

Faris Raouf discusses the fate of Linux in the coming years

FUTURE PROOF



Editorial column from Faris Raouf

Judging the worth of an operating system is easy to me. It's measured simply by how long it stays on my main PC before I get annoyed with it and revert to my trusty Linux kernel. One operating system that didn't last very long at all was IBM's OS/2.

As an operating system, OS/2 actually has an awful lot to recommend it. It doesn't gobble system resources like there was no tomorrow. It is also very stable and was generally easy to use and administer.

In its "Warp" desktop variant, which IBM launched at great expense, it can even run Windows desktop applications through a sort of emulator, using code licensed from Microsoft. As you'd expect, running Windows applications is not an ideal thing to do and is much more trouble than it's worth. Still, back in the OS/2 heyday it was the only way for many OS/2 users to get access to the kind of applications they need because few OS/2-specific products of any note ever hit the streets. Those that did were custom written, such as those used in the banking sector.

From my point of view, however, the real trouble with OS/2 was its lack of drivers and relatively poor hardware recognition during installation. The recognition problem could be solved with a bit of effort but drivers were a real problem – few hardware manufacturers couldn't be bothered to write any.

The end result of all this (plus a few other factors, of course, including Microsoft's marketing machine) is that OS/2 is far from popular. I hear that it is nowadays an order of magnitude better at everything than when I tried it out. But how many people do you know who run it? Some predict a

similar fate for Linux for similar reasons but they are undoubtedly wrong. I know this because Linux has stood the test of time and has remained on my system ever since I first installed it.

Using my criteria above, it's clear that Linux has a great future ahead of it – you only have to look at the amount of news generated and the number of big name manufacturers getting involved with the operating system in one way or another. More and more manufacturers are voluntarily producing Linux drivers for their hardware too, which means better compatibility than ever before (as you'll find if you look at our notebook supertest on page 34).

Not only that but comprehensive and stable USB support is now almost with us, as you'll see in the USB storage feature in this issue. And with each new distribution released, hardware recognition gets even better and system configuration gets easier. I installed Linux Mdrake a few days ago and could count on one hand the amount of clicks and key strokes I undertook!

And this being Linux, if you are willing to experiment you can download patches and test versions of drivers and Kernels almost as soon as the last line of code has been written.

The unstoppable momentum behind Linux is bringing it head to head with Windows sooner rather than later. Of course it will still be a very long time before a little Penguin appears on almost everyone's screens instead of a Microsoft logo during boot up. You never know, though – Microsoft might decide to start speaking Penguin at some point. It could happen, you know. Only time will tell.

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Subscriptions and back issues
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Annual Subscription Rate
 (12 issues)
 UK: £44.91. Europe (inc Eire):
 £73.88 Rest the World: £85.52
 Back issues (UK) £6.25

Distributors COMAG, Tavistock Road, West
 Drayton, Middlesex
 England UB7 7QE

Print R. Oldenbourg

Linux Magazine is published monthly by Linux New Media UK,
 Europa House, Adlington Park, Macclesfield, Cheshire, England,
 SK10 4NP. Company registered in England.

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ISSN 14715678

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Linux New Media UK Ltd is a division of Linux New Media AG,
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