

# Sharing Photos with Friends, on Ubuntu!

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Ever notice how a simple, common task like sharing photos with friends and family is still a mystery to many people? With digital cameras in nearly every device you can buy, from phones to computers to media players, and the Internet being ubiquitous all over the world, sharing photos is something that everyone wants to do at some point, so it should be easy, quick, and effortless.

With Ubuntu Linux, there are many ways to get this task done, from popular web sharing services to homebrew websites. This article will examine each option, and the many ways that Linux offers to make most of them even easier. Yes, it's true, your new OS will actually make repetitive tasks easier – how often does that happen? Well, with Linux you'll find it's pretty common.

## Web Services

The most obvious (and yet, in some ways, the most problematic) choices for photo sharing are the latest web services offered from Flickr, Google Picasa, and Facebook. Each of these services make it fairly easy to share photos online by simply navigating to their site and using their uploader to send your photos to their server, publishing them for the world (or just your friends; it's usually up to you in your account's privacy settings) to see.

These web services are pretty popular and the more people who learn how to use them, the more people around to help other people who don't yet know how they work, and so the web service grows. They work because they achieve the end goal quickly: they get your photos on the Internet.

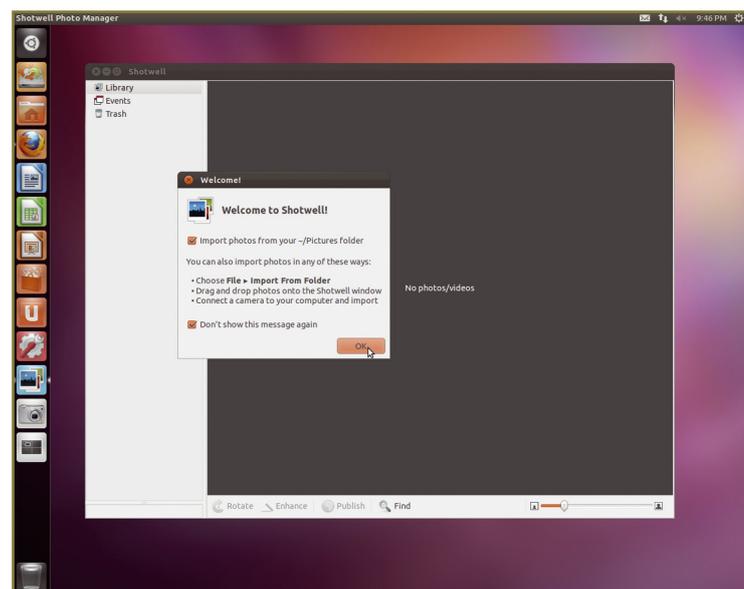
The problem with these services is that they all require membership to post, and their membership agreements are too long for people to read so most people just join blindly. So not only have you signed up for a service with-

out realizing that you are giving the website permission to re-use your photos in advertising, or cancel your account (and your data) without notification, but you're loading your personal photographs onto someone else's server. In other words, you're handing over your personal data, art work, and, in many ways, your life (at least your digital life), to a company you know nothing about.

Some people don't care so much about that. In this case, you can use these services by either going to their website and posting your pictures via their web interface, or you can post to many of them via Shotwell, the photo management application bundled along with Ubuntu.

## Shotwell

Every time you dump a folder of pictures from your camera (or phone or media player, etc.),



**Figure 1.** When starting Shotwell, you can opt to import all pictures from your Pictures directory, or import them manually

## ■ Sharing Photos

you should place the folder in your Pictures directory. You could look through all of your photos in the file manager, but it's probably more convenient and more powerful to use a photo management tool, like Shotwell.

Launch Shotwell via the launcher screen by hitting the Windows key on your keyboard and typing in *Shotwell*. The first time you launch Shotwell, it will scan your Pictures directory for pictures, and it will import them all into the Shotwell photo library, organizing them into Events. You can filter your photos by Event, or you can view them all at once.

To post any collection of photos to the web service of your choice, simply select the photos, click the *File* menu at the top of the screen (it will not appear until you mouse over the top bar), and choose *Publish*. Choose which service you'd like to publish to, log in to your account, and publish. All that without opening a web browser!

### Ubuntu One and Dropbox

Ubuntu has its own set of web services, available either for free or for a modest cost. If you pay for it, you get more storage space but otherwise the plans are identical in features and functionality.

This is, in theory, an effective way of sharing photographs, and anything else you might need to distribute to friends, and even backing up your own data, syncing important configuration files and bookmarks between computers, and more.

Unfortunately, its implementation leaves quite a bit to be desired. Signing up for Ubuntu One is quite easy, and you get 5 Gb of data storage right away. The service seems to work fairly well from the moment you join, although you don't get much feedback about the progress of synchronization or what exactly is possible with your new cloud storage.

What absolutely does not seem to work is the actual sharing of your data with the rest of the Internet. Even though it claims you can "publish" your photos to the web, and even though it gives you a web URL to give out to friends, the resulting web location rendered a blank page with this single error message: "Could not locate object". None of the Ubuntu One support channels were able to explain this or even offered ideas, and in fact one user even suggested a competitor: Dropbox.

Dropbox has a few years of cloud-based storage experience, and works quite well on all platforms. You are able to share photos and files in easy-to-use and attrac-

tive web galleries or web browser based file managers.

To install Dropbox, go to <http://www.dropbox.com> and download the installer for Ubuntu. Firefox will offer to open the installer in the Ubuntu Software Center; allow it to do so, and click through the installer.

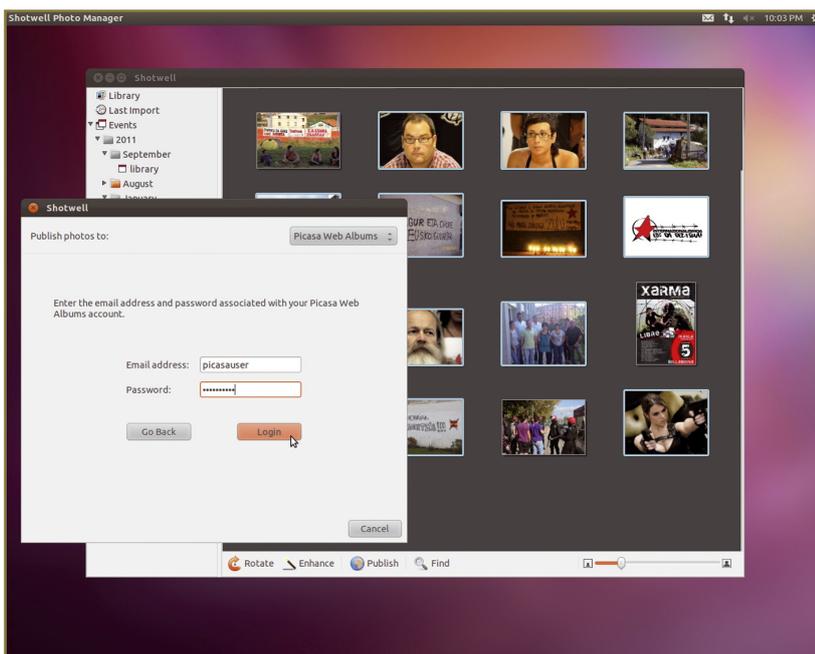
After installation, you'll see a Dropbox icon in the upper right of your desktop. That's a link to a special dropbox folder on your computer; anything you place in the dropbox folder will be synchronized to the Dropbox servers but it will remain private (or at least as private as something you're putting on someone else's server can be). Anything you place into Dropbox's Public or Photos folders will not only be synchronized to the Dropbox servers, but it will also have a link that will allow your guests to use to look at the files.

Once the photographs have synchronized to the web, go to [dropbox.com/photos](http://dropbox.com/photos) and log in. You'll see the folders you've made in the Photos directory in their gallery form. And at the top of the page, a public link is generated so that you can give that to your friends and family so they'll be able to look at your photos without having your login information.

Since it's available for so many platforms, Dropbox is a simple way to get your photos out to all of your friends. It also makes it seamless and easy to take photos off the web when you're finished sharing them; simply move them out of the Dropbox Photos directory and they're no longer accessible over the internet. And never do they have to be accessible to everyone on the Internet; you can always require a password to even access the photographs. Other services offer something similar to this, but some tend change policies frequently, or their security practices are questionable at best.

### Coppermine

Finally, the ultimate in control is to create your own photo sharing space. Believe it or not, this is much easier than you'd think, made possible by the plethora of free software out there that has already set up the framework for you.



**Figure 2.** Publish select photos to the web directly from Shotwell

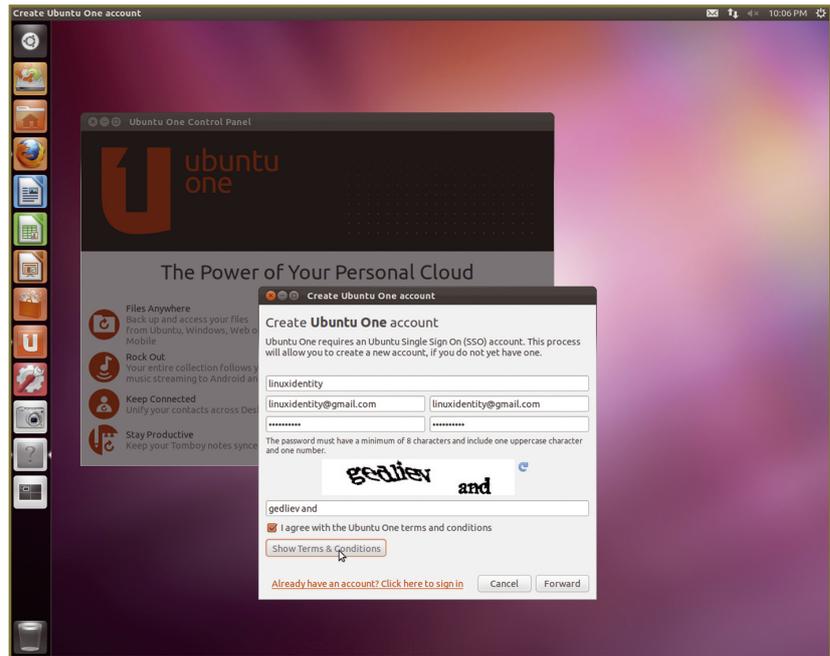
To create your own photo sharing site, that will not only let you post your own photographs, set privacy options, maintain all copyrights to all of the photos, and even let your family and friends sign up for accounts of their own so that they can also share photos back, you only need three things:

- a domain name, i.e., *myphotos.me*,
- a web host; that is, a server that will hold the photos and website,
- a photo sharing framework, like Coppermine.

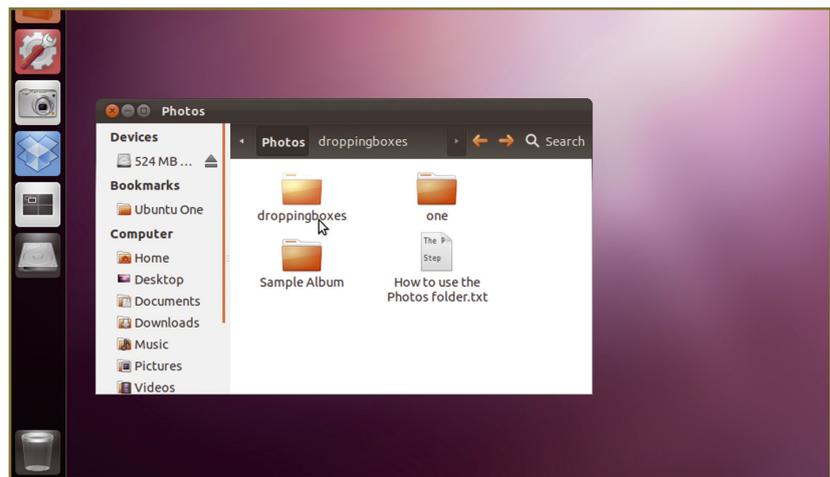
Luckily, all three of these things can be obtained through the same company, more or less all in one step. First, you'll want to find a web hosting provider; there are a lot out there, including *wiredtree.com*, *bluehost.com*, *hostgator.com*, *mediatemple.com*, *1and1.com*, and many many more. All of them offer beginner, low level accounts that give you the basics for a very reasonable fee.

Purchase the domain name that you want, purchase a hosting plan (make sure you're posting a Linux plan and not a Windows plan!), and then sign into your account. All of the companies I've listed feature one-click installs for all the popular software. This means that you may browse their application store and choose what web framework you'd like for them to install; you can install a number of different applications, from Wordpress for blogging, Drupal for multi-user websites, and Coppermine or Gallery for photo sharing. There may be other choices; do some research to decide which one is best for you and your family and friends.

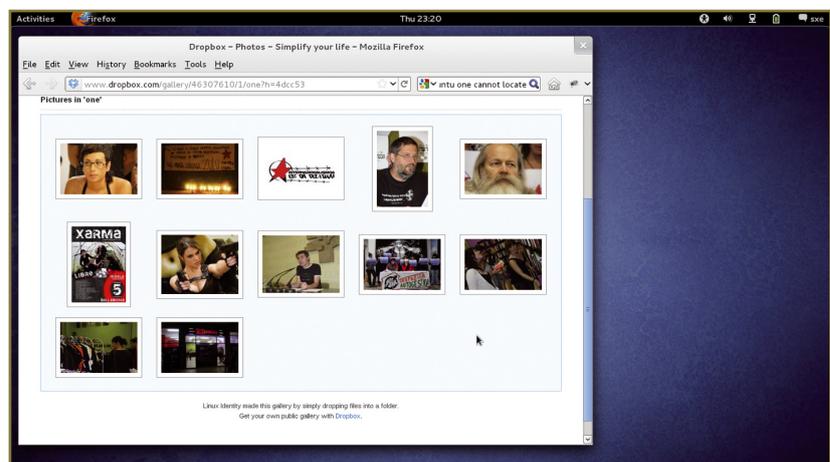
Once you've installed the application, your photo sharing site is live! You can go to the URL your host will provide you, sign in, and start uploading photos. Most photo sharing frameworks will allow you to set different levels of permission, or require for users to login in order to see the photos at all. There are no hidden terms of service or licenses;



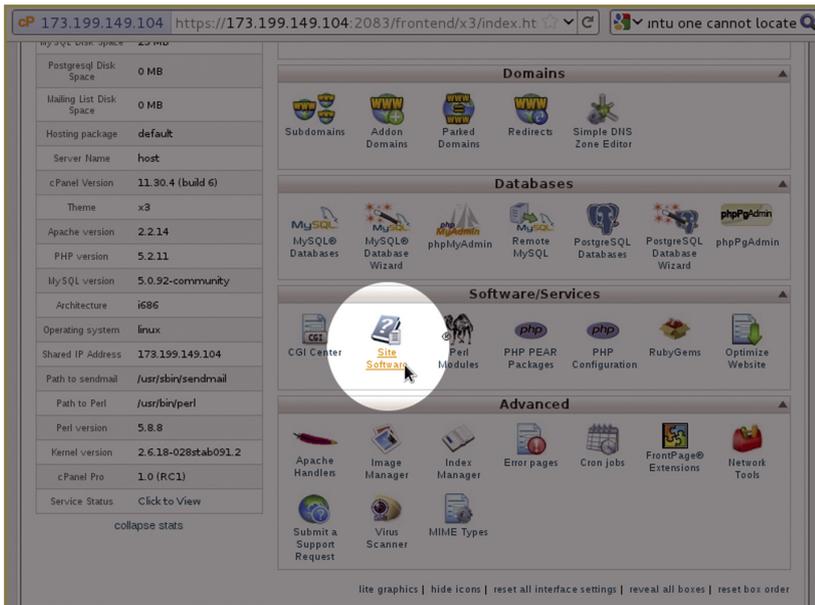
**Figure 3.** Signing up for Ubuntu One is easy. After that, it unfortunately gets progressively less user-friendly



**Figure 4.** Creating a web gallery in Dropbox is as easy as dragging and dropping



**Figure 5.** Browsing photographs by *www\_ukberri.net* in a Dropbox public gallery



**Figure 6.** A common, generic control panel for a web host, with a Site Software installer

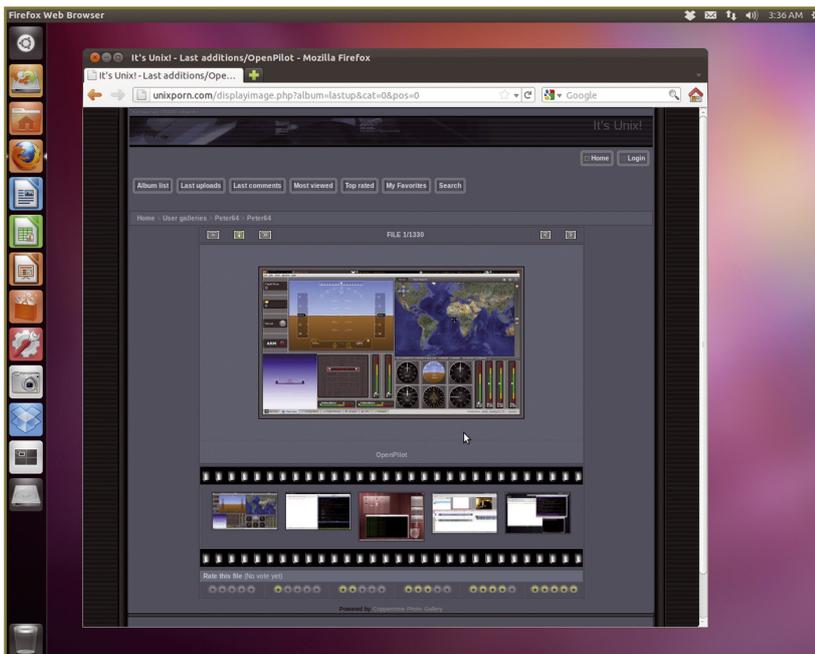
you own every bit of content on your own site, right down to the harddrive slice on the server.

### Photo Sharing and Security

The problem with monolithic social sites that encourage users to post photos and every aspect of their life to the site is that a user slowly builds an online portfolio with every detail of their life, for anyone to view. It's a centralized service, so if that

service is breached, then everyone stands to lose.

If you've got your own site, it has the same likelihood of being compromised, but it has a few advantages: it is its own target, rather than a potential by-stander among a million other targets all congregating in one place, it has its own security policies, and it is controlled and managed by you rather than, well, whoever controls the popular social networks.



**Figure 7.** A personal web gallery with a one-click install. Complete with ranking, user accounts, and a comment system

Regardless of where you post your photographs, remember that the Internet is, essentially, one big shared computer. Your photos are no longer truly private once you post them to the Internet (this includes, believe it or not, emailing photos). So be sure that the photos you are sending are pictures you'd be fine with everyone in the world seeing, and remember that the world is a big place.

### Owning Your Web

Of all the solutions, hosting your photo sharing site yourself is probably the most empowering. It will de-mystify the web for you, give you all of the control of your own data, and start you down a D.I.Y. path that could lead you anywhere. The site *unixporn.com* (now also called *unixpuppies.info* for sensitivity reasons) features screenshots of different Linux and Unix desktops. The site was originally built entirely on a one-click install of Coppermine on a zero-configure server account from a popular webhost. Since then, the site has become so popular among Unix and Linux geeks that it has received free hosting and has had multiple upgrades and improvements as its admins have learned more about building and designing websites, and even has its own app to help users take quick screenshots and automatically upload the pic to the site.

You also get full say in how your photographs will be re-used. For instance, you might be fine with people using your vacation photos of snow-tipped mountains as long as they attribute you as photographer, while you may not want anyone to use pictures of your family members for any purpose at all. With your own site, you have the ability to specify those copyright licenses; other sites might either limit your ability to dictate how photos may be used, or else limit the number of photos you're allowed to upload.

Realizing that the Internet is just one big Linux computer is just one of the ways your world is about to be expanded by GNU Linux. Enjoy! ■