

# PROGRESS VS. PRIVACY



Rikki Endsley, Editor in Chief

Dear Ubuntu User Reader,

**A**fter I installed Ubuntu 12.04 LTS, I briefly considered settling in and enjoying the *Long Term Support* instead of jumping into each new release. Then Ubuntu 12.10 rolled out and, like many Ubuntu users, I had to check it out.

Although 12.10 isn't dramatically different from 12.04, the latest release does include noticeable changes in the Dash search, which users generally see either as enhancements or privacy concerns. Now when you search in Dash using the Home lens, you'll get back results from your computer and also from Amazon. "In 12.10 we'll take the first step of looking both online and locally for possible results," Canonical founder Mark Shuttleworth explains [1]. He makes it clear that this integration is just the beginning, saying, "What we have in 12.10 isn't the full experience, so those who leap to judgement are at maximum risk of having to eat their words later."

In addition to connecting users to Amazon, Ubuntu 12.10 also allows users to connect to other online accounts. When you use Firefox to log into your Facebook account, for example, you'll get a pop-up window that says, "Would you like to install FacebookMessenger, for extra features and quicker access?" By installing FacebookMessenger, you integrate the photos search plugin, Shotwell, Empathy, and Gwibber applications on your Ubuntu system with your Facebook account.

I'm intrigued by the potential this connectivity brings, and a little apprehensive. The Ubuntu developers have earned my trust over the years, but still... We're talking about privacy and security, after all.

In a post by Micah Lee, the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) does a good job of addressing the privacy concerns that go along with integrating Amazon results in Ubuntu searches [2] and explaining how to disable the new feature. "Ubuntu is the third most popular desktop operating system, and it's the most popular free software one," Lee writes, adding, "Many of EFF's employees run Ubuntu on their own computers." Lee provides a list of EFF suggestions for future versions of Ubuntu:

- Disable "Include online search results" by default
  - Explain in detail what you do with search queries and IP addresses
  - Make the Search Results tab of the Privacy settings let users toggle on and off specific online search results
- And Lee closes with a statement that sums up my take on the Ubuntu 12.10 features. Lee writes, "We love that Ubuntu is bold enough to break new ground and compete directly with the large proprietary operating systems, but please make sure that you respect your users' privacy and security while you're doing it. Windows and Mac users are used to having their data sent to third parties without their express consent by software companies that are trying to maximize profits for their shareholders. Let's make sure Ubuntu, like the GNU/Linux operating system at its heart, remains an exception to this."

The new year will bring us two new Ubuntu releases. If you're a long-time Ubuntu user, think back to your first install and consider how far the operating system has come since then. A few years ago, I liked the idea of Ubuntu competing with Windows and Mac systems, but that vision seemed a long way into the future. When I look at the Ubuntu 12.10 desktop, I think the future is starting to feel like now.

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## INFO

- [1] Amazon search results in the Dash: <http://www.markshuttleworth.com/archives/1182>
- [2] Privacy in Ubuntu 12.10: <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/10/privacy-ubuntu-1210-amazon-ads-and-data-leaks>