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Making It Real - Part 1 - Installing Real Player 8 for Linux.

By: Paul Summers

Years ago, April 1995 to be exact, Progressive Networks demonstrated its Real Audio technology for online radio over the Internet at the National Association of Broadcasters conference in Las Vegas. Real Audio was based on a proprietary audio-compression scheme (basically MPEG1 Layer 2.5) and a new high-reliability communications protocol; it transmitted in real time with no need to download and play back huge audio data files.

This was a pretty big thing at the time, as back then the only realistic way to transfer high quality audio files was to zip up a WAV or similar psuedo-compressed audio format and toss it over FTP or HTTP. As this predated MP3 by a number of years, it was pretty significant to listen to an audio clip in near to real time over a simple modem, especially when the average user was connected at 14.4 kbps.

Time passed, and slowly but surely the Real Audio format and players improved. What was once a glorified file download agent became the Real Player-- dropping the "Audio" portion of its name as streaming video support appeared-- and Progressive Networks became Real Networks. Since then, the Real Player has taken on a load of features including its SMIL markup language, significantly improved buffering, and support of broad band media streams. Of course, one must also contend with the less popular "options" that are less then favorable to many purists who don't particularly enjoy a GUI that includes twenty-odd dancing advertisements for different media sites.

Surprisingly enough, the Real Player and it's predecessors have long-since had very good UNIX support. Currently, six different platforms are supported including: Irix, Solaris, AIX, HP-UX, Unixware 7, and of course, Linux. Recently, it seems that Linux support has really taken off, as six different packages are available for Linux running on pretty much any system. (PowerPC, Alpha, Sparc, and of course, x86 Intel) Disappointingly absent are the two native BSD builds from past versions, however the libc6 i386 build seems to play well enough with binary compatibility.

As per Real's posted requirements, all Linux users will require at least 32 MB of ram, though I think 64 is probably more realistic considering that XFree86 and the average window maker will happily eat that up rather quickly. PowerPC users require a

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166Mhz or faster proc, while Alpha users must have at least a 21064 233Mhz taco, and the minimum Sun config is a SPARC 20. Intel users are safe down to a 120Mhz proc, but as with the ram estimate, I'd consider that a bit of a stretch. Naturally, you also must have a 16-bit compatible sound card working (See the how-to section for audio assistance) and a video driver which can run at least 16-bit color depths.

So, let's get right into it and install the player. First, you will need to download the binary package from Real Networks. To my knowledge, this is still not possible via any OS-level package manager such as apt, as Real Networks insists you tell them who you are and dig through a half dozen pages of ads first.

I'll spare the reader a bit of head scratching and provide the link to the UNIX client download area.

Once providing the required information, you are presented with a number of download options in terms of your geographic location, or whichever mirror you feel like choosing at random. The file itself seems to cause a good deal of confusion among most people. Named something like rp8_linux20_libc6_i386_cs1.bin, most people seem to automatically assume they made some sort of mistake, as they are assuming a .tar.gz loaded full of README files and the like. The bin file is, in fact, the binary package itself in an executable form. You will need to make it executable:

```
chmod u+x rp8_linux20_libc6_i386_cs1.bin
```

And then execute the file to install the Real Player.

```
./rp8_linux20_libc6_i386_cs1.bin
```

This will, according to Real Networks, install the player and all it's required libraries. The process seems to work fairly well under my Debian test system, which is not officially listed as a distribution on the real.com site. A little hacking may be required to make it play with other flavors, and I should point out that a RPM version is also available.

So, assuming the binary installed itself and you can now execute realplay, the next step is to set up your browser to play with it auto-magically. Here we will cover the major browsers currently in use: Netscape 4.x, and Mozilla 0.8.

Netscape 4.x:

Select "preferences" from the Edit menu, and expand the Navigator tree. You should see the "Applications" category. Click it, and you should get a list of "helper applications" for use with certain mime types. Scroll through this list, and be on the lookout for "RealAudio" and/or "audio/x-pn-realaudio" on the Description side of the table.

If you have one of these types:

Select the Description, and click the "Edit" button. You should see:

Description: RealAudio
MIMEType: audio/x-pn-realaudio
Suffixes: ra,ram,rm

Note: By default, the .rm suffix is not set. Be sure to set it so you can play with newer real media files. Should you wish to have .mpeg and any other supported file format auto-magically handled by the Real Player, edit their MIME types and enter the Real Player path as the helper application.

Now, click the "Application" button beside the form field. Then, enter the path to the Real Player application. The default installation path is /usr/X11/bin/realplay.

A note on SMIL: A common problem which seems to happen under most unix installations of the Real Player is the inability to use SMIL or CGI-based Real Media content. This is generally due to Netscape incorrectly passing query string variables to the Real Player, or simply not passing them at all. The solution to this is to use the following string as your Application for the Real Media MIME Type.

/usr/X11/bin/realplay "%u"

This will pass the query string variables from the browser to Real Player, allowing it to play with SMIL and CGI-generated Real Media.

If you do NOT have one of these types:

You will have to add a MIME Type for Real Media. To do this, click the "New" Button and enter the following Information:

Description: RealMedia
MIMEType: audio/x-pn-realaudio
Suffixes: ra,ram,rm

Now click the Application button, and enter the following path as shown above:

/usr/X11/bin/realplay "%u"

Now click "OK" and restart your browser. When restarted, Netscape should recognize Real Media content and automatically pass it off to the Real Player, whether called in external or embedded mode.

Mozilla:

The process for setting up the Real Player with Mozilla is similar to Netscape 4.x.

Select "preferences" from the Edit menu, and expand the Navigator tree. You should now see the "Helper Applications" category. Click it, and you should get a list of "helper applications" for use with certain mime types. Scroll through this list, and be on the lookout for "audio/x-pn-realaudio" in the "File Types:" window.

If you have this mime type:

Select the Mime Type Name, and click the "Edit" button. You should see:

RM File

Extension: RM, RAM, RA

MIME Type: audio/x-pn-realaudio

Now, in the "Handled By" Area, enter the path as above in the NS 4.x example:

/usr/X11/bin/realplay "%u"

Uncheck the "Ask me before opening" option, and click "OK" and restart mozilla.

If you do NOT have one of these types:

You will have to add a MIME Type for Real Media. To do this, click the "New" Button and enter the following Information:

Description of type: Real Media
File extension: rm, ram, ra
MIME type: audio/x-pn-realaudio
Application to use: /usr/X11/bin/realplay "%u"

Then click "OK" and restart Mozilla.

Testing it:

Assuming all went well, you should now be able to open and play any supported media format with the Real Player. Streaming and other formats can easily be tested at the handy page the folks at Mozilla have set up.

So what if something blows up?

Can't get Real Player to work with your distro or hardware? Well, Real Networks has provided a forum for such troubleshooting discussions. Registration is required, however it seems that actual Real Networks people do answer questions fairly regularly, even if they do dance around certain issues (FreeBSD builds, etc).

Want more?

Check the sysadmin section for the second part of this article, Installing Real Server for Linux. Making It Real - Part 2 - Installing Real Server for Linux. [From Linux.Com]