

Re: Newbie FAQ #2: Where's the GUI?

Source: <http://coding.derkeiler.com/Archive/Lisp/comp.lang.lisp/2008-04/msg00153.html>

- *From:* vanekl <vanek@xxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Thu, 03 Apr 2008 00:11:13 +0000
-

Jonathan Gardner wrote:

snip

I happen to believe that we write web apps today only to satisfy Windows users. See, Windows is so insecure you can't download and run software on your computer. There is no jail, no security measures in place to keep applications from messing with each other and with the OS.

Exaggerating much? No security? No permissions? If you're suggesting that most of the windows security features are bypassed by running as admin all the time, then I'd agree.

I believe the rise of the web app has more to do with 1) piercing the corporate fire wall, 2) running software that doesn't require an install, 3) doesn't require administration, and 4) has a low barrier to entry.

I realize that one data point does not an argument make, but you might enjoy this story.

I work with a lot of women who are afraid of installing software for some reason. I don't know why that is, but it's just what I've noticed. They don't mind installing shit^H^H^H a bunch of browser 3rd-party toolbars, but they enter a catatonic state when they are forced to install shrink-wrapped software. I can't explain it, but it's just the way it is in the wild. A phenomenon that may just be unique to my environs, but I doubt it.

Anyway, this one woman spends most of her time away from the main office, and is such a klutz that she has been given TWO computers, one located within the main office that we install everything she needs to work with, and her laptop that does nothing more than login to her office computer remotely and use the apps installed on it. For some reason, she actually prefers working this way, and the boss doesn't

Re: Newbie FAQ #2: Where's the GUI?

care one way or another as long as she gets her work done.

What I'm trying to say is, there is a group of people who have so little confidence in themselves to install software on their computer, that they prefer other people to set it up, even if that means the purchase of twice the number of computers. I couldn't believe it the first time I saw this, but it does go to show to what extent some people will go to avoid having to tinker with their computers.

Many people are afraid to install software on their machines, and zero-install web apps solve that. Installing software is scary. For the average user, security really doesn't even factor into it much; users are treading in territory that is foreign to them, and that can be frightening.

People feel comfortable running webapps because they seem to be more secure. But I know enough to say that they aren't secure, even with Firefox. They can't be made secure without the same measures it would take to make the OS secure.

Firefox may be a better OS than Windows, but it is certainly lacking compared to what I know about Linux.

Firefox is a poor OS. It's strength is that it is a cross-platform, standardized VM in which to run serialized apps. It's a layer on top of the conventional OS layer, as I'm sure you're well aware, not a substitute. Ever try to run more than one javascript script concurrently? You can't, not within the same instance of FF. Again, it's a poor OS.

Soon, it will no longer be the case that the majority of users are running Windows. When people get onto a decent platform with a decent security model, we'll all download and run apps without thinking about the security implications. It won't be possible for joe user to run any application that can destroy his machine or even hurt another app, no matter how hard he tries.

Sun tried this, and for a variety of reasons, it failed. The reason why I hated it is because bandwidth was usually not sufficient to achieve a satisfactory start-up time. I also hated Sun's UI choices, but I could've gotten over that.

Re: Newbie FAQ #2: Where's the GUI?

(Using Windows, it drives me nuts that I have to get admin permission to install stupid programs. What in the world do they need permissions to mess with my OS for? I just want to put songs on to my iPod, dammit.)

That sounds to me like your music library directory permissions are not set up right, but I'm just guessing. If you've got this set up correctly, however, I agree with you, data files should not require admin rights, in most circumstances.

But more importantly, webapps are terribly restrictive. You can only do certain things, and you can't do those things well. Some of the ideas that webapps have forced onto us are good—throwbacks to the days of thin clients. But as an author of many webapps, I can't tell you how many times I have run into the limitations of the webapps—even with AJAX or what-have-you. They simply are not enough to get the job done. Some things, yes. But never everything, and I'm always sacrificing the user experience to fit the model of web app programming. This is not right. It's not the future of software.

Maybe a maturing of the web platform and a widening of the pipes is all that is required?

For example, MIT's X has separated display from computation for decades.

To say that this is not the future of software is, to me, not very convincing.

If you want something to pray about, pray that Mozilla comes out of round 3 of the browser wars intact.

Someday everyone will wake up and wonder why web browsers are running web apps when those same apps run on your desktop at a million times the speed with a million times more features and a million times the simplicity.

Response time isn't everything, nor is development simplicity, but they certainly can be useful.

One day, you'll have a document reader that reads any document anywhere on the internet with cross-referencing and you'll have a app

Re: Newbie FAQ #2: Where's the GUI?

launcher that can find and launch any application anywhere on the internet. The two will be different tools.

>

We'll look back at the 1990's and 2000's, wondering why we wasted our time trying to do something useful on such a terribly restrictive platform.

I think the trend is to go where the users want to go, not where the developers want to go.

Yes, things are in a primordial state now. Doesn't mean they will be forever. To wit:

HTML5 or bust.

HTML5 is simply (1+ HTML4).

More importantly, we are finally getting movement for a maturing of this new platform.

I don't like the direction of this, recursively speaking. Might as well write a linux emulator on Windows and have people download that instead of building it piecemeal.

If people want to run both Linux and Windows on the same machine, they can do that now.

I'm currently running coLinux/Debian and Win XP on the same machine. [This was the best way for me to get SBCL to run alongside Windows.]

In short, I don't buy that we should all be writing web apps. Let's write real apps.

What are "real" apps? Didn't you use to partition your code before the advent of the web so that UI wasn't mixed with core logic?

I long for the ol' days of programming, too, just because it was easier to program. But I'm willing to trade more difficult development and a slightly poorer user experience for,

Re: Newbie FAQ #2: Where's the GUI?

- o wider audience,
- o centrally-maintained apps with extremely fast update cycles,
- o better user monitoring/tracking/feedback, and
- o ability to tunnel under the corporate firewall.

We're just heading in opposite directions, and I think the trend is for wider dispersment.

BTW, feel free to agree to disagree and we can leave it at that. The dichotomy of apps we're discussing will co-exist for quite some time, and I understand your current frustration.

.