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Elegantly Disabling PulseAudio in Ubuntu 10.04

Submitted by Jeff250 on Sat, 08/01/2009 - 18:00

PulseAudio is a controversial addition to Ubuntu. PulseAudio is a userspace sound daemon that brings many benefits to users, but it is also problematic for others as well. For instance, many experience audio latency issues and stuttering with it. I've opted to disable it in Ubuntu. The longer I've been around, the more I've discovered that there really is no truly elegant way of disabling PulseAudio in Ubuntu, but I hope that this guide is one of the more elegant.

By the time you've finished this guide, you'll have disabled the PulseAudio server and made gstreamer unaware of PulseAudio in Ubuntu 10.04. This is sufficient for almost all applications—certainly everything that I've ever used—but some may have other ways of detecting PulseAudio that might require additional steps to disable that are not in this guide.

To disable the PulseAudio server and gstreamer's awareness of it, we are going to do two things:

1. Tell the packaging system to always rename any file in a package named `/usr/bin/pulseaudio` to `/usr/bin/pulseaudio.ubuntu` and `/usr/lib/gstreamer-0.10/libgstpulse.so` to `/usr/lib/gstreamer-0.10/libgstpulse.so.ubuntu`. This prevents the pulseaudio daemon from running and gstreamer applications from being aware of it.
2. Put in our own dummy `/usr/bin/pulseaudio` file

To do that, we can run the following four commands:

```
sudo dpkg-divert --add --divert /usr/lib/gstreamer-0.10/libgstpulse.so.ubuntu --rename /usr/lib/gstreamer-0.10/libgstpulse.so.ubuntu /usr/lib/gstreamer-0.10/libgstpulse.so
sudo dpkg-divert --add --divert /usr/bin/pulseaudio.ubuntu --rename /usr/bin/pulseaudio.ubuntu /usr/bin/pulseaudio
sudo sh -c 'echo '\''#!/bin/sh'\'' > /usr/bin/pulseaudio'
sudo chmod a+x /usr/bin/pulseaudio
```

Note that there are no double quotes in the above—they are all single quotes, sometimes adjacent.

Finally we need to make sure that gstreamer uses ALSA instead of PulseAudio. Run:

```
gstreamer-properties
```

and set everything from PulseAudio to ALSA.

As of Ubuntu 10.04, the `ubuntu-desktop` metapackage also depends on `libsdl1.2debian-pulseaudio`, but we want `libsdl` applications (games, typically) to use `alsa` instead. To do this, we can trick the package management system into thinking we have `libsdl1.2debian-pulseaudio` installed by installing the following dummy package: [libsdl1.2debian-pulseaudio-dummy_1.0_all.deb](#). You can save it somewhere and double-click it to install it or, in a terminal, type

```
sudo dpkg -i libsdl1.2debian-pulseaudio-dummy_1.0_all.deb
```

...in the directory where you saved it.

After you have installed the dummy package, now type the following:

```
sudo apt-get install libsdl1.2debian-all
```

This should automatically remove the real `libsdl1.2debian-pulseaudio` package, keeping the dummy, and installing a `libsdl` library that includes `alsa` support.

If you want to restore the ALSA volume controls in `gnome-panel`, use a third party repository (not maintained by myself) by adding the following lines to your `/etc/apt/sources.list` file:

```
deb http://ppa.launchpad.net/dt1131/ppa/ubuntu lucid main
deb-src http://ppa.launchpad.net/dt1131/ppa/ubuntu lucid main
```

Add the key for the repository by running this command:

