



Extending free software with Ubuntu

MAKING THE LEAP

Jono marks his four-year anniversary with Canonical and looks to the road ahead. **BY JONO BACON**

September marks my four-year anniversary at Canonical. I traditionally write a retrospective each year, but for some reason “four years” feels a tad more special; maybe it’s because great things come in fours. Well, Megadeth and four-cheese pizzas do, but you get my point

For this anniversary, I want to build on the blog entries that many friends and colleagues in the Ubuntu community have been writing, about how their work is helping Free Software. Before that, I want to prefix this with where we stand today compared with four years ago.

Six years ago, Ubuntu changed desktop Linux. Of course, this had nothing to do with me. I wasn’t involved back then; it was the fantastic work of the original gangstas, such as Mark Shuttleworth, Matt Zimmerman, Robert Collins, Scott James Remnant, Jeff Waugh, Benjamin Mako Hill, and others. They took the fantastic and inspiring rock that is Debian and created something different. It was fresh-faced, innovative, and had a wicked-cool tan. It inspired me to use and advocate Ubuntu and ultimately see if I could fit into that world.

Back then, Ubuntu targeted a very different demographic of user. Ubuntu was shooting to capture the hearts and minds of those passionate about Linux but who

wanted a devilishly simple experience. Two years in, Canonical let me join the ride as Ubuntu Community Manager. My goal was aligned with that of Ubuntu: to help build a community that embodied the values of Ubuntu; open, accessible, rewarding, and just a ton of fun. :-)

I see myself as a facilitator. By definition, my role is helping others do great things for Free Software; those are the people who deserve the credit and hugs.

Getting back to four years at Canonical, the shape of Ubuntu is quite different now. Back then, Ubuntu very much served enthusiastic Linux fans who wanted a simple experience. Now, we are staring at a much wider demographic of people that we can bring Free Software to. I am proud to see how successful Ubuntu has been. At every open source conference, I see a large number of Ubuntu laptops. I see Ubuntu machines on trains, in airports, and coffee shops. You can now buy laptops with Ubuntu pre-installed, and Ubuntu and Linux are no longer things that you typically need to explain to people.

In the software industry, people often talk about crossing the chasm, and I believe Ubuntu has the ability to cross that chasm. I have never believed that more so than I do today.

In the past six years, Ubuntu has transformed from a sleek experience in a community predominantly populated with heavily technical people, to a sleek experience that is also interesting to a wider community. That community now includes people who think of their computers more like appliances. Members of my family use Ubuntu. I know kids who use Ubuntu. And schools. More impor-

tantly, they are all using Free Software; Ubuntu just brought it to them in a way that’s accessible and in a form they can understand and work with.

Although I believe we are on the edge of that chasm, we have lots to do to get over it. The chasm is big. We have made tremendous progress, but we now need to understand every detail, nook, and cranny of what Ubuntu users expect and how they define quality. Now more than ever we have the opportunity to leap that chasm, but we can only do it together.

Just think of the potential. Think of the impact on people’s lives. Think of all the benefits we feel as Free Software users today, and imagine all those benefits being enjoyed by the wider world.

Leaping that chasm is going to be difficult, and we will need to pull together to stay motivated and focused. We will need to make some hard decisions and question and challenge the culture and assumptions we place on ourselves if we are to understand the opportunities on the other side. We are also not going to make everyone happy all the time. We may even lose some people – that’s fine, though; if Ubuntu loses folks, Free Software doesn’t.

I am proud of Ubuntu, and never before have I ever felt so positive about a project really changing people’s lives for the better. Now, we face the real challenge, but everyone has a piece to put into the bridge. We need developers, testers, translators, an army of advocates and enthusiasts, artists, designers, and more. As I said, I am a facilitator, and I am passionate about helping our community make the leap. Let’s roll. :-)