

# CURRENT ISSUES

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## Technical Support

Readers can write in with technical queries which may be answered in the magazine in a future issue, however Linux Magazine is unable to directly provide technical help or support services either written or verbal.

This month sees the release of a variety of new Linux distributions, some of which we review in this issue. These releases have, of course, been precipitated by the recent release of the 2.4 kernel. Each new distribution builds on the one before it and is better than the last, with advances being made either in ease of use or in functionality. The promise of added functionality naturally necessitates an upgrade — but *which* upgrade to choose and how to manage it?

If I remain with one distribution I gain the benefit of being very familiar with it — anticipating its shortfalls and fully exploiting its strengths. Sticking with one boxset would free me from the constant race to keep up with new developments — with so many distributions coming out I would need to install almost daily to keep up with every innovation and so would lose productivity. Also, my day job allows me to use Linux exclusively and so I need a stable system.

On the other hand, I wouldn't like to miss out when other distributions race ahead. Sticking with one system may mean that the virtues of another's tools pass me by and changing between distributions has the advantage that I am always up to date.

Fortunately, I can resolve this dilemma quite easily: With development systems at home, and a stable system at work, I am lucky enough to be able to run many environments and so can try out differing distributions as and when they are launched. This odd arrangement means I can keep up to date with what is new and only change my work machines when finally I cannot manage without that must-have utility.

Eventually, most distributions seem to merge. Although they all have their own nuances, their collective similarities ultimately outweigh individual differences. SuSE has its YaST configure system, Debian its package apt-get tool and Mandrake its drake tools. All good. All worth having. All missed when on another machine — but equally all circumvented on other systems. It leaves me wanting a combination of everything and so, like most other users of Linux, I add packages and modify files until the system ends up as the hybrid I require. Another user may love or loathe my systems — but they're *my* systems, and so, my choice.

This exercise left me thinking just how many distributions are available. Woven Goods for Linux lists some 71 distributions. However if we count differing systems rather than distributions then, as everyone configures their own machine, there could be said to be at least 175858 distributions. Why this figure? Well, this is the most conservative figure based on the number of people who have registered on the Linux counter (<http://counter.li.org>). Although not everyone who is registered is still using Linux, a far higher number are not registered who do use Linux. The site estimates up to a hundredfold factor for each country, giving England some 685,400 active Linux users. Quite a community. Now if only I can find someone to finish off the vCard standards...

John Southern, Editor

## GUARANTEE

We pride ourselves on the origins of our magazine which come from the very start of the Linux revolution. We have been involved with Linux market for six years now through our sister European-based titles Linux Magazine (aimed at professionals) and Linux User (for hobbyists), and through seminars, conferences and events.

By purchasing this magazine you are joining an information network that enjoys the benefit of all the knowledge and technical expertise of all the major Linux professionals and enthusiasts. No other UK Linux magazine can offer that pedigree or such close links with the Linux Community. We're not simply reporting on the Linux and open source movement - we're part of it.