

New Xfce beta focuses on usability

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Xfce version 4.6 is shaping up to be more significant than most minor releases. Besides fixes and enhancements that are invisible to the casual user, the first revision in almost two years of GNU/Linux's third most popular desktop includes numerous changes to applications such as the calendar, mixer, and logout dialog, a new configuration engine, and usability changes to the desktop. Their combined effect is to increase the usability of Xfce without sacrificing any of the speed for which the desktop is well-known.

Code-named Fuzzy, the new beta is available as source code or as packages for the Intrepid Ibex release of Xubuntu. Although both these formats are released with the usual warnings that the beta may not be stable, in practice, this is a mature beta. It ran without problems on both machines I tested it on.

Applications

Besides Xfce's speed, the desktop environment's reputation rests on its specialized applications. Fuzzy makes no major change to Thunar, Xfce's lightweight file manager, or Xfce Appfinder, the convenient list of installed programs, but other programs are improved in minor ways. For example, the logout dialog is expanded to include options to suspend or hibernate the computer, or to switch users. Similarly, the Xfce mixer now supports simultaneous use of different sound systems such as ALSA and OSS, as well as multiple sound cards, and independent settings for various audio input and output sources.

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