

Letters to the editor

Write Access

■ Unsupported

I have taken up the challenge to stop using Microsoft software in favour of Linux. I am not a developer, a programmer nor do I run a business of any size. I am just a humble home user who has decided to not use Microsoft.

The discussion continues about how well positioned Linux is to handle the desktop market, but for me it provides all I want for my modest computer needs – an office suite, e-mail and web browsing (with some minor complaints) and the ability to handle all the hardware I have, though this is helped by some wise purchasing choices. So, the Linux desktop is ready for me, unfortunately, me and my Linux desktop are not ready for the rest of the world.

A little while ago I started suffering problems with my broadband connection, provided by Telewest. I found that I was suffering a huge amount of dropped packets, up to 70% dropped in some cases. This meant that my access to the internet was severely restricted, anything moving more than a few kilobytes of data would result in a mail or web server timing out.

Nothing had changed on my system, I was certain of that, so I had no option other than to phone customer services, with the run around beginning thus...

"Hello sir, what version of Windows are you using?" says the support guy.

"I'm not," says I, "I am using a Linux based system."

Obviously the wrong thing to say because no one, yet, offers any support for Linux users. Even though I was able to provide Telewest with all of the information they wanted, everything a Windows user would have needed to provide, pings, traceroutes and modem parameters, they were still unable to resolve the problem.

I was then told that they couldn't help me any further because I was using an unsupported operating system, leaving the unresolved matter there. I'm sure you will all breath a sigh of relief when

you hear that it all started working again, all by it self, several hours later.

Up until this time I had not appreciated how vital the support from suppliers is, being lucky enough not to have called on them before. This ingredient, now obvious to me, is vital to the mix when declaring a market ready for everyday use, be that market for home desktop, SOHO, or whatever use.

The aim of this letter isn't to put people off from using Linux just because I've acknowledged Linux lacks something, that is, outside support. My hope is that more people will ask directly for it support from suppliers, otherwise this viscous circle will never be broken.

Simon Tunsley, by e-mail

LM Obviously Telewest have not done anything wrong, they do clearly list what systems they support. However, from our position they haven't done anything right either. You are right when you say that support is a vital ingredient, not just ISPs, but hardware and software manufactures too. Those who start to supply this to Linux users are going to very quickly capture the lions share of a growing market. ■

■ Initial impressions

I recently became curious about using Linux on my computer and obtained a copy of Red Hat Linux version 8. The installation seemed to go well and I was presented with a desktop full of things waiting for me to explore. This piqued my interest even more and I started to look forward to learning what was available to me.

There was so much for me to learn that I felt I really needed a book to help give me a path to follow. I had also been given a Linux magazine, admittedly not yours, who I phoned looking for advice on books. They suggested I phone Red Hat directly, which I did, but with little reward. The Red Hat Education depart-



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ment came up with the suggestion for me to look to Amazon for a book. I was hoping for something a little more specific.

Luckily, I've now made contact with my local user group, who have been able to give me the sort of 'user' advice I was looking for. What worries me is that others may not be so lucky and may not bother to investigate further options. It's a shame that more couldn't be done.

Antonella Lasta, by e-mail

LM You were kind enough to attach the follow-up e-mail you received from Red Hat after querying the response you got from them on your search for further Linux education, where they point out the responsibility and effort involved in providing accurate book recommendations, this we must accept. Thankfully, there are lots of books out there and any single company would find it impossible to read them all and to provide a valid response to such a query. Is Amazon the best place to recommend after that though?

Red Hat is, for many, synonymous with Linux and a new user could very easily choose a Red Hat distribution purely because it's the name they know. Surely they must shoulder some of the responsibility in catering for new users. In other countries the same would be true of SuSE or TurboLinux.

Would it not be possible for them to work together to create a list of resources that might direct new users in appropriate direction in the search for further information. ■