Installing applications on Linux

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Seth Kenlon is a UNIX geek, free culture advocate, independent multimedia artist, and D&D nerd. He has worked in the film and computing industry, often at the same time. He is one of the maintainers of the Slackware-based multimedia production project Slackermedia.

5 reasons to use Linux package managers

Before I used Linux, I took the applications I had installed on my computer for granted. I would install applications as needed, and if I didn't end up using them, I'd forget about them, letting them languish as they took up space on my hard drive. Eventually, space on my drive would become scarce, and I'd end up frantically removing applications to make room for more important data. Inevitably, though, the applications would only free up so much space, and so I'd turn my attention to all of the other bits and pieces that got installed along with those apps, whether it was media assets or configuration files and documentation. It wasn't a great way to manage my computer. I knew that, but it didn't occur to me to imagine an alternative, because as they say, you don't know what you don't know.

When I switched to Linux, I found that installing applications worked a little differently. On Linux, you were encouraged not to go out to websites for an application installer. Instead, you ran a command, and the application was installed on the system, with every individual file, library, configuration file, documentation, and asset recorded.

What is a software repository?

The default method of installing applications on Linux is from a distribution software repository. That might sound like an app store, and that's because modern app stores have borrowed much from the concept of software repositories. Linux has app stores, too, but software repositories are unique. You get an application from a software repository through a *package manager*, which enables your Linux system to record and track every component of what you've installed.

Here are five reasons that knowing exactly what's on your system can be surprisingly useful.