

## Working to get Ubuntu pre-installed onto hardware

## UBIQUITOUS UBUNTU

Chris Kenyon explains the role and goals of Canonical's OEM Services. **BY AMBER GRANER**

Chris Kenyon is Vice President, Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) Services, for Canonical, the corporate sponsor behind Ubuntu.



**Q** Chris, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. Could you please tell readers a little more about you and how you came to be Canonical's Vice President of OEM Services [1]?

**A** About five years ago my wife, Suzanne, was working on a development project in Afghanistan and the team donated 50 computers with no software. I was in the software industry, and Suzy asked me to investigate options. I was familiar with Firefox but, in doing the research, I discovered the rich world of FLOSS and this extraordinary project called Ubuntu. I got in contact with Jane Silber [2], and, two months later, I was on board!

At the beginning, I spent a lot of time helping set up or expand the partnership and commercial offerings we had. It did not take long until the importance of building our relationships with some of the giants of the technology industry and getting Ubuntu pre-installed on hardware became clear.

**Q** What location do you work out of and how often do you travel?

**A** I live in London and work in the Millbank office. I spend about 10 days a

month traveling in the US (Bay area, Texas, and Boston), Taiwan, and China. We have more people in offices than most teams in Canonical. We are about eight-strong and have part of the team based in Boston, a technology center in Taipei, and our new office in Shanghai.

**Q** How does the OEM services team fit into the overall strategy of taking Ubuntu everywhere?

**A** Ubuntu is unbelievably simple to install on a computer, and I marvel each release at how we continue to make that simpler.

There are, however, a finite number of people in the world who are willing to install a new operating system and suite of applications onto a PC they have already.

The OEM Services teams helps PC makers (OEMs) and their Taiwanese manufacturing partners (called ODMs – Original Design Manufacturers) work out which models they should certify or pre-install Ubuntu with and then make it happen.

We have to get Ubuntu pre-installed on great hardware so that it becomes as easy a decision as Windows on a PC.

**Q** People often ask how free and open source software makes money. Can you explain to readers how OEM services is helping Canonical become a profitable business?

**A** OEMs installing Ubuntu need help with Linux drivers, project management,

QA testing, and marketing to name just a few areas. We have a strong reputation of delivering excellent engineering, and Canonical charges fees for these services.

If we did not charge for these services, it would be impossible to scale the teams in the way that Bug #1 requires!

**Q** What are some of the OEM partners and what new and exciting technologies can we expect to see in the future with Ubuntu on them?

**A** We announced Ubuntu Light [3] as a fast web option back in May, and I am confident that we will have partners taking devices to market toward the end of

the year. This combines the great new Unity interface that Canonical has developed with optimizations to help boot your PC faster.

**“We have a strong reputation of delivering excellent engineering ...”**

**Q** I have often said OEM Services when I meant Corporate Services, can you explain the differences between the two entities?

**A** OEM Services works with any company that wants to certify or pre-install Ubuntu on a computer. Dell, Lenovo, HP, and Acer are great examples.

Corporate services helps people who are deploying those devices in companies or organizations.

**Q** ARM is a hot topic in technology at the moment. What role does OEM services play in bringing ARM vendors and Ubuntu together?

**A** Frankly, the same role we play in bringing x86-based hardware to market. We help plan, develop, and pre-install.

What is certainly changing is that Ubuntu is optimized for more and more ARM-based chips, and that is opening up new categories and opportunities for us and the OEMs.

We are starting to see ARM-based chips being used in thin-client-style devices, and that is a strong growth area for us. There are many new categories to follow.

**Q** What are some of the services and training programs that are offered through Canonical's OEM Services?

**A** It is impossible to overestimate how much the computer industry got used to working exclusively with Windows over the last 20 years. From product planners to the QA technicians on the factory line in China – there is less knowledge of working with Ubuntu than with Windows. This is starting to change, but it is a big effort.

We run a large range of training and technical services in Taiwan and China to help partners make sure that Ubuntu works perfectly on a PC. We have also had to learn a lot about what it takes to make Ubuntu consumer grade.

Because no distribution has had such a strong focus on the consumer Linux market, issues like great sound and peripheral support have never been top priorities.

We break new ground every month in solving the problem of how we bring great hardware together with Ubuntu as quickly and as easily as you can with Windows.

**Q** In your bio on the Canonical website [4] you say, "We are here to give good counsel on when to use Ubuntu

and to make it easy for industry partners to ship it.

"Ultimately, we want to make it faster, cheaper and more profitable to ship Ubuntu than any other platform in the world." From when you started with Canonical in 2006, how has Canonical been able to do this?

**A** A lot of collaboration with partners. We have had to learn a lot about what the industry wants – from ensuring that a PC can resume and connect to WiFi after closing the lid 500 times to making sure that we comply with Energy Star criteria.

I feel confident that we now have the most experienced team in the world when it comes to preparing Linux to be installed on PCs. There remains, of course, a long way to go!

**Q** What to date has been the most exciting and rewarding moment with OEM Services and the deployment of Ubuntu on various platforms?

**A** I am going to cheat and call out two key moments. First, Dell installing Ubuntu on the Mini 9 and Mini 12 was a breakthrough moment for us. I remember landing in Heathrow and catching the tube back home. There was a Dell catalog on the seat next to me, and there too was Ubuntu – we had been working in Russia and China with smaller OEMs, but it felt great to have a breakthrough with such a global partner.

More recently, I would call out the Ubuntu Hardware Summit in Taiwan last month. It is an industry event where more than 200 technicians from the hardware industry learn about pre-installing Ubuntu.

Affecting the whole PC industry is like trying to change the course of a super-tanker. We have been turning the wheel for a while, but with the purchasing power of companies like Dell and Lenovo, we are now able to see that the ship is changing course. The summit is the best way of seeing this change of course in action.

**Q** If companies want to find out more about Canonical's OEM Services, where should they go?

**A** Canonical's website is the best place to start. We have members of the sales team in the US, Brazil, Europe, India, Taiwan, and China, and there should be someone who can help close by.

**Q** Chris, again thank you very much for taking the time to answer my questions and to speak to the readers of *Ubuntu User*.

I look forward to speaking with you more at the Ubuntu Developer Summit [5] to be held in Orlando, Florida at the end of October. ■

## INFO

- [1] Canonical OEM services: <http://www.canonical.com/engineering-services/oem-services>
- [2] Jane Silber: <http://www.canonical.com/about-canonical/overview/management-team>
- [3] Ubuntu Light: <http://www.canonical.com/news/unity-ubuntu-light-instant-web>
- [4] Chris Kenyon: <http://www.canonical.com/about-canonical/overview/management-team>
- [5] Ubuntu Developer Summit: <http://uds.ubuntu.com/>

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