

## They're Popping Up Everywhere!

Breadbin Interactive's Freedom Toaster is a wonderful convergence of third-world problems and first-world technologies. This unusual union has resulted in an elegant and simple free-standing unit, containing Tactile Technologies' ELO TouchSystems monitors. These are now being avidly patronised and widely installed locally. The ultimate compliment is being paid internationally as it is being replicated all over the world. From Ethiopia to Saudi Arabia to India, Canada and beyond, more and more countries everyday are seeing these people-friendly touch screen information portals becoming part of their physical information landscapes. They're simply popping up everywhere.

The Shuttleworth Foundation began the Digital Content Distribution Initiative in an attempt to promote open source software, including Ubuntu, their highly successful local version of Linux. The Foundation initiated development and production of the original Toasters, with a view to carrying all open source software and selected free content, too. South Africa's expensive bandwidth makes it prohibitive for the very people who would draw the most benefit from Ubuntu, to get their hands on it. Like most operating systems, a comprehensive download can run to 700 megs, but now the platform can be acquired from a toaster, the perfect holdall dispenser solution.

Utilising the Rolls Royce of touch screen hardware, Tactile Technologies' Elo TouchSystems, the Toasters are rugged and robust and have the kind of functionality which, according to Brett Simpson of Breadbin Interactive, the Shuttleworth Foundation-established company which has been managing the now iconic Toasters, 'Work anywhere, all the time and are practically glitch free.' The Toasters are fixed to the floor so they are vandal proof too, and are fitted with the best of the best in peripheral hardware which, when combined with the preferred open source software, makes them into low-maintenance and trouble-free work horses. All they need is a conventional powerpoint.

A smaller countertop kiosk version of the toaster will be rolled out within the next month by Breadbin, which Brett Simpson says, 'Will have all the same features and functionalities but, being smaller, will be



significantly more versatile. It will be suitable for areas where space is at a premium, such as post offices and the like.'

Ironically one of the most successful toasters is not situated in a technological cul-de-sac like ours at all, but in Canada, a country without the problems the toaster was originally designed to address. Analysis indicates that the popularity of a toaster seems to be directly related to what software and media it dispenses, of which there is more and more every day. Music, videos, news, motivational interviews – and free software and applications for just about everything under the sun – can be posted into the toaster and retrieved just as easily. The beauty is that it can all be accomplished super quickly and totally securely, with none of the normal worries about viruses, connectivity or compatibility. All one needs is a USB memory stick or a blank disc, and a few spare minutes.

Freedom Toasters can now be found on most of South Africa's university campuses; UNISA alone have 30 specifically dedicated units, not to mention the 35 which they have just ordered. For UNISA, the Toasters have been a phenomenal success and have resulted in overhauls of their entire registration and resource distribution systems. Consequently, students now have the choice of whether or not to pay for hard copies of their course materials, download them from the Internet, or pop them out of the nearest Toaster. This alone has decreased paper consumption and carbon footprint considerably, now that only a fraction of the previous amount of material needs to be printed and physically posted to students.

Encouragingly, the Education Department of the Western Cape have ordered one too, which bodes well for all involved; clearly, news of the positive experiences of UNISA and others is spreading.

One can only guess at what the future holds, now that the One Laptop Per Child Initiative has changed their conventional laptop design into a hinged touch screen keyboard-cum-book; and seeing as Jeff Han, the inventor of the latest multi-touch screen, was listed as one of the most influential scientists of the year by Time magazine. Clearly, Tactile Technologies and Breadbin are right at the rock face and happy to be there too.

For more info on Breadbin, go [www.breadbin.co.za](http://www.breadbin.co.za).