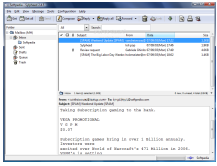


11 June 2006

By: Bogdan Radulescu, Editor, Linux Software Reviews



Sylpheed Review

Lightweight and user-friendly e-mail client

E-Mail is essential these days, so I guess it's important to figure out which e-mail client is best for each of us. Even though most e-mail is read from web based mail interfaces (webmail), it's a good practice to also use one installed on the hard drive. After installing a new Linux system, I thought it would be nice to test drive a client that I've never tried before. Thunderbird, Evolution and KMail are well known clients that do the job just fine but I had heard about Sylpheed on several occasions, so I wanted to check it out. I fired up a browser, I misspelled the name of this client in Google and found little results :) I realized something was wrong and, in a couple of minutes I found out that there isn't only a Sylpheed, but there are two of them. Now I guess some of you might wonder how that is possible. First, there was Sylpheed e-mail, written by Hiroyuki Yamamoto, and then appeared Sylpheed-Claws that was supposed to be a testbed for the new features in Sylpheed. At some point the codebases stopped syncing and Sylpheed-Claws emerged entirely on its own. I decided to write a review for both applications to see which one is better. I'll start with Sylpheed because most of the code from Sylpheed-Claws comes from here and without it there wouldn't be any Sylpheed-Claws. The first thing I noticed about it is that it uses the GTK2 GUI toolkit so it looks nice and in the same time it's lightweight. GTK also allows Sylpheed to be cross-platform. Secondly, I noticed that it has a tray icon. Unfortunately, this tray icon doesn't seem to be of any help since it disappears when I close the program. It should be something lets it stay in the tray after the program is closed but I didn't manage to find it. One thing that Sylpheed can be praised for is support for the Japanese language. Since the author is from Japan, he did a very good job at supporting this language. I haven't actually tested this, since I'm European, but that's the word on the program's forums. Support for i18n internationalization is also taken into account as well as m17n multilingualization. Sylpheed is translated in more than 30 languages so I guess it's out of discussion to consider it as a client for Japanese people only. At first, the interface looks simple and very straight forward so it seems easy to use. It adopts the display with three panes that we are used to see in any modern client. It shouldn't create any problems to anyone since it's a mail client and everybody should be using e-mail nowadays. The truth is that I didn't actually feel it as warm as the other clients I used before. As soon as I went through the tools and the configuration options I felt that perhaps things are a bit complicated. Anyway, after using it a little I got used with it and I realized that Sylpheed has a fair amount of features. Unfortunately, I think that Sylpheed has poor support for filtering junk mail. It has pre-made settings for bogofilter, which uses the popular Bayesian technique which was explained in the [Evolution review](#). Average users will not be able to do much with the junk mail filtering feature but the advanced ones will be able to squeeze the most of it because external commands to any program can be used. You should decide if this is a good or a bad thing. On the other hand, advanced users will be disappointed by the security features. I find it very hard to make any settings related to security. The supported security features are GnuPG and SSL/TLSv1 and this should be enough for most of us that even want security. Settings related to junk mail control can be found in the Common preferences window and the ones related to the security can be set from the account preferences. In Sylpheed, the filtering is very powerful and versatile but maybe a little complicated. Considering that this software is designed to be able to handle tens of thousands of e-mails easily, advanced filters are essential. The ones used here are definitely up to the job. The integrated search function also utilizes the filters. A quick search is also available and it can be used to quickly narrow down the message list. The flexibility of Sylpheed comes from the fact that external

commands can be used in various circumstances. For example, you can define a custom command for selecting an external editor, for printing, for an external web browser, even for receiving mail with something like fetchmail and many more. Last but not least, you should know that Sylpheed can be handled fast, easy and efficient with the keyboard. The mouse can be used with no problem but I still prefer using the keyboard. **The Good** The fact that GTK2 is used as a GUI toolkit is very good because it makes the interface beautiful, nice and easy to port on different platforms. Flexibility is excellent and advanced users can do a lot with it. **The Bad** I think I'm fair when I say that it is hard to configure. The average user will be scared of all the configuration options and to be honest I'm not sure how many of them are required. I think it would have been a lot better if there were two modes of the configuration options: a basic one and an advanced one. **The Truth** The truth is that Sylpheed is a good e-mail client with a lot of features and configuration options but when it comes to just using it efficiently out of the box, you might have a problem. Some time is necessary for adjusting with it and if e-mail is very important in your daily activities you should give it a try. If e-mail is just something you use from time to time and you are not very confident with your computer skills, perhaps you shouldn't go with Sylpheed. I send very few e-mails every day and I will not use Sylpheed for this task. *The screenshots below show Sylpheed in action:*