

Moblin 2.0



At last, a distro designed for netbooks from the start. **Neil Bothwick** wonders whether Moblin is the future of the netbook or just another respin.

In brief...

» A compact distro designed for small form-factor devices. See also: Ubuntu Netbook Remix or Mandriva Mini.

Key software

- » Kernel 2.6.30
- » X.org 7.3
- » Gnome 2.26

When manufacturers such as Asus wanted to produce low-cost netbooks, Linux was an ideal choice. To make best use of the limited hardware, they used special versions of various minor distros. None of these really succeeded, neither with those used to Linux or people expecting a Windows-like experience. What was needed was a distro designed explicitly for small screens and tiny drives. Moblin does this by drawing on many existing technologies without being tied to a particular distro, providing a base operating system and software suite that hardware vendors can tailor to their needs.

Moblin's UI uses something that the developers are calling zones, which are areas containing running applications akin to the multiple desktops that most Linux users are used to. When you run a program, you get the choice of opening in an existing zone or a new one, so you can group running apps together.

The choice of software emphasises the intended use, with plenty of web-related programs, media players and a few games. The office section contains calendar, email and to-do tools, but not what you would most expect to find in such a section – an office suite. As most



» The MyZones home screen provides a summary of recent activity – both yours and those of your social networking (Twitter and Last.fm) buddies.

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people's computer use revolves around email, web browsing and word processing, this is a major omission. However, there's nothing to stop netbook makers adding the software when they roll out their own version.

Free as in speech

The web browser is based on *Mozilla*, so it can cope with most websites. The one limitation here is that Moblin uses only free software, so some codecs are not supported. This applies to the core release, but hardware manufacturers can add whatever software they wish, so it's likely that netbooks supplied with Moblin will support a wider range of media formats. The same applies to the media player. This automatically scans any devices you plug in and offers up any suitable content. This is a slow process the first time you do it, but the data is cached ready for the next occasion you connect.

Moblin is intended for use on other devices too, including mobile internet devices, although it's currently built for the Atom processors and Intel chipsets used in netbooks. For netbook use, the interface layout is far better than some of the offerings included with netbooks and more efficient than UNR, but the

windowing toolkit badly needs a paint job. Performance depends on the hardware used, but Moblin was very responsive and loaded from boot menu to MyZones in a touch over 15 seconds.

Networking support is currently limited to wired and Wi-Fi, support for 3G and WiMAX isn't yet ready, so a 2.0 version number seems optimistic. Moblin is promising and doesn't need much to make it an excellent choice for small devices. Acer and Dell have already announced that they will be offering Moblin-based netbooks, and we can't wait to see what they look like. **LXF**

Features at a glance



Speed-dial lite
You can see recently visited websites at a glance, and return to them with a click.



Anjal
The mail program demonstrates the unappealing black-and-grey window toolkit.

LINUX **Verdict**
FORMAT

Moblin 2.0
Developer: Moblin Project
Web: <http://moblin.org>
Price: Free under various open source licences

Features	6/10
Performance	8/10
Ease of use	8/10
Documentation	6/10

» *The best attempt at a netbook distro yet, but it's not ready for the 2.0 tag.*

Rating 7/10