

RE: Open Source Supported Graphics Cards

Source: <http://linux.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/Debian/2006-08/msg01093.html>

- *From:* "Seth Goodman" <sethg@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Fri, 11 Aug 2006 21:57:09 -0500
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On Friday, August 11, 2006 6:23 PM -0500, Paul Johnson wrote:

On Friday 11 August 2006 14:41, Seth Goodman wrote:

On Tuesday, August 08, 2006 6:43 PM -0500, Paul Johnson wrote:

On Tuesday 08 August 2006 10:38, Seth Goodman wrote:

Since the end-users we need to interest, if we are ever to break out of the expert niche, will run X and use GUI's for everything, being limited to low-end 2D performance will be an ongoing problem.

I thought the niche Debian was trying to fill was rock solid stability and reliability in a 100% free software format. If I'm confused, let me know.

<OT discussion>

That's a reasonable goal, even a good goal, if you are willing to remain a small, exclusive club. If you believe that people who use Debian need to be comfortable with the command line, consider natural language as a second language behind PERL and be fluent in regexp's, then it will remain a terrific operating system for the few. Maybe this is what most people in Debian want. I'm relatively new here, so if that's the case, please educate me.

It's not that hard if you use a desktop environment and use the desktop environment task during installation. Getting it installed is the tricky part, but you'll only have to do it once. And if you don't like aptitude, there's kpackage, and I'm sure there's Gnome frontends, and even a web frontend (if you're really brave or on a

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trusted network).

Me thinks you misunderstand. I didn't have any real problem installing a Debian server or desktop. OTOH, I don't panic when asked to grep for patterns, write a PERL script or (at least in the distant past) write SED scripts. However, casual computer users cannot and will not be able to do any of those things. Getting the desktop installed is only a small part of the battle for a typical Windows user moving to Linux. That step is probably the easiest for a computer noob, and the problems will start soon after.

However, if you have a desire to bring quality, free software to a wider audience, you're not likely to get there with the present vision. For the majority of casual computer users, who are hostage to a certain evil corporation, the GUI is not just a convenience to be used after fully mastering command line operation.

Though if you were read the HTML installation manual, or even just the mastheads, you probably would have gotten a base install with KDE installed without much problem.

Of course I read the manuals before I did my first install. I'd give them a B+ for experienced computer users, and a D for casual computer users. They refer to all manner of things of which the casual user hasn't the faintest idea, and of the large number of concepts they don't understand, they are at a complete loss to figure out which are relevant. For example, we all understand what a kernel is, what it does and when you need to think about it, which isn't often. This is not realistic for the casual computer user. Frankly, even if we did successfully explain this in plain speak, I have no illusions that a casual user could manage to build a kernel to run on their non-compliant hardware. It's just not a reasonable expectation. For the experienced user, it's just another task, and any time spent refreshing what you've forgotten is time well-spent. In the Windows environment, hardware detection and driver installation is largely automatic. Knoppix approaches this level of hardware awareness, but Debian seems to lag in this area.

We presently require people who use Debian to do this, or they are effectively hamstrung once it's installed.

Only if you aren't reading your monitor during installation is this

a problem.

That only gets you to the end of installation. Besides, the average Windows user is not going to notice when hardware detection fails or there is a broken dependency because of the hundreds of lines of, to them, gibberish that scrolls by on the screen. We can watch this, they can't.

Post installation, common tasks are not easily explained, and the documentation is often inconsistent or downright misleading. That's acceptable for experienced users. We have a sense when something doesn't sound right and will look elsewhere. When something works differently from the documentation, it's a challenge, not a brick wall. It all depends on your experience and point of view. I'm arguing to consider the point of view of would-be Windows defectors.

Why do we require this? It's not for technical reasons, but because we believe it is better for them as computer users.

Hypothesis not supported by evidence present. Sounds more like pilot error.

I humbly disagree. And that attitude will hardly attract Windows users. Deny a problem exists, and if there is something wrong, it's the user. Yes, Windows users, by virtue of not understanding the insides of their PC's, do commit an astonishing number of ID10T errors. The fact that so many users of this class can successfully configure a Windows PC is a testament to the thought that went into the configuration scripts. It's still garbage code, but they did do some things right, and we shouldn't be afraid to learn from that.

Here are a couple of cases for things that casual users can manage in Windows PC's but would have great difficulty in Debian. The following is not meant to say that Windows is good. It's not: it's crap. But they did do some things right, and we ought to take notice.

1) Doing a backup. Windows includes a rudimentary backup utility, and most PC's you buy today come with giveaway commercial backup software preinstalled that is quite serviceable. You are generally led through a wizard that sets things up properly for most cases. If you want to do this manually, you will do a very well by backing up only the "C:\Documents and Settings\" directory tree. What do you backup in a Linux system, and how? A bare metal backup is not so bad, though you probably have to search out and install the software. You won't find a good explanation of what to back up in Debian because that's tricky business, even if you are experienced. User home directories are easy,

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but config files are scattered all over the file system. Unix, and Linux that followed it, were not built for people who use the computer as an appliance, with little knowledge of its internals. Windows takes care of such users quite well, but it's commercial software and it's very badly written. There's no reason Linux can't provide the same user experience for those who need it, but something has prevented Debian from doing this.

2) Configuring a home network. On a Windows PC, the user is guided by a wizard to provide workgroup name, and they are given explanation during the process of what it means to share information indiscriminately vs. requiring credentials and, for advanced users (!!!), setting up read/write permissions. This may seem silly, but the result is that a total noob can get a Windows PC talking to on a local network and sharing printers easily. In Linux, the user has to install Samba, and then configure it manually with a text editor. The casual user is befuddled by the fact that they should need a Windows networking server at all (can't all computers just talk to each other?). They would have no idea they even need to add a package, nor do they know what it means to add a package from a repository, nor would they figure out what package to add of the thousands available. Once someone tells them to add and configure Samba through Synaptic Package Manager (forget about apt or aptitude, they run from the command line, and BTW, what's a dependency?), they now approach the Samba manual. Here, the user is exposed to concepts like emulating a Windows domain controller, which is total gibberish to them. We know that it is safe to ignore anything to do with that in a simple network, but to the casual user, the plethora of terms like this piles up quickly and becomes a brick wall. If you want to share printers in Linux, you probably will deal with CUPS. Lots of people who know what they're doing have trouble getting CUPS to work, and I don't think it reasonable to expect the computer-as-appliance crowd will be able to manage it.

3) Setting the time from a remote time server. In the Windows environment, you go to a freeware site, pick a time server client, download it and double click on what you downloaded. It installs and it works, though the user doesn't have a clue what is going on. In Linux, you start out by reading several manuals on the NTP protocol site. This is a terrific resource, and I really had a blast filling in gaps in my knowledge about the hierarchy of time servers and the methods for using multiple time servers at different tiers to improve accuracy. To the computer noob, who doesn't understand that there are delays in communications, this would be pure pain and largely incomprehensible. I doubt they'd get through the documentation on the NTP site and I further doubt they'd manage to get the NTP daemon running, even if they do figure out how to run vi or vim.

If you want more examples, you can pick almost any common operation and it is substantially harder for a computer noob in Linux than in Windows. That's largely because the folks who put together Windows, even though they can't seem to write ten lines of code without doing something

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foolish, appreciated the need to provide wizards that anticipate what most people want to do and the level of computer knowledge they don't have. On this mailing list, giving a straightforward answer to a simple question, rather than a polite exhortation to RTFM, has been referred to as "breast feeding" the noobs.

That's the nut Debian has to crack, IMHO, if it wants to see wide adoption. Expecting unsophisticated users to decide in large numbers that it is in their best interest to educate themselves on the internal workings of an operating system is wishful thinking. Though the sentiment comes from a good place, it is completely unrealistic.

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Seth Goodman

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