

LindowsOS 3.0

Window Dressing

Just over a year ago, Lindows set about developing a Linux version capable of installing and running Windows programs. LindowsOS is currently at version 3.0. This article takes a peek behind the scenes to discover how many of those promises Lindows has actually kept.

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The manufacturer's [1] stated target group for LindowsOS is made up of first time computer users and users wanting to migrate from Windows without becoming involved in system configuration and administration issues.

We tested the LindowsOS Membership Edition, which costs US \$119 in the download version and US \$129 in the CD version. Our lab environment comprised of a computer with an AMD Duron/750 MHz and 256 MB RAM. The machine also had an Elsa Erazor video adapter, an ATAPI Zip drive, a CD writer and a Fritz ISDN card.

Installation

Installing LindowsOS was easy. After inserting the installation CD and rebooting the machine, Lindows plugged & played our hardware and automatically launched a GUI installation routine. We were prompted to agree to the "End User License Agreement" and choose an installation method.

Two flavors are available: standard mode re-partitions and formats the hard disk before installing the System. *Advanced Install* allows the user to choose a partition for the new LindowsOS installation.

As there are no other options available in *Advanced Install* mode, you end up

with the US keyboard layout; additionally the X environment is configured without any possibility of user interaction.

The setup program then went on to prompt us for a computer name and a password. The help text does not point out that this is actually the password for the system administrator. The installation program allows the installer to choose an empty password; in fact you can install and run the system without setting the password for *root*.

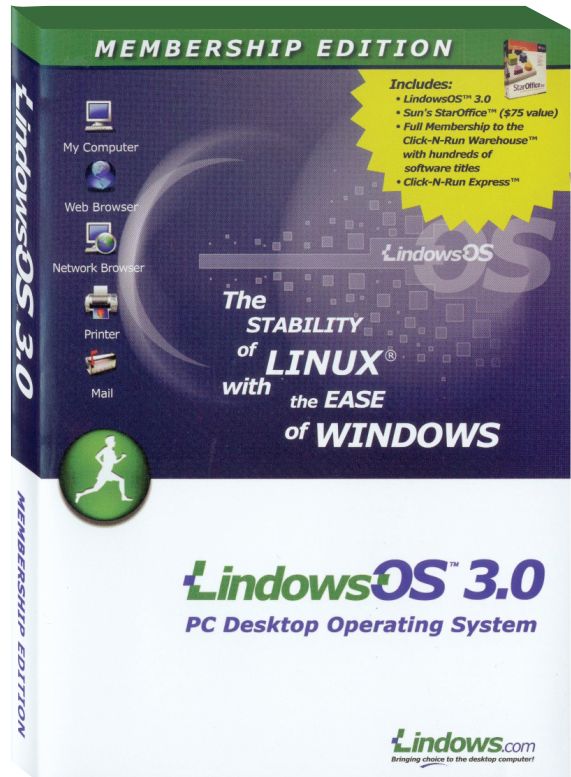
After double-checking, the installation program started setting up the system – the process took about ten minutes on our lab machine. The computer rebooted without any trouble and displayed a character based login prompt.

However, things started to go wrong on executing *startx* to launch the X server, as the kernel module needed to support the nVidia chipset used by the video adapter failed to initialize. As we were unable to setup the video adapter using the *xf86config* script, we had to resort to an older card that we happened to have in hand.

To keep things simple, we repeated the complete installation procedure; this time everything worked, and GUI login appeared to welcome us to Lindows. A modified KDE desktop appeared after replying to the password prompt (see Figure 1).

The first task is to select a time zone and possibly create a new user – the *First Time Setup* dialog box appears automatically to simplify this setup. Any new users created on Lindows are placed in the *root* group by default, and thus possess root privileges for the system.

For security reasons it may be preferable to create a "normal", non



privileged user and log on with that user's account – most other distributions take care of this step as part of the installation procedure. As X is pre-configured with a 60 Hz display frequency, it might also be a good idea to select a more comfortable setting.

You can then use the KDE control center to change the keyboard setting, if required; menus and help texts are displayed in English by default.

Where Did All the Programs Go?

A glance at the program menu reveals a minimal software configuration, mainly comprising of Netscape 7 and a few CD and MP3 players, but conspicuously lacking Office and graphics programs.

Lindows uses a system called *Click-N-Run Warehouse* to install program packages. The "Warehouse" offers a large selection of programs available via Internet download. The Lindows system maintenance and program setup tool automatically recognizes and resolves

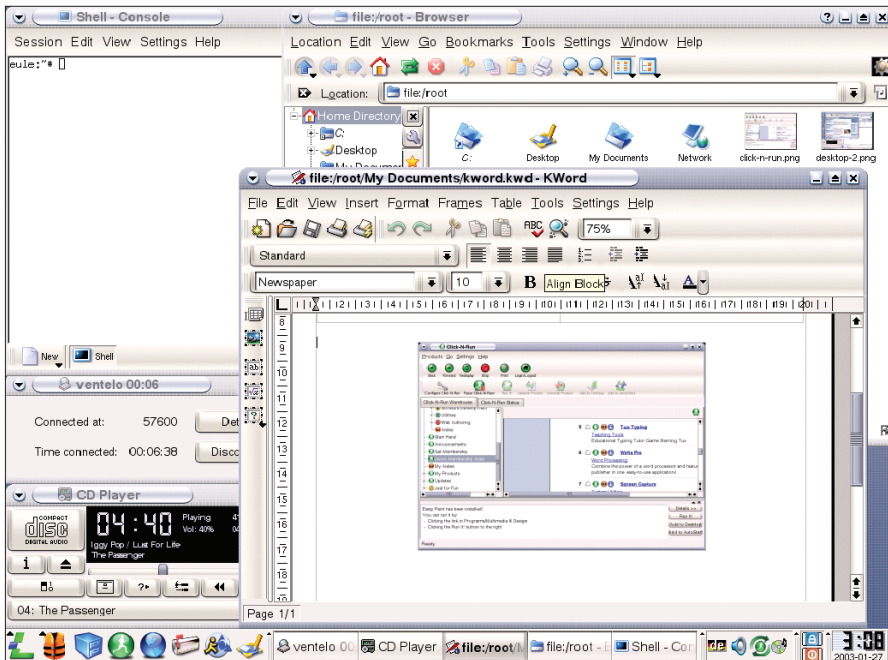


Figure 1: Lindows uses KDE for a Desktop

package dependencies during package installation (see Figure 2).

The fact that you need an Internet connection to install programs is annoying – this even applies to the programs on the additional Membership Edition CD.

Connect me!

The next disappointment occurred when we attempted to use the ISDN card to connect to the Internet. Lindows only supports Internet via modem, DSL or a LAN with internet connection. After connecting to the Internet via modem, the Click-N-Run program took a few minutes to update the installation and display a selection of software. You will need to

register with Lindows before you can start downloading.

Doing so revealed that the free Junior Membership Edition allows you to install a total of 10 of the 1700 programs in the Warehouse. Access to all the programs in the Warehouse requires full membership at US \$99 per annum.

The Lindows manual did not mention any localised language versions, but a quick search of the Warehouse revealed that they were available. After using Click-N-Run to install one of these packages (it took two attempts as the routine crashed shortly before completing on the first attempt), localized menus were available on the desktop.

Localized menus are only available

for KDE based programs.

Any other tools, such as Netscape, will still use the default English menus and help texts.

The *Word Pro* program available with the Junior Membership Edition turned out to be KWord after we installed it. Apart from that, the selection is restricted to a few games, a

simple graphics program (*gpaint*), a communications program for accessing digital cameras and a snapshot tool for screenshots.

What's in a Name?

Lindows' original goal was to allow users to install and run Windows programs, but the distribution seems to be well off-target at present. The only support Lindows provides for Windows software is an unmodified Wine [2] version, and you will need to launch Click-N-Run to install the package.

Wine launched older and smaller Windows programs on our lab machine without any trouble, but our attempts to run any graphics programs like Corel Draw or Designer failed. We were also unable to launch any of the major Office programs.

Conclusion

Lindows has a lot less to offer than many other distributions. The selection of programs available in a default installation is too meager to be of any use. The business model, which envisages selling free programs for a large annual fee, is dubious. A buggy installation routine and the lack of ISDN support for Internet connections are further points of criticism. Lindows is well off target with respect to its original goal of running Windows programs on a Linux distribution; The wine version is only capable of running older or extremely simple applications.

Taking a look under the Lindows hood reveals Debian 3.0 Woody [3] with XFree 4.2 thrown in. A Debian package manager (such as *apt* or *dselect*) will allow you to bypass the Lindows Software Warehouse and install other programs. Having said that, if you want to use a Debian system, why not go for the original?

Beginners are better off with distributions like SuSE or Mandrake that provide a good selection of programs for a variety of interests without enforcing a long-winded and complicated Internet based installation procedure.

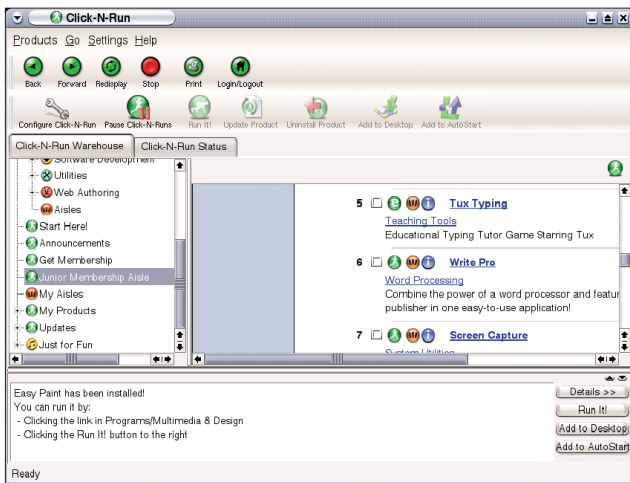


Figure 2: Installing programs through the Warehouse

INFO

- [1] Lindows homepage:
<http://www.lindows.com>
- [2] Wine project: <http://www.winehq.com>
- [3] Debian: <http://www.debian.org>