

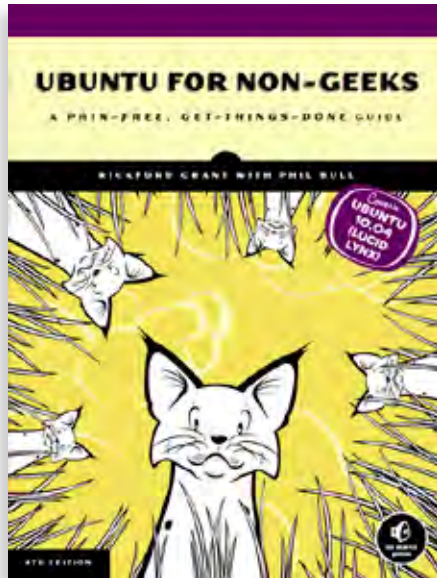
Ubuntu for Non-Geeks: A Pain-Free, Get-Things-Done Guide

Paul Madarasz

Linux, the open-source clone of *Unix*, is big (just ask a *Linux* user). Of the many flavors of *Linux* around, arguably the biggest is *Ubuntu*.

Spearheaded by one-time cosmonaut/billionaire Mark Shuttleworth, Ubuntu has grabbed a huge chunk of the *Linux* world. It's different enough from the other operating systems (OS's) out there that a guidebook is a handy thing to have for someone just getting involved in *Ubuntu*.

Luckily for those who are just getting their toes wet, No-Starch Press has come out with *Ubuntu for Non-Geeks*. It covers *Ubuntu version 10.4* (the version released in April 2010, which is supported for two years after its release date).



I found the book to be pleasantly written without being overly cutesy. The authors explain everything from installing *Ubuntu* to using the apps that come with it (or that you can install afterward), to wrestling with peripherals. Common hang-ups, printers and scanners, get their own chapter.

The explanations are clear and precise. I had no trouble following any of them.

Ubuntu for Non-Geeks starts with an introduction explaining why you might want to use *Linux*, then moves into setting up

Ubuntu on a machine. It steps the reader through running the (enclosed) live disk, to give a taste of the OS without having to install it. Then it explains how to take the plunge and install *Ubuntu*. For those who still need *Windows*-based apps, there are instructions for allowing Microsoft and *Ubuntu* to co-exist on a hard drive.

An overview of the desktop (called GNOME) follows, with a rundown on how to install built-in applets, such as a system monitor, an applet for inserting non-English characters, or any number of other clever devices to help you along with your computing.

These days, virtually no computer can be said to be complete without a connection to a network. That's especially important with *Ubuntu*. Detailed explanations are given for this, whether the connection is wired, wireless, or dial-up.

For those who need more information than the book provides, the authors provide numerous URLs to help you along. Once connected, there's a quick-and-dirty explanation of the *Firefox* browser, a chat program, and two e-mail apps – *Evolution* and *Thunderbird*. All except the last is included with the *Ubuntu* release, and it can be downloaded by the user.

A chapter is dedicated to *Ubuntu's* updating process and installing new programs from the Internet.

As always, the apps discussed in the book (and many thousands more) are open-source and free.

Instructions on how to do what might sound like a confusing prospect for users of other operating systems is explained clearly and succinctly. Again, the authors serve up a number of URLs, through which the *Ubuntu* user can find an entire universe of apps for *Ubuntu*.

Games, photo, audio, and video related programs, scientific programs, office tools, and just about any type of app imaginable can be found in the built-in *Ubuntu* Software Center.

Files and folders are handled differently from *Windows*, and the authors offer a good, if necessarily not-too-deep, explanation of the *Linux* file system. The same chapter covers CD-R and DVD file reading and burning.

Bluetooth devices aren't forgotten, and for those with increasingly smaller and smaller hard drive space, file compression is also covered.

For those who aren't happy with the installed look of Ubuntu, eye candy is available in a bewildering (to me) amount of variation. The user can customize screensavers, wallpaper, icons, window borders – just about everything on the desktop.

The geekiest the book gets is an introduction to the command line, reachable through the Terminal app. This will bring back memories for the old-timers who miss DOS. Beginning with simple commands on file and folder manipulation, the chapter walks the reader through extracting and installing files with the .tar extension, and installing a program from its source code.

The office suite that is bundled with this version of *Ubuntu* is *OpenOffice*, which has been superseded by *LibreOffice*, a spin-off in subsequent versions. Should the reader opt to install *LibreOffice*, the instructions provided for *OpenOffice* will work for the newer suite. I find it more than an acceptable substitute for Microsoft *Office* (both *LibreOffice* and *OpenOffice* can read and save *Word* files). In particular, I prefer *LibreOffice's Writer* to *Word*.

The graphics and audio sides of *Ubuntu* are well-covered, with sections dealing with photo organizing and display (using both bundled and user-installed apps), audio recording and playback (including connecting peripherals such as the iPod, iPhone, and other digital media devices), and video recording and playback. Again, there are a number of references to web sites to download programs and documentation for those apps that aren't included in the CD that comes with the book.

Ubuntu security is also addressed. Firewalls, virus scanners and encryption are explained, with examples of both built-in and downloadable apps available for the security-minded (which should be all of us).

Ubuntu is tightly bound up with the *Ubuntu* community, and there are numerous examples of places to go to get help with any problems the user might have with *Ubuntu* (including IRC, official and unofficial forums, and websites devoted to *Ubuntu*).

Finally, there is a chapter on what can go wrong with *Ubuntu*, and how to fix problems that might arise in many of the most common errors in installing it, connecting it to peripherals, and networking. For more in-depth help, again the authors refer to websites where detailed information can be found.

In short, I found *Ubuntu for Non-Geeks* a valuable guide for the user who wants to explore this version of *Linux*. It gives the prospective user enough information to get rolling, and points him or her in the right direction to explore *Ubuntu* to whatever depth is desired.

About: *Ubuntu for Non-Geeks: A Pain-Free, Get-Things-Done Guide*

Authors: Rickford Grant with Phil Bull

Publisher: No-Starch Press
<http://nostarch.com/>

ISBN-13: 978-1-59327-257-9

Price: \$34.95 Print Book and FREE Ebook
\$27.95 Ebook (PDF, Mobi, and ePub)
\$22.83 @ Amazon