



Single Product Review



ESET NOD32 Antivirus 4 for Linux Desktop

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Table of Contents



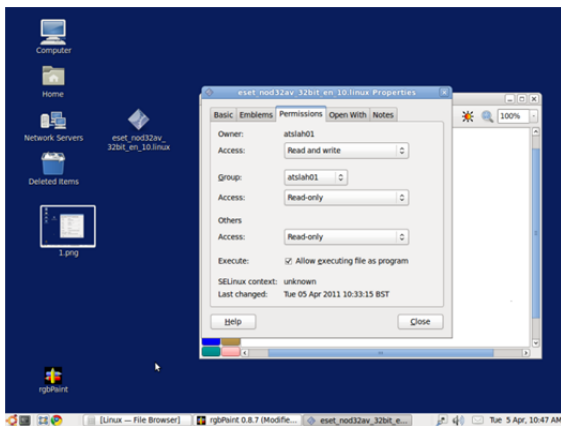
Introduction	3
Installation	3
Program Interface	4
Reaction to malware detection	6
Uninstalling the program	7
Manual	7
Summary	7

Introduction

The growing availability of free, user-friendly Linux operating systems for desktop and laptop PCs means that anti-malware solutions for Linux are becoming more important. Security software for Linux is needed not only to protect the computer itself, but also to prevent malicious code aimed at other systems, such as Windows, being passed through the system. To counter such threats, ESET have released ESET NOD32 Antivirus 4 for Linux Desktop. For our review, we installed version 4.0.66.0 on 32-bit Ubuntu Desktop Edition version 10.04. ESET also make a separate version for 64-bit Linux systems.

Installation

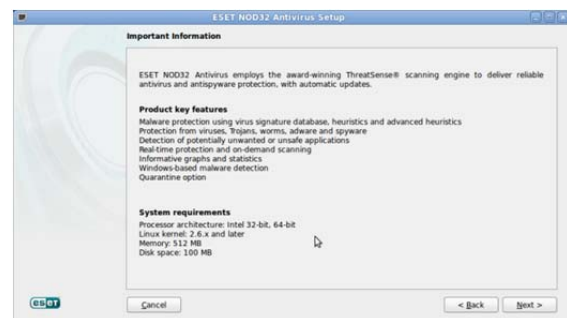
ESET's manual makes clear a small but vital configuration step needed for a setup file downloaded from the Internet. It is necessary to right-click the file, select Properties, Permissions, and tick the box entitled "Allow executing file as a program", as shown below:



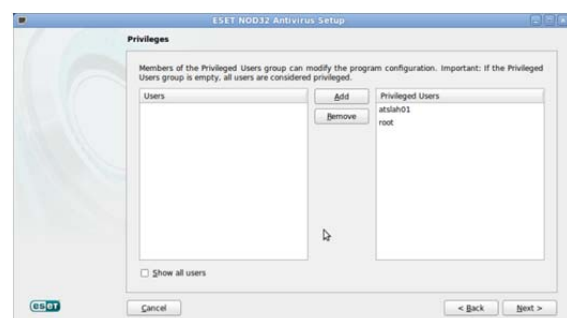
We take this step, and the installation program springs into life when the .linux file is double-clicked. The Welcome page of the setup wizard tells us to uninstall any existing antivirus software to avoid conflicts, and provides a brief overview of the installation and activation process:



The next step gives information about the scope of NOD32, and the system requirements:

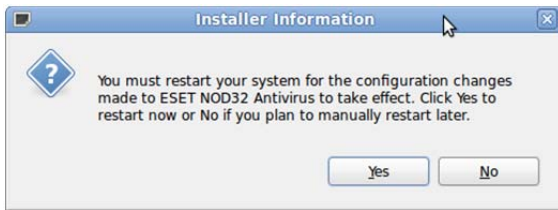


After this comes the obligatory acceptance of the licence agreement, followed by a choice of Typical or Custom installation; we choose Custom, to see the extent of the options available. This gives us the chance to enter details of a proxy server if used, and to list "Privileged Users" who will have admin rights for configuring the program:

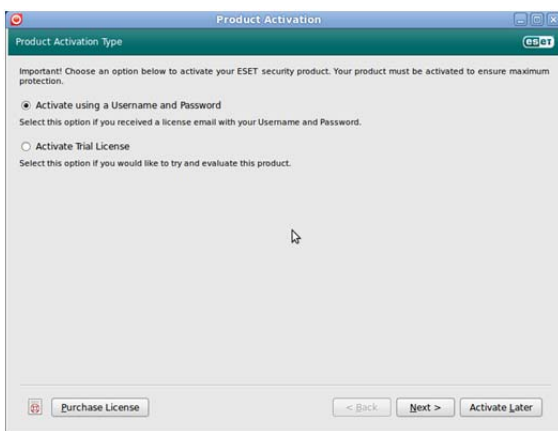


After this, the setup wizard asks whether Threat Sense should be enabled; this is ESET's method of gathering information about malware, via submission of suspicious files from the user's PC to the manufacturer, for analysis. The next step is a choice of whether NOD32 should detect "Potentially Unwanted Applications". After this, installation begins. The process completes very quickly, and the

wizard invites us to complete the installation by restarting the computer:



On rebooting, we are greeted with the ESET activation window. This allows us to activate an already-purchased licence, or use a trial licence to test the product:

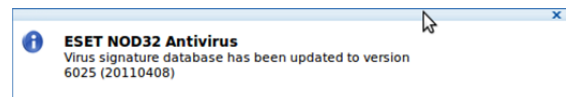


We choose to enter an existing licence key for our test. ESET's Unilicence model allows a key purchased for a Windows or Mac antivirus version of NOD32 to be used for the Linux version, and indeed the Windows licence key we enter works perfectly for our Linux program. We then see the main program window of NOD32, showing the virus signature update progress bar:



Unfortunately, the heading at the top of the page states "Virus signature database failed", which may alarm inexperienced users. We

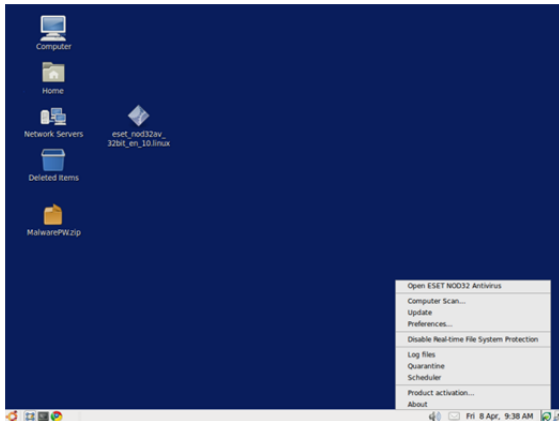
assume that like the Windows version, the NOD32 for Linux attempts to update as soon as the computer starts, meaning that the first attempt would have taken place before the licence key was entered. The second update attempt finishes very quickly, and a typical ESET small message box appears to inform us that the product is up to date:



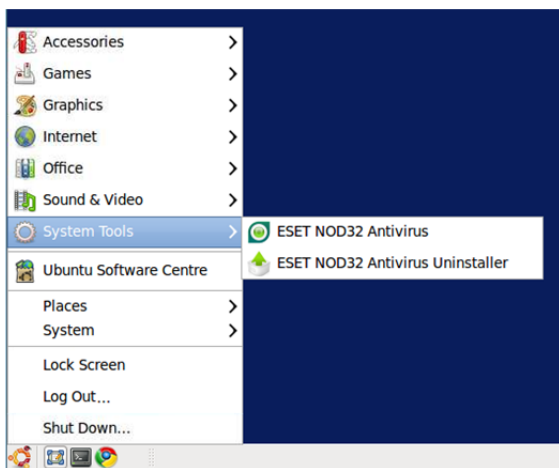
The program is now installed and has the latest signatures. We found the installation process to be simple and straightforward, with the sensible choice of a custom setup for advanced users. It would be plain sailing for anyone who is familiar with Windows installation programs, especially if they have ever installed NOD32 for Windows.

Program Interface

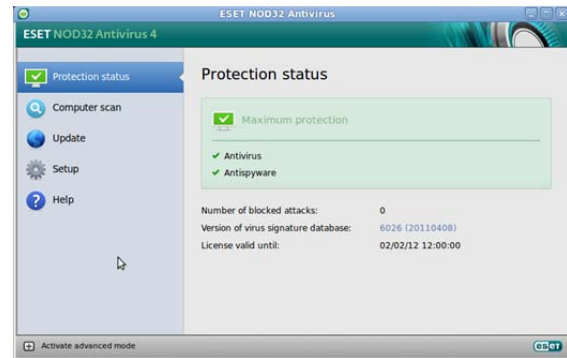
As with its Windows Version, ESET creates a system tray icon for NOD32 in Linux (please see screenshot below). In our Ubuntu 10.04 installation, we found that single-clicking the tray icon would open the NOD32 window; clicking again would then close it. Consequently, double-clicking the icon makes the program window appear for a second and then disappear! This may be confusing for some Windows users at first, but must be regarded as one of the things they have to get used to when using a Linux system. The NOD32 system tray icon can also be right-clicked to produce a useful context menu:



The ESET installer also creates menu items for NOD32 in the applications menu, System Tools folder:



The main program window will be instantly familiar to anyone who has used ESET NOD32 or Smart Security for Windows, being virtually identical to its Windows counterpart. For the benefit of those who are new to ESET programs, the layout of NOD32 for Linux is extremely simple and clear. The window opens on the Protection Status page, which shows “Maximum Protection” if real-time protection is working, signatures are up to date, and there are no other warnings. The same page shows the number of blocked attacks, version of the virus signature database, and the expiry date of the licence:



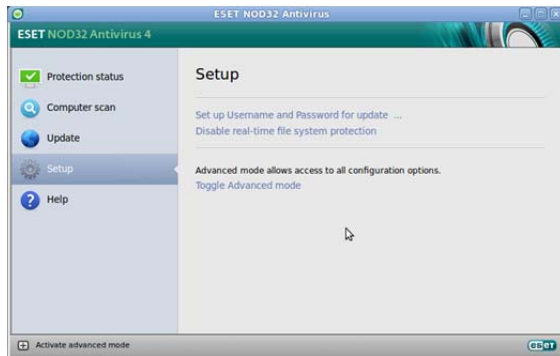
To see how the status page reacts when there is a problem, we switch off real-time protection. The status display immediately changes to “Maximum protection is not ensured” in red, with a link to start the real-time protection:



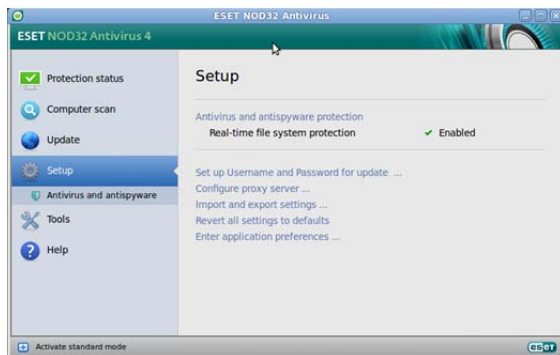
Clicking on the link immediately reactivates the protection.

The left-hand pane of the main window is a very simple menu bar, containing the items Protection Status, Computer Scan, Update, Setup, and Help. Computer Scan not surprisingly allows the user to scan the computer, with the options Smart Scan and Custom Scan, the latter giving the choice of disks and folders to be scanned. Unfortunately, as with the Windows version, there is no means of setting a scheduled scan from the Standard Mode. Update enables the user to run a manual update of virus signatures, and displays the date and time of the last successful update, as well as the version number of the signature database last downloaded. This page also displays the licence key being used, and allows this to be changed via a link entitled “Username and Password setup”. Clicking on the Setup menu also allows the username and password for the licence key to be changed, as well as allowing

real-time protection to be disabled, and giving a link to Advanced Mode:



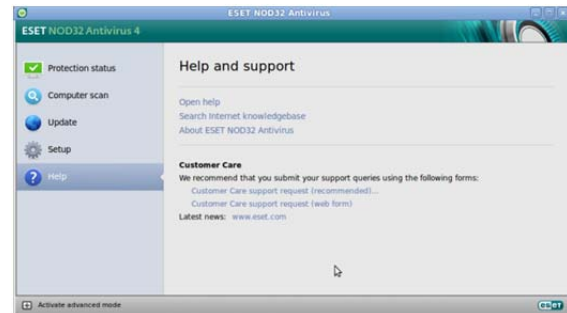
Advanced Mode gives experienced users extended configuration options, and can be activated from using a permanent link in the bottom left-hand corner of the window, as well as the Setup page. Activating Advanced Mode provides a number of additional options on the Setup page, a submenu entitled “Antivirus and antispysware”, a submenu to Protection Status entitled Statistics, and a main Tools menu:



The Tools menu provides options for viewing log files, quarantined items, and scheduled tasks. We find the easily toggled Standard Mode/Advanced Mode an ideal way of providing less experienced users with a very clear, simple interface that enables them to find the essentials quickly, whilst giving advanced users easy access to more sophisticated tools.

The Help page of the program has links to the html-based local help files, ESET’s Internet knowledge base, and program information

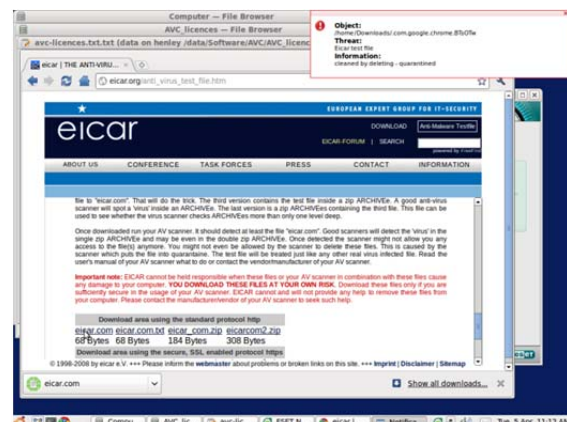
(“About”). It is also possible to submit a support request from this page.



We are pleased to see that when we adjust the screen resolution of our test system to 640x480 pixels, the NOD32 program window resizes itself, leaving all features fully accessible and useable, even in Advanced Mode. The program could thus be used comfortably on a netbook.

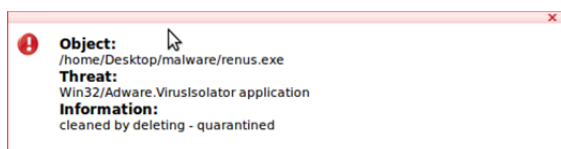
Reaction to malware detection

To see how antimalware programs for Windows react when a threat is discovered, we attempt to download the EICAR test file, a harmless string of characters which antivirus programs are normally programmed to recognise as a virus, for testing purposes. We tried this test with NOD32 for Linux, and noted that it reacted exactly as its Windows counterpart would, by quarantining the file and displaying a pop-up message to this effect:



The principal function of an antivirus program for Linux must of course be to protect against malware specifically designed to attack Linux

systems. However, an antivirus program which only stopped Linux-specific malware would enable the Linux system to act as a conduit for passing on the much more common Windows malware, e.g. if the user were to forward an email containing a Windows-specific Trojan. Clearly, a socially responsible manufacturer of Linux antivirus software would enable the program to recognise and remove Windows malware as well, even though it presented no threat to the system in question. In the NOD32 for Linux manual, ESET state “ESET NOD32 Antivirus includes the ability to deflect Windows threats, protecting Linux users as they interact with Windows users and vice versa”. In a very simple experiment to see how NOD32 for Linux would react to Windows malware, we copy 5 executable files from Windows rogue antivirus programs, which are detected by NOD32 for Windows, onto our Linux test machine. We are pleased to note that ESET’s Linux program detects and quarantines all of these files, just as the Windows version would do:



This very simple test MUST NOT be taken as any indication of the overall ability of NOD32 for Linux to detect and remove Windows malware, but would support ESET’s claim that it has not limited its virus signatures for its Linux program to Linux-specific malware.

Uninstalling the program

ESET NOD32 Antivirus 4 for Linux Desktop is very simple to remove from the computer. In the program’s folder in the applications menu there is a link to the uninstaller, which quickly and easily removes the program in just a few clicks. There is the opportunity to submit feedback to ESET as to why you are uninstalling the program, but this is optional.

Manual

ESET NOD32 for Linux includes a detailed 22-page manual which can be downloaded in .pdf format. This has 6 sections, including an introduction to the program and system requirements; an installation guide; a beginners’ guide to the Standard Mode interface; working with the program, i.e. performing essential tasks such as scanning and rectifying status problems; advanced user options, useful for administrators of business networks; and a glossary.

The manual is comprehensive, and explains very effectively all aspects of program installation, configuration and use. The glossary is a very well-written, clear guide to the major types of malware and what to do if they are detected on your computer. This is something every computer user should read, regardless of which operating system or security software they use.

Summary

With ESET NOD32 Antivirus 4 for Linux Desktop, ESET have retained all the excellent features of the Windows version. The program is easy to install, and it provides a clear, simple interface for beginners, with one-click access to more advanced options for advanced users. It is apparent that this Linux version not only protects the system against Linux-specific malware, but also detects Windows malware, thus preventing attacks on other systems being passed through unchallenged.