

Re: Debian or Ubuntu Dilemma

Source: <http://linux.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/Debian/2005-07/2416.html>

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Date: 07/18/05

To: debian-user@lists.debian.org

Date: Mon, 18 Jul 2005 01:20:35 -0400

On Saturday 16 July 2005 10:11, Bernie Betlach wrote:

> *I'm new to Linux but have a little programming experience. Which should I*

> *install Ubuntu or Debian???*

>

> *Thanks.... I appreciate your opinions and advice.*

>

> *Bernie*

Advice:

Create a separate partition for /home ;

If you ever need to reinstall (or want to try another distro), this allows you to reinstall without deleting your personal data. (When reinstalling, just make sure you tell the installer where /home resides.)

(/home is where all your documents, music and the like will be stored, so make it as large as possible.)

Here are my thoughts on the distros:

Less Maintenance ---- > More Maintenance

Debian Stable < Ubuntu < Debian Testing/Unstable < Any Distro w/mutt packaging
(Less Flexible ---- > More Flexible)

Wants and Distro:

Bleeding Edge Features:

You'll eventually have to compile a few packages with any distro (from Debian to Gentoo)

Playground: Debian

Long-Term Playground: Debian

Usability Playground: Ubuntu

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Consistent Needs: Ubuntu

Rarely Play: Debian Stable

Ubuntu seems to be a good balance if its default install does almost everything you need, and you like to be somewhat current. It promises 6–month stable release cycles that will keep you working with updated versions of the default tools. These 6–month upgrades are similar to the Debian stable releases—fairly painless upgrades.

Debian stable is good if its default install and (stable/Sarge) repositories almost does everything you need, and you do not mind using useful, but old packages. (These old packages are updated for security reasons.) I mention old packages because stable releases of Debian have occurred once every few years.

Debian unstable/testing is good if you like to install current, new programs often, and do not mind taking time to fix things that break. Upgrades are sometimes painful, especially if you aggressively update the system (e.g. install new sid packages during a C++ ABI transition, or get unofficial xorg packages). Personally, I believe Debian unstable is the closest to Gentoo if you want to be bleeding edge; it seems to have more non–official repositories of bleeding edge packages than any distro I've seen.

Rule for Having No Trouble with Linux:

When everything is working, change nothing—not even for fun!!!
(Each change is another step away from a default install.)

Ha—that isn't very practical. So, here are some tips:

Good Housekeeping:

- * A separate /home partition allows for less painful emergency reinstalls.
- * Do as much as you can with the default (stable) repositories—what's offered in Synaptic. Be wary of non–official repositories, especially for critical system functions. (Often, problems occur when one has been using non–official packages, Debian suddenly offers the same packages, and one must remove some of the non–official packages to install the Debian packages.)
- * Keep any changes you make to the system separate from the system defaults. If you compile any programs, put them in /usr/local/bin or some other special directory. If you hand–edit configuration files, do two things: keep a copy of all your personally changes files together AND keep a backup of the system defaults (even if the backup is as simple as renaming foobar to foobar–debian). (Keeping all of your personal changes together will save you a lot of time when you want to reinstall, apply the changes to another machine, or simply remember what you've done.)

Ubuntu:

- * See what Synaptic offers before looking for other package repositories

Debian Stable:

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* See what the default repositories offer before looking for non–official packages

Debian Unstable:

* learn apt–get, dpkg, and how to force package installs and removals with both dpkg and apt–get

* install package debfoster

If you plan to compile your own packages to stay as current as possible (e.g., tracking KDE SVN HEAD), plan to spend time learning how to manage your custom installed programs (or packages) along side system packages. If you plan to use external repositories (non–Debian or non–Ubuntu official) to stay as current as possible, plan to spend time working out package conflicts. (If you plan to do this, Debian will be best because it seems to have smoother non–official packages than Ubuntu.)

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I saved personal testimony for last. I've used Debian for years, and love having up–to–date software. I went to Debian unstable and would always spend a little bit of time fixing this or that when a big update (or self–imposed change) came around. I've installed Ubuntu on several computers for people who are new to GNU/Linux, and there were very few problems; they have working hardware and up–to–date software with no hitches. I now use Ubuntu (or, the kubuntu–desktop meta package) on my desktop (as even 10 year release cycles are fine for my servers), and have had the same trouble–free experience I saw on the other computers (e.g., some personal pet hassles did not show such as KMail worked with gnupg, pgpMIME, and pinentry by default after install, and by default, plugging in a USB drive pops its root onto the desktop). (A recent xorg, KDE, and C++ ABI switch put me off; the hassle–free Ununtu experience kept me here. I'll see how hassle–free Ubuntu is when it's time for an upgrade to the next stable version; upgrades always showcase problems.) I am fairly certain I'll end up with some of the same hassles I had with Debian unstable if I add non–official repositories, so I am sticking with the default repositories. The default programs happen to encompass almost everything I use, so using a more limited package set is fine for me. I would recommend installing Ubuntu first if you do not want to spend a lot of time tinkering with GNU/Linux. If the computer is usable with the default features/programs provided (or, you feel there is very little missing), then keep Ubuntu. If you feel there is a lot missing, then install Debian and have a lot of fun learning. Debian makes backing out of fscups non–lethal (unlike the early versions of Mandrake I once used), and, often, quite easy. (Ubuntu has those same tools to make rollbacks easy—apt and dpkg.) Debian is extremely flexible. (But, for me, this flexibility often didn't translate into making the computer a more useful productivity tool.)

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