The VirtualBox Guest Additions and Linux distributions

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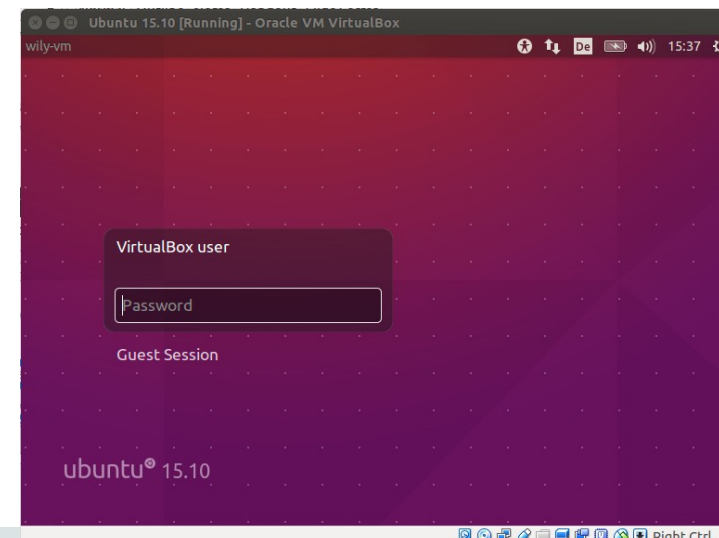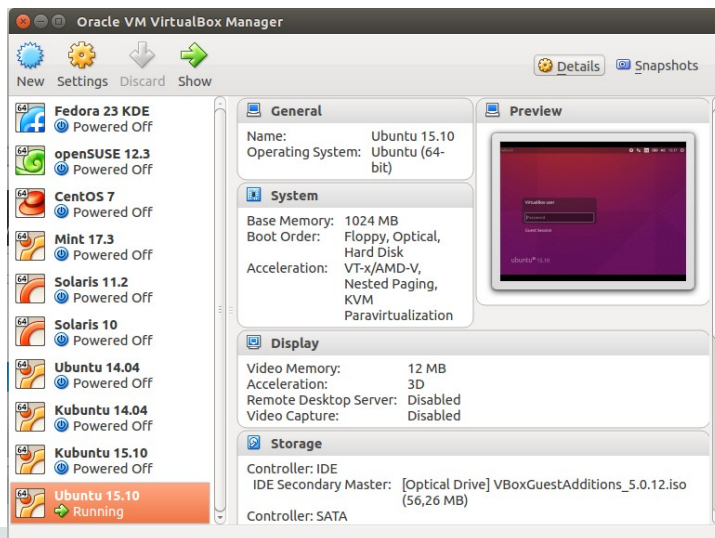
What is VirtualBox?

- A "cross-platform virtualisation application" (VirtualBox User Manual) for x86 on x86

- Aims for easy-to-use virtualisation (oxymoron?)

- Mainly targets desktop users

What are the VirtualBox Guest Additions?

- Drivers and tools which run in virtual "guest" systems
- Make working with guests more convenient, and give access to host resources
- Example: synchronise guest and host pointers
- Example: script guest applications from host
- Example: accelerate 3D rendering in a guest

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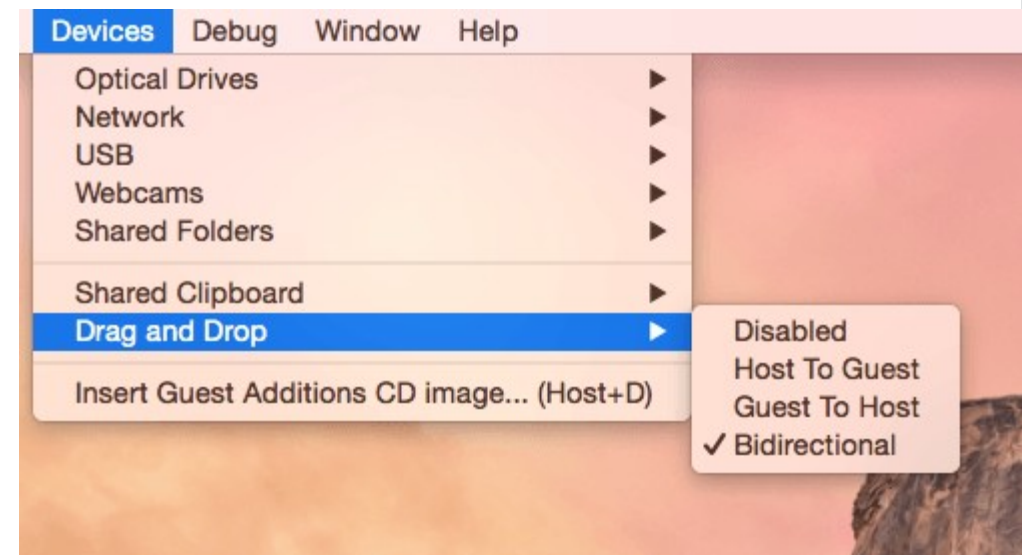
Why do distributions want to package the Guest Additions?

- Having Guest Additions installed by default makes the distribution nice to use in a virtual machine.

- Distribution developers are virtual machine users.

- "Because we can"?
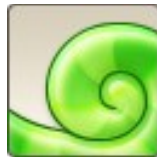
Why should that cause difficulties?

- The Guest Additions are regularly updated to use new VirtualBox features.

- But distributions are not consistent about updating them if they do it at all, especially older distributions.

- Supporting older distributions is a key selling point.

- And installing "our" Guest Additions on top of distribution ones is (probably) a bad idea.

```
You appear to have a version of the VirtualBox Guest Additions software
on your system which was installed from a different source or using a
different type of installer.  If you installed it from a package from your
Linux distribution or if it is a default part of the system then we strongly
recommend that you cancel this installation and remove it properly before
installing this version.  If this is simply an older or a damaged
installation you may safely proceed.

Do you wish to continue anyway? [yes or no]
```

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What are the good sides for us?

- Having Guest Additions pre-installed really is a nice user experience.

- Distributions are better at packaging things than we are.

- Someone else can test that things work well.

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So what can we do to improve the situation?

- At the moment we do not have a master plan.

- So let's go through the ideas which come to mind...

- … and see what a room-full of distribution experts can do with them!

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Solution 1: ask users to remove distribution Guest Additions first.

- Works now

- Pretty fool-proof

- But terrible user experience

Solution 2: let it be the distributions' problem

🧘

- Also works now

- But may also not be as good an experience as we would like

- Especially not if the distribution provides a very old version of the Additions

Solution 3: support multiple parallel installations

- Needs some sort of agreed selection mechanism

- I doubt distributions will like this much though

- Distributions like to put kernel modules into initrds and kernel packages (but they can be unloaded at service start)

Solution 4: you tell me!

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