional somewhat unique tasks done by Admins.

Personally I am a programmer. I appreciate that some kinds of programs could or can currently be automated better with a GUI, but I also know that a GUI is limiting in some aspects, while freeing in others, and the issues for programmers is where does one become more valuable than the other. In other words, we need both tools and concepts to be the most effective in our class of work. I really like dabbling in the bits and stuff on unique things. I hate having to regenerate a "window application" in C code, and would much prefer to find a GUI that will

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create a good basic Window or two that I can then flush out with the appropriate code. One of the best things about GUI's I think are the "balloon hints", which can help you understand the "next step" or an error on the fly. These reduce debug times, increase my effectiveness and let me concentrate on the "good stuff" rather than on the mundane.

But finding, or creating such tools is difficult, and finding the correct balance a truly mystifying task to a bit oriented guy like me.

On Linux and networking and the bits for networking, I know the underlying formats, protocols and even a lot of the code, but I still don't have a good clear "big picture". To me it is like examining an elephant through a microscope. I know what the hair, hide, blood, and veins look like, but I have no concept of the elephant yet. (a bit of an exaggeration, but I am sure you get my drift).

Here! Here! I'll agree with that! Definitely me too– and a very good analogy if I do say so myself...

A gui that shows a network with my system, my router and my other local systems would help me see that. Balloon help to describe each bit and what it does would be even better, so I could mouse over the router, and it would bring up the router system window and tell me what it does. Mousing over the workstation would show me the required bits to make it work with the router as a menu, and each would then have a good explanation of how it interfaces to the rest of it. Then I could get a graphical view of the elephant.

None of this network, admin stuff is difficult, it is just very complex by the number of bits that all have to be right to make it work effectively and without errors. As I tell my students in programming, there is no magic, just misunderstood technology. (and yes I know there is a quote about this or maybe three or four, but I didn't know that when I first started using the phrase in the 70's.)

So here I have a question: do you teach programming? At what level– shell, C, or assembler?

If so, what text books do you use to teach (or recommend)? (even if it is assembler...)

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