

What I wish I'd read months ago about KDE3 vs. KDE4

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Created 03/10/2008 - 4:27am

Submitted by blackbelt_jones on Friday 3rd of October 2008 04:27:27 AM

If a certain (suspected) spambot had not resurrected an old thread at the KDE forums, I never would have seen this post from Aaron Seigo's blog which completely ended all of my anxieties about KDE4 finally and for the foreseeable future. It's all here. And I quote:

Meme 1: What is the future of 3.5?

This year, as with most years since KDE3 emerged, there have been huge deployments of KDE 3 based software. These deployments will not shift for years to come, no matter what KDE4 is. This is because large institutional deployments (government, corporate, educational, etc) typically have 3-7 year cycles (sometimes even longer) between major changes. Patches and security fixes? Sure. Major revamps? No. This alone ensures that KDE3 will remain supported for years. Why? Because there are users. That is how the open source dev model works: where there are users, there are developers; as one declines so does the other. The developers tend to be a step ahead of the users for software that is progressive, but you'll also find that they have a foot in the here and now too (as well as the past, often).

KDE3 is still open in our svn so that bug fixes, security fixes, etc. can continue to be made. KDE 3.5.x is a rather solid desktop system and really doesn't need a huge amount of work given what it is today; the work to move it to the next level is what we refer to as KDE4, of course. This means that the efforts needed to put into it aren't huge to keep it viable. However, efforts that do go into it are welcome.

While the core KDE team will continue to concentrate our work on KDE4 since that is the long term direction of things, it is fully expected that our partners (which include some KDE core team members as employees/members) will continue supporting and even developing on KDE3 issues. The central project will also be around to lend a helping hand with advice and what not; I did that for a person the week before I left for holidays in December, actually, so it's not wild hypothesis but solid theory.

For those familiar with the open source method, the above probably sounds .. well .. obvious. That's because it is .. for those familiar with the open source method. We will find in this blog entry that many of the concerns people raise come from not acknowledging how Free(dom) software is created via the open source method.

Really? And thanks for helping us out with that. For months I've been going out of my freaking mind, posting angrily, trying to get a handle on where KDE3 was going. And there has always been a fairly clear, black and white answer that we weren't hearing. KDE could have done a better job of getting this information out. Judging my my own case, I think that this has been the source of a lot of discord between developers and users, not KDE4 not being ready. In all of the general whining and bitter accusations-- anyone who didn't like KDE4 was accused of being a secret gnome-lover-- and (now clearly unnecessary) fork proposals, I don't remember anyone from KDE saying that KDE expects to maintain KDE3 for years! I would have put down my pitchfork and extinguished my torch... as I do now.

Ah well. Possibly, the KDE team doesn't excel at Public Relations, but I can see know that they're handling the

development part exactly right. I don't prefer KDE 4, by which I mean I don't prefer all the versions of KDE4 I've tried up to now, and I'm not really interested in trying any more for a while. But KDE3.5 is alive and well. It's now in "maintenance mode", and that's all that KDE3 users can ask, in my opinion. KDE4 is where the development is happening, and development is the business of developers. We users may wish for a little constancy, but the developer's job is to look toward the future. To me, the surprise ending to the conflict may be that everybody wins.

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