Event HOWTO

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Revision History

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First revision. Comments from readers is appreciated.

The purpose of this document is to show you how to create good presentations for almost any sort of Linux event.

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1. Introduction

While many Linux users will give presentations at Linux User Group (LUG) meetings, Expos, and other conferences, not everyone is effective at giving presentations. Much like public speaking, a presenter needs to know how to communicate with their audience so that their topic is clear and understood by all. Topics that may interest users can easily be lost with ineffective presentations. Hopefully this document will spell out how you can do this properly.

1.1. Copyright Information

1.2. Disclaimer

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1.3. New Versions

This is the initial release.

1.4. Credits

I'd like to thank Prof. Brad Broughton, Technical Communication Department, Clarkson University. He taught a number of courses on effective presentations and public speaking. I don't always follow his rules, but I know what they are.

1.5. Feedback

Feedback is most certainly welcome for this document. Without your submissions and input, this document wouldn't exist. Please send your additions, comments and criticisms to the following email address : `<markk@linuxdoc.org>`.

2. Getting Started

Before you even give a presentation, there are a few things you have to do:

- Choose a topic.
- Submit your topic to a show to LUG. (and get it accepted!)
- Create presentation from the topic.
- Give the presentation.

Contrary to poular belief, each of these may be as hard as all the others. Choosing a topic for some may be easy, based on their expertise, whereas a Linux jack–of–all–trades may be stuck choosing a topic. Those comfortable with public speaking may have trouble designing the slides, and so on.

So let's jump right in and hit all the topics and get you started!

3. Choosing a topic

In many cases, you can choose your topic based on the area of expertise you have. If you're a known (or unknown?) expert on RAID, you can give a presentation on RAID. But what do you talk about on RAID? Do you talk about the design of the controller drivers under Linux 2.4? Do you talk about installing Linux on a RAID device? Case study?

Unfortunately, these are things you'll have to think about and decide on your own. Your best bet is to think of a generic enough subject, and change it based on your audience (we'll get into this later on). If you're talking to a more advanced LUG/USENIX crowd, you can give a more advanced presentation, whereas newbie groups can get a presentation of what RAID is and how it works. The basic idea is to keep the intended audience in mind at all times.

4. Submitting your topic

Once you have the basic idea of what you want to present, you have to get it accepted by groups and get the opportunity to show it. Your best line of strategy is to start off giving your intended presentation to a local LUG and let them critique it. Audience feedback is cruicial, especially if you have not done a presentation before.

So what's the secret for talking to a LUG? In many cases, just offer. LUGs like to have speakers for each meeting to give a reason to get together other than go for a beer after the meeting.

In terms of conferences that you would like to attend, check the major conferences and expos out there. Many are listed at Linux web sites, some send out a call for papers (CFP) to approprate discussion lists, like `<ldp-discuss@lists.linuxdoc.org>`. Many will have either an e−mail CFP, or have you fill out a web form.

The author cannot comment on what papers are accepted or declined, mostly because I don't know how it works. The best I can say is to see what topics have been selected in the past and tailor your abstract that way.

Assuming your presentation has been selected, try and get some information about the location, dates, time, and so on. This will have a lot of bearing on how your presentation is laid out. A presentaton using printed slides will appear different on screen than one with an LCD projector that connects to your laptop. In some cases, you will need to bring your own laptop to the presentation.

5. Creating your Presentation

There are a number of programs for creating presentations. What you use should really be a personal preference. However, there are a few choices for you to use.

Table 1. Presentation applications

Application Name	**URL**	**Notes**
MagicPoint	http://www.Mew.org/mgp/	Presentation−only. Reads text files for creating presentation. Exports to PS and HTML
StarOffice	http://www.staroffice.com	Good conversion to and from Microsoft PowerPoint. Not really good for laptops, as it consumes a lot of memory and CPU cycles.
Applixware Office	http://www.vistasource.com	Commercial application, but smaller requirements than Star Office.

So how do you create the your content? First, you'll want to have some introductory information. Your first slide should contain the title of the presentation, your name, and who you're representing (if anyone). Remember that it's good form to include the name of the organization that is paying for your trip, even if they're not who you're representing.

Your second slide should contain the agenda for the remainder of the presentation. This serves two purposes − it not only tells the audience what to expect, but serves as an outline for you as you create the slides.

Your third (or forth, depending on how big the agenda is) should contain some information about you. This sets your credibility with the audience as to your expertise with the subject matter.

After that, it is up to you to start creating your slides. However, here's a few hints to keep in mind as you go along:

1. Make the text of the slides big, and the amount of text small. You want everyone to be able to read what is on the slide.
2. There is no real need to write in full sentences. You will want to make short points, since your talking will fill in the details.
3. If you use backgrounds in your slides, make them of light colors. Dark colors will contrast the text when they are printed out as handouts for attendees.
4. Stick to one topic per slide. You can have multiple slides per topic, just title them "Topic", "Topic (cont'd)", or number them.

6. Giving your presentation

Before you give your presentation to a group of people, give it a test run to a friend or SO. This lets you know how well the flow of the presentation is, plus may give ideas for improvement.

If you have never taken a public speaking class, or given presentations to large groups, the first few times you do this it may seem unnerving. As I mentioned earlier, it may be easier to start with your local LUG and get used to talking to groups of people – the local LUG will be filled with a friendly audience and you will be more at ease.

When talking to a large audience, keep the following in mind:

1. Don't just read the text on the slides. Anyone can put slides up and read the text on it. You are an expert!
2. Keep eye contact with the audience. Every now and then, look up from your screen and scan the audience. If this makes you nervous, look across the tops of the heads. From the perspective of the audience, you're looking at them. Look up, and scan from one side of the room to the other, then look back at your screen.
3. Feedback from microphones can cause headaches for all around. Test your microphone setup before talking.
4. If you do not have a microphone, try and face your audience as much as possible. Your voice will carry better.
5. Do not let yourself get sidetracked. Stay on the topic. If a member of the audience tries to get you off topic too far, offer to discuss it after the presentation. Others who are interested can take part then.