Communicating with Others

Being online is all about staying in touch, and Ubuntu is no slouch in this regard. Ubuntu offers a wide range of applications, including a full-featured e-mail program, called Evolution, as well as an instant messaging client called Empathy, which allows you to connect to the most popular instant messaging sites, such as GTalk and MSN.

You can install a Skype client that allows you to connect to the popular service to make voice and video calls to other Skype users or to telephones; and you can install an open source alternative to Skype called Ekiga.

Introducing Evolution

Evolution is considered the “official” GNOME desktop e-mail program, and the Evolution interface retains the same look and feel as many elements of the Ubuntu desktop.

Evolution is similar to Microsoft Outlook: in addition to being a powerful e-mail client, it incorporates contact management, a calendar, a to-do list, and a memo function. It is a first-class business tool. Evolution is even able to connect to Microsoft Exchange (2000 and later) groupware servers and synchronize with contact and calendar data, in addition to fetching e-mail. Of course, it can also connect to standard POP3/SMTP e-mail servers, as well as IMAP, Novell GroupMail, and a handful of other mail server technologies. This means it is compatible with practically every e-mail system in common use today.

Evolution consists of five components: Mail, Contacts, Calendars, Memos, and Tasks. These are interconnected but operate as separate modes within the program. Each mode can be selected by using the switcher located at the bottom-left side of the program window. Simply click the button for the mode you wish to use. The program window, toolbar, and menu system will change to accommodate whichever mode is selected. Figure 14-1 shows the program in the default Mail mode.

Tip You can shrink the switcher component to small icons or even just text buttons by selecting from the choices on the View ➤ Switcher Appearance submenu.
Figure 14-1. You can switch between Evolution’s modes by clicking the buttons at the bottom left of the program window.

The five Evolution modes work as follows:

**Mail:** The e-mail component is at the heart of Evolution, and all the functions you might be used to are available here. After the Mail mode is selected, you’ll find the mail folders at the top left of the program window. These include the Inbox and Sent folders, along with any other mail folders you create. On the right is the list of e-mail messages, and beneath this is the message preview pane, where the body of any message you select will be displayed. Above the message list is the search box, which works like most e-mail search routines: type the relevant word(s) and press Enter. Notable icons running along the top of the window include the New button, which will let you compose an e-mail message, and the Send/Receive button, which will download new messages and also send any messages in the Outbox folder. By default, Evolution checks for new mail when the application is launched and every 10 minutes thereafter, though this behavior is configurable for each account under the Edit ➤ Preferences menu.

**Contacts:** Tied in with the mail function but acting as a separate and powerful entity on its own, Contacts mode lets you store every pertinent detail about colleagues, friends, and others. After the mode is selected, you’ll see the various contact folders at the left side of the program window. For most users, there will be just one, named Personal, but if you specified a groupware server during setup, you will also be able to connect to this by clicking its entry. You can also create new address books (e.g., if you have a collection of addresses for work and one for personal information). Simply right-click beneath the existing address book, select the New Address box, and fill out the form. The type On This Computer will create a new book on your machine. At the top right is the list of contacts. Clicking any contact displays that individual’s information at the bottom of the window, in