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logrotate on a VPS: stopping log files from filling the disk

VPS & Servers

CODE

RLX-MZ-KB-1676

VERSION

v2026.10.15

COUNTRY · LANGUAGE

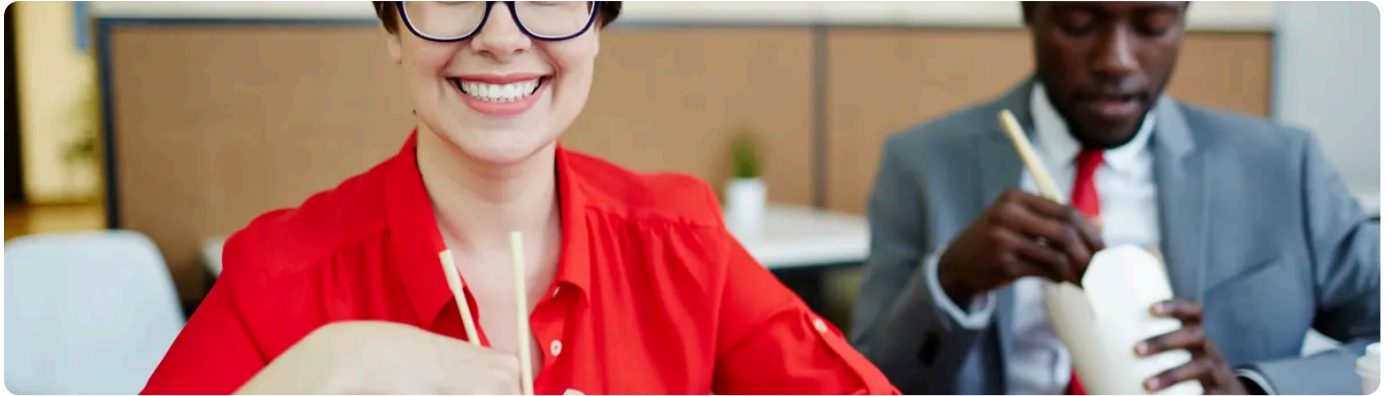
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RLX Holdings, S.A. · Group RLX Holdings

Tax ID (NUIT) 401 191 607 · Legal entity no. (NUEL) 105 045 974 · Economic activity code (CAE) 62022

<https://www.meu.interweb.co.mz/knowledgebase/1676>



The short answer: logrotate is the program that, every day, takes the log files, keeps the old ones compressed and starts a new one, deleting the oldest. The system services already come configured. **Yours** (an application, a script, a container) do not, and it is almost always one of those that fills the disk. A configuration file of half a dozen lines is enough.

On a VPS with root access, log housekeeping is yours. When the disk fills, the site and the database stop writing and strange errors begin. The symptom and the first step are in **No space left on device**.

First, find the fat file

- 1 List the biggest log files: `sudo du -ah /var/log | sort -rh | head -15`. Where each service keeps its logs is in **Where are the logs on a Linux VPS**.

- 2 See what the system **journal** takes: `journalctl --disk-usage`. To shrink it, `sudo journalctl --vacuum-size=200M` keeps only the most recent entries up to that size.

- 3 If you use containers, their logs live elsewhere: see **Docker filling the disk**.

How to rotate a log of your own

Create a file in `/etc/logrotate.d/` named after the application, for example `/etc/logrotate.d/my-app` , with this content (changing the path to that of your logs):

```
/var/log/my-app/*.log {  
weekly  
rotate 4  
compress  
delaycompress  
missingok  
notifempty  
copytruncate  
}
```

Line	What it does
<code>weekly</code>	Rotates once a week. <code>daily</code> and <code>monthly</code> also exist. To rotate by size, use <code>size 50M</code> .
<code>rotate 4</code>	Keeps four old files and deletes the oldest.
<code>compress</code> and <code>delaycompress</code>	Compresses the old ones, leaving the latest uncompressed for a program that may still be reading it.
<code>missingok</code> and <code>notifempty</code>	No error if the file is missing, and an empty file is not rotated.
<code>copytruncate</code>	Copies the log and empties the original, instead of renaming it. For programs that keep the file open and cannot open a new one.

Test before you trust it

1

A dry run that changes nothing: `sudo logrotate -d /etc/logrotate.d/my-app` . The `-d` shows what it would do, without doing it.

2

Force a rotation now: `sudo logrotate -f /etc/logrotate.d/my-app` . Then look at the folder: there should be a new file and a compressed one.

3

Let it run: the system calls logrotate once a day, by itself. You do not need to create a cron job for it.

Do not delete with `rm` a log that a program has open. The file disappears from the folder, but the space only comes back when the program closes it, and the disk stays full. To empty it without deleting use `sudo truncate -s 0 /path/to/log` .

For a container, the right limit is in Docker's own configuration: the maximum size and the number of files of each container's log. See **Running Docker on a VPS safely**. The commands in this article are yours: our support does not write them or repair them (see **How far our support goes**).

The VPS disk fills up and you cannot tell where from? Open a ticket with the output of the first command.

[Open a support ticket](#)

SEE ALSO

[No space left on device: finding what fills your VPS disk](#)

[Where are the logs on a Linux VPS](#)

[Docker filling the disk: images, volumes and logs](#)

[How to see what is using CPU, memory and disk on your VPS](#)



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TAX ID (NUIT)	401 191 607
LEGAL ENTITY NO. (NUEL)	105 045 974
ECONOMIC ACTIVITY CODE (CAE)	62022
REGISTERED OFFICE	Bairro 7 de Setembro Vilankulo 1304 • CEP 0411-02, Inhambane, Mozambique
CONTACT	info@interweb.co.mz • +258 84 635 1111 • +258 86 635 1111 • www.interweb.co.mz
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