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BIG BROTHER

Groklaw shuts down

Award-winning, software freedom-defending legal site to close over privacy fears.

Groklaw, the legal site set up to fight the protracted SCO vs IBM case (see boxout, below) has folded after 10 years of award-winning campaigning journalism. The site's founder, Pamela Jones, cited fears that she would not be able to protect the identity of sources in the light of recent revelations over email security.

Writing in the site's last post, Jones said: "The owner of Lavabit tells us that he's stopped using email and if we knew what he knew, we'd stop too. There is no way to do Groklaw without email. Therein lies the conundrum.

"I hope that makes it clear why I can't continue. There is now no shield from forced exposure. Nothing in that parenthetical thought list is terrorism-related, but no one can feel protected enough from forced exposure any more to say anything the least bit like that to anyone in an email, particularly from the

US out or to the US in, but really anywhere. You don't expect a stranger to read your private communications to a friend. And once you know they can, what is there to say? Constricted and distracted ... That's how I feel."

Thanks for all the fishes

Jones, a paralegal by training, set up Groklaw to bridge the gap in understanding between the worlds of the programmer and the courtroom. Although it was originally intended to provide clarity over the SCO vs IBM legal fight, Groklaw also helped other legal cases with implications for free software, including Oracle vs Google, Microsoft vs Motorola and Apple vs just about everyone in the world.

The owner of Lavabit (the email provider used by, among others, US whistleblower Edward Snowden), Ladar Levison, closed the service in August



› **Groklaw spoke truth to power, and power doesn't like that very much.**

rather than comply with a demand that it be given access to its users' email accounts. He posted at the time: "I have been forced to make a difficult decision: to become complicit in crimes against the American people or walk away from nearly 10 years of hard work."

Lavabit had complied with an earlier investigation into a suspected paedophile, so the issue here isn't one of legitimate cooperation with the authorities; rather, it looks as though Levison and Jones didn't want to subject their users to fishing expeditions. Whatever the cause, the

Groklaw vs SCO

In March 2003 the SCO group sued IBM over alleged copyright infringement for \$1bn (later rising to \$5bn). SCO alleged that IBM stole code that SCO owned, and illegally contributed it to the Linux kernel. Many years and many millions of dollars later, the case eventually petered out, with the ruling that SCO didn't even own the allegedly infringed code in the first place. In the meantime the case spawned suit and counter suit.

SCO failed to identify the code in question, attempted to collect a licence fee from Linux users, and tried to warn off companies that were using Linux.

In hindsight SCO's claims were risible, but at the time they created an atmosphere of uncertainty around



› **Former SCO CEO Darl McBride.**

Linux that may have slowed Linux adoption in business, and definitely added fuel to the fire of Microsoft's anti-free software marketing. We have Groklaw to thank for exposing SCO's claims for the nonsense they were.

"There is now no shield from forced exposure."

Pamela Jones, Groklaw

internet will be a poorer place without Groklaw. Big companies will find it easier to bully smaller companies, governments will find it easier to bully subjects, and we've all lost a valuable resource for understanding the increasingly complicated world of software rights.

QUIXOTRY

Ubuntu Edge falls short of \$32m goal

Only \$12.6m pledged to bring super-smartphone into production, but the future looks bright for Ubuntu phones.

The Ubuntu Edge, the smartphone-cum-desktop PC replacement, has failed to reach its ambitious \$32m funding goal on the crowdfunding platform IndieGogo. However, there are some positives to be drawn from the experience, according to Canonical founder Mark Shuttleworth.

"It's definitely set a record for the most money raised," Shuttleworth told the *Guardian* shortly before the campaign ended, "but also for the most missed in a campaign."

The previous record for the most amount of money pledged in a crowdfunding campaign was the \$10.2m raised by the Pebble smartwatch. The Edge beat that with \$12.6m pledged, but according to the conditions of the IndieGogo funding platform, this money must now be returned to the backers, so Canonical hasn't actually raised a single penny.

What it has raised, however, is a ton of media coverage. *The Sun*, the *Guardian*, the BBC, the *Independent*, *Wired* and several other outlets have been falling over themselves to write about

the Edge, a fact acknowledged by Shuttleworth in a statement from Canonical: "The big winner from this campaign is Ubuntu. While we passionately wanted to build the Edge to showcase Ubuntu on phones, the support and attention it received will still be a huge boost as other Ubuntu phones start to arrive in 2014."



› No \$32m for the Ubuntu Edge, but loads of publicity for the fight against Android and Apple.

GAMES

More guns on Linux

Two top titles are coming our way.

We're very soon to get two more excellent games, both featuring guns and shooting things. *Wargame: Airland Battle*, a real-time strategy game set in the Cold War years of 1975-85, is at the time of writing in beta for Linux and OS X at a tasty 50% discount. The multiplayer mode is cross platform, so early adopters will be able to team up with gamers playing on the PC version. What's more, the beta will automatically upgrade to the full version when it gets its official release.

Also available is the remake of *The Chaos Engine*, the classic top-down shoot-'em-up that earned much praise when it was released for the Amiga in 1993. The original will be preserved – just in a form ported to Linux, OS X and Windows – and there will also be an enhanced version, for extra steampunk gun-based fun.



› *The Chaos Engine* is set in a Victorian England controlled by a rogue Babbage-like scientist.

Newsbytes

› According to a proposal put forward at the Flock conference for Fedora contributors, the distro could be moving back to the days of Fedora Core, when a base distro was released along with several meta packages to enable users to tailor the distro to their requirements. Or, as is the way with suggestions made at conferences, perhaps things will stay as they are.

› On 16 August 2013 it was the 20th birthday of Debian, the foundation distro for Ubuntu and Mint and, lest we forget, a damn fine distro in its own right. The first Debian release came just two years after the announcement of the Linux kernel, so hats off to the Debian folks for spotting the potential of Linus' creation.

› Steve Ballmer, the man who famously described Linux as a "cancer that attaches itself in an intellectual property sense to everything that it touches", has announced that he will step down as Microsoft CEO within the next 12 months. Hyperbole aside, under his stewardship the company has continued to make loads of money. Well done Steve!



Photo credit © Microsoft/Sweden

› All together now: "Developers! Developers! Developers! Developers! Developers! Developers! Developers! Developers!"

› Our Bulgarian correspondent tells us that LG's head of mobile for that country has revealed that the company intends to enter the Firefox OS market, and could do so as early as the first quarter of 2014.

› Google has released the binary code and OS disk images for its latest Nexus 7 Android operating system. If the company follows its usual pattern, the source code and SDK will follow in a few weeks.

Comment

Gregor Mendel

Michael Meeks



This month's highlight was a trip to the Gnome Users

And Developers European Conference (GUADEC) in the Czech Republic. Amusingly this was preceded by some advanced negative speculation about this being "the last GUADEC". What I saw in Brno convinced me that this is not so, indeed I was thrilled to see the community unfazed by such chatter.

One of the big moves in Gnome this year is the drive to use the *Wayland* display server in place of *X11*. The hope is that this will provide a step change in quality of rendering: every frame will be perfect. It should also significantly improve graphics extensibility and drop a lot of baggage from the long and twisted past of *X11*. The developers committed to shipping Gnome on *Wayland* in distributions early next year.

Along those lines, it was also great to see the recent work that Collabora did to make *Wayland's Weston* compositor work nicely on the Raspberry Pi. That work, exploiting the built-in compositing hardware of the device, gives an extremely smooth and slick window management experience even on that low-power device.

I was particularly pleased to catch up with the team behind the *Evolution* personal information manager and see the great work they've done fixing performance and scalability issues, and also to compare notes on cleaning the internals of another large codebase.

Finally there was a lot of excitement around systemd, and the plans for generic Linux application containment. This has the potential for bundling self-contained desktop apps and managing them cross-distribution in a much more intuitive way.

It is a year of great change and improvement in the Linux desktop space. The board is set, the pieces are moving and I'm excited about where things are heading.

Michael is a pseudo-engineer, semi-colon lover, SUSE *LibreOffice* hacker and amateur pundit.



MOBILE

Samsung violates GPL, then fixes it

Company quick to comply with licensing conditions.

Samsung, the world-leading mobile device manufacturer responsible for putting Linux into the hands of millions in the shape of the Android mobile OS, has violated the GPL by incorporating sections of GPL code into some of its software aimed at working with Microsoft's ExFAT filesystem.

Soon after the infringement was pointed out, by a hacker calling herself rxrz, Samsung put itself in contact with the Software Freedom Conservancy Group, which worked together with Samsung to ensure that it was complying with the GPL.

Ibrahim Haddad, head of open source innovation at Samsung, told *Wired* that "After discussing with multiple open source organisations and getting their thoughts on this matter, we proceeded [to release the code in

question under the GPL]. We take our responsibility to abide by open source licences seriously and recognise the value that open source software brings."

As well it might: having overtaken Apple, Samsung is the world's largest manufacturer of mobile phones, thanks largely to Android, Linux – and the GPL.



The GPL obliges those who use it to share the improvements they make.

SOFTWARE FREEDOM

Microsoft, Nokia cry foul over Android

Companies complain to EU over unfair pricing.

FairSearch.org, an organisation devoted to protecting tech minnows from being dominated by Google, has issued a complaint to the European Commission over what it sees as 'predatory pricing' of the free Android mobile OS. The wording of the complaint makes it clear that it's the fact that Android is free that is the really objectionable thing about it.

"Google's predatory distribution of Android at below-cost makes it difficult for other providers of operating systems to recoup investments in competing with Google's dominant mobile platform," the complaint says.

There's nothing wrong with free though, as the Free Software Foundation Europe pointed out in an open letter to the commission: "The predatory pricing theory proposed by



Anyone can use Android for free – including Nokia, which rejected it.

FairSearch is plainly unsuitable to describe a market where there is no price, and a product that, being free software, can literally be taken by anybody and 'forked'."

FairSearch represents 17 companies with a closed-source business model, including Oracle, Microsoft and Nokia.

Comment In search of identity

Tony Chapman



“One thing that gets my goat is the constant need for an organisation, particularly within technology, to have a ‘brand image’. While I agree that it’s important to have an identity, the issue here is that everyone is trying to create what they interpret as the new Google or Facebook. Everyone has a football table, everyone has table tennis and everyone waxes lyrical about how casual, creative, social and ‘cool’ they are – it turns into a parody of itself where everyone is trying to be so different they are actually all the same!

The main gripe I have about this is the number of companies I see that are getting it so wrong and rather than fulfilling their objective of attracting top talent, it is actually being detrimental to the process and they are actually turning people away. Interviews and candidate attraction within the technology sector is now a two-way street and if you’re getting the fundamental culture of your company wrong, you’re going to struggle.

People get paid thousands to create brand image, but the fundamentals are simple: follow the basics, be true to yourselves and your traditional core values. You don’t need to come up with buzzwords to describe how vibrant you are in some naff promotional material, you’re better off spending your time and resources creating a vibrant atmosphere.

Don’t get me wrong: I think it’s great building an interesting and fun working environment, however, we can achieve this in so many other ways, mainly by creating great challenges and cutting-edge technology to work with. People aren’t stupid: if the job isn’t very interesting or challenging, they will not join just because there is a fridge full of food and employees dress up as superheroes for a foosball competition every second Thursday.

› Tony is a leading Linux and open source recruiter at specialist agency LinuxRecruit. www.linuxrecruit.co.uk



Hitting the mirrors

What’s behind the free software sofa?

MEDIA PLAYER

If you pine for the lost days of getting an album home on the bus, then sitting reading the sleeve notes as you obsessively listen to your new purchase for the first time, *Amarok* is for you. This music player, which has just reached version 2.8, comes with more bells and whistles than any other music player on the Linux platform, including lyrics, biographies and even a music quiz.

New for 2.8 is a smooth fade-out feature when pausing music,



› **Amarok 2.8 includes work by four Google Summer of Code students.**

better support for themes other than KDE’s standard grey, and a better MusicBrainz database tagger.

SOLUS OS 2

SolusOS, the Debian-based distro that aims to provide a pure version of Linux, with applications as close as possible to their upstream packages, is getting close to its version 2 release. Only this time, it’s all being built from scratch rather than based on Debian, which makes the jump from version 1.0 to 2.0 rather more significant than usual.

SolusOS 2 is still in alpha testing at the time of writing, but when it’s ready you can expect to find an *Xfce*



› **SolusOS: “a genuine attempt to bring back the true Gnome”...**

4.10 desktop at the heart of a lightweight, easy-to-use desktop OS.

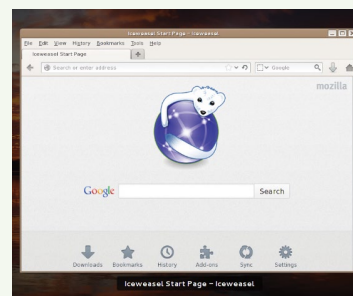
OFFICE SUITE

Calligra 2.7 has burst forth on to the internet, with a release that provides KDE users with an integrated office suite that should fit with all your careful customisation – unlike *AbiWord*, *LibreOffice* and the other GTK applications that ride roughshod

over your meticulously assembled desktop. New for version 2.7 comes a new toolbox, which is used in *Words* and *Sheets* (the word processor and spreadsheet respectively), better export options and improved CSV data import, among other goodies.

LINUX DISTRO

Like Debian? Like Gnome 3? Then you’ll like Parsix 5.0, which aims to graft the latest stable version of the Gnome desktop on to the Debian testing branch to create a distro that looks great and benefits from the huge package repositories of the rigorously free software-compliant Debian. Gnome 3.8.13, *LibreOffice 3.5.4* and more, but really it’s all about the polish.



› **Because it’s based on Debian, Parsix uses Icceweasel, not Firefox.**