An up-to-date look at free software and its makers

PROJECTS ON THE MOVE

Free software has been confronted with many an accusation in its time, but could it conceivably infringe on weapon export regulations? SourceForge is facing legal issues, and Jajuk steps in as a DJ and statistics expert. **BY CARSTEN SCHNOBER**

In an attempt to stay friends with less cyber-friendly voters, politicians assert that the Internet must be governed by laws. The age-old populist trick is employed of spreading fear, predicated on the idea that the Internet is a chaotic place, where only the fittest survive and the weak are left to the mercy of the elements.

Informed readers are likely to be shaking their heads right now. After all, populist claims like this are both a deliberate attempt to manipulate people and a clear demonstration of ignorance of the subject matter, not simply because the claim is incorrect, but because it spectacularly pretends to champion what is actually already the status quo. The Internet never has been a lawless place; in fact, the same laws apply online as offline.

Border-agnostic sales channels exist for publications, services, and goods of all kinds, and have for a long time, but the special thing about the Internet is that it makes everything so much easier. You can migrate a homepage to a server in a different country in a matter of minutes, and without anything changing for the user. Imports and exports occur without the customs people even noticing.

This easy export vector is what has caused the web portal SourceForge [1] (Figure 1) and the company that runs it, Geeknet Inc. [2], legal hassles since the beginning of the year. SourceForge offers programmers scope for collaborative development, documentation, and publication of free software projects. The list of freebies also includes access to the CVS versioning server, discussion forums, a bug tracker, and web space. This extensive package has made the service one of the most popular sites for open source developers and users.

Targeted Blockade

The operators of SourceForge were recently treated to a clear demonstration of how the Internet really isn't lawless. Under US law, exports of weapons and technologies possibly suited to building weapons are forbidden to countries such as Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria.

The embargo also covers security software; even the use of encryption algorithms could be sufficient to qualify. The best-known example of a legal case of this kind concerns PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) [3]. US customs accused developer Phil Zimmermann of infringing on weapon export law by releasing the program free of charge in 1991.

More recently, SourceForge's Lee Schlesinger admitted this January that the portal operator has been forced to block contacts from IP address in countries subject to the embargo [4]. Although the service doesn't actually develop the projects hosted on its servers, many of which did not originate in the US, downloading from servers based in the US is still viewed as a US export, no matter what the previous history of the software might be.

Because SourceForge is an important part of the open source community's infrastructure, the community was, as you might expect, fairly disgruntled. Complaints piled up accusing the operators of censorship and failing to respect the principles of free software. Other stakeholders pointed out that it would make more sense to address complaints to the people who made
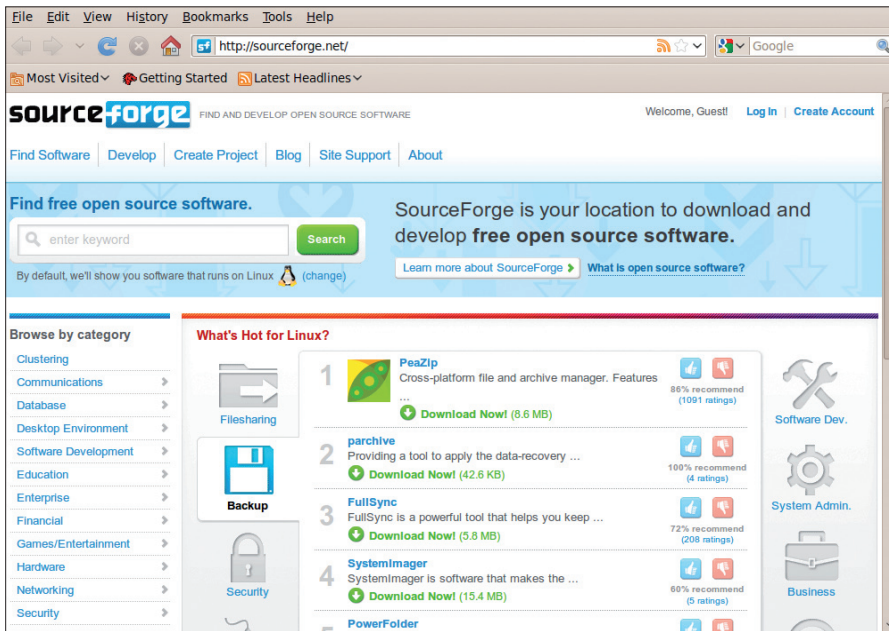
Figure 1: Many programmers use SourceForge to manage their projects. The web portal integrates a huge number of open source applications, including GNU Mailman, CVS, and SVN.

all participating countries apply equally is unrealistic. Because there is no such thing as a globally applicable legal system, we will have to make do with interim solutions based on the Source-Forge model, which is infinitely preferable to filtering the Internet to force it into compliance with legal systems in individual countries.

Desktop Jukebox

Whether private, digital music collections are legal or not is still a question of much dispute. The fact is that many users face a flood of musical data, and navigating it is typically a far bigger problem than the threats the entertainment industry throws in the direction of its potential customers. Finding your favorite song is not typically the biggest obstacle, but retrieving those forgotten greats slumbering in the depths of your hard disk can be daunting.

Large volumes of data need a statistics-based solution. The approach taken by Jajuk [6] music player (Jajuk is an abbreviation of Java Jukebox) is reminiscent of the classic KDE tools Amarok [7] and JuK [8]. The program offers a number of perspectives – that is, different views – of a collection of tracks.

The standard view (Figure 2) offers basic functionality: Users see a list of available titles, which they can play by double-clicking. The program makes suggestions in the top part of the window, such as the most popular, latest, or least frequently played tracks. Jajuk will optionally search Last.fm [9] for tracks similar to your taste.

the laws that Geeknet has to keep. The people behind SourceForge said from the outset that they were unhappy with the situation, but didn't have any alternatives at the time.

The harsh criticism leveled at Source-Forge by its users, who went so far as to compare the situation with censorship in China, was part of the reason Source-Forge looked for alternatives.

Self Control

In February, Schlesinger presented a solution [5] that gave project administrators the ability apply export restrictions themselves. To allow this to happen, the SourceForge developers added an *Export Control* button to the web platform and enabled it by default for all projects. Administrators who don't think that their projects are subject to US export restrictions can simply disable the function and allow citizens of "rogue nations" free access to the files they publish.

On initial appraisal, it might look as though the SourceForge operators had taken the easy way out and just passed the buck; however, it is in fact quite a bold step and one that takes SourceForge into unknown legal territory. Right now, nobody can be certain whether or not the provider might still be held legally responsible in case of a dispute on illegal software exports.

Realistically, you can't expect foreign administrators will be held to blame be-

cause they are probably blissfully unaware of the legal situation in the US and inaccessible to US authorities. Having said this, things seem to be fairly peaceful right now, and the SourceForge user community seems to be happy with the new feature.

Whatever the outcome, this case goes to show that the Internet isn't and never has been lawless; different countries just have different laws. And if politicians in any particular country call for stricter laws on the Internet, they are actually trying to apply their own legal system to the whole of the world.

Having said this, trying to run a worldwide network for which all the laws of
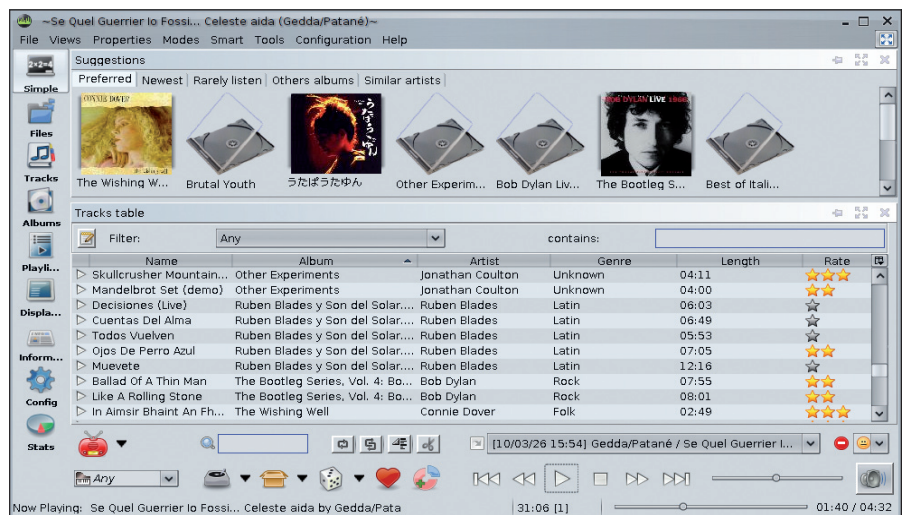

Figure 2: Jajuk sees itself as a player for demanding listeners: On the basis of a number of statistical functions, the jukebox guides the user through a collection of music.
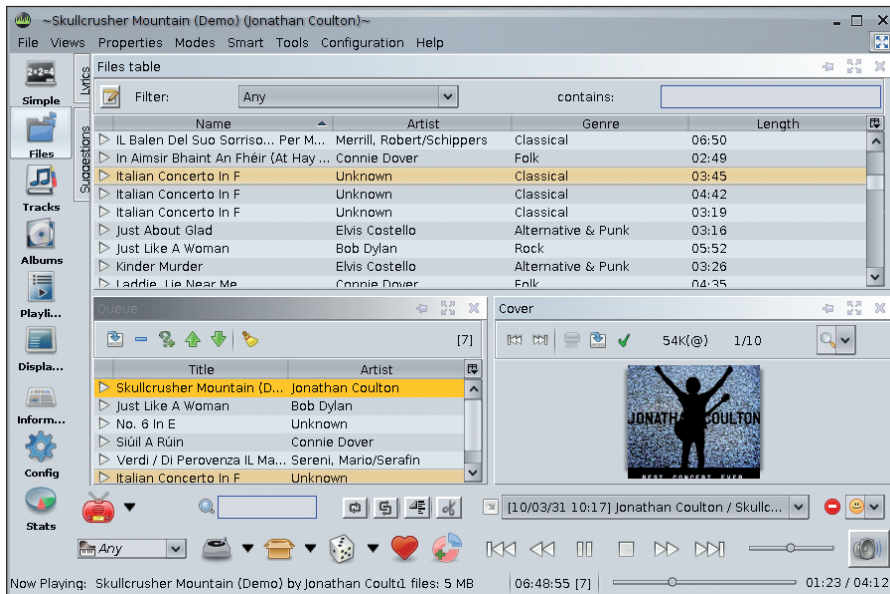
Figure 3: Create a playlist manually (lower left) from your Files table. For this song, the album cover was pulled from the web.

Two tree views give the user direct access to the filesystem or to a hierarchical structure organized by artist and album. Alternatively, the Jajuk interface will juxtapose existing albums. If needed, the player automatically creates playlists, with your most frequently played songs, current new entries, or tracks from a specific genre. Alternatively, users can compile manual collections. In the *Player* view, Jajuk shows you the text and album cover for the track currently playing. The player searches the web, or your disk, for the cover image; images from ID3 tags are not currently supported.

Jajuk developers have also integrated Wikipedia access. The *Information* tab shows you background information on the band or album currently playing – both courtesy of the free encyclopedia. Finally, the *Statistics* view presents a graphical analysis of your music collection (Figure 3). Users can freely arrange and combine these views.

Turntable Statistics

Jajuk picks up the idea of fully automated playlist creation and adds a whole new aspect. Users can create virtual DJs that provide musical entertainment. To do so, the DJs randomly create playlists on the basis of certain rules. Users can define a quality standard for their tracks in line with Jajuk's internal rating system, which in turn is a combination of manually and automatically defined ratings. The automated part evaluates various factors, such as how often a track is played or if the user cancels playing a track.

Various types of DJ base their lists on user-defined properties. For example, if you have a transition-based DJ, you need to tell it exactly what kind of tracks from which genres you would like to listen to and in which order. Alternatively, you can simply specify what percentage of tracks of a certain style you would like to listen to and leave the order up to the DJ. Finally, the Ambience DJ has nothing to do with the musical genre of the same name, it simply plays songs of the same kind. To define ambiences, you assign specific genres to them.

The Jajuk developers place much emphasis on the fact that their player is platform independent. The Java program will run on Linux, Windows, and Mac OS X systems. A Java webstart version runs without installation for users who want to try before they install.

The Jajuk team is looking for support to help with ongoing development. Right now, they don't have enough Mac OS X users willing to test the automatic jukebox on their systems, but Linux users are also welcome to create packages for their distributions, enhance the somewhat Spartan documentation, or translate the program into their local language. ∎
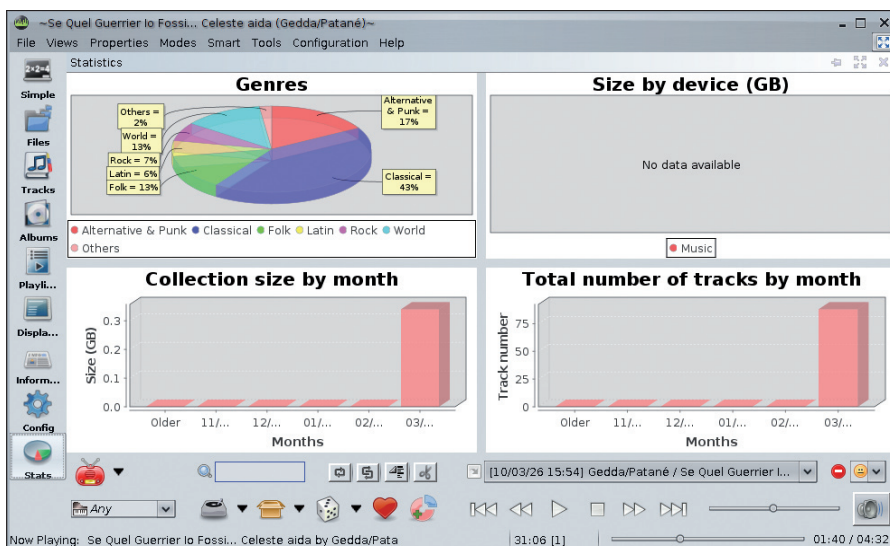
INFO
[1] SourceForge: *http://www.sourceforge.net*
[2] Geeknet: *http://geek.net*
[3] PGP Corporation: *http://www.pgp.com*
[4] SourceForge announcement of blocking of IP addresses: *http://sourceforge.net/blog/clarifying-sourceforgenets-denial-of-site-access-for-certain-persons-in-accordance-with-us-law*
[5] SourceForge blog entry on removing blocking: *http://sourceforge.net/blog/some-good-news-sourceforge-removes-blanket-blocking*
[6] Jajuk: *http://www.jajuk.info*
[7] Amarok: *http://amarok.kde.org*
[8] JuK homepage: *http://developer.kde.org/~wheeler/juk.html*
[9] Last.fm: *http://www.last.fm*

Figure 4: The Jajuk statistics view gives you statistical information on your music collection.