

Why is Firefox printing in Linux so slow?

Source: <http://linux.derkeiler.com/Newsgroups/comp.os.linux.setup/2005-10/0361.html>

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I am wondering why printing in Firefox in Linux on a PostScript printer takes so long.

Here is my setup: SuSE 10.0 using CUPS; Brother HL-5150D laser printer (which is a native PostScript printer) hooked up via USB; recent Firefox (either 1.0.6 or 1.0.7); PPD file from the Brother CD that comes with the printer.

When I used this printer from Windows XP to print pages from Firefox, pages would start emerging from the printer within seconds after I clicked "print." This was true with both the Brother PCL Windows driver and the Brother PostScript Windows driver. After printing started, the pages would continue to emerge at top speed until all the pages were printed.

Then I tried the new SuSE. Firefox printing is extremely slow. Even when printing relatively simple webpages (e.g. a newspaper article from washingtonpost.com after clicking on "Print this article" in the webpage, which leaves only one ad in the printout) it can take over two minutes for printing to even begin. After I click on "Print" in Firefox, Firefox quickly completes its printing process, handing the job off to the print spooler and allowing me to continue web browsing. (This process is complete in, say, two seconds.) This also causes the light on the printer to turn from green to amber (indicating that it is receiving data.) The light will flash, indicating data is coming in, and the printer will make some warming-up sounds.

The delay comes in at this step. The printer will sit there for several minutes, with the light flashing, but printing nothing. After printing begins, the printer will print a single page, and then there is another pause of a minute or so until the next page comes out. These pauses continue until printing is complete.

I know Firefox uses lpr by default, so I got it to use KPrinter by following the directions here:

<http://www.granneman.com/webdev/browsers/mozillafirefoxnetscape/linuxspecific/kdeprintinginmozilla/>

comp.os.linux.setup: Why is Firefox printing in Linux so slow?

When I use KPrinter (which is set to use CUPS and has the Brother PPD installed), the KJobViewer will show the printing job almost instantly after Firefox has completed its printing task. KJobViewer will show the job as "Processing" while the printer's amber light is flashing slowly.

I did some tests of my own to try to figure out what is going on. I tried using Firefox to print to a PostScript file rather than straight to the printer, and then using the KDE PS viewer to print the file. This makes no difference in print speed. Creating a PDF and printing that out prints out perhaps a bit faster, but with considerable sacrifice in print quality.

I also tried printing from my Windows laptop via the Linux machine (I set up printer sharing through Samba.) I configured Samba to have my Linux machine provide an anonymous print server, and I then installed the HL-5150D PostScript driver on the Windows machine. Then—boom!—printing the same webpage from Windows was very fast—pages start coming out almost instantly—while the Linux machine is very slow. (I made sure that all the settings in the Windows and Linux drivers—e.g. DPI—were identical.)

I tried printing in Konqueror, which is no faster.

My most fruitful test was to try something I had learned earlier in Windows with an inkjet: I copied an entire webpage from Firefox by pressing "Control - A", and then I pasted this into OpenOffice.org Writer. I printed this page, which contained all the same graphics. Bam!—this printed out very quickly, just as quickly as Windows. The fonts were a bit different from the Firefox printout, but still of top-notch quality; the graphics were of the same top-notch quality.

I noticed that, when printing directly from Firefox, the job size shown in KJobsViewer is in the neighborhood of 300k for a newspaper article of four pages or so that contains a few simple chart graphics (like the Wall Street Journal.) This is well below the 16MB of memory that is standard in the Brother HL-5150D.

I have also printed a PDF from Linux (the SMB Howto in PDF format.) This printed extremely rapidly; just as fast as Windows printing.

So what I am wondering is: why is printing webpages in Firefox so much slower in Linux than it is in Windows? Obviously the cut-and-paste workaround I detailed above works okay, but I am curious as to why printing straight from Firefox (and from Konqueror, for that matter) is so slow, especially when essentially the same data in OpenOffice.org prints out very quickly.