

Applications on demand with Apwal program launcher

READY FOR ACCESS

Launching a program by clicking with your mouse can have a few disadvantages. Users lose their way in nested menu structures, and desktop icons can become hidden behind windows. The Apwal program launcher makes it easy to launch with a click.

BY ANDREA MÜLLER



Modern desktops and window managers typically give you all the options you need to launch your favorite programs by clicking with your mouse. This saves time, as clicking takes just a couple of seconds, in contrast to entering commands at the command line. But this still wasn't fast enough for Pascal Eberhard. Moving active windows to look for icons wasn't his idea of efficiency. This prompted Pascal to develop Apwal [1], an icon-based program launcher that pops up a user-defined selection of icons under the mouse cursor when called on.

The program name is an acronym for

advanced and powerful window app launcher.

Frugal

The project homepage includes Debian packages for the icons-on-demand application. If you have any other distribution, you will need to build from the source code. Apwal is frugal in its use of resources and only requires the *gtk2* library and developer packages. You will need at least *gtk2-2.4* or a later version. The source code does not include a *configure* script; on a positive note, you can simply run *make* to build Apwal. Then become *root*, and enter *make install*, to drop the *apwal* executable into */usr/local/bin*.

Selection

When you launch Apwal for the first time, by typ-

ing *apwal* in a terminal window, the program displays a single terminal icon. Clicking on the icon will launch an *xterm*. To put together a collection of icons, you need to launch Apwal with the *--edit* parameter. This opens the setup dialog, which simply has a termi-



Figure 1: The Icon Selection tab lets you select the icons Apwal will display.

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When she is not taking care of articles, or wrapping packages for the EasyLinux download area, she looks beyond Linux and is involved with other operating systems like QNX, BeOS and NetBSD.



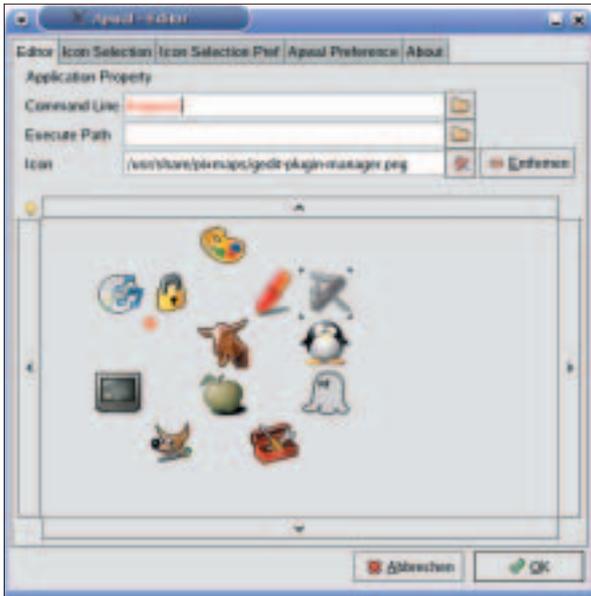


Figure 2: If you mistype an entry or select a program that you have not installed, Apwal colors the entry red to show that clicking the icon will not give you the desired results.

nal icon and a red cross in the first tab, *Editor*. The red cross represents the mouse cursor position and gives you an idea of how the icons will be arranged.

To create another program launcher, double click an empty spot in the *Editor* area. Apwal will then automatically toggle to the *Icon Selection* tab (Figure 1) and show you the selection of 48x48 pixel icons that it has discovered in the preconfigured icon paths. Double click to select an icon; Apwal toggles back to the *Editor* tab.

You will note that the program has put the new symbol in the Editor window, but the icon is still grayed. To change this, you need to add a *Command Line* for the program, such as *konqueror* for launching the KDE file manager. Apwal validates your entry to make sure an application with this name is in your program search path. If you mistype this entry, or if the program is not installed, Apwal colors the program name red to point out the error (Figure 2).

The *Execute Path* field is particularly useful for launching terminal programs. This allows you to specify the directory in which Apwal should run the com-

mand in the *Command Line* box. If you specify */home/username/pictures* for the terminal window icon, the command line window will automatically launch in the */home/username/pictures* directory rather than your home directory.

Drag & drop allows you to modify the position of an icon later. You can drag icons to the desired position in the Editor window. If you do not have enough room, you can click on the up, down, right, or left arrow icons to scroll. And if you notice that you do not need a specific icon, simply click on the icon with the mouse to select

it, and then click on *Delete*.

Extending your Icon Collection

If you have Suse Linux, the selection of icons in the *Icon Selection* tab is not particularly inspiring, as the KDE desktop program icons are missing. You can add them to the selection in the *Icon Selection Pref* (Figure 3) tab. Clicking on *Add* creates a new entry. Now double click the *Pixmap Path* column in the list view and type the path to your KDE icons. On

Suse Linux, the icons are located in folders below */opt/kde3/share/icons*. When you are finished, check the box in the *Rec* column to tell Apwal to add the new icons to its collection. You can follow similar steps to add other directories with icons, such as */opt/gnome/share/icons*, for example. This is where Suse Linux stores the icons for Gnome applications.

Quickstart

After assigning icons for your favorite programs, you can check the results by typing *apwal*. For a

quick launch, you might like to assign a keyboard shortcut to the Apwal program. Users with KDE first need to create a menu entry for Apwal, and then assign a keyboard shortcut in the KDE Control Center *Regional & Accessibility | Keyboard Shortcuts | Application shortcuts*.

If you have the Fluxbox window manager, you can add the shortcut to the *~/fluxbox/keys* file, as in:

```
Mod1 x :ExecCommand apwal
```

This shortcut allows you to launch the icon selector when you press [Alt] + [X]. Pressing your chosen shortcut tells Apwal to display the program launcher at the mouse cursor position for three seconds. You can click one of the icons to launch the application assigned to it. If you need more than three seconds to find the right icon, don't worry. The Apwal editor allows you to set a new timeout interval for the icon display in *Apwal Preference | Launcher Timeout (in seconds)*.

The Enlightenment and Sawfish window managers even allow you to launch Apwal by clicking. The FAQ at [2] tells you how to do this. On the downside, you need to click on the desktop background to launch Apwal. The window manager does not understand mouse clicks in application windows, whereas a keyboard shortcut works wherever you are. ■

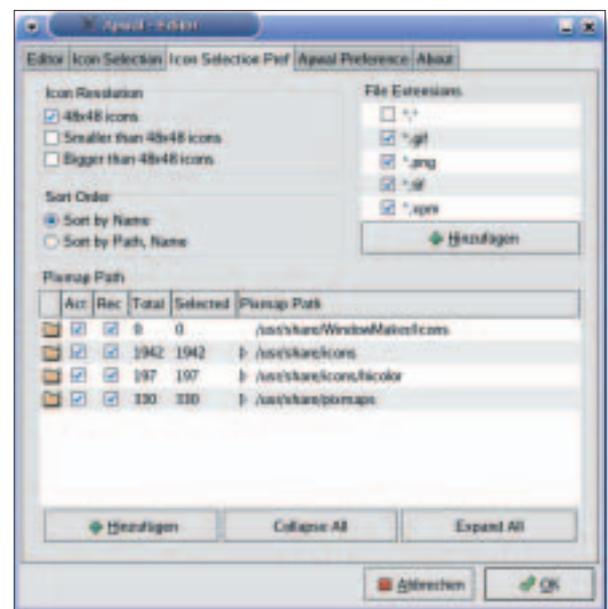


Figure 3: Apwal only displays icons from folders in the directories listed in the *Icon Selection Prefs* tab.

INFO

[1] Apwal: <http://apwal.free.fr>

[2] Apwal FAQ: <http://apwal.free.fr/faq.html>