

KDE 3.4 Unleashed

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[4]Defined as a network transparent contemporary desktop environment for UNIX workstations similar to the desktop environments found under the MacOS or Microsoft Windows, KDE provides an easy-to-use highly customizable integrated graphical interface for today's most demanding tasks. These include email communication, newsgroup participaton, web surfing, instant messaging, graphic design and manipulation, multimedia capabilities thru audio and video applications, system monitoring, file managing, and even software package handling. Today we will look at the latest incarnation.

KDE 3.4 is a reflection of the many years of development invested into the project with more shine and polish than ever experienced with any desktop environment in existence today. Beginning in October of 1996 with just a handful of developers it helped spawn such major projects as Mandrakelinux in 1998. Today there are an estimated 900 developers improving the approximate 5 million lines of code comprising the KDE desktop.

Today features expand much beyond basic functionality to encompass some of the most advanced options imaginable. Some new features in 3.4 include:

- Text-to-Speech API
- Use of .ogg Vorbis files
- Read support for XCF images
- Support for passwordless wallets
- Added accessibility features to the KPersonalizer
- Logitech mouse specific features
- Add keyboard gestures for enabling AccessX

- Drag 'n drop between panels
- System Tray Icon Hiding
- Reboot options in kdm
- Middle-click functionality in konqueror
- Cursor indication when hovering mailto: link
- Support for the XComposite extension
- Limit on history size relaxed in klipper
- Support for images in klipper
- Autolock feature in kscreensaver
- Support for SVG wallpapers
- Drag & drop files or contacts on the chatwindow in kopete
- Support incoming MSN handwrite messages in kopete
- Contact behaviour statistics plugin in kopete
- KOrganizer Journal Plugin in kontakt
- X-Face support and Smileys in kmail
- X-Face support in knode
- DNS-based service discovery
- IOslave abstraction for a trashcan and better implementation for other media

One of the most obvious things one might notice upon their login to 3.4 is the vastly improved speed at which it functions. Desktop start up time is decreased by my approximations of 50% over 3.3. The applications on my desktop open up in about one second. I usually have one instance of konqueror preloaded and I open it to a blank page, but it's opening is just too fast for this human to clock as it is almost instantaneous. Kontakt takes about one second and kcontrol about two.

Another improvement is the increased stability. Gone are the days of konqueror crashing on a java or flash site. No more are the crashes of kmail as it re-indexes or compresses a large folder. A distant memory are the crashes of knode due to a malformed character or large image in a usenet post. No longer does one experience freezes as one checks their klipper content. Past is the lagging as one tries to move around large files. It may have went through some growing pains over the years, but KDE has become mature, stable, and complete. We have finally reached desktop utopia.



[5] However, the most noticeable improvement is the default look. Sporting an attractive wallpaper, jazzy icons and sexy window decorations, one almost hates to customize. But customize we shall and no one makes it easier than KDE. Even installing themes and icons are a breeze within the kde control center. Setting them for use is a no brainer. This is the first thing I do.

One can configure a wallpaper right from their desktop. In fact one can *install* new wallpapers right from their desktop. Right click on your desktop and choose Configure Desktop. Right there in the first heading Background, one can click the button [Get New Wallpapers](#) [6]. This opens one of KDE's best new features, a [Get Hot New Stuff](#) [7] dialog box. In this application, Hot New Stuff contains choices of wallpapers from [kde-look.org](#) [8] with tabs for Highest Rated, Most Downloads, and Latest. One can even get detailed information on their choices by clicking Details. Choose a wallpaper and click Install. Close the applet and navigate to your `~/.kde/share/wallpapers` folder and choose one of your newly downloaded wallpapers. From this same Configure Desktop applet one can set their general desktop Behavior, Multiple Desktops, Screensaver and Display variables including power control.



[9]

I have much more in mind when I customize, so I prefer to just open the KDE Control Center. I've always appreciated the integrated controls of the kcontrol application. KDE Control Center is just that, the main configuration hub for KDE containing all necessary modules for setting up a beautiful and functional desktop.

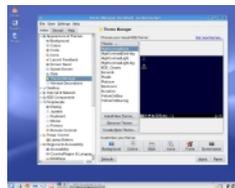
Another application that will be making use of Get Hot New Stuff is [kopete](#) [10]. Soon one will be able to connect to [kde-look.org](#) and download new emoticons. Developer Will Stephenson says, "Implementing this was incredibly easy - only 8 lines of code - and since KMail, Kopete and Konversation share the same emoticon themes, the other apps will be able to use the new emoticons too."

kstars also uses the Get Hot New Stuff interface to download extra datafiles. Click, click, click to a more complete experience. Jason Harris [says](#) [11] of kstars' new look and functionality, "the layout is much less cluttered, and all of the data fields now use KActiveLabel(API|LXR), so the text can be copy/pasted with the mouse."



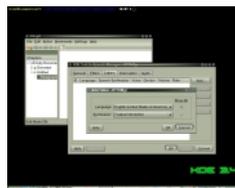
[12]

New in accessibility is some high and low contrast light and dark color themes with monochrome Flatmono icons. This can be a great advantage to individuals with visual impairments.



[13]

KSayIt is a utility that simply speaks a given textfile or the actual content of the clipboard.



[14]

There are wonderful things in kcontact in 3.4. One of which is the news aggregator is now part of kpim and includes http caching, appearance/font settings, uses kNotify for notifications, and KDEPIM's progressbar.



[15]

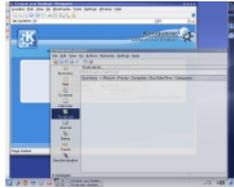
But most notable in kcontact is the support for smileys for your communications in kmail. I'm a sucker for the eyecandy.



[16]

Other improvements include [passwordless kwallet](#) [17], [support](#) [18] for gimp's native xcf format, and [highlighted address bar](#) [19] to indicate encryption status in konqueror.

I've saved the best for last. Transparency. Transparent windows is one of the newest trends in x11 and now KDE. It works fairly well but in default state it's limited, slow and a bit unstable. I wasn't able to get transparency above 75% and kde crashed out to the terminal more than once. In it's infancy transparency makes a beautiful effect. But this feature needs some more time to mature. I don't use it on an everyday basis, but it's nice a feature to include when showing off your desktop to windows users.



[20]

There are just so many new additions, features, and improvements that I can not possibly include them all. For a complete list of new features in 3.4 visit [developer.kde.org](#) [21]. I can not stress enough how impressed I am with this latest version. I've said more than a few times how stable it is and I think to everyone that is the most important thing a desktop needs. The install from sources was effortless requiring a mere `./configure, make, make install`. Most major distributions are already uploading their compatible versions to mirrors, but anyone can install these from the source. Sometimes details like that get overlooked in reviews, but I think it's very important for a package to compile cleanly without a lot of fuss and muss on the part the user. There is no reason to wait. Visit [kde.org](#) for a full list of [mirrors](#).

This is most likely the last feature release in the 3.x series. Makes one wonder how they can possibly [improve KDE](#) [22] enough to make a new major version. I for one can hardly wait for the next round.

Please visit my [gallery](#) [23] for [these shots and many more](#) [24].

[KDE Reviews -s](#)

Source URL: <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/308>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/108>
- [2] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/101>
- [3] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/102>
- [4] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/kde34_6
- [5] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/kde34_0
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- [10] <http://www.kdedevelopers.org/node/view/920>
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- [12] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/hns2>
- [13] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/kde34_17
- [14] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/ksayit>
- [15] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/agrinpim>

- [16] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/smileys>
- [17] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/pwlswt>
- [18] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/kdexcf>
- [19] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/kde34_114
- [20] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/kde3-4/trans1>
- [21] <http://developer.kde.org/development-versions/kde-3.4-features.html>
- [22] <http://www.kde.org/mirrors/ftp.php>
- [23] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery>
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