

Why is the choice of distribution so important and contentious?

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I was just going to leave it at the question but, like an old washer woman, I just can't help yakking on...

Is a distro a distro a distro? Why would anyone care? I'm a distribution slut, quite happy to run any distribution that allows me to install and run my programs in the quickest and easiest possible way. I don't have the time to build everything from source on each kernel update. I need Linux, I don't really need a distribution but it just so happens that a distribution is the most convenient method of getting Linux installed without too much farting around. Once installed what do I run? Linux? No, on it's own Linux is just a platform for me to run the things that make me productive. Linux on it's own is, well, pants in terms of usefulness pertaining to my work.

MS and Apple don't sell their respective OS's because they run system operations, they sell a platform on which to run the things you need. If I install Ms/PC Dos what can I do with it. Run DIR a few times? Copy files? Send some text to a file on copy con? Delete a file? Ok, done all that, now what? Aha, I have to INSTALL some programs... Although lately the marketing has shifted to showing your apps running in nice, foil wrapped eye candy. Even the eye candy would be pretty useless without the apps to show running in it.

It is the applications available that make the operating system popular and not the operating system itself. So perhaps more attention should be given to the applications we have available in Linux and getting more apps ported from the other platforms. Taking the cream of the crop and making them better when running in whatever distribution tickles your fancy. Windows is still prolific because of the massive number of corporate installs and the huge slice of gaming home users. Port those games to Linux. Mr (or Mrs or Ms or Miss) average user couldn't give a toss if it's Linux, Windows or the fruity one (Linux will take precedent as it is cost free and the average user would give you the Homer Simpson "Huh?" look if you even whisper the word(s) OpenSource).

Well these are the apps that I spend most of my time in:

Oracle SQLDeveloper

Aqua DataStudio

Eclipse (J2EE with OC4J, perl, php, webdev, Java, Tcl)

Monodevelop

MySQL Query/Admin

Gambas2 (occasionally, quick prototyping)

Dia

Open Office

Gimp

Xara

Inkscape

Anjuta (c++, c)
SPE
Glade Interface Designer
Mplayer
Amarok (on gnome but who cares, I happen to like gnome and amarok)
Evolution (works for me, rsync to keep all computers up to date)
Firefox
amsn
Pidgin
TsClient
gFTP
battletanks
neverball/put (good fun with my macbook motion sensor)
warzone 2100
MobilityClient
Tacacs
Wireshark
SpamAssassin/Clam

plus the plethora of CLI tools, vi is my friend. He's an apt get that one!

All of these applications are installed regardless of Distribution and who keeps the default distro install setup anyway? As soon as I get one installed I make it look exactly like the other I have on my Vaio or Pavilion. The distribution differences seem to be wallpaper, colours, some graphics, usplash and fonts with a few apps thrown in so you can actually use it for something. No matter which distribution gets installed by the time I've added all the applications that I run, hung up my posters, made it look comfy and put my feet up on the shell coffee table I have effectively the same distribution as any other (barring one or two nice distro specific config apps that on the whole I would rarely use once everything is up and running).

So, asking again, why should I care about the distribution I run when, whichever one I choose to try, is customised to look like the previous? Or, am I really missing something here? Why is it that people are so passionate over their favourite?

Anyway I read Linux Format and built my own that installs all the above apps by default, sets the wallpaper and moves in the rest of my furniture and the dog too. Hopefully I won't have to create another for a while if I keep the kernel up to date. I'll keep up with the review reading though to find some useful utils, config apps etc. It would be helpful if reviews just mentioned what was useful instead of whining on about how the default colour scheme resembles a Martian struggling with a bad case of constipation.

As for the DW's (Distribution Whinger's), the old joke goes:

A man visits the doctors, waves his arm around and says, "Doc, it hurts when I do this".
The doctor looks up from his scribbles and replies, "Well don't do that then".

If you don't like the distribution you've installed then run another one or change it into something that you do like. Any colour so long as it is black?

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