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Fedora 13 alpha arrives amid controversy

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The Fedora project has released an alpha version of Fedora 13 featuring automatic print-driver installation, the Btrfs filesystem, enhanced 3D driver support, and much more. Meanwhile, on *LWN.net,* Jonathan Corbet reports on the growing controversy in the Fedora community over the quantity and quality of updates.

This techie-focused Fedora is known as a cutting-edge, community-driven upstream contributor to Red Hat Enterprise Linux (RHEL). Expected to ship in final form in May, Fedora 13 follows the final release of Fedora 12 in November. Fedora 12 added speed optimizations for i686 CPUs and the Intel Atom, and enhanced support for IPv6, Bluetooth, virtualization, multimedia, and power management features. Fedora 12 also added support for the netbook-oriented Moblin desktop environment, in the form of a Fedora 12 Moblin Fedora Remix edition.

Plug and play printing -- yea!

From the end-user perspective, one of the most noticeable improvements to Fedora 13 is automatic print driver installation. Using the RPM and PackageKit for automatic installation, printer drivers may have finally reached plug-and-play status.

In addition, the user account tool has been completely redesigned, and the accountsdialog and accountsservice test packages are available to streamline configuration of personal information, says the Fedora project. Color management has also been improved, and Fedora has added automatic installation of language packs, says the project.

Moving up to Linux 2.6.32, which was released in early December, Fedora 13 adds kernel-related features including memory de-deduplication, ATI R600/700 3D and KMS support, and Btrfs filesystem improvements and speedups. Other cited enhancements tied to the 2.6.32 kernel include a CFQ low latency mode, tracing improvements, soft limits in the memory controller, and support for Intel's upcoming "Moorestown" version of the Atom processor.

3D driver taps Nvidia cards

3D graphics support is also said to be improved, including support for Nvidia systems via the open source Nouveau Gallium3D driver. "We are one step closer to having 3D supported on completely free and open source software (FOSS) drivers," says the Fedora project, adding that Fedora now supports a wide range of NVidia cards. In addition, Fedora 13 now offers enhanced webcam support, including support for low-cost dual-mode cameras, which typically lack memory card slots.

The RPM package manager has moved up to RPM 4.8 Beta 1, which adds enhancements such as ordered erasures, smarter dependency loop handling, revamped Python bindings, and numerous bug fixes, says the Fedora project. In addition, kernel space file system code and the I/O stack "now have the ability to use information from certain types of storage about how best to layout data." Specifically, the kernel exports information about the optimal byte alignment for a partition, the optimal and minimum IO sizes, and whether or not the device is rotational, says the project.

The Upstart init system is now said to provide incremental steps towards moving to native Upstart scripts. The Anaconda installer, meanwhile, has gained a fresh UI, and enhanced options for advanced storage usage, says the Fedora project.

Fedora's NetworkManager has now gained a command line interface (CLI), as well as support for current signal strength, 3G cellular technology, roaming status, and Bluetooth Dial-up Networking (DUN), says the project. Meanwhile, MPI enhancements include support for MPI compilers and runtimes that are now managed at the userlevel in Fedora with environment modules.

Fedora 13 uses the KDE 4.4 desktop environment by default, bringing features such as PolicyKit 1, the KAuth backend, and improved PulseAudio integration, says the project. Mozilla's Firefox browser, meanwhile, has now been upgraded to version 3.6.1, offering built-in personas, full-screen HTML 5 video, the Gecko 1.9.2 web rendering platform, and other improvements.

Is Fedora's 3D support getting slower?

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Over at *Phoronix*, Michael Larabel has dug in a little deeper into the alpha release, and notes the latest packages for X Server 1.8 and DisplayPort monitor support among other Fedora 13 enhancements (see link farther below). He also offers some early OpenGL benchmarks to test out new Intel 3D support incorporated in the release, and finds that at least with the alpha, Fedora 13 ran slower than Fedora 12, although faster than Fedora 11. He adds, "It was these Intel packages last year that killed the netbook experience for a short while as Intel's developers addressed fallout from all of the invasive changes that went on with their Linux graphics stack in recent years."

Fedora community kvetches over updates

At *LWN.net* this week, Jonathan Corbet reports unrest on Fedora mailing lists about the frantic pace, growing quantity, and shoddy quality of package updates. Noting that this may be more than "yet another Fedora flame war," Corbet writes that a growing number of Fedora users are fed up with the accelerating churn in a distro that they believe should begin mellowing out into the more sustainable pace of middle age.

As a testing pad for recent Linux kernel releases, and the upstream inspiration for many features that end up in RHEL and other distributions, Fedora is known for its "adventurous updates," as Corbet puts it. Its users expect more change and cutting edge software than are typically found in more consumer-friendly distros, he suggests. However, over 600 package updates were made to the Fedora 11 release alone in just the last month, he reports. "There are limits," he writes.

Specific user beefs are said to include the discovery that a routine update significantly changed the behavior of the Thunderbird email client. An additional Thunderbird update was also said to have caused problems. More recently, KDE users were surprised to discover that a "stable update" moved them to the 4.4 release, "breaking things for some users," writes Corbet.

Proposals for taming this chaos include moving to a rolling release schedule, as well as freezing releases, or making releases look like "a moderately-slowed version of Rawhide." Others note that the "Bodhi" update review process is often circumvented, without user testing and voting, leading to quality problems.

So far, writes Corbet, Fedora's governance institutions have yet to agree on solutions. He concludes: "Until those institutions act, Fedora risks looking like a contentious organization lacking a clear idea of what it is trying to do."

Availability

The Fedora 13 Alpha announcement may be found here, and the release notes should be here. As usual with an alpha release, Fedora notes that there are numerous bugs, and that users should take appropriate cautions.

The *Phoronix* story on the alpha release may be found here, and the *LWN.net* story (subscription content) on the controversy over Fedora updates should be here.

-- *Eric Brown*

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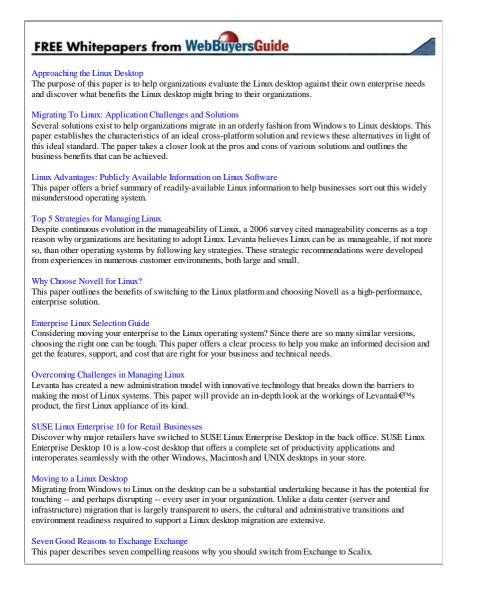

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