



Innovating one step at a time

LINUX LUCIDITY

Among the many improvements in the works for the Lucid Lynx release is the humble task of simplifying the system tray. **BY JONO BACON**

With so many Linux distributions out there – Ubuntu, Fedora, Debian, Mandriva, and more – it could be tempting to suggest that they are all basically the same. They all ship upstream components, they all ship a Linux kernel, so surely they don't vary all that much? Of course, this is not actually the case: The differences between distributions in quality, community, availability, and support vary hugely, and this is why I have always been passionate about Ubuntu. And, I am even more excited about our renewed focus in fixing and improving different parts of the desktop.

One such area slated for improvement in Ubuntu 10.04 Lucid Lynx is the system tray: those little icons that applications such as Rhythmbox and TomBoy put in the top right-hand corner of the screen in Ubuntu. These icons are typically used as shortcuts to the application itself, and the way they function is riddled with problems.

These problems begin with inconsistencies in clicking. Some applications require a left-click, some a right-click, some put different menus in different left-/right-click menus, with seemingly no standard enforced. Also, applications put all kinds of custom, hacked-together widgetry in those menus, much of which

is never used. As such, the menus look cluttered, inconsistent, and messy. What's worse, you can't scrub the different application icons.

In other words, if you click on one notification icon and move your mouse to the next, it won't automatically show the next one; instead, you need to click it. You should just need to click on one icon and then slide the mouse through all the icons like a normal menu. To top things off, the whole shebang is not particularly accessible. For those using accessibility tools for navigation, these menus can be a nightmare.

In Lucid, we are fixing this, so most of these problems will go away. You will be able to click on a system tray icon, and all menus will appear with a left-click. They will be clean, consistent menu items, and you will be able to slide your mouse through the other notification icons smoothly and easily. Everything will be accessible and keyboard controlled, and KDE applications running in Gnome will have their notification menus rendered in the native Gtk toolkit, which will look more consistent and reflect your current theme.

The work involved in fixing this set of problems in our desktop is not unsubstantial, but its effect is subtle in developing a sleek and efficient user experience. What excites me is that this attention to detail

will continue to seat Ubuntu as an innovator in the desktop, server, and mobile realms and beyond.

In the same way that Ubuntu innovated with notify-osd – those sexy, little notification bubbles that pop up – we are continuing to innovate here and beyond. These improvements are a testament to the design team that has been formed to tackle this work, the desktop experience team that is developing it, and the desktop team shipping it. The fruits of the labors of all of these teams working together means that step-by-step, release-by-release, the Ubuntu experience for our users will grow and become more refined.

Of course, all of these innovations and improvements are free software, using open and accessible technologies. It is an exciting time for Ubuntu, the desktop, and the future of our community. The future is looking rosy ■

