

Re: free vs commercial

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From: Steve Lamb (grey_at_dmiyu.org)

Date: 01/05/05

Date: Wed, 05 Jan 2005 10:35:48 -0800

To: ken keanon <kenkeanon@yahoo.com>

ken keanon wrote:

- > *Starting with the maxim "To beat MS you have to be as*
- > *good as, if not better than, MS", I am constantly*
- > *comparing the Linux I had installed with WinXP.*

[snip]

- > *What I find wanting in Linux is Device Management.*
- > *With plug-in, adding new devices to WinXP is a breeze*
- > *but not in Linux.*

While it is great to keep in mind the your maxim I think it is best to remember that one should not look at each piece individually and judge Linux wanting based on one individual part or another.

Is Linux, and in particular, Debian better than Windows? For a great many of us Debian users it is. I know others will answer and I would like to think we as a whole would acknowledge the warts Debian and Linux have but I will confine my comments to myself. Yes, Linux has warts and you've run across one of them. And yes, you've mentioned that with a certain suite of applications you find Linux is on par with Windows, which is great.

But let me ask this question, which do you do more often: upgrade complex devices such as ASDL routers or upgrade/install software? For me it is software having never touched ASDL routers and the most complex piece of hardware thus far being a USB scanner. I agree that device setup is a pain sometimes. I still don't have a printer working.

During the past several years my Windows box went from 95 to NT 3.x to 98 to NT 4 and finally on to Win2k. Several of those jumps were complete reinstalls as upgrading wasn't an option. Several steps also had multiple reinstalls. Oh if you were only with me the day it took me 8 hours to install NT4 because of one small tweak in my machine that I didn't make. Keyboard abuse doesn't cover it. Or how about installing a new Motherboard/CPU on an already existing version of Win2k? Easier to reinstall than try to repair as the machine is left **unbootable** and Microsoft's idea of recovery tools is a joke.

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Each Windows reinstall (the most recent of which was about a week ago) was accompanied with the standard "update one part, reboot, update another part, reboot, update a third part reboot... repeat 10 more times w/10 more reboots" process. Installing my suite of software on Windows requires a CD-R I maintain to bring myself up to the normal level of operation. Firefox, vim, winamp, rar or 7zip, irfanview and so on and such. Updating them requires me to watch every program piecemeal. I am constantly behind on my software on my Windows box.

WinXP and it's successors? I won't be able to change hardware without calling Microsoft for the permission to boot my own machine! 3 hardware changes and it is considered a new machine. Can only run on one machine, ya know!

But on the flip side I can tell you the exact lineage of every Debian box I've ever installed and how simple they were to maintain over the years. The crown-jewel was the hard-drive which started started on hamm or slink (Debian 2.0 or 2.1, whenever the transition to glibc was) and ended on woody (Debian 3.0). It went through 4 motherboards/CPU's, started with 64MB of RAM and ended with 512Mb. Was a tiny 10Gb drive (huge at the time) which was later complimented by several other HDs. It was a installation of Debian to continue learning Linux, a workstation, my Netrek station for 2 years, a simple router to a full-service server with web, ftp, dns, ssh, NAT router & firewall, samba mounts and such. The only reason that drive was wiped was not because of Debian but because of an error in judgement on my part when installing a new 200Gb drive on a different controller card. I put the 10Gb drive on the same card and somehow that interaction screwed it up.

Software updates are an aptitude (dselect, apt-get, synaptic, etc) away. I can switch hardware as often as I want and never have to worry about spending who knows how long on the phone waiting for an activation code to run *my machine*. The base OS is updated easily over the years. I'd like to think that someone could download hamm by mistake and make the transition upward without reinstalling though I admit not having tried it myself recently. The machine can be as much or as little as I want. And by \$diety or \$favorite_celebrity (if you're atheist like me) if I want to swap out the motherboard/cpu I'm not left in a non-bootable state.... and if I am the recovery tools are the exact same tools I use to maintain the system in the first place.

All of that ease, security, flexibility and maintainability far outstrips anything Microsoft has yet to offer. The only exception(1), as noted, is that some devices... *some* devices are a pain to install..... once. A problem which does happen on Windows to this day. Woe be the unsuspecting person who plugs in a USB device before installing the drivers on hardware where that is required. *shudder*

To me Debian Linux meets your maxim in spades. When comparing warts between Windows and Debian Linux it is Windows that is more the toad. Why quibble over the exact placement of warts when the numbers are radically different? :)

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(1) ok, two. Games. But it looks like we were talking productivity here. ;)

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Steve C. Lamb      | I'm your priest, I'm your shrink, I'm your  
PGP Key: 8B6E99C5 | main connection to the switchboard of souls.  
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