

The Open Pitt



What's cooking in Linux and Open Source in Western Pennsylvania

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Linux Radio and Podcasting: Interview with Sean Parsons

Pittsburgh's Sean Parsons was host of The Linux Box Show, one of the more popular Linux-related audio shows during its run. He sat down with *The Open Pitt* for an interview about the current state of Linux podcasting and his plans for a successor show.

How did you get started doing an Internet broadcast?

I actually became a Linux user myself about four years ago and really became interested in the community aspect of Linux. I started off just contributing some art. One of the major sites I like to contribute to is KDE-Look. They had limited storage space, so I decided to get my own server and start hosting my own stuff. Over time, I started writing opinion pieces and it eventually grew into a news site called The Linux Box. I had some volunteers contributing and then one of the major tech shows that I used to listen to, The Linux Show, became defunct. I thought there was an opening to try and introduce Linux to people in a similar capacity.

Was that your first experience with radio or broadcasting?

That was definitely my first foray into it. I had already done some, I don't know if you'd call it journalism or not, but I had already done some reviews of different distributions and products and concepts in the open source community by that point in

written format. So this was just applying that to a verbal format.

What's unique about audio compared to weblogs or other written media?

It has a couple of factors. I think it's much easier to express feeling whenever you're using the spoken word. It kind of puts a voice to the community if you don't have a lot of contact with the community yourself. One of the frequent comments I got when I first started was that they now had a voice they associated with the Open Source movement. There's also the factor that being in audio format makes it portable in a different way than in a text format because now you can load it on to your MP3 player and listen to it when you're jogging or going somewhere in your car without it being intrusive or all-consuming.

Some people respond better when they're trying to learn something new to have the spoken word than they do with the written word. Different people learn different ways. I also like to include lots of notes with my shows so people would understand where my facts were coming from if I were doing an informative piece.

What's the best way to get shows?

These sites that offer podcasts also usually offer direct links so you can just directly download it. Easier to use programs, like bashpodder by Linc Fessenden, will automatically download your favorite podcasts for

you. A tool out there that is only at 0.4 status but I think is really great if you want a GUI tool is gPodder. It's written in Python and GTK, so it blends in really well with your GNOME desktop, or Xfce for that matter.

I know iPodder has been ported to Linux, but unless you're already comfortable playing with a GUI with 50 buttons this is one of those things that seems overly intimidating for what should be a very simple job. I don't mean that to bash the iPodder project, it's just if I had to recommend one to my mother, it'd probably be gPodder.

How many Linux-related shows are there? What do you recommend?

There are a lot of Linux tech shows out there right now. Go to <http://www.thelinuxlink.net/>, they do a very good job of providing a resource for the different tech shows that are out there. I think there are about a dozen that they reference, because they don't necessarily include the ones that only last five or ten minutes.

See **PODCAST**, p. 2

Coming Events

Nov. 5: General User Meeting/
Election Meeting. 10AM to 3PM,
1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Nov. 19: Installfest. 10AM to 5PM,
1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU

Dec. 10: General User Meeting.
10AM to 2PM, 1507 Newell-
Simon Hall, CMU
(date tentative)

Dec. 17: Tutorial, Topic: Intro to
Objective C. 10AM to 3PM,
1507 Newell-Simon Hall, CMU
(date tentative)

The public is welcome at all events

September Roundup

Aug. 13 *General User Meeting:* **Nicolas Baldi** demonstrated Linux running on the XBox. He discussed the XBox architecture and how it makes

booting a non-standard operating system difficult. Nicolas explained a few of the hardware and software tricks that can be used to get Linux running.

PODCAST, *from p. 1*

The GNU/Linux User Show is really a newbie show. It's Jon teaching his wife, who has been a lifelong Windows user, how to use Linux. He sits down in front of a KDE box with the object of teaching her one new thing and goes over expressly how to do it and asks for her feedback.

The Linux Link Tech Show really does a good job of getting at least one to two interviews on every episode and interviewing different people from the community. Usually people that are well known, involved in projects like Debian or KANOTIX, or like Marcel Gagne from Linux Journal. They also share different news finds they thought were relevant and spend a lot of time trying to make it fun and entertaining by bantering back and forth.

LUGRadio also does a good job of getting different interviews and gets some of the most high-profile interviews on, overall. They probably spend more time than anyone else being zany, which is what their intention is—they're there to have fun and a lot of people enjoy them for that factor. It's not necessarily one you want to play in front of your co-workers or small children; it's not what I would call a family-friendly show.

How popular are these shows?

It's very hard to say. I know the most downloads I had from a single show was in the range of 10,000, but that's not necessarily all-inclusive, either. The Linux Show, when it was still around, they were claiming to have upwards of 75,000 listeners at times to a single episode. I don't think anyone else is claiming to have numbers anywhere close to that but it shows there's a definite market there.

Has the iPod caused an increase in the number of listeners and shows?

It's definitely created a major impact on both. The whole podcast phenomenon has really made people listen to a lot more audio off the Internet, so there's just a lot more shows

out there now. Prior to the podcasting phenomenon, there were only really three Linux shows: LUGRadio, The Linux Show, and The Linux Link Tech show. Now there's a dozen that have considerable length to them, besides all the ones that are more or less five to fifteen minutes of someone's daily ramblings about Linux.

What do you need to produce a show?

Basically, get a decent microphone. You can get a good microphone from Radio Shack for about \$30 and you'll get good quality from it. Get a cheap mixing board so you have something to amplify your microphone before it goes into your computer. That is around another \$30. Other than that, you just record in Audacity.

Audacity, while it's considered non-professional software, really is extraordinary. It can do multi-track recording, it does great noise filtering, you can add all kinds of sound effects. It can pretty much handle your very beginning recording to creating your finished product at the end.

What do you plan for the new show?

I really enjoyed doing The Linux Box Show, but scripting 45+ minutes of a show every other week for myself to monologue is a lot of work. What I'd really like to do with the future show is to get several voices on there and actually look at different opinions. They may have found a really informative article that the rest of the community should know about. So it would be nice to have multiple people there to give different opinions.

I'm probably approximately a month away from releasing the first episode. I've had some people express interest, but no one confirmed that they absolutely want to be involved.

How can someone who's reading this get involved with the new show?

The best place to get hold of me right now is sean@plan9linux.com.

Thank you for your time!

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<http://www.wplug.org/top/>

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What is Linux?

Linux is a *kernel*, the core of a computer operating system, created by Linus Torvalds. It is typically packaged as a *distribution*, which includes the extra programs necessary to make a computer functional and useful. Since 1991, it has grown from a one-man project which ran on one computer to one with thousands of contributors running on everything from personal organizers to million-dollar supercomputers.

What are Open Source and Free Software?

Open Source and Free Software provide you, the user, with the opportunity to see the source code of the programs you use. You are free to use it, share it with others, and even make changes to it if you wish. While the Free Software and Open Source communities differ in their philosophical approach, in practical terms they share nearly identical goals. Learn more at <http://www.opensource.org/> and <http://www.gnu.org/>.

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WPLUG Annual Meeting

WPLUG's Annual Meeting will take place on November 5. The program for the General User Meeting will consist of a series of five-minute lightning talks on any topic of interest.

After lunch will be the election for the Board of Directors. See <http://www.wplug.org/vote/> for details on the candidates and the voting process.

We'd like to encourage all members to attend if at all possible. A free lunch will be provided and there will be other giveaways as well.

So come on out, join the fun, and help make WPLUG a strong and active organization!