

In praise of KANOTIX -- A biased introduction

By *eco2geek*

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There are almost too many [Linux distros](#) [2] to count, and many [live Linux CDs](#) [3]. So what is [KANOTIX](#) [4], and what's so great about it?

KANOTIX is two things. First, it's a live Linux CD, based on [Debian](#) [5] [Sid](#) [6], with plumbing -- excellent hardware detection scripts -- based on the well-known [Knoppix](#) [7] live CD. In "live CD" mode, you can do many things, including:

- Experimenting with Linux without installing it to your computer's hard drive
- Connecting to the Internet and other computers
- Fixing broken Linux and Windows installations
- Computer forensics
- You can also install the proprietary nVidia driver (although not the ATI driver) while running off the live CD, if you use one of the two latest "preview" releases, [KANOTIX-2006-VDR-RC6](#) [8] (link to ISO)

But KANOTIX's main *raison d'être* is to be a simple way to get a robust, enhanced version of Debian Sid installed on your computer. In order to do that, it includes an installation program that's fairly simple and straightforward to use. The installer can also be used to upgrade an existing KANOTIX installation.

It also provides the benefits of:

- Customized kernels, with support for specialized hardware
- Versions for 32- and 64-bit CPUs
- Many customized scripts (e.g. an easy way to install accelerated nVidia or ATI drivers)
- End-user documentation, in the form of a [FAQ](#) [9]; a [Wiki](#) [10]; and an [Installation Manual](#) [11]
- A [forum](#) [12] and an [IRC channel](#) [13] (link goes to a Web-based interface) for quick answers to problems

A bit of background is in order for those unfamiliar with Debian. Debian is an excellent, if somewhat geek-oriented, version of Linux to use, mainly due to its package management system, [APT](#) [14]. I remember trying to install a new version of Pan, the newsreader, on a 7.x version of Red Hat (before the days of Fedora), and getting stuck in RPM dependency hell. Long story short, I ended up having to upgrade to version 8 (which had, thankfully, just come out) in order to get the mess sorted out. Nowadays, with front ends such as [YUM](#) [15], this isn't such a big issue. But the benefit of having an APT-based system is that dependencies are normally all sorted out for you, and running the command `apt-get install pan` would be all it takes to get pan, and all its dependencies, either installed for the first time, or upgraded to the latest version. (And there's a huge amount of software available in Debian's repositories, around 15,500 packages.)

Debian software comes in three distributions: Debian Stable ("Sarge"); Debian Testing ("Etch"), and Debian Unstable ("Sid"). (The nicknames are based on characters from the movie *Toy Story*.) As mentioned earlier, KANOTIX is based on Debian unstable. "Unstable" is a bit of a misnomer; generally speaking, it's as stable as any other bleeding-edge distro out there. However, as the [Debian Reference](#) [16] notes, "The advantage of using the unstable distribution is that you are always up-to-date with the latest in the Debian software project?but if it breaks, you get to keep both parts. :-)"

And sometimes, changes do break things. For example, X.org was recently updated from version 6.9 to 7.0, with major changes to existing directory structures and configuration files. As any Linux user has experienced, documentation often doesn't keep up with changes, and that's especially true of Debian Sid. Fortunately, the KANOTIX team was there with advice on when it was OK to upgrade and how to upgrade; and they wrote custom scripts to make things work correctly.

Since KANOTIX is based on Debian Sid, you can upgrade all packages to current by running `apt-get update && apt-get dist-upgrade` Of course, you can always run KANOTIX without making any updates whatsoever, and just upgrade when a new version of KANOTIX comes out.

Debian has a reputation for being a bear to get working, especially for the newbie. And if CDs are only available for Debian Sarge, how do you install Debian Sid? As they say, you don't; you install Debian Sarge and upgrade to Sid -- or, you can install KANOTIX.

Some are put off by the fact that the KANOTIX forum has a large German section, and that a lot of the conversation on the IRC channel takes place in German. The reason for this is that KANOTIX's largest user base is in Germany, where it's produced. However, the English section of the forum is large and growing, and all the KANOTIX developers speak (and answer questions in) English.

Also, don't be put off by KANOTIX's latest offering being called a "preview" release. It's installation-ready.

So, please try KANOTIX and see what you think. Hopefully you'll end up liking it, and its community, as much as I do.

[Reviews](#)

Source URL: <http://www.tuxmachines.org/node/7808>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/57>
- [2] <http://distrowatch.com>
- [3] <http://www.frozentech.com/content/livecd.php>
- [4] <http://kanotix.com>
- [5] <http://www.debian.org/>
- [6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unstable_%28Debian%29
- [7] <http://knoppix.com>
- [8] <http://debian.tu-bs.de/project/kanotix/preview/KANOTIX-2006-VDR-RC6.iso>
- [9] <http://kanotix.com/module-FAQ.html>
- [10] <http://kanotix.com/module-pnWikka.html>
- [11] http://linux.kopporama.de/en/kanotix_manual.html
- [12] <http://kanotix.com/module-PNphpBB2.html>
- [13] <http://irc.kanotix.net/cgi-bin/cgiirc/irc.cgi?adv=1>
- [14] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advanced_Packaging_Tool
- [15] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yellow_dog_Updater%2C_Modified
- [16] <http://www.debian.org/doc/manuals/reference/reference.en.html>