Syncing a Palm to KOrganizer with KPilot

Linux offers many tools to sync your PDA with your Linux desktop.
Jenn Vesperman details the use of one of those tools.

JENN VESPERMAN

NOTE:

This article uses KPilot and KOrganizer, which work with most PalmOS handhelds. If KPilot and KOrganizer are not already installed, you can install KPilot and KOrganizer with your package manager. They are in the kdepim package for Red Hat, kdepim3-kpilot and kdepim3-organizer for SuSE, and kpilot and korganizer Debian packages.

What would you do if you lost your handheld? I know it bugs me every time I'm an hour away from home and realise I left it sitting in its cradle. It's not only the computer, though, it's the information—appointments, contact details, shopping lists. Is it Tuesday or Wednesday that I'm supposed to see the doctor? How can I book a time with this client if I don't know when I'm free? And then there's the nightmare—not only leaving the handheld in its cradle, but losing the information in it. It would take weeks to sort it all out. Of course, the handhelds come with tools to fix that—you back them up to your desktop computer. The catch is that the tools work for Windows and possibly Mac OS, and your computer is running Linux.

There's a solution, of course. Too many programmers run Linux and have handhelds for a problem like this not to have a solution. There actually are several good solutions, and the best three, in my opinion, are KPilot, Gnome-pilot, and JPilot. KPilot and Gnome-pilot link directly to KOrganizer and Evolution (a free Microsoft Outlook clone) letting you synchronise your handheld with your personal information manager application. JPilot has an information manager of its own, mimicking the four primary applications in PalmOS.

KDE puts KPilot in the Utilities menu. Look for the icon of a Palm Pilot in a cradle and the name PalmPilot Tool (KPilot). To run KPilot from the command line, or the Run option under the K menu, use the command `kpilot`.

KPilot needs to be configured before you can use it to synchronise your handheld. The configuration dæmon should start auto-
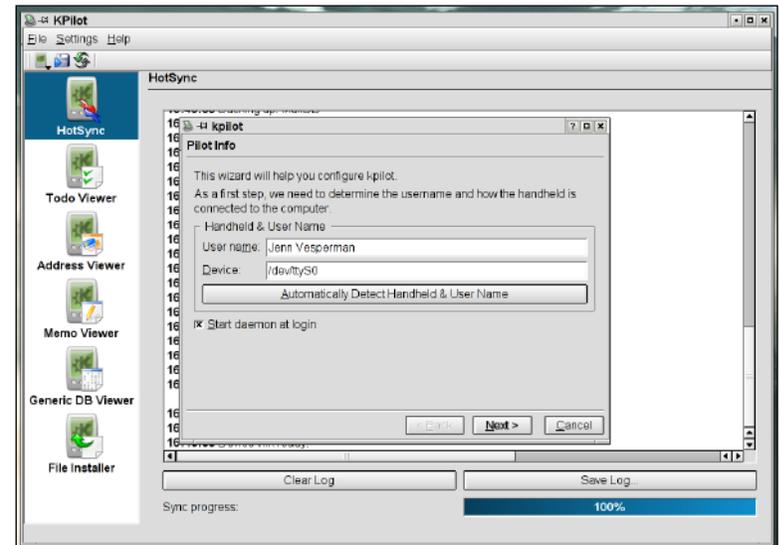

Figure 1. KPilot Wizard

matically at login. If it doesn't, run KPilot to make the dæmon start.

Now that KPilot is set up, you can do your first synchronisation. Check that your handheld is in the cradle, then press the Hotsync button. Your address book, calendar, and to-do list information are added to the information in KOrganizer, and the address book information is shared with KMail. KOrganizer also does group scheduling, which is not itself synchronised to the handheld, but calendar events and to-do tasks that are scheduled within the group scheduler are synchronised.

Next, open KOrganizer. The to-do list items are on the left, under a month-view calendar. On the right, is your to-do and calendar tasks for the current week. Below that is your schedule for the week. A normal menu bar and icon bar are at the top, and a status bar is at the bottom. Hover your mouse over the icons for tooltips that tell you what each icon is for. On the top right in the icon bar is a symbol that looks a bit like an open book. If you click
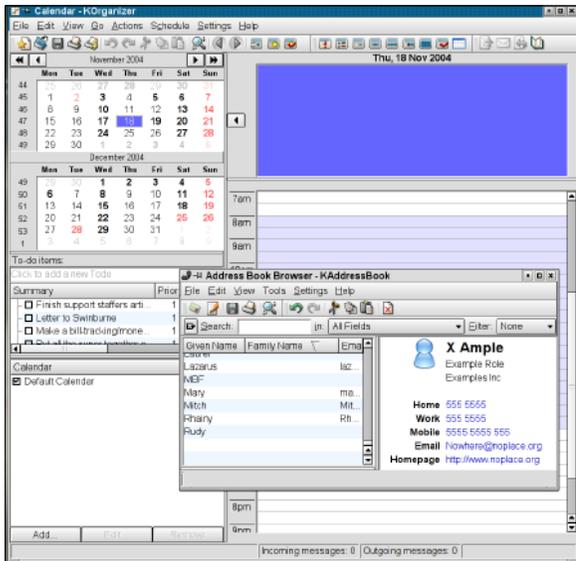
Figure 2. KOrganizer

on that, the address book opens.

Experiment with KOrganizer. Your Palm information is preserved, but KOrganizer allows additional information to be stored with to-do, calendar, and address book entries. Right-click on one of the to-do items, and select edit. The title, priority, category, note, date, and time are preserved, but you can see a row of tabs in the dialog. The tabbed dialogs provide a host of additional information you can store about each to-do entry, such as attachments (similar to e-mail attachments), percentage complete, and attendees (people who also need to know about the to-do item).

Close the to-do dialog, and right-click on a calendar event, such as a meeting. Select edit, and look at the tabbed dialogs. Select Attendees, and enter in people who normally would be involved in a meeting. Either click the New button or the

Select Addressee button—the latter uses your address book to provide you with a list of potential people for the meeting. Once you have at least one person entered, you also can choose a role and a status for each person. Decide whether you want to mail this person with the meeting information; if you select OK, a dialog box opens and asks whether KOrganizer should e-mail the attendees.

Now that you've played with KOrganizer a bit, let's go back to KPilot and synchronisation. KPilot offers three types of synchronisation:

■ Fullsync: synchronises everything and copies everything to the backup directory, and it is the slowest option.

■ Fastsync: synchronises only the things that connect to programs on the PC. It doesn't copy to the backup directory, and it is the fastest option.

■ Hotsync: synchronises changed data and copies the changed data to the backup directory.

In addition, there is an option to back up the pilot data to the PC or to restore from the PC without synchronising with KOrganizer. The backup and restore options must be used with care, as any information on the target system is overwritten by the information on the source. The List Only option lists the databases on the Palm Pilot but does not actually exchange data. There are a lot of synchronisation options, but most of the time, you will need only Hotsync, which is the default. If you want to change your default sync, a drop-down menu under Settings→Configure KPilot→Hotsync can do it for you.
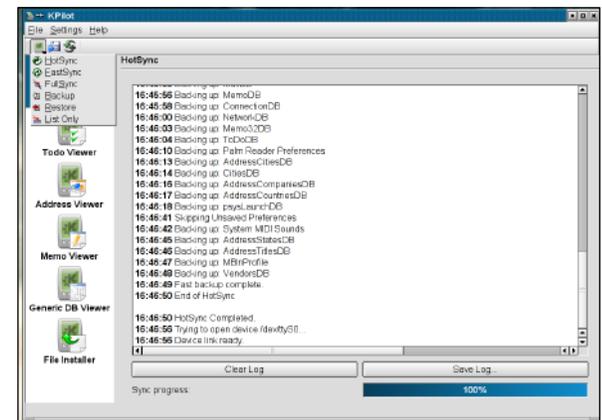

Figure 3. Hotsync

You may want to use Fullsync every month or so, to be certain that everything on the handheld is backed up properly. On the other hand, you may choose to use Fastsync when you're about to run out the door and simply want to check that the appointment list on your handheld is correct. To do these changes of synchronisation type, either right-click on the KPilot icon in your panel or open KPilot. Select the synchronisation option from the Next Sync menu in the panel icon or from the Hotsync button menu or the file menu in KPilot. Then, press the button on your

> **TIP** You also can install a new file or program application to your handheld (these are usually files with a .prc or .pdb extension). Open KPilot and select the File Installer from the icons on the left. Click on the Add File button, which opens a file selector. Select your file or application, click OK, and then synchronise your Palm as normal.

cradle to sync the palm. This changes the next synchronisation, but leaves the default unchanged.

If you lose information from KOrganizer, you can restore it by synchronising from the handheld. If you lose it from the backup directory, you can restore it with the backup synchronisation option. If you lose it from the handheld, you can restore it with the restore synchronisation option. Then there's the real concern, losing it from everywhere. The solution to that is to include your handheld's information in your regular system backup.

With every synchronisation method other than Fastsync, KPilot copies your handheld's data to the directory /home/*username*/.kde/share/apps/kpilot/DBBackup/*handheld name*/, where *username* is your Linux user name, and *handheld name* is the user name in your handheld. To store your handheld data as part of your regular system backup, ensure that this directo-

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NOTE:

/home/username/.kde is the usual $KDEHOME environment variable. If your data is not there, use the command `env` in a terminal window, and look for the KDEHOME variable. Your data is at *$KDEHOME*/share/apps/kpilot/DBBackup/*handheld name*/, where *$KDEHOME* is the value of the KDEHOME variable, and *handheld name* is your handheld user name.

DEVICE SETTINGS

The most common reason for the configuration wizard to fail to locate your handheld is incorrect permissions on /dev/pilot. If you have access to the superuser (root) and are the only person who will be using your computer, you can fix this yourself:

■ From the K menu, select File Manager—Super User Mode.

■ Change the Location to file:/dev.

■ Find and right-click on pilot, and select Properties. If pilot isn't there, you have other problems and will need to fill in your device manually (discussed later in this article).

■ Look at the properties window. It should have a Points to section, which lists the actual device to which your handheld cradle is connected.

■ Find and right-click on the device listed under Points to, and select Permissions.

■ Change the permissions so that Others is set to Can Read & Write.

If that doesn't fix the problem, you can fill in your user name and device manually. Your user name must match the user name listed in your handheld, which you can find by pressing Home, then Hotsync on the handheld. The name should be in the upper-right corner of the screen.

The next best solution is to enter the actual device into the Device field of the wizard. If you use a serial cradle, the device is somewhere in the series /dev/ttyS0 to /dev/ttyS3, depending on which serial port you've
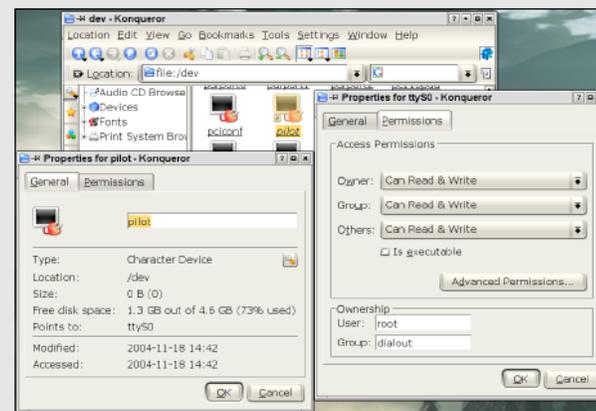

Figure 4. Properties for Pilot

connected to: the first port is /dev/ttyS0, the second is S1, and so on. If you use a USB cradle, it will be /dev/USB0 or higher. USB cradles can be a problem, because adding other USB devices can cause the devices to renumber—a cradle that was USB0 before you added your memory stick may be USB1 afterward. The ideal solution for the USB renumbering problem is to have your system administrator configure the USB dæmon to link /dev/pilot to the handheld's cradle. The method for this depends on your USB dæmon.

The Device dialog contains a connection speed option, which is relevant only to serial connections. The default should be fine, but if you have trouble getting your handheld to synchronise, you may want to try a slower connection speed. You can try a faster speed—any speed that synchronises successfully is good enough.

KPilot also supports infrared or network connections. Helpful information for these connection types is available from the Help menu, under KPilot Handbook. Check both Device Setup and Special HotSync Questions.

Gnome-pilot and Evolution

There should be a handheld icon in the GNOME control centre that represents Gnome-pilot. If it's not there, install the Gnome-pilot package. Evolution should be in the Office section of the Gnome-foot Applications menu. If it's not there, install the Evolution package.

Double-click on the handheld icon, or add the Pilot Applet utility to the panel. Doing either of these opens the dialog Gnome Pilot Settings, with a Welcome to Gnome-pilot! dialog heading. Click Next.

The first configuration is Cradle Settings. See the Device Settings sidebar in this article for advice on devices. Leave the Name and Timeout options at their defaults, and click Next.

The second configuration is Pilot Identification. If you've ever synchronised this pilot to a desktop computer, even a different computer, leave the setting at "Yes, I've used sync software with this pilot before." If you haven't, set the user name you intend to use with this Pilot. Leave the ID field at the default. Click Next, and let the wizard run its Initial Sync. Follow the instructions, and GNOME will retrieve the user name and ID from the pilot or set it onto your pilot if it's new. Click Next when it's finished.

The next configuration is Pilot Attributes, which sets your backup directory for your pilot information. Leave the options as the defaults (MyPilot and /home/*username*/MyPilot). Click Next, and you reach the Success dialogue. Click on Apply.

Double-click on the handheld icon in the GNOME control centre again. You don't get the wizard, but instead you should see a dialog with three tabs: Pilot, Devices, and Conduits. The Pilot tab lets you edit the same information that is in Pilot Identification and Pilot Attributes in the wizard, the Devices tab lets you edit the Cradle Settings, and the Conduits tab is new.

The conduits set what happens during a sync. Click on the conduits tab and set the following:

- Backup Enabled.

- EAddress Synchronize.

- ECalendar Synchronize.

- EToDo Synchronize.

- Everything else should be left at the default.

These settings will give you a backup and synchronise your address book, calendar, and to-do with Evolution. The backup is stored in the location given in your Pilot Attributes and can be saved as a regular file.

ry is included. If you lose the data from both your handheld and your PC, you can copy the contents of this directory from your backup media, back to the PC, and then use the Restore option from KPilot's File menu to restore it to your handheld.

With all the additional tricks and tools KOrganizer offers, the combination of your handheld and your desktop becomes more useful than ever. The wizard runs you through the setup, and synchronising is as easy as pressing a single button. Your information can be included automatically in your general system backup, so there's no reason to lose your handheld's information ever again. Now that you know how easy it is, isn't it time to set up your handheld on Linux?

> **NOTE:**
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> If you are working on a system that has multiple users, you can use this technique to check the permissions but you should let your system administrator be the one to change permissions.

SAFE AND SOUND

As you can see, your Linux system provides a number of options for making sure that the information on your handheld stays up to date with what's on your system. Furthermore, these tools, when used regularly, should help to ease the quiet dread that all users of a handheld secretly harbor, that someday they will lose the little thing, their schedules, their address books, and everything else in between.

Hotsync, backup, and rest easy.■

Jenn Vesperman is a strong advocate for women in computing and has been the coordinator of LinuxChix for several years. She also has written *Essential CVS* for O'Reilly & Associates, and she works as a programmer, system administrator, and/or writer. Jenn lives in Australia and is owned by two cats.