Overview of some of the best Linux applications

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Linux Mint strives to pick the best applications from the available pool, sometimes going against the grain where necessary in an attempt to provide the best user experience possible. There are several applications that Linux Mint is not able to include in its standard base due to size restrictions or otherwise, but their absence is not indicative of any shortcomings. Let’s go through several applications which are clean, beautiful, and above all – functional.

**Filezilla – The FTP and SFTP Choice**

Filezilla is one of the first applications I install due to its absolute functionality of allowing easy connections to FTP and SFTP servers. Simple drag and drop interface, file queuing, the ability to run through proxy servers, bookmarks, and even the ability to initiate a manual transfer when necessary. The GUI is extremely well laid out and does a great job at presenting itself cleanly and crisply. When I need to move several different batches of files, I inevitably turn to Filezilla for its ease of use if I need to transfer a few files or 50,000 files. It is one of those programs I can simply load up with all my files to transfer and just let it go for an hour or two.

**Gnome-Do – The Functionality Unlocker**

A second utility that I get immediately after finishing my installation of Linux Mint is a handy Swiss army knife by the name of Gnome-Do. Gnome-Do is similar to QuickSilver on OS X, enabling a wide array of useful features with a few strokes of the keyboard. It also sports an extensive library of plugins, allowing one to do anything from find files, post to Twitter, launch applications, view and edit Google Calendar, control Rhythmbox, send to Pastebin, and that’s just a handful of the official plugins – it also sports a community that is also constantly creating new plugins and evolving Gnome-Do. It has become a program in its own right that is capable of controlling many common aspects of the desktop, saving you the time from having to use the mouse and perform searches on a per application basis. It is highly recommended to try it for yourself and see how it can help you improve productivity and make tasks easier.

**Avant-Window-Navigator – Classy Dock and Launcher**

Avant-Window-Navigator (AWN) is a mainstay choice if a dock is in your “must-have” applications list. It has a wide array of applets that can populate the dock, such as the Stacks applet, an emulation of the Mac OS X stacks, allowing the popout view of a folder; a terminal applet with a popout terminal, standard launchers, and even a system monitor will full ability to kill applications (and looks stylish doing so!) AWN

Figure 1. Filezilla
also has a community behind it developing plugins, and is able to be themed in dozens of ways to suit a specify color scheme or style. If you are looking to add a bit of flair to your desktop, or add the last bit of the puzzle to turn your desktop into simple beauty, take a look at Awn. It is certainly an application that has polish behind it, is functional, and is worth trying at least once.

Minitube – Get Your Youtube On Without Flash

Minitube is a great way to view videos on Youtube without needing a web browser or Flash to play them. It supports searching, previews, playlists, and the ability to download the videos directly from within the application. To install, the size is only 6MB overall on a standard Linux Mint 11 Katya installation, so there is no excuse to have this at your fingertips if you are a constant YouTube viewer. The application does not support comments or video upload, it is strictly a video viewer and fetcher. Some may see this as a shortcoming, but to me it does not retract from the overall usefulness. The biggest selling point here is the ability to watch YouTube without the necessity of Flash.

Geany – The Lightweight IDE and Text Editor Choice

Geany is a multipurpose text editor which is mostly used by programmers as a very lightweight IDE. It has few dependencies and is ideal for a new programmer to learn languages and not be encumbered by a full IDE. It supports a wide array of features such as a built in terminal, dozens of file recognition types, regular expression search, tabs for documents, and much, much more. It can even be used as a replacement for Gedit if desired, and it is quickly becoming a must have application for anyone programming or editing large amounts of files. It is very quick to read tens of thousands of lines, and supports automatic reload if the file changes while loaded. If you are familiar with Notepad++ on Windows, you will thoroughly enjoy working with Geany.

Mumble – Teamspeak and Ventrilo Replacement

If you enjoy group chatting with people or are an avid gamer and are looking for a FOSS alternative to Teamspeak or Ventrilo, then you should check out Mumble. Mumble is a low-latency high-quality software similar to the two programs mentioned. Featuring all the necessities such as rooms with password protection, voice equalization, noise reduction, push to talk, and text to speech, it is a mainstay in my list of applications. If you have never used it before and find yourself in IM conversations with groups of people, try it. You’ll be amazed how much time it saves being able to hold a conference call. Mumble even has its own server called Murmur, so you can run your own locally installed server and keep your data in your hands.

Tilda/Guake – Quake Style Terminal for the CLI Junkie

Those of us who still like to use the terminal in our day to day lives often spend substantial amounts of time in them editing configuration files and doing other tasks. There are two applications I’m going to highlight here because they are both very respectable at doing what they do – drop down Quake style terminal emulator. The two applications in question are Tilda and Guake. They both have tabs, can be configured to use custom colors, transparency, and sizes, and to be bound to a key for easy drop-down access and be hidden again with the same press. It is extraordinarily handy for launching a package update or build and then press a key to hide the terminal and put it out of sight, letting the system work in the background. Try both and see which one fits better for your personal style.

Conky – Your System Specs on the Desktop

A mainstay favorite of ours in the Linux Mint community is a system monitor and status display by the name of Conky. It is customizable to no ends, enabling the ability to show
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just about any kind of information imaginable. All the way from CPU, RAM, and HDD speed, and disk input/output speeds, to controls for your media player of choice, mail updates, and weather information, it is a program for the person who loves having all their stats at their fingertips. It is very lightweight and runs stuck right on the desktop so it doesn’t interfere with your day to day tasks. On top of being able to display almost anything about your system, it can also be configured to look however you want as well, including different fonts, colors, and display styles of the information. Check online for some Conky configuration files and screen shots to see all the possibilities – they are truly endless!

Devede – Video Editor for All of Us

Devede is an absolute requirement for anyone who does video editing and enjoys making those personal and home videos. It’s a small program and can make DVD’s or AVI files from anything that MPlayer can handle, and only has dependencies on some small authoring programs, MPlayer, and Python. The ability to create custom menus, adjust video sizes and formats for different media devices are key elements, along with the (more obvious) ability to do drag and drop editing on videos without the need to entire the command line for conversions. It is a program that has a use for the beginner who simply wants to make videos of all the memories, or for the more professional video editor who is looking to produce a more refined product.

Virtualbox – Virtualize Your Environments Safely and Easily

Virtualbox has become one of the best ways to freely virtualize other operating systems, and it works wonderfully both on Linux and with using Linux as what is termed a “virtual machine.” In simple terms, a virtual machine is just an emulation of a desired operating system, and maintains itself outside of your physically installed system. This is a great way to test new things before “biting the bullet” and installing them, or using them as vanilla programming environments. Virtualbox supports the ability to full screen virtual machines, share folders and clipboard from guest to host, dynamic memory allocation, headless operation (can access from VNC), and the ability to use the host USB ports in the non-free version make this an application that may well occupy more of your time than your installed system if you are the type to enjoy tweaking and having fun with new distros. If you have a powerful enough computer, you can even run more than one system at once.

If the desire is even more eye candy on the desktop and you have the power to spare, then look to some programs to produce desktop widgets. One of my personal favorites is Google Gadgets for Linux, because they look beautiful and also provide some useful features. Additionally, it is not necessary to have KDE/QT just to have these nice widgets, as these can run perfectly on the GNOME Desktop. Weather reports, news/RSS, photos, mail, quick search tools for getting some fast information, games, and music players are just some of the possibilities that Google Gadgets offers you. Instead of searching for information, get it delivered straight to you on the desktop. If you are new from Windows Vista or 7 and enjoy having the Windows Sidebar with widgets, then Google Gadgets will make you feel right at home.

Dropbox – Bring a Piece of Cloud Storage to the Desktop

If using the cloud is part of your routine for synchronizing items between multiple computers or sharing large files with your friends and family, then definitely check out Dropbox. Dropbox is, as I’m sure most of the readers already know – a cloud storage service which offers the ability to store any files you want (up to certain sizes, of course) and add/remove at will. The service is incredibly easy, and when installed in Linux Mint 11 Katya, places a folder called Dropbox in your home folder, and any file you put in there will automatically synchronize to and from Dropbox provided the service is running on your computer. This is extremely useful and carefree, as you don’t need to run a separate interface or go to the website to manage your files. There is also another service called Wuala by LaCie which functions similarly to Dropbox and which they claim by default has encryption of all files on their servers. Wuala isn’t as simple as dragging and dropping a file to a folder, but they do have a very nice program which acts as a manage-

www.linuxidentity.com/us/
Wine – Run Your Windows Programs

An often asked question is “How can I run X Windows program on Linux?” The answer in short, is a program called Wine. Wine implements several common functions of the Windows API in Linux, and allows you to run many programs. You can even use it to specific certain versions of Windows, such as Windows XP, 98, and 7, just in case you have applications that may span from different eras. Many people have had great luck running their favorite Windows applications in Wine, including games. So if your trigger finger is itching and you’d like to play your favorite game on Linux, or if you’re trying to be a bit more productive and run your required business applications, Wine is the key. It is not a full replacement for a virtual machine, so therefore some things may not work 100%, but the Wine team is constantly implementing changes and fixes, making this a very active and shining community within Linux.

XChat – Connect to IRC and Both Get Help and Receive Help

This entire article has covered applications that are not pre-installed in Linux Mint 11 and their functionality, but for the last one we will cover an application that already comes on a Linux Mint system and discuss the potential it has to help you with your system beyond the features it provides. That application is XChat, and it is an IRC client which can be used to connect to servers and IRC channels across the world, including the Linux Mint ones where there are a great group of volunteers, most of whom give their time to help people with their issues and get them running. There is almost always someone available that can help with simple issues, and sometimes those pesky complex ones as well. XChat is extremely full featured, with logging, find/replace support, DCC request handling, and is extensible through scripts which can allow additional functionality or external calls to system information. It is a wonderful program for offering service and support to Linux Mint users, and one we hope you use – we are there to help on the IRC, so come by and get some help, and then stick around to offer some advice of your own and learn some new things. IRC is very fast paced and happens like a conversation, so it may not be for everyone, but we recommend you try it.

These applications highlighted are by no means the absolute end all and be all to applications in their respective categories, but merely just a sampling of some high-quality (and many are FOSS) Linux software that exists out there. Try some of these applications and then try others to see what suits you best depending on your needs. Because there are tens of thousands of applications out there. That is the beauty of the open source movement – your computer is yours again to do whatever you want. These applications serve as a reference point for beautiful, functional software that is free. Many of these developers would appreciate some recognition and thanks for their hard work, please do show your respect by giving them a hand with programming if you are able, or if you are not the programming type, write documentation, translate features, or provide testing feedback.

Concluding

Thanks for reading, get on out there and experiment with some new programs, and above all – have fun. The system is whatever you make it with looks, functionality, and application choice. Customize it to your heart’s desire – the Linux Mint team provides the base, you provide the customization and make it yours. Good luck, and happy hacking!

Figure 4. Chatting with the community with XChat