

Printing PDF's in Ubuntu/Xubuntu/Mint

Nobody likes that sinking feeling when your favourite OS lets you down, but the truth of the matter is Linux, Printing and PDF's don't get on. A vanilla install of Linux Mint on a Dell XPS laptop and Xubuntu on a hp desktop confirms that out of the box you could well find yourself having problems printing – especially PDF's. What really annoys me is that I specifically bought an hp Laserjet printer for it's simplicity and supposed compatibility with Ubuntu (albeit via the *hplip* – HP Linux Printing Libraries package conveniently available in the Ubuntu Repositories).

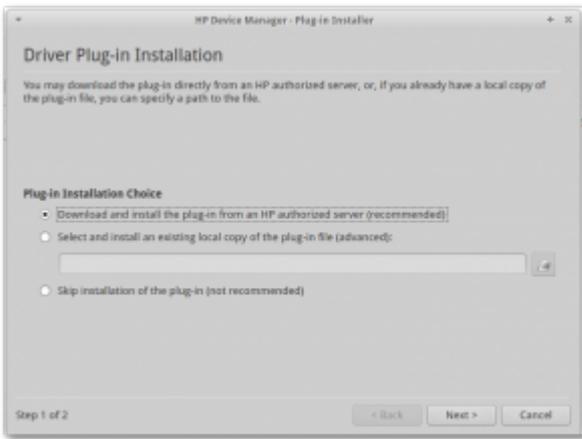
hplip on it's own isn't enough though. You'll get your test page out but thats about it. Anything else is a lottery and with PDF's you're out of luck. This frustration will be accentuated by the reasons for printing a PDF in the first place – in this day and age of electronic communication, its usually a rare requirement in order to sign a form prior to scanning it and sending it back to someone. Yep, printing pdf's is usually for something really important and thats exactly when “favourite OS” will let you down. Grr.

So, this is how to sort it (if you find yourself having problems).

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sudo apt-get install hplip hplip-gui
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sudo apt-get install cups-pdf
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sudo hp-plugin
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Note that the *cups-pdf* package isn't actually for printing PDF's via CUPS (Common Unix Printing System) as such. It's actually for printing a file *to* a PDF (as opposed to paper). Irrespective of this, I can assure you that printing PDF's (PDF files to paper) did not work until this package was installed. Being able to print to a PDF file instead of paper is also a great feature to add to your linux desktop. It should be installed as part of the base install. Folks shouldn't be expected to figure this stuff out. It's the sort of non-functionality that drives people away from Linux, sadly sending them running back to Windows with their tails between their legs.

hp-plugin provides a convenient GUI to download a mysterious binary package from HP that once installed, everything works beautifully.

Be aware of this apparent bug in Xubuntu though <http://www.cyberfella.co.uk/2014/05/02/ubuntu-admin-users/> whereby any users other than the first user cannot run sudo hp-plugin to fix their own printing woes, even if they appear to be an admin user according to the Settings Manager, Users and Groups utility.