

FIVE ESSENTIAL APPS FOR THE UBUNTU USER

Ubuntu is arguably the most popular Linux distribution available. It's solid, stable, and well packaged. On top of that, the developers have made some good calls about the software that they package with Ubuntu.

"GNOME Do can do a lot. And it's fun exploring the application's capabilities."

There's a lot of software for Ubuntu (and other Linux distributions). A lot of it's good, some of it's OK, and there are a few duds. But the five applications that this TechTip covers are great additions to anyone's installation of Ubuntu.

Note: Some of the software discussed in this TechTip can also be installed on other *Linux distributions*.

Ubuntu Tweak



There are many different ways you can modify or just fiddle with the configuration of Ubuntu. You can edit configuration settings in a little application called *gconf-editor*. You can mess with configuration files in a text editor. Or you can choose one of the options from the **System > Preferences** menu. A better option is to use *Ubuntu Tweak*.

Ubuntu Tweak, as its name implies, lets you change the configuration of an Ubuntu system right from a single user interface. With Ubuntu Tweak, you can install a number of popular or third-party applications, change the look and behavior of your *window manager*, set up shortcuts, and more.

Two of my favorite features of Ubuntu Tweak are the third-party software installer and the package cleaner. While you can install a lot of software using *Synaptic Package Manager* (the default software installation tool for Ubuntu), there's a lot of interesting software that you can't get through Synaptic. The third-party installer

lists some of these – like *VirtualBox* and the *Chromium browser* – and installs any additional software or libraries that they require.

The package cleaner frees up space on your *hard drive*. Whenever you install a new piece of software using Synaptic, Ubuntu saves a copy of the installer (called a package) and information about that package on the drive. The thing is, though, that you don't need those packages. With Ubuntu Tweak, you can clear all of that out easily.

Epiphany

Firefox is the default Web browser for Ubuntu. It's a great application that has some nifty features. But the problem with Firefox is that it's fairly large and can be quite slow. If you want to speed up your Web browsing, then *Epiphany* is for you.

Whereas Firefox is plodding, Epiphany is lean, fast, and mean. In fact, it's almost spartan. The browser window contains a set of menus, a button bar, and an area in which



to type Web addresses. That's it. No search box and no other eye candy. If you want to do a search, just type the term that you want to find in the address box and press Enter. You'll be taken to a Google page with the search results.

What you'll notice, though, is that Epiphany can do everything that Firefox can do. Only faster. From clearly rendering Web pages to logging into secure sites, Epiphany does it all.

While Firefox comes with a massive array of add-ons (which extend the features and functions of the browser), the pickings for Epiphany are *pretty slim*. There's an ad blocker, one that lets you subscribe to an RSS feed, and one that lets you look up text that you select with a bookmark.

Epiphany's not everyone's cup of tea. Some people who try it are frustrated by its lack of features. But if you want to see how fast Web browsing can be then give Epiphany a look.

Ubuntu One

Sharing files between computers can be a chore. Emailing files or copying them to a *USB flash drive* gets

really tedious really quickly. A more efficient way is to share your files online. Shortly after the release of Ubuntu 9.04 in April, 2009 *Canonical* (the company behind Ubuntu) opened a service called *Ubuntu One* to users by invitation only.



Ubuntu One is an online service that enables you to upload, share, synchronize, and store files. You install the Ubuntu One client on your computer, and it integrates with Nautilus (the file manager for the Ubuntu desktop). You can copy files into the Ubuntu One folder in your /home directory, and the client synchronizes them with the Ubuntu One Web

site.

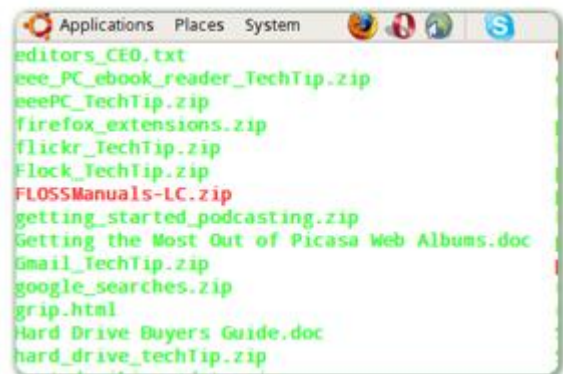
On the Web site, you can specify which folders to share and with whom. At the moment, service is in beta testing which means there may be a few problems. But it looks like it will be quite useful. And you get 2 GB of free storage, which isn't too shabby.

Note: An upcoming TechTip will look at online storage and file sharing services.

GNOME Do

Inspired by a Mac utility called *Quicksilver*, *GNOME Do* is a very powerful utility that lets you start applications, search for items on your computer and on the Web, and a whole lot more. Once you've given GNOME Do a shot, you'll find it indispensable.

When you start it, GNOME Do sits out of sight. You launch it by pressing the Windows key (also called the Super key) on your *keyboard* along with the space bar. From there, you type the command or search criteria that you want to execute and press Enter. GNOME Do then fades into the background.



While GNOME DO is a powerful tool, it gets a lot more power and flexibility from its array of *plugins*. There

are dozens of them – some you can download with GNOME Do itself, and others which have been created by enthusiastic users. These plugins do a lot of things, like allowing you to access your files in *Google Docs*, *microblogging*, searching for files on your computer, shortening URLs, and looking up words in a dictionary.

GNOME Do can do a lot. And it's fun exploring the application's capabilities.

Guake

One persistent myth about Linux is that it's all *command line* (also called the terminal). Or, at least, you need to use the command line as much as the graphical user interface. Nothing can be further from the truth. I know several Linux users who've never gone to the command line.

That said, using the command line can enhance your experience with Ubuntu (or any other Linux distribution). For an interesting perspective on why you should learn the command line, read *this article*.

To get to the command line in Ubuntu, you'd normally select **Applications > Accessories > Terminal**. That's a lot of work. I like to have the command line at my fingertips. Literally. Which is why I love *Guake*.

Whenever I need it, I just press a hot key (in my case, F9) and Guake literally drops down from the top of my screen. I do whatever I need to do, and then press F9 again to make the Guake window disappear.

You can tweak Guake in a number of different ways. You can change the size of the window to best suit your *LCD monitor*, set the transparency and background of the window, change the font, and modify the keyboard shortcut to call Guake. You can even configure the behavior of tabs. Yes, you can have multiple terminals in a single Guake window.

Conclusion

Ubuntu really shows the flexibility and potential of the Linux desktop. And the various applications – like the five discussed in this TechTip – add to that flexibility.

Are you an Ubuntu user? If so, what are some of your favorite applications? Leave a comment and share your favorites.

Source: <http://www.geeks.com/techtips/2009/Five-Essential-Apps-for-the-Ubuntu-User.htm>