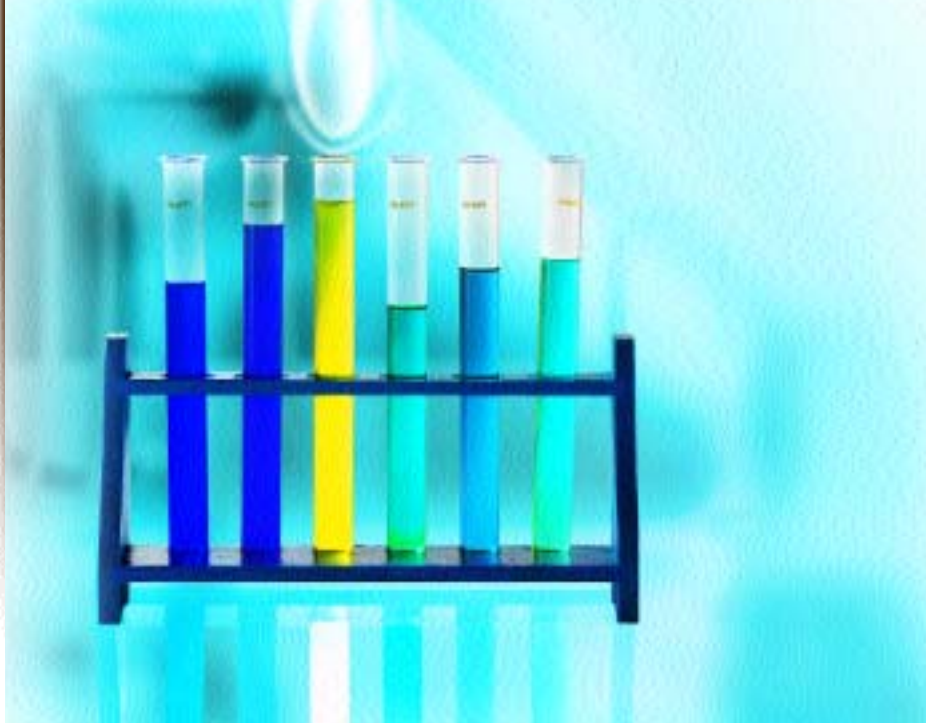# SUPPORT AND DOCUMENTATION

A competent and easy-to-contact support department, together with up-to-date and comprehensive manuals is what makes a distribution actually usable. We evaluate each distro in terms of accessibility.

SuSE Linux 7.2 Personal

The Personal release of the SuSE distribution has no superfluous information. The manuals are harmonised according to target group and purpose. Cryptic sysadmin jargon is only dished up to the newbie in an easily digestible dose. With the 60-day installation support that can be called on via fax, telephone or email, any serious problems should be dealt with easily.

SuSE Linux 7.2 Professional

This is practically the only distribution to come with so much documentation, and refined for various levels of knowledge. The manuals - from the "Quick Install Manual" (for visually oriented newbies) via the task oriented "The Programs" up to the "Network Guide" (which is specialised and also of interest to experts) - cover the entire spectrum.

The fact that the SuSE developers were involved

Support and Documentation				
-	SuSE Linux 7.2 Personal	SuSE Linux 7.2 Professional	Red Hat Linux 7.1 Deluxe Edition	Red Hat Linux 7.1 Professional Edition
Electronic. help, content	very good	very good	very good	very good
Electronic. help, ease of use	very good	very good	very good	very good
Online help, database	very good	very good	yes	yes
Online help, FAQ	yes	yes	yes	yes
Telephone support, cost	Long distance	Long distance	-	no charge (0800/1825497)
Telephone support, free period	60 days	90 days	-	90 days, max. 4 calls
Manual	yes	yes	yes	yes
Manual, table of contents	yes	yes	yes	yes
Manual, index	yes	yes	good	good
Manual, keyword index	yes	yes	good	good
Online documentation, FAQ	good	good	yes	yes
Assessment	++	++	-	o

in the documentation work shows that within the company a high value is placed on the documentation. And the online documentation, like the support via the Web, is among the best the test field has to offer.

Red Hat 7.1 Deluxe and Professional Edition

Red Hat only offers support for the Deluxe variant (around £71) over the Internet. Those buying the more expensive Professional Edition get 90 days installation support via a free 0800 telephone number, but the support is limited to four telephone enquiries. By way of comparison, SuSE offers unlimited telephone support for all variants.

The manual for configuring the Professional Edition also contains a few inaccuracies. Time and again non-existent menus, or entries with inconsistent names or which have not been translated, are described.

Linux-Mandrake 8.0 Power Pack and Pro Suite Edition

The only difference worth mentioning between Power Pack and the Pro Suite Edition lies in terms of support. While with the Power Pack, you have to manage with 30 days telephone installation support and 60 days Web support, with the Pro Suite you get 60 days telephone support and 90 days Web support, expressly including servers.

Both manuals fail to make a good impression. The topics dealt with are certainly clearly illustrated, but there is a marked lack of substance. And it is the system administrator who really wants more information. The lack of a keyword index is annoying. There is a great deal of room for improvement in the documentation (both printed and electronic).

Caldera Open Linux Workstation and Server

Caldera sells its new Linux distributions for an extra charge with 60 days installation support via email and a telephone hotline. The documentation available on the system could just about be called adequate. Many Linux basics can be found in the Developer Guide, the Administration Guide explains the fundamentals of Webmin and the configuration of various servers. Manual and online documentation were not available at the time of going to press.

Progeny Debian 1.0

The email support from the service network is still at the Beta stage - anyone who lets themselves in for the Progeny adventure should know how to get out of a jam in an emergency. Although the English manual is among the better ones, as long as you are interested in the command line, there is still the problem that there is very little relevant online documentation available.   ■

Red Hat Linux 7.1: The conclusion

The American company is bringing a highly stable system into the shops, even the DRI modules of the kernel are extraordinarily robust.
Seen like this, the Deluxe Edition is definitely worth considering, especially since the games CD is good fun. But whether the overall performance of the Professional Edition justifies the price of over £177 is something the customer must decide for themselves.

Mandrake Linux 8.0 Power Pack	Mandrake Linux 8.0 Pro Suite	Caldera Open Linux Workstation 3.1	Caldera Open Linux Server 3.1	Progeny Debian 1.0
yes	yes	-	-	nothing special
average	average	-	-	-
yes	yes	yes	yes	no
yes	yes	yes	yes	no
0700 number	0700 number	not yet available	not yet available	overseas call
30 days	60 days	60 days	60 days	30 days for registered users
yes	yes	not yet available	not yet available	no
yes	yes	not yet available	not yet available	yes
no	no	not yet available	not yet available	yes
no	no	not yet available	not yet available	could be better
on website	on website	-	-	no
o	o	cannot be assessed	cannot be assessed	-