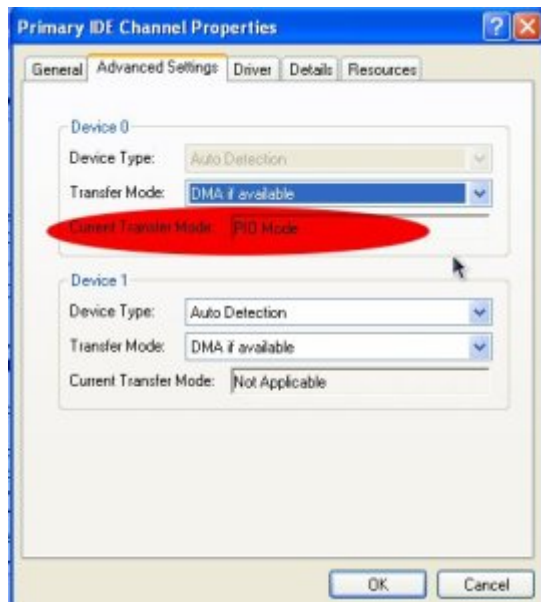


Dramatically restoring the performance of an exceedingly slow Windows XP machine



Last night a young lady asked me to look at her Windows XP laptop. It was running much slower than it did when she first got it. Usually, I first consider that the system is probably infected with malware or spyware, and I installed and ran [SuperAntiSpyware](#) to scan the C drive of her PC. But later I realized that she, being the type of girl she is, would not be going to dangerous websites from where she would be infected. SuperAntiSpyware reported no malware present. I then remembered that the primary IDE channel of a Windows XP system sometimes reverts from DMA to PIO. The graphic on the right shows what the current transfer mode should **not** be!

IDE stands for Integrated Drive Electronics. It refers to the electronics of either your hard disk or DVD drive. In this case, the hard disk is in question.

DMA stands for Direct Memory Access, a technique for transferring data from the main memory to a device (like your hard disk) without passing it through the CPU (central processing unit, the computer's brain).

PIO stands for Programmed Input/Output, a method of transferring data between two devices that *uses* the computer's CPU.

PIO is the older and slower method of data transfer. DMA is at least 10 times faster than PIO from my personal observation. This means that if the IDE primary channel is set for PIO, this will slow down the read and write speed of your hard disk by at least 10 times which dramatically slows down the entire system! Windows XP will automatically revert from DMA to PIO if there are too many DMA errors. In such a case, it may be a sign your hard disk is beginning to fail.

You can check the if the transfer mode of your hard disk is DMA or not with the procedure below.

1. Click Start
2. Click Control Panel
3. Click Switch to Classic View (if you are not there already)
4. Double-click the System applet to open it.
5. Click on the Hardware tab to open it
6. Click on Device Manager to open it
7. Click on the plus sign of IDE ATA/ATAPI controllers to expand it
8. Right click on Primary IDE Channel
9. Left click on Properties
10. Click on the Advanced Settings tab
11. Look at the current transfer mode of Device 0. It should say Ultra DMA Mode with a number after it as shown in the picture. If it says PIO Mode, this is the reason for your slow PC.



Ultra DMA mode

If you see that the current transfer mode of the primary IDE channel on your PC is PIO, you may be able to reset it back to ultra DMA mode by [downloading and running this script](#). Just right click the and left click “save link as” to save the file. Windows may save it as a text file by adding a .txt after the real extension of .vbs If so, you would need to rename the file before you can run it by deleting the .txt, and to do that you may have to change the Windows default setting to show registered file extensions.

After you run the script, reboot and check the primary IDE channel settings again. If it is restored back to ultra DMA mode, congratulations! If not, the only fix would be to change the hard disk altogether to a new one or buy a new PC.

Using Gnome Shell



Screenshot of Gnome 2.8 desktop

I installed a beta version of the new [Gnome Shell desktop environment](#) on my Fedora Linux PC, and it seems to be very cool indeed! And it's free, not only free in in the meaning of “freedom” but even free as in “free lunch.”

[Gnome](#) is the standard desktop graphical environment for many [Linux](#)

[distributions](#), including [Fedora](#), the Linux distribution I've been using on my PC since February 2005. Another popular Linux desktop environment is [KDE](#). Some people like it better than Gnome, because it looks a bit more like Windows®, but I found KDE buggy and unstable, at least it was 5 years ago, and stuck with Gnome. There are even more desktop environments besides these two.

The first screenshot shows my normal Gnome desktop using a top bar to show open applications, and a bottom toolbar showing the standard Gnome toolbar. The wallpaper contains a not so subliminal message.

By default the Gnome toolbars are on the opposite sides, but like to change them because it's more what I was used to when I worked in Windows®. Click any of the pictures to see an enlargement.

This screenshot is of the Gnome Shell after first running it. Notice the Gnome applets are now missing with the bottom toolbar gone. Maybe later I'll figure out how to add them again. Or possibly that feature is still not available in this beta version of Gnome Shell.



Gnome Shell after startup

Here's how it looks like after clicking on "Activities" in the top left corner!!



Gnome Shell after clicking on Activities

All open applications are in the right side of the screen. Just clicking on one of the icons show the application to a full screen! The area on the left shows all the folders I have for easily finding files.

When I click on the time display on the top bar, a calendar drops down and stays down until I click on the time display a second time. Cool! Click on the graphic below to see it more clearly.



Gnome Shell with dropdown calendar

Eat your hearts out, Windows® lovers!

WordPress power



I realized today it's been a little more than a year since I started to use [WordPress blogging software](#). My first post was on January 7, 2009. I've grown used to it and think it's probably better overall and easier for me than the HTML / CSS hand coding coding method I used to use. Not that it's not good to learn HTML and CSS. Because I know these technologies, I can do things with WordPress that others cannot who do who do not know them.

WordPress blogs are easy for me to keep up with. Since my friend in Taiwan started to use WordPress for his [Paradise Post](#) blog, I can now keep up with him much better than when he used his former method of making web pages. What that was I do not know, but my Firefox browser didn't seem to like it. It would freeze up on his older web site – on my Linux PC with near state of the art technology, a CPU not even a year old, (AMD Phenom II) and 4 gigs of DDR 3 RAM!

I consider the Weaver II theme to be the best theme for WordPress ever! The free version is much more powerful and tweakable than most of the paid version's I've seen, and it even has a pro version to boot! So far I haven't seen the need to upgrade to the pro version.

PC security issues



I noticed the performance of a certain Windows XP PC was down again, even though I cleaned it from malware only a few months ago. I installed and ran [Super Anti Spyware](#) and it found over **1500 security issues!!** The browser was hijacked and a **fake anti-virus** program called [Antivirus 2008](#) was installed. [SuperAntiSpyware](#) cleaned it up and its running fine again.

The particular user of that machine is a young adult who uses a peer to peer file sharing application known as [Bearshare](#). I'm sure she affected her PC again as a result of poor Internet browsing habits. I certainly do not recommend file sharing networks and software such as Bearshare but recommend [Bittorrent](#) instead for downloading large files. My favorite Bittorrent client is [Deluge](#). It's better security, and especially so in Linux, Mac, or a Windows PC when the user is logged in with limited privileges, and not as the Administrator.

Did you know that the [German government has warned web users to find an alternative browser to Internet Explorer](#) to protect security? I highly recommend [Firefox](#). It's much better security, open source, and heavily supported by software developers from around the world, and not just by a single cooperation like Microsoft whose bottom line is always money. I believe they have often put the priority on user convenience, and to do that, they sacrificed the user's security. Not requiring the user to always log in with limited access (as in Mac / Unix / Linux) is one example of this.

[Upgrade to Fedora 12 beta](#)



November 2: [Fedora Linux](#) version 12 is due to come out on November 18, but I couldn't wait to try it out and installed the yet beta version.

Improvements from Fedora 11 that I've noticed:

- The default video driver recognized my dual monitor setup and automatically gave me the correct screen resolution and spanning monitors.
- Gnome seems to run faster. Terminal now comes up instantaneously.
- Many of the applications appear to load faster.
- Pulse audio now works as it should without quirks. In Fedora 10-11 I could not use other audio applications when Firefox was accessing a flash media file.
- Mplayer plays my MP3 files without the irksome shuddering sound it used to have during the first couple seconds when playing the file. This was a problem in Fedora 10 and 11 but now seems fixed.
- Bluefish HTML editor doesn't crash anymore when I do a spell check as it used to do in Fedora 10 and 11
- The new version of [Dansguardian](#) Internet content filter now runs. I couldn't get the latest version to work in Fedora 11. Dansguardian has improved with options to weed out unwanted pop-ups and advertisements. Using the Fedora Linux – Firefox – Dansguardian combination gives me the safest browsing imaginable! Eat your heart out, Windows 7!

The downsides of upgrading to Fedora 12 beta:

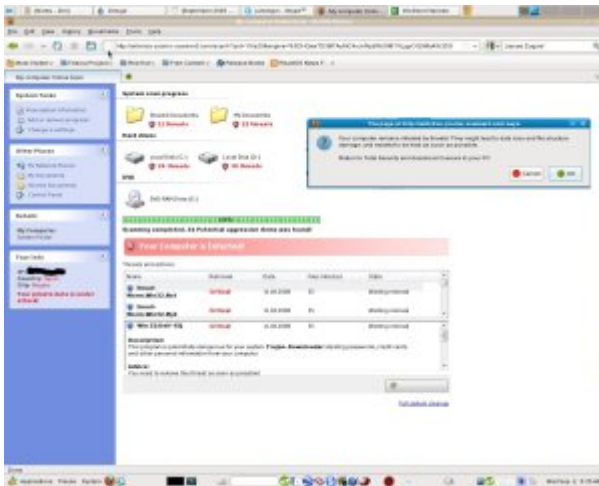
- In the beginning Firefox crashed a couple of times. It seems to be stable now after a week.
- I can't yet install the Nvidia video driver. But this only means I can't run applications that take a lot of video power such as Google Earth. Video files play perfectly fine.
- Wine doesn't run anymore. I have to wait for a Wine upgrade to fix a conflict with Pulse audio.

All of the above are fixed now after Fedora 12 came out with the final

release, and also thanks to the good advice on [Fedora Forum](#). I found a fix for Wine by installing the 64 bit version with the command:

```
yum install wine.i686 -y
```

[Beware of False Virus Popup Reports from Internet Pages](#)



I clicked on a link to access a certain article when all of a sudden a window popped up saying that my hard disk was undergoing an online scan for viruses and trojans. It reported that my private data is under attack and my PC is infected with security threats. I was advised to download and install “Total Security” to remove the threats.

Notice the interface of the PC screen in the image is that of Microsoft Windows? I’m *not* running Windows on my PC! I’m running Fedora **Linux** with the Gnome desktop environment.

The scan reported C drive and D drive infected, but Linux has *no concept of drive letters* as in Windows. My Linux system *doesn’t have* a C drive or D drive. Neither do I have any folders named “My Documents” and “Shared Documents.” This proves without a doubt that such unsolicited online PC scans that report problems are really **scams** to try to rip us off!

[WordPress global search and replace](#)



I moved this site from `blog.jamesjpn.com` to `jamesjpn.net`. A problem I faced was there were 678 lines of code that pointed to photos on the `blog.jamesjpn.com` server and I needed to edit the posts to point the links to the new server on `jamesjpn.net`. Thanks to <http://www.barrywise.com/2009/02/global-find-and-replace-in-wordpress-using-mysql/> I learned how to do a global search and replace in the Sql section of phpMyAdmin!

```
UPDATE wp_posts SET post_content = REPLACE(post_content,  
    'blog.jamesjpn.com', 'jamesjpn.net')
```

It would have taken me a **long time** to do the job by editing each post, whereas Sql did a global search and replace of 678 lines of code in only 0.8187 of a second!

[The best way to safeguard your PC from bugs and viruses](#)



The best thing any Windows user can do to protect their PC from the getting infected from the Internet is to create a second user account with administrator privileges and to change the working user account to one with only limited user access. I promise you if you do so, your chances of picking up some web-bug, or virus are probably 99% less no matter how good your anti-virus program is. This is because a virus or malware cannot modify your Windows registry, nor can it copy itself into your Windows system folders if you work as a user with *limited* privileges. A simple reboot will kill any virus that may invade into the PCs memory.

The purpose of the Administrator account should be only to install software or to do certain tasks like changing the time or date, or to de-fragment the hard disk. It should never be used to browse the Internet! Probably more than 90% of all Windows users (especially Windows XP users) browse the Internet with Administrator privileges. It's no wonder their PCs get infected, perform slower and slooower, and sometimes come to a grinding halt!