

Bytes & Pieces

Newsletter of the Hobart Computer Users Group Inc.

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Win4Lin Pro

Some time back, NeTraverse gave the Group a copy of their Win4Lin product. This allows Windows 98/98SE/ME to run in a Linux window. You can then run most Windows applications in that window. Some, however, require Windows 2000 or XP so Win4Lin, as they are now known, have developed a product called Win4Lin Pro, which allows those versions of Windows to run in a Linux window.

The first version was difficult to install and ran only slowly unless you obtained and installed an accelerator KQEMU from a third-party source. Even then you needed a “degree in Linux” to get it to work.

Version 2 came with the KQEMU code, but I still could not figure out how to install it and put the whole question of running XP under Linux aside.

Recently I revisited the subject and found that Win4Lin Pro had reached version 2.7 and came with instructions how to install the necessary headers into the Linux kernel so that KQEMU could be installed. Although some familiarity with the Linux command line is necessary, the instructions were quite detailed and I have now installed Win4Lin Pro, KQEMU and Windows XP and it runs well even on my laptop.

Some people promote Linux as a “free-of-charge” product. However, while Linux is “free” in the sense of “freely available source code”, to get the best from it, you may have to spend some money. So far I have subscribed to a premium Xandros membership, which allows me to download the latest tested applications and to purchase others at reduced prices; I have bought Turboprint, which provides printer drivers for most recent printers; and I purchased Win4Lin Pro to run Windows XP without having to dual-boot the computer. The result is a fast reliable system that still cost less than an equivalent Windows-based one.

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The world is changing

Intel CPUs in Macs? Windows running on Macs without emulation? Microsoft supporting Linux on its Windows Server product? Intel and RedHat Linux co-operating? What on earth is going on?

As you may already be aware, the latest crop of Apple Mac computers now have Intel CPUs. The change from Motorola designed CPUs recognises the superiority of the latest Intel designs over the CPUs that Apple was using. Intel CPUs and compatible designs from AMD and VIA are, of course, the basis of Windows computers and hackers immediately began looking for ways to make Windows run on the new Macs. Apple, however, have made it

possible with the release of Boot Camp.

Boot Camp is designed solely for Intel-based Macintoshes, including the new MacBook Pro and specific iMac and Mac mini models — the ones with dual- or single-core Intel CPUs. Intel-based Macs can run Windows XP natively, which means there's no emulation process running to handle the differences in the way PowerPC and Intel chips run software. So, the hard part of the equation was accomplished by Apple's adoption of Intel CPUs. Apple's Mike Shebanek, product manager for Mac OS X product marketing, affirms that Apple is ahead of schedule with the roll out of Intel-CPU-based Macs, and that it expects to complete the transition to Intel chips across its Macintosh product line by the end of 2006.

To finish out the solution, Apple needed a way to set up the hard drive and install Windows XP on supporting Macs, and it accomplished that by creating the Boot Camp Assistant software. Boot Camp is essentially a dual-boot utility. It works similarly to the multiple-boot functionality supported by all recent versions of Windows. The only real downside to that is that any time you want to switch from Windows XP to OS X or vice versa, you must reboot the computer.

When you run the Boot Camp Assistant utility, it carries out several steps:

1. It burns a Windows driver CD specific to your Mac hardware.
2. It dynamically repartitions your Mac hard drive, creating a new logical drive for Windows.
3. Then it initiates the Windows XP setup process (using the "full install" copy of Windows XP Pro or Home Service Pack 2 that you must acquire separately).

The Windows installation routine asks you to select the partition to install Windows (the answer is always C:), formats the partition, and installs Windows on your Mac. After you successfully boot into Windows XP, the last step is to install the Windows drivers from the disc Boot Camp burned. The process is less complicated than it sounds.

Apple's beta release of Boot Camp was offered as a test in preparation for the release of OS X Leopard, the next major release of Apple's operating system. Leopard, which could arrive early next year, will include Boot Camp. Apple will not distribute Windows XP with Boot Camp. The company won't comment on whether it will upgrade Boot Camp and OS X to perform the same feat for at least some versions of Windows Vista.

Meanwhile, Microsoft, perhaps in response the hard line that the European courts have taken in respect of interoperability with other software, has announced Windows Server support for two major Linux distributions. It even has its own Linux lab!

Intel, too, has a foot in the Linux camp, working with RedHat Linux to help customers deploy the open source system. Whilst it is not about to abandon its commitment to Windows, Intel must see a market for Linux servers in addition to Windows Server products and is pursuing it. Novel, Oracle and IBM are among others supporting Linux, which shows how far Linux has come.

Increasingly it is becoming possible to mix and match hardware, operating systems and software so that you have the best of all possible worlds. You can choose an Apple Mac, because you like its design and run Windows XP on it to tap into the vast amount of software available. Or you can run Linux on your choice of computer for its greater security and robustness, adding Windows in a Linux window to run that elusive piece of software for which there is, as yet, no Linux equivalent. At last the barriers are coming down!

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Windows logon hint

If you are the only user of your computer, you may not need that annoying little logon screen demanding your username and password be entered before Windows XP starts.

To remove the prompt, try the following:

- Select **Run** from the Start Menu, type **control userpasswords2**, and click Ok.
- Turn off the **Users must enter a user name and password to use this computer** option, and click Ok.

For other versions of Windows, go to this URL for instructions on how to free yourself from the tyranny of the logon prompt:

<http://www.annoyances.org/exec/show/article04-103>

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Resize your Windows wallpaper

The popularity of wide-screen monitors, especially on laptops, makes the following tip very relevant.

If you just made the switch, your desktop wallpaper image may no longer look right, or you might just want to make a small adjustment to it. You may even prefer not to have your icons on top of that wonderful picture of the grandchildren, or whoever. To gain the necessary control over your wallpaper's placement, you will need to edit Windows Registry. As incorrect editing may stop Windows from booting or working properly, back your Registry up first. Then highlight the `HKEY_CURRENT_USER\Control Panel\desktop` key in the Registry Editor, and double-click the `WallpaperOriginX` icon in the right pane, if it is there. (If you don't see this icon, right-click in this pane, choose *New, String Value*, type `WallpaperOriginX` to name the value, and press `[Enter]`.)

Screen positions and sizes are stated in pixels. For example, your screen might be 800 x 600 pixels. To reposition your wallpaper you need to give the new position in pixels. First establish what size you are using by checking the display settings. This will help you decide how many pixels will be needed to reposition the wallpaper to where you want it. Once you have decided, type a number for the starting horizontal position of your wallpaper's left edge, and press `[Enter]`. Now double-click the `WallpaperOriginY` icon (create it if there isn't one) and enter a number for the starting vertical position of the image's top edge. If your wallpaper image is larger than the screen, type a negative number (for example, `-100`) to push the picture's edge off the screen.



To test the effect, first minimize the Registry Editor (and any other open window), right-click the desktop, choose *Properties*, and click *OK* to refresh the wallpaper placement.

Repeat these steps as needed until the wallpaper is positioned correctly. (The effect should be something like that shown opposite.) Experiment with centred and stretched settings as these will also affect the final result.

If you choose to have the icons arranged as shown in the illustration, change to background colour, if necessary, to make the icons stand out more. You may also find it useful to crop the picture to make it more nearly square.

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Cheap dialup

Patricia Rogers drew my attention recently to what appears to be the cheapest dialup Internet service available in Australia. However it is only available to people who qualify. The service is provided **exclusively** for people who possess a Disability Support Pension, Aged Pension or DVA Entitlement Card and is subject to conditions, details of which are available from the TADAust Connect website.

If you qualify, you need only pay \$5.50 per month for dialup Internet. There is a once-off \$15.50 connection fee, when you join TADAust Connect, but, after that, you have unlimited hours and unlimited download. You may be logged off after 4 hours or after 20 minutes idle time. However, this is common to many Internet providers.

Virus screening and one email address is included, but they do not provide webspace for your personal use, as most other providers do. TADAust also provides broadband services, but check their offerings carefully. While they are competitively priced and offer low cost starter packages, they are not necessarily the best value available. Go to:

<http://www.whirlpool.net.au>

and make some comparisons before signing up to any broadband package.

TADAust Connect is operated by Technical Aid to the Disabled (ACT) Inc. (TADACT) in Canberra for TADAust. TADACT manages the site and provides the support for the service. It is run by a staff of 3 with volunteers providing assistance with enquiries and administration and has been operating dialup services for almost a year now. The broadband service has only just begun operating. Wholesale services for the operation are provided by IspOne.

<http://www.tadaustconnect.org.au>

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Dealing with spam (Part 1 – Prevention)

Prevention is better than cure according to the old adage. So why not take preventative measures so that senders of unsolicited commercial email (spam) can't send you heaps of junk?

Rule 1: Restrict the use of your email address

Only give your “real” email address (the one given you when you sign up with an Internet Service Provider) to your immediate friends and relatives, and then only if you trust them not to send out those forward messages with everyone's address showing. For everybody else, see Rule 2.

Spammers' sources:

Spammers harvest addresses from various sources, and one of their sources is websites. Where email addresses are visible and active, they simply harvest them and add them to their databases. This is a real problem for genuine sites that wish to provide an email address for visitors to the site. That is why you will sometimes find that the address is something like `webmaster(at)hobartpcgroup.org.au` instead of webmaster@hobartpcgroup.org.au. While this subterfuge won't defeat all spam harvesters, it does help. In other cases, some form of encryption is used. You can click on the address, but you can't copy it.

With some websites, you are required to register in order to gain access. Sometimes spammers will hack into the website and obtain the registered addresses that way. However, it is more common for less reputable websites to simply sell the addresses to spammers. Some websites may even be set up by spammers with the primary purpose of obtaining address that can then be subsequently spammed. If you visit websites that require registration, read their privacy policy and consider the reputation of that website. If it a relatively obscure website that distributes, dare I say it, illegal copies of files (or even porn), then you are definitely going to have the address you hand over spammed.

Spammers also use computer generated email addresses and send a message to each one. If you are silly enough to respond to the message, you confirm that their computer generated email address is a valid one and on to the database you go to be spammed over and over again, not only by that spammers, but by many more to whom they sell the address. Never respond to an obvious spam mail and never order goods and services from sites that use spam to advertise.

Rule 2: Use disposable email addresses:

Once spammers have your address it will be bombarded with all sorts of unwanted offers. At this point you will wish that you could just get rid of that email address. You can, but only if you have used a disposable email address. These can be a Yahoo, Hotmail or AOL address; or a spammotel.com issued disposable address. If a spammer gets hold of your disposable address, get rid of it and use another one.

Rule 3: Use a Hobart Computer Users Group-provided alias

Members can obtain an email alias from the Hobart Computer Users Group. Simply email the Webmaster requesting one, if you haven't got one already. Email aliases take the form member@hobartpcgroup.org.au and can be changed on request, should they fall into spammers' hands.

Mail to all our email addresses and aliases is screened by a process known as “greylist”. The first attempt to send a message to the address is automatically knocked back. Most spam is sent only once and is thus eliminated. Genuine mail is sent again and this time it is allowed through. That's why emails sent to addresses ending in @hobartpcgroup.org.au are subject to a small delay.

Emails to hobartpcgroup.org addresses are also subject to virus screening and restrictions on the type of attachments that may be sent as detailed below:

Virus scanning: All incoming emails are scanned for known viruses. Any email that tests positive for a know virus is rejected or deleted.

Attachment policy: Emails with attachments with the following extensions are banned from the mail server and are rejected: `bat com cmd exe hta pif reg scr vbs wsh`. The virus scanner may also reject other attachment types as they become used in virus or worm emails. If you need to receive an attachment with a banned file type, please have the sender compress the file into a zip file.

Levels of protection

When an email is sent to editor@hobartpcgroup.org.au (for example), it is screened as detailed above. It is then redirected to my Internet Service Provider, Internode, who again screen it for viruses and spam. Virus infected attachments are removed and suspected spam is held for fourteen days. I have to log on via webmail every few days and check that no genuine emails have been wrongly held as spam. When the email reaches my Xandros Linux system it is again screened for viruses and spam. Viruses are removed and spam is diverted to a "Junk" folder, where it is held until I have examined it to ensure that no genuine mail has been junked.

This multi-level approach ensures that my system remains free of viruses and spam is well controlled. Some spam will always get through unless you tighten the filtering systems to the point where high levels of genuine email are branded spam. It is always a question of balancing spam identification and false positives (as such mis-identifications are called) and I prefer to allow a little spam through rather than have to chase messages that have been junked.

If you don't want to receive a lot of spam, my advice is to take a new address/alias and adopt measures similar to those outlined above.

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Convert iTunes to MP3

To protect its bottom line, Apple markets its iTunes in a protected format. This prevents you from making copies directly. However, Bob Rankin of Tourbus describes his method of overcoming this restriction, thus allowing you to do "perfectly reasonable things with the music" you have purchased. His method should not, of course, be used to provide your friends with copies of music you have purchased. That would most certainly be a breach of copyright and you could be prosecuted.

With that warning firmly in mind, you may care to visit:

http://www.askbobrankin.com/convert_itunes_to_mp3_format.html

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Beware of WinFixer

Winfixer 2005 purports to fix all manner of ills on your Windows PC. In reality, it's a "malware funnel" that most of the commercial anti-spyware tools cannot touch. A computer belonging to one of my customers became infested with Winfixer, and it resisted all attempts to remove it. If you need help with Winfixer, see Bob Rankin's solution in his *Removing Winfixer* article:

http://www.askbobrankin.com/removing_winfixer_popups.html

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Freespire

In a recent Linspire Letter, CEO Kevin Carmony says that five years ago he knew nothing of Linux and was recruited by Linspire founder Michael Robertson for his expertise in getting people to adopt new technology. His introduction to Linux was a rough one. Here's how he describes the experience:

When Michael asked me to consider the President's role at Linspire (called Lindows at that time), he had me first download and install several versions of Linux. I spent days trying to get it even to install, and then when I did, nothing worked. I couldn't connect to the Internet, I couldn't print, most websites didn't work, I couldn't use my existing Excel spreadsheets or Word for Windows documents. In short, I told Michael, "this is garbage." I told him I would never use Linux on my desktop, it simply didn't do the majority of things I needed to do, all of which Windows did do...

I can emphasise with that experience; my early attempts to use Linux followed a similar pattern. It wasn't until I bought Lindows and later Xandros that I began to make real progress. Since then, free distributions (or "distros") have improved greatly, but it is the proprietary ones that have become the most versatile and easiest to use. As Kevin says:

Today I run Linux full time on all my computers, and it is a thousand times better than it was when I first experienced it. I can shut the lid on my laptop computer, and it hibernates. I can travel between home and work, and my laptop automatically finds the different Wi-Fi networks and connects automatically. I can

share Excel and Word documents with my friends running MS Windows. And on it goes ... Linux truly has become a joy for me to use. In these few short years, Linux has gotten so much better that I definitely prefer it over the expense, viruses and security problems that plague Windows.

However, there is a very important reason why I'm so happy with Linux today. In addition to the things I mentioned above, Linux works for me because I can play .mp3 files on my iPod, watch a DVD movie on my laptop, use Java, Flash and Real. I can view movie trailers on the web with Apple's QuickTime, and view and print Adobe .pdf files. I have advanced 3D support for my nVidia and ATI graphic cards. However, what many may not understand, is that for me to enjoy all of these things, Linspire uses legally licensed, proprietary codecs, drivers and software from third-party companies. Without utilizing this software, Linux is right back where I started five years ago: unusable.

With seeming irony, Mr Carmony wrote the above when announcing a free version of Linux stripped of these proprietary components is being developed! However, the option to include them will also be available to people downloading *Freespire*, as the new version will be called.

I found one part of his announcement very interesting. Linspire's proprietary online distribution system *Click'N'Run (CNR)* will be open-sourced. This should make it possible for users of other Debian-based Linux distros to add it to their installation and, thereby, tap into the vast repository that Linspire has built up. They will also be able to use apt-get. If I have a criticism of Xandros, it would be that its equivalent of CNR doesn't provide access to anywhere near as many applications and the ability to access this repository with Xandros would be great.

Linux has found broad acceptance on servers, but has met with resistance from desktop and laptop computer users for its lack of native support for hardware and multi media formats. Freespire addresses this hurdle by offering proprietary drivers and software as a choice, and giving desktop Linux users the option of "out-of-the-box" legal support for MP3, DVD, Windows Media, QuickTime, Java, Flash, Real, ATI drivers, nVidia drivers, Adobe Acrobat Reader, third-party fonts, and so on. This is a significant first for free, community versions of Linux. Other Linux distributions do not include all of these pieces of proprietary software in their core, free distributions.

Once we make the Freespire available for download, a list of all the different proprietary codecs, drivers and software used in Freespire will be available at the Freespire website, along with the detailed licensing information needed to help assist others in the modifying and redistribution of the core Freespire open source code. For Linux to thrive, the open source community needs to be better educated on how to legally and successfully incorporate proprietary licensing in those instances where there are not yet good open source options available.

I know there will be some who will abhor the idea of offering proprietary software to be used next to open source, but I honestly believe it's time to take a realistic approach. The world just isn't going to throw away their millions of iPods, or stop watching DVDs. Until viable alternatives emerge, Linux needs to offer a total, usable experience. Freespire doesn't force any proprietary code on anyone, it simply gives them that choice as an option.

Freespire is about choice. The user should be free to decide what software they want to install on their systems, be that proprietary or open source. Linspire continues to fully embrace and supports the open source model. In fact, we honestly wish we didn't need any closed source software, but if Linux is to gain mainstream acceptance it needs to work with iPods, DVD players, and fully support hardware, such as 3D graphic cards, Wi-Fi, sound, and printers. Until there are viable open source replacements, Freespire will provide the choice to users to easily access legal proprietary codecs, drivers and software. By making this available, more people will be exposed to desktop Linux, have a positive user experience and in the end adopt the operating system as a viable alternative to Windows. As the Linux user base grows, so does its circle of influence to facilitate change.

The release of the first beta of Freespire is expected around August 2006.

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