

World of Netbooks: Interview with Jon Ramvi of the Ubuntu Eee Project

Submitted by **Josh Bancroft** (... on Fri, 10/24/2008 - 14:53)

While I was trying different OS options on the Eee PC 901, I spent some time with **Ubuntu Eee** (<http://www.ubuntu-eee.com/>) . It's not an official Ubuntu/Canonical project, but rather a community driven custom distribution with some Eee-specific features and tweaks. It's quite nice, and very functional.



While I was playing with it testing it, **Jon Ramvi** (<http://www.jonramvi.com/>) , Ubuntu Eee's maintainer/organizer, noticed a few of my notes on **Twitter** (<http://twitter.com/jabancroft>) , and contacted me. I asked if he'd be willing to do an email interview, and he graciously responded. So, here is the result. Many thanks to Jon for the interview!

Me: Tell us a little about yourself: where do you live, what do you do for a living, any other personal interests you want to share/promote, etc. Help us get to know you! :-)

Jon: My girlfriend, Marie, and I live in Oslo, Norway where I'm studying computer science and technology at the university :)

What is the Ubuntu Eee project?

It's three things.

First of all, it's an alternative operating system for the Asus Eee.

And it's an OS which isn't putting strict laws upon itself, like Ubuntu who only deliver open source software drivers. This initiative from Ubuntu is great for the open source community, but not that great for new users and non-geeks who just wants something to work. Ubuntu Eee is delivered with the best applications and drivers available, open or not.

And last of all, Ubuntu Eee is an organization which is striving to be as open as possible. Our accounts is available to everyone. Updated continuously. Discussions are moved from closed emails to open foras like forums and so on.

How does Ubuntu Eee differ from the "standard" Ubuntu Linux distribution?

From the last answer, Ubuntu Eee doesn't bind itself to only using open source applications, but always uses the best applications and drivers available. For example, if we were to deliver ATI support for a machine we would without a doubt deliver the closed driver from ATI. Ubuntu delivers the open source alternative: radeonhd.

It's hard to join in on the development of Ubuntu. This is probably because it's a fairly big organization. We don't have this problem. We have some contributors who work on Ubuntu Eee every day and some who only fix a little thing for us and we never see again.

Ubuntu Eee is completely community driven. There's no company behind us who's selling support.

What netbooks does Ubuntu Eee work (and not work) with? Any plans to expand to other models?

With the latest release we support every Asus Eee out there.

Our plan now is to re-brand and deliver this great operating system to all netbook owners. We're now working on support for the most used ones like Acer Aspire One, Cloudbook, Dell Mini 9 and so on.

Why did you feel the need to create a specific modified distribution for the Eee PC, rather than a list of instructions on how to make the "standard" Ubuntu install work?

The whole project started out just like that, making a tutorial on how to fix the regular Ubuntu install. Then I made a script which did it automatically and then I started a whole new distribution.

It's a whole lot of fun trying to get a distribution up and standing :) And the whole "we use the best software available"-thing seems to be working out for our users. Lots of people are downloading. We now have 80 000 users!

What are the coolest, best things about Ubuntu Eee?

The open organization.

If you want to contribute, there's room for you. Even if you need some help along the way, need help getting started and don't really know how to do anything. Maybe you know a language other than English or you know your way around Gimp or Photoshop.

Describe the Ubuntu Eee community. How many people are active contributors?

How many depends on how you count. Hardcore-working people on Ubuntu Eee itself is only 3. Well two really. Ferry and Adam. Adam is compiling the kernel and modules to support the different Asus Eee models and Ferry is making the scripts that automate the process for the user. Different hacks for different Eee models. And there's me, who just puts it all together.

If you count how many contribute with stuff like translating, writing articles, helping people, design wallpapers, webpages and so on - well then you're good at counting.

Convince me why I should use Ubuntu Eee on my Eee PC instead of the default Xandros Linux, or Windows XP. :-)

It's way easier to get you not to use Xandros (the distribution that ships on Linux versions of the Eee PC - Josh) than not to use Windows XP.

If you're not up for the change from Windows to Linux, maybe you shouldn't do it yet. I think the transition should come naturally.

Xandros on the other hand is so old that you can't run Firefox 3 on it. If you try to install you will be informed that your libraries aren't up to date. If you try to compile a new library or on the road to dependency hell.

Installing Ubuntu Eee is a lot easier :) The Xandros interface also feels unresponsive and just connecting to a wireless network is hard and slow. The boot time with Xandros is amazing though.

What are your thoughts on the Intel Atom processor? How is it different from other mobile processors in the past? (be honest here - I'm not trying to get you to shill for Intel, I promise!)

I have to say I don't know too much about the atom cpu or how it's different from other mobile cpus. It's smaller, generates less heat and uses less power, so my conclusion is that I like it :)

What do you think about the netbook phenomena in general? Why do you think people are buying netbooks, and how do you see them being used?

It must have something to do with the price. Sub-notebooks have been available for some time. For example Vaio from Sony - but you had to pay a whole lot for it. When OLPC started the whole cheap netbook thing, that's when netbooks started to sell.

I think it's really great for consumers. I think size and price is more important to end users than amazing specifications. Most consumers are fooled into thinking they need several gb of ram and that surfing the web with 2 ghz will be a whole lot faster than 1.6 ghz. The netbooks are a real win for the consumers. And for Linux, which is the obvious OS for low end computers.

Describe your perfect netbook - hardware, features, OS, software, etc.

Full / almost full size keyboard (this should be the maximum size of the notebook. The screen shouldn't be larger than the keyboard), LED screen to save power, >1024px resolution would be great, bluetooth, wifi n-draft, cheap low end cpu, 512 mb of ram. And a sexy case - like a mac. Oh, and turnable screen to make it into a small tablet pc - that's cool.

Any update on the Ubuntu Eee naming issue (<http://www.jonramvi.com/re-branding-ubuntu-eee-please-help/>) ?

We're trying to figure out how long time we've got and won't re-brand until we have to.

What's the biggest problem/challenge you think the Ubuntu Eee project and community are facing? How can we fellow netbook geeks help?

*One of the problems is supporting the netbooks that none of us have. The community can help by sending us data and reporting back what doesn't work. (Since the interview, it looks like all Eee PC models are working, so here's a link to **the general "Contribute" page on the Ubuntu Eee Wiki** (http://www.ubuntu-eee.com/wiki/index.php5?title=Quick_Start_Contributing) .)*

Another problem is staying friends with the open source community even though our distribution comes with Skype instead of Ekiga.

What does the future of the Ubuntu Eee project look like?

I was approached by the founder of Netvibes (<http://netvibes.com>) , Tariq Krim, who wanted to start a new project and use Ubuntu Eee as a fundament. Ubuntu Eee, however, will stay community driven.

Thanks again to Jon for the interview! If you have an Eee PC (any flavor), and want to check out Ubuntu Eee, you can learn more, download the latest version, and join the community at <http://www.ubuntu-eee.com/> (<http://www.ubuntu-eee.com/>) . Also, don't miss Jon's blog at <http://www.jonramvi.com/> (<http://www.jonramvi.com/>) . And you can follow Ubuntu Eee on Twitter.

Got thoughts or questions about Ubuntu Eee, or Linux on netbooks in general? Post a comment below, and I'll do my best to find you an answer. If there are follow up questions for Jon, he might even be nice enough to answer them for us. :-)

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Tags: community , distribution , Eee , eeepc , interview , jonramvi , netbook , netbooks , Project , Ubuntu , worldofnetbooks

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Anonymous Fri, 10/24/2008 - 19:41

interesting

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Anonymous Sat, 10/25/2008 - 09:46

I've got Ubuntu Eee 8.04.1 set up in a 1gig SD card that I can boot onto anytime I want. It's a wonderful OS and I imagine it will only get better.

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Anonymous Sat, 10/25/2008 - 12:35

Nerd!

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Anonymous Sat, 10/25/2008 - 12:41

Hello Everyone,
This is Way Cool !! :) !!!
It's kind of neat that Intel would stand up and take notice.
I admire Mr. Ramvi for his firm stand on making this wonderful computing tool accessible to the average Joe & Jane. It seems to be a delicate balancing act between having fun by giving all kinds of diverse people the freedom to be creative – and circumventing any particular paradigms, canons, or dogmas imposed by commercial interests. Make it reliable, keep it modern with the latest innovations i.e.FFX 3 -- make it flexible and customizable for those individuals who want to expand their repertoire after they have decided to make the transition to a GUI Linux distro. Most people I know don't even realize that a GUI Linux exists – most believe that it is still textually based with arcane command line DOSish geeky symbols.
I was one of them – I'm ashamed to admit.
Jon's statement, "we use the best software available;-thing seems to be working out for our users. Lots of people are downloading. We now have 80 000 users!" -- makes the mantra Freedom, Freedom, Freedom – practical, exciting and doable!
The combination of Jon's Clear Cut Vision and his determination to freely distribute the best product possible – open or not...
Simply Works.
This is what makes ubuntu-eee so Exciting and Popular.
It Works !!

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Even hard-core developers have expressed the need to fire up a system and get productive instantly. Yes, they can write the code to make the camera work – but they happen to be in a playful mood at the moment – and want to send a picture of themselves in a cool new goofy hat – they just got – to their girlfriend's cell phone – who is busy in another part of town – and make her chuckle and smile!!!

This is what makes us part of the human family.

We want a tool that we can have fun with, that brings Joy to us and To Those We Love, consistently, quickly, easily, and without a bunch of hassles – before we have to put up the Eee PC and move on to the more pressing responsibilities of daily life – making money, paying bills, getting food, doing laundry...etc., etc., etc....blah... blah.. blah...

Extraordinary!

ubuntu-eee.com IS THE Breath of Fresh Air We Have ALL Been Waiting For !!!

Please Don't take it down... Please????!!!

We all have other ways to make money, this is just plain fun!

FREEDOM! FREEDOM! FREEDOM! -- CREATE! CREATE! CREATE!

Sincerely,

-- Burt B.

burtdayt on twitter

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Anonymous Sat, 10/25/2008 - 13:51

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Sorry but im too impressed if all theyre doing is adding non-free drivers. I use Mandriva because it offers a true free software version and one that has those drivers. I understand the need for both.

I actually thought that Ubuntu is the same way as Mandriva which is why they have the Gobuntu version which was their free version. I always believed that was the case. Launchpad and CNR are proprietary to the best of my knowledge so its not as if Ubuntu hasnt used proprietary stuff.

As for being hard to join the Ubuntu ecosystem. BS. I talk regularly to developers and its the first time I heard of that. You do hear that about the kernel work though. The biggest problem isnt getting people to join but getting people to work on things they like.

If you join a group, they usually have certain needs. Newbies have to work their way up and guess what? They have to do the menial tasks and TRUST ME many of them will quit because of this. This is a big problem.

I just IMed a friend who works at the Ubuntu Montreal office and when I told him that, he answered with a BS! We are ALWAYS looking for developers. ALWAYS!

I am all for derivatives because that's what this is all about but I expect those to give something back as well. Adding closed driver brings nothin back to the community. It is a curiosity and nothing more.

Its an old story this driver stuff and one that will soon disappear as most big manufacturers have turned the corner and opening their drivers. It is now easier to name the few companies that dont than it is the companies that do.

This is something that was unfathomable even 2 years ago.

But having worked in free software for 12 years when there was no choice and we were busting our asses out of necessity and principle, I find it charming that kiddies will come in a discover america.

If only we had the hindsight to try something so daring and bold, we could have saved ourselves a lot of grief. Of course, had we done that, the manufacturers would have never changed their ways.

And Burt, you might have to come out of the cold or stop talking to people who have never used the internet. KDE, XFCE and Gnome are about 12 years old... I know because I got out of college when they came out then.

The fact that you havent heard of a Linux desktop is a bit of mystery.

Btw, I left work without my Acer One so I borrowed a neighbours Dell Mini 9 w/ Ubuntu to go to the gym and guess what? Everything works.

How about that.

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Anonymous Sun, 10/26/2008 - 04:25

[to post comments](#)

Burt B., wow, thanks for the support! :)

rob enderle, Ubuntu Eee is much more than just some drivers thrown into the Ubuntu mix :) Ubuntu will never come with messy drivers (which is why the EeePC isn't supported) and Ubuntu will never come with closed source applications like Picasa and Skype. Ubuntu is working for the Open Source Foundation with promoting open source. Ubuntu Eee is working for it's users with making the best operating system available (that's the goal anyway)

It's worth noting that patches and bug fixes we make ARE sent to Ubuntu. Adam, kernel developer, is doing an amazing job keeping them up to date with his latests work.

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Josh Bancroft
(Intel)

Mon, 10/27/2008 - 09:46

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Rob, Jon responded pretty well to your comments. I was just going to chime in and say that the Ubuntu Eee project is definitely for the users, rather than for the good of open source ideals and the Ubuntu project as a whole. I love and support open source projects. I'm wearing my Open Source Initiative t-shirt right now, in fact. But the big down side of many open source projects is that they sacrifice ease of use and friendliness to non-geeky people. In the case of Ubuntu, sure, the regular Ubuntu 8.04 distro boots and runs on Eee PCs. But there are drivers missing. And a ton of other tweaks you have to do to get it really usable. Ubuntu Eee fills that gap. In the interview, I asked Jon why make a whole distro rather than a cookbook of tweaks to get Ubuntu running on Eee PCs. He said that it started out that way, but then he realized he could automate that fixing/customization, and make it valuable as it's own distribution. That makes a lot of sense to me, and I'm grateful for not having to hack and tweak my way to a working Eee PC with Ubuntu on my own. :-)

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Anonymous Sat, 11/29/2008 - 12:02

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I also must agree with Jon Ramvi here, After all, that is why my primary machine (and the one that I respond here with) is my ASUS Eee PC 701 with Ubuntu-Eee v8.04.1 And you can rest assure... Yes, I will be getting the 901/1000 for myself for Christmas and you better believe that it too will be happy with the costumed Ubuntu-Eee OS as it's primary operating system.

Wow! What else can I add here? Ubuntu-Eee is solid and wonderful - not to mention the best companion for the Eee PC...

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Anonymous Mon, 12/01/2008 - 22:18

[to post comments](#)

Awesome! I love Ubuntu-eee, been using it for a few months. I never knew Jon was such a cool looking guy. Sweet shades.

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Anonymous Fri, 12/05/2008 - 15:19

[to post comments](#)

Digg detta Jon. Utrulig at jeg har lett sÅ evig lenge etter en linux-distro, og sÅ sitter det en hjemme i Norge med IOSninga... Tusen takk, KjOrer Ubuntu eee pÅ SD disken til eee 1000h'en min og det funker gull. Thnx :D

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