MUUGLines

The Manitoba UNIX User Group Newsletter

Volume 34 No. 6, February 2022 Editor: Alberto Abrao

Next Meeting: February 8th, 2022 (Online Video Meeting)

Feature Presentation: Tactical RMM

This month's presentation is on Tactical RMM, a powerful, self hosted tool for managing large amounts of Windows computers. Chris Audet will demonstrate some common use cases for TRMM such as patch management, client system health checks, and remoting into client computers to provide support.

The latest meeting details are always at:
https://muug.ca/meetings/

Where to Find the Meeting:

This month we will continue to use the open source meeting software: Big Blue Button. If you haven't tried it yet, we recommend joining the meeting a little early to familiarize yourself with the controls.

The virtual meeting room will be open by 7:00 pm on January 11th, 2022 with the actual meeting starting at 7:30 pm. You do not need to install any special app or software to use Big Blue Button: you can use it via any modern web-cam-enabled browser by going to the website link above.

Please note that the meeting link will not be active until approx. 30 minutes before the actually meeting date and time.

The early days of Unix at Bell Labs

Unix legend and illustrious Canadian, Brian Kernighan presented a keynote titled "The early days of Unix at Bell Labs"[1] for the 2022 linux.conf.au conference, which was held online this year.

The video is available here[2].

LWN also has an interesting summary here[3].

Pay the piper

Another month, another MUUG Newsletter's "State of the Bork" report.

The creator of two MIT-licenced projects, **faker.js** and **color.js** - the latter with 20 million weekly downloads on rpm and almost 19,000 projects using it as a dependency – decided he was done with it all.

After a monetizing attempt that went sideways – his account of the story can be found here[4] - he openly asked interested parties to either pay him for his efforts or just fork the project entirely. Neither happened.

After a while, he set out to do what he said he would. Both projects were replaced with prank-laden versions, geared to print gibberish instead of useful results. In yet another example on how far and wide the dependency chain can go, many applications which depended on either/both of these packages were broken as a result.

At least since Heartbleed (2014), the sustainability of an ecosystem built on decentralized collaboration and loose control structures, yet central to the fabric of modern IT infrastructure, is debated. Moral

1 https://lca2022.linux.org.au/schedule/presentation/95/
2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ECCr_KFl41E
3 https://lwn.net/Articles/881431/
4 https://web.archive.org/web/20210628030444/https://marak.com/blog/2021-04-25-monetizing-open-source-is-problematic

considerations aside, the crux of the issue is funding: we are far removed from the days where one would share the fruits of their spare-time labour for all to enjoy, but were otherwise gainfully employed. In many ways, the modern IT job landscape has a lot of the "starving musician" stereotype. One shares their work, and accepts spare change as currency, anything to have an audience and make a name for themselves… until they hit it big. Then, they're Lars Ulrich[5]…

…or Google.

While many were quick to blast the aforementioned prankster, the responses were a lot more nuanced when Google also decided to take their toys and go home. I failed to find a mainstream venue who dared state anything other than "Google is the sole owner of their toys, taxes extra, please see store for details, conditions subject to change, pray they don't change it any further".

If you're one of the formerly-referred-to-as-lucky ones who still uses a free G Suite account, you have until July 1, 2022 to either start paying, or to get out of their servers.

It seems that they are going to be kind enough to let you convert your disenfranchised accounts to the standard Free Edition, thus keeping the purchases you made in places such as the Play Store. How thoughtful! Details on how that will work have not been released yet, though.

Speaking of the *Don't be Evil*, regulators all over the world – chief among them the Europeans with their GDPR – are keen on making sure they live up to their (former) motto, even if they're not *that* fond of it anymore. A ruling in Austria[6] declares that Google Analytics is a breach of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Other countries have similar cases in progress

Wait, there's more!

There is yet another vulnerability to watch out for: pkexec, part of Polkit.

First reported in 2013(!)[7] - although with no proof-of-concept exploit at the time – and going back all the way to 2009, when the first version of pkexec was released – this vulnerability allows an unprivileged user to get root access to the system.

As usual, patches are are now available for all major distributions.

The advisory also states that "*polkit also supports non-Linux operating systems such as Solaris and *BSD, but we have not investigated their exploitability; however, we note that OpenBSD is not exploitable, because its kernel refuses to execve() a program if argc is 0.*"

There is a patch[8] being discussed that would make the Linux kernel behave like OpenBSD's. A quick glance suggests patching ancillary applications would be required to not break userspace, so it remains to be seen how this will be handled.

One month after: CentOS 8 end-of-life

Our last month newsletter reported that CentOS 8 reached end-of-life status as of December 31st, 2021. The big alternatives in Red Hat Enterprise Linux(tm) (RHEL)-land at that point were Rocky Linux and AlmaLinux.

Both clones have managed to reach parity, "bug-for-bug" compatibility. Both make it easy to migrate CentOS 8 systems to their own. AlmaLinux went a step further with *ELevate*, a program to migrate CentOS 7 not only to Alma, but "to any 8.x variant of your choice."

While Red Hat certainly bore the reputation hit, others not only showed up to fill the gap, but established players are now making inroads on uncharted territory. SUSE Liberty Linux is an attempt from the European Enterprise Linux darling to conquer the trust of businesses on the other side of the pond, who like the warm, fuzzy feeling of dealing with a big, established name, but are now wary of Red Hat's bait-and-switch.

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5 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metallica_v._Napster,_Inc.

6 https://www.wired.com/story/google-analytics-europe-austria-privacy-shield/

7 https://twitter.com/ryiron/status/1486207182404472832

8 https://lwn.net/ml/linux-kernel/20220126043947.10058-1-ariadne@dereferenced.org/

On APT land, Ubuntu was quick to renew its marketing efforts to showcase how cost effective a migration to its ecosystem would be. Debian is now home to many who realized that corporate backing was a bug, not a feature, to their intended usage. After being forced to go back to the drawing board, many decided to move altogether.

So far, lines were drawn, business strategies revamped, new players emerged, and nifty tools that even Red Hat was not able – or willing – to offer are now available. On the technical side of things, all is as boring as ever: RHEL is known for being a very dull distribution, which is a feature for their intended applications. From a business perspective, however, it brought competition and even some innovation to the otherwise stagnant-by-design Enterprise Linux landscape.

One can only hope the subscription windfall was worth all the community goodwill that simply evaporated with the move. Else, the biggest loser on the CentOS debacle may turn out to be Red Hat itself.

Coming up...

Ubuntu 22.04 is the new LTS version for Ubuntu, scheduled to be released on April 21, 2022. It will sport Kernel 5.15, PHP 8.1, Python 3.10, Ubuntu's flavour of the recently-released GNOME 42, a brand new installer, enhanced Raspberry Pi 4 support, and more.

The grapevine also blurbs of Slackware 15 (finally?) showing up. The main page for Slackware does not inspire confidence on its vital signs, the last entry being more than 5 years old at this point. Dig deeper, and you'll find that the gears are still turning: the *ChangeLogs* section tell a more pleasant story than the front page does. The oldest active Linux distribution is expected to release its new shiny soon.

Help us promote this month's meeting, by putting this poster up on your workplace bulletin board or other suitable public message board:

https://muug.ca/meetings/MUUGmeeting.pdf

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Thank You Michael W. Lucas

MUUG would like to thank Michael W. Lucas for donating one of his ebooks every month as a door prize. You can view and purchase his tech books here:

https://www.tiltedwindmillpress.com/product-category/tech/

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