COVER FEATURE   DISTRIBUTIONS TEST

Linux Distributions for newbies/users
THE **WIDER** THE CHOICE…

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Word has got around by now that Linux not only performs reliably as a server operating system, developer platform or embedded system, but is also regarded more and more as a serious alternative to commercial operating systems for desktop users. But which of the numerous Linux distributions available on the market is best suited to the requirements of a desktop user is a matter that is frequently still unclear. Linux Magazine risks a topical evaluation of the market situation.

Focusing completely on the latest Linux distributions is not without its problems. One of the hardest decisions is surely the choice of when to conduct a test series. Since the manufacturers of Linux distributions bring their latest collections of packets to market at various times and (with few exceptions) at intervals which are also hard to predict, it is hard to avoid the fact that distributions that have only just come out enjoy a certain advantage in terms of newness compared to their competitors, which may have been on the market for a while already. These circumstances frequently also affect the test result as a whole.

We nevertheless feel it is worthwhile, even necessary, to subject the various distributions at regular intervals to as fair an evaluation as possible. This kind of comparison test is designed to help you decide which distribution is best for you. Nor, though, should the responses that such tests can

trigger among the manufacturers of distributions themselves be underestimated. Even two years ago, most distributions could only be installed using really monotonous console menus, which were also hard to understand. Administration of the system was mainly done through console-based scripts, if at all. Nowadays a graphical installation program forms part of the standard repertoire of most distributions. Certainly, in the past few years some technical specifications have improved. But the fact that now almost all distributors make every effort to enable installation and configuration to be as easy as possible and also visually attractive, is also due to the increased expectations of a rapidly-growing group of Linux users. As we write this article Red Hat 7.1 and Mandrake 8.0 have both recently been released (and are reviewed in this issue) and Caldera openLinux workstation is released as beta. ∎