



Picasa 3.0 image manager

MEMORY MANAGEMENT

makuba, Fotolia

In the age of the digital camera, users are overwhelmed by a flood of images. Picasa not only helps you manage photos but also will enhance the image quality with just a couple of mouse clicks.

BY THOMAS LEICHTENSTERN

Since digital cameras made it easy for users to shoot as many photos as they wanted without spending a fortune on processing and printing, many photographers have made excessive use of this option. The result is an enormous, jumbled collection of photos on home PCs. Google's Picasa [1] manages photos and also supports easy image editing.

Various add-on functions allow users to upload photos to web albums or photo labs and to create incremental image backups. With the press of a button, Picasa will create collages and contact prints or export selected photos or folders as HTML pages for uploading to the Internet.

As of this writing, Google offers only a beta version of the Linux and Mac OS ports of Picasa 3.0. However, without a native Linux version, the installer includes a customized Wine environment to ensure trouble-free launching of the program on Linux (Figure 1).

Linux Installation and Configuration

To install Picasa, download the installation file for your operating system. Online, choose the RPM or DEB format package matching your distribution [2] and install it. Alternatively, you can add the Google repository as a source in your package manager [3] and then use the package manager to install the software.

The basic settings for the program are located in *Tools | Options...* Also, this is where you set the locale (the system setting is used by default) and the file types you want to index, such as PNG or RAW. The *General* tab has a *Save imported images in* option, so you can tell the program where to store your images.

Importing Images

Now specify the directories in which the program is allowed to search for image files by opening the *Folder Manager* (Figure 2) and selecting the item in the *Tools* menu. Then click a directory and set the options on the right-hand side that specify whether Picasa scans once, always, or not at all. In the latter case, the pro-

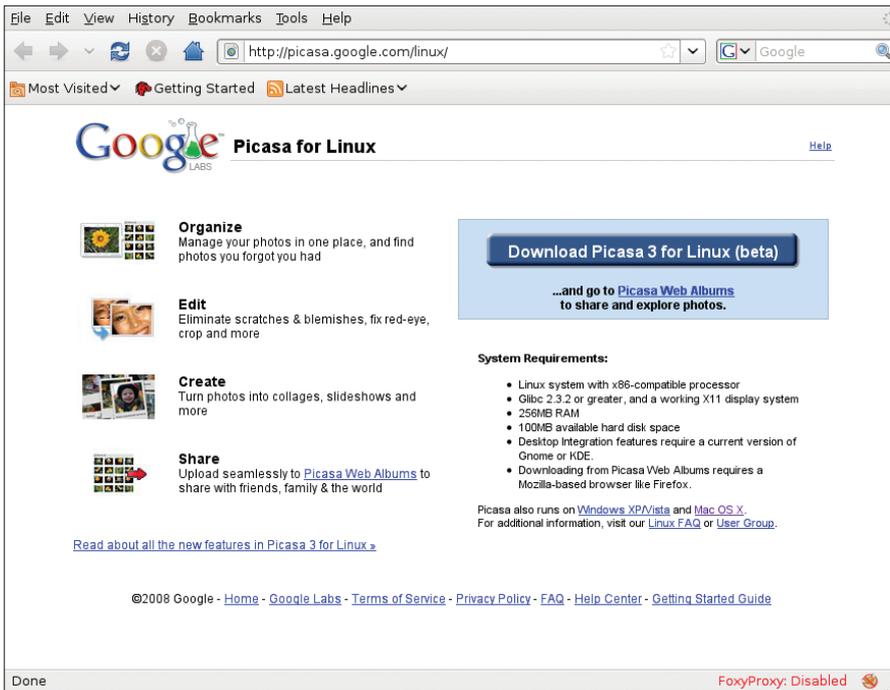


Figure 1: With the help of Wine, Picasa is also available for Linux.

gram will automatically add new images to the archive.

To copy images from your digital camera to your computer, click the *Import* button in the top left-hand side of the main window. After selecting the import source, Picasa copies the files to the import folder you defined previously. The program automatically identifies existing images and will not re-import by default. If you want to change this behavior, uncheck the *Avoid duplicates* box.

Picasa uses three categories: *Collections*, *Folders*, and *Albums*. A *Collection* is a containment category that can include both *Albums* and *Folders*. To define a password for a collection, right-click the collection and select *Add/Change a Password...* from the menu.

In Picasa, a *Folder* is a physical directory on your computer, whereas an *Album* is a virtual directory that can contain images from any directory. This lets users use dates as folder names, while organizing photos in albums by subject matter.

On the left-hand side of the main window, the program lists the scanned photos in order by date in the *Library*. Clicking the third icon from the left, next to *Library*, switches to a tree view. The tree shows how the directories are physically organized on your hard disk. Clicking a directory opens a thumbnail preview of the image files in the right-hand panel.

To change the description for a folder or album, left-click the entry and select *Edit folder description...* in the drop-down menu. In the dialog, you can enter the date and time you shot the photo and some additional information. Picasa lets you assign keywords to multiple images at the same time. To start, select the images by holding down the control key and clicking. Then click the button showing a label; its description says *Tag photo(s) with words for searching*.

To add captions to images, double-click the photo in question to open the photo for editing. Then click on the gray bar below the image and enter the caption. Picasa indexes the image, just like keywords and folder descriptions, with its internal search engine.

For a normal search, you can simply enter a term in the input box. Matches appear while you are typing. Hidden below *Tools | Search for...*, Picasa lets users search for images with a predominant color. For example, selecting *Blue* takes you to photos in which blue

is the predominant color (Figure 3). It is easier to search for colors by entering color: "*colorvalue*". The color values you can enter include *red*, *green*, *blue*, *white*, and *black*.

The *iso*: operand lets users search for images with a specific ISO value; *focal*: searches for photos with a specific focal value, although it did not work for me.

To change the order of the photos in the overview, you can simply drag and drop images to the required positions. To display extended information for an image, right-click the photo in question and select *Properties* in the context menu. If the image includes Exif data, Picasa will display it. The *Timeline* function gives users the ability to display images in an animated timeline. Clicking an album opens the slide show, which you can start by clicking the slide show icon in the main window.

Editing

Double-clicking an image in the overview switches Picasa to the full screen and editing view (Figure 4). To the left of the image, you will see various buttons and controls that let you change the brightness, correct color casting, and align the image. The *Effects* tab has a number of functions for artistic image manipulation, such as adding a color gradient or changing the color to sepia or black and white.

Picasa's editing features are fairly simple and are unlikely to satisfy more ambitious amateurs. For example, the brightness function only supports lightening, but not darkening the image. The

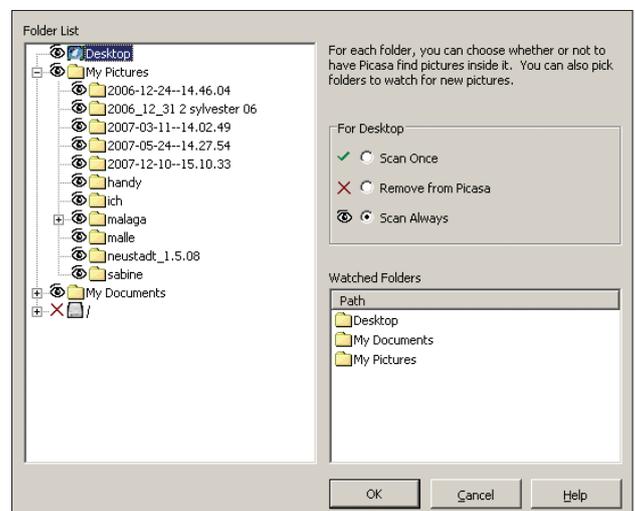


Figure 2: With the Folder Manager, you specify the directories that Picasa is allowed to index.

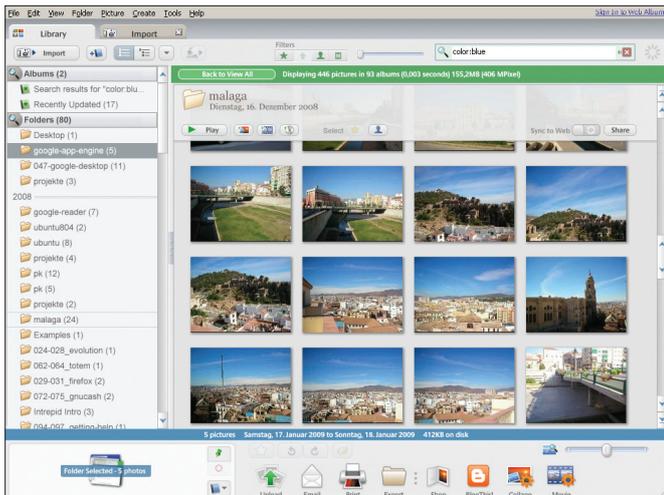


Figure 3: Besides file names and keywords, Picasa will search for images with a predominant color or specific ISO value.

contrast function is automated; manual correction is not supported.

Slide controls at the bottom of the screen let users scale the image. Alternatively, you can click the image and move the cursor to scale to 100 percent. Clicking the icon with the propeller to the right of the scaling settings displays a histogram next to the image metadata and displays the brightness and color distribution for the image.

To edit multiple images with the same settings, select the images and then select *Picture | Batch Edit*. A number of tools in the Edit window are available to you, such as *Auto Contrast* or *Sharpen*. Another way to edit multiple images is to edit a reference image and then click on *Edit | Copy All Effects*. Then select the images you want to edit in the same way, and select *Edit | Paste All Effects*. Doing so applies the effects and image editing to all the other images.

When you edit an image, Picasa originally stores the settings and does not save them with the image. To apply the changes, you need to click *Save* in the File menu. The software creates a copy of the image and moves the unchanged original to the *Originals* subdirectory, which Picasa does not index.

Transfer

Picasa also has a number of options for sending files. If you want to publish your photos, Google offers a free account on Picasaweb [4]. Uploading images

just requires selecting them and clicking *Upload* in the bottom of the window (Figure 5). If you already have an account, you just need to select the resolution and the directory in which to save the images on the web service.

If you are a blogger, you would appreciate some help from the application; however, Picasa only supports Google's own Blogger [5] format. To host the images on your own website, click *Folder | Export as HTML page* in the menu. The software then embeds the selected images and thumbnails in a web page.

To send an image to a photo lab, click the *Shop* button. The software then shows you a selection of service providers and lets you choose one.

Miscellaneous

Another way to share photos with your friends is on a CD. For Windows users,



Figure 5: With a click of a button, you can use the Picasa Upload Manager to transfer images to the Picasaweb online service.

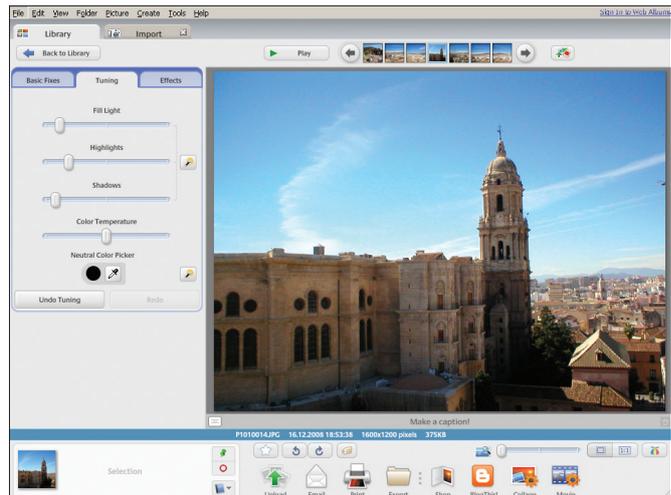


Figure 4: Picasa's editing mode does not offer much in the way of manual interaction, but it is simple to use.

Picasa creates an ISO image that includes the images and the *PicasaCD.exe* presentation software, and it automatically displays the folders as a collage. Clicking on the display opens the images in the slide show. Linux users will need Wine to launch the software on their computers.

The backup function, located under the *Tools | Backup Pictures...* menu item, is more useful. The checkboxes next to the folders let users select the backup sources. The backup can be full or incremental; the later only saves images that have not yet been backed up. However, Picasa will create an ISO file rather than burn the backup to CD or DVD despite what the *Burn* button implies.

Conclusions

Google's Picasa software not only offers a full set of image management features, but also various extended features, such as the integrated uploader for uploading images to a photo lab or for publication in a web album. Features offered by the integrated image editor are the bare essentials, although they are ease to use and support batch processing. ■

INFO

- [1] Picasa: <http://picasa.google.com>
- [2] Picasa download: <http://picasa.google.com/linux/download.html>
- [3] Google repository: <http://www.google.com/linuxrepositories/>
- [4] Picasaweb: <http://picasaweb.google.com/>
- [5] Blogger: <https://www.blogger.com/>