

My Top 5 Distro Picks

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Seems a hot topic for internet journalists in the technology field is "which distro should you try." I read 'em and link to 'em, but I rarely agree with 'em. So, I decided to write my own "which distro should you try" article. As you might know, I download and [check out](#) [1] a few from time to time. I'm nothing nearing a Linux expert. However, if it's one thing I do have a lot of experience with, it's installing and checking out Linux distributions. I started testing Linux distros loong before I started my site. I started testing Linux back when there were only a few players in the field. I'm quite fortunate for my site's sake this is no longer the case. In fact, there are so many these days, what's a newbie to do?

If you start throwing out criteria, is this going to mean anything to a newcomer? Do you want a binary-based quick install with excellent package management? Do you want to use a Debian-based, Slackware-based, or rpm-based distro? Do you want to install one or one that can be run from a cd without having to repartition? Poor newbie...

For the sake of newcomers let me try to explain some of the differences, as best as I know them. Binary-based mean basically that it's a distro with packages already built and ready to install and use. This is a nice method if you are in a hurry and want to be up and running in short order. The main disadvantage is these packages are binaries and could theoretically contain anything. I never worried about this actually, trusting if anything malicious was ever included, someone much smarter than me would find it. Truth of the matter is, this bad situation could happen in source-based as well, until someone bothers to look at the code. How many of us actually look through source code before we compile it?

In my separation types in the above scenario, (Deb, slack, rpm based), I was referring mostly to package management? There are many other differences in these types of distros as well such as the init method, configuration methods, reading and location, and sometimes even directory structure and location of packages as well as their philosophies, goals and market.

As far as package management (software installers/uninstallers), these days and times, from a superficial outward appearance, the differences in those have diminished. They all have gui front-ends (or amazingly easy cli method) to install software while checking for and installing dependencies if and when needed. So, does it matter what kind of packages a particular distro uses? To tell you the truth, it doesn't mean beans to me anymore. As long as I can figure out how to use them and install what I want I'm good.

So what is our criteria then? I think a newcomer, or even an old hack, is looking for a nice looking distro that does the work without crashing out and causing data loss. You may look at some and find one just appeals to you more than another. Perhaps one has the applications you're accustomed to, or very similar. Maybe one interacts with your hardware better than another. It could come down to something as simple as eyecandy. Where do we wanna-be-journalists get off telling you which distro to use because when all is said and done, it comes down to pure preference?

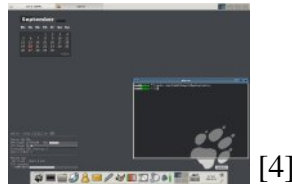
Well, we are asked from time to time. And our recommendations usually come down to which distros we "like". Which work for us? Which are stable on our hardware? Which have the applications or desktop environment *we* like?

So, which distros do I like?

In no real particular order:

- [Wolvix](#) [2]

This is a livecd based on slax/slackware that just blew me away. It has no hard drive installer right now and that's the biggest, and probably only, drawback I found with it. It was beautiful, complete and stable. No real configuration needed, it worked wonderfully out of the box. It configures the internet connection and other hardware for you and looks great doing it. It's light weight and can perform excellently on slightly older hardware. The menu is logical and contains an application for most of the basic end-user's needs. I like to think of Wolvix as functionality without complication. I highly recommend Wolvix. See my [full review here](#) [3].



- [PCLOS](#) [5]

PCLOS is a binary-based livecd/installable distro based on Mandriva, an rpm-based distro. PCLOS uses rpm as its package type and has a gui-front end for installation of packages. It is absolutely the most beautiful desktop in existence. If your main goal is the prettiest desktop around, this is the one to use. It's stable and functional. It comes with a lot of extras that newbies and lazy-folk (like me) don't want to set up themselves such as plugins for flash, java, and all sorts of media playing. It also has one of the most intuitive selection of applications in a distro out there, not to mention an ever expanding repository for other software. The head developer is accessible and works 24/7 for his users. This distro has a very active user forum, irc channel and mailing list to help anyone with any questions they have. It has a sexy graphical hard drive installer and is a wonderful choice. See my [full review here](#) [6].



- [Frugalware](#) [8]

Frugalware is another rpm-based binary distro. It derives from Redhat. I admit never being the big Redhat fan, but Frugalware was absolutely wonderful. It was very stable and complete. The install and use of Frugalware was one of the easiest, hassle-free experiences in my Linux tenure. It just worked. See my [full review here](#) [9], although an update or two has been released since that review and I suspect it's even better. Just look at a recent [screenshot here](#) [10].



[11]

- [Damn Small Linux](#) [12]

Damn Small Linux is a tiny distro with modest hardware requirements that is still very complete and easy to install and use. It features a graphical package manager, although it may not "look" quite like the others, it is still quite easy to figure out and navigate. It comes with an application for about every basic need and it very stable and pretty. I've reviewed this distro a coupla times, although they aren't on the latest and Damn Small is one distro that releases often and releases a much better version each time. This is a wonderful choice. My reviews are [here](#) [13] and [here](#) [14].



[15]

- [SuSE Linux](#) [16].

SuSE is another binary-based and super-duper easy install. They use rpm for their software packages with a wonderful graphical front-end. I find it stable, complete, and widely supported. A newcomer or an old hack alike can't really go wrong with SuSE Linux. I've done numerous reviews of this following their latest development cycle. This [review](#) [17] might give you some idea of what it's like and it links to the other reviews for more information as well.



[18]

This turned out to be a much harder article to write than I first anticipated. There are so many nice distributions out there and I have so many favorites, but I had to stick to the subject: Which would be the easiest for a newcomer to install and/or use. Too many of my very favorites are not that user-friendly or still have a few issues. Then there's the issue of many being left out of my repertory of reviews or experience altogether such as Knoppix, Mepis and Ubuntu. And then there's the subjective factor. The ones I'd pick may not be the ones someone else with equal or more experience would pick. In any case there ya are, these are my top 5 picks for an user-friendly experience.

Source URL: <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/2867>

Links:

[1] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/337>

[2] <http://wolvix.org/>

[3] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/2716>

[4] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/wolvix/xfce4>

- [5] <http://www.pclinuxonline.com/pclos/index.html>
- [6] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/1345>
- [7] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/album02/fhdinstalled>
- [8] <http://frugalware.org/news.php>
- [9] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/1501>
- [10] <http://frugalware.org/images/shots/kde.png>
- [11] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/frugal/desktop>
- [12] <http://www.damnsmalllinux.org/>
- [13] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/1774>
- [14] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/878>
- [15] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/dsl1-3/dsl3.jpg>
- [16] http://www.opensuse.org/Welcome_to_openSUSE.org
- [17] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/2569>
- [18] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/osuse/desktop>