

[opensuse] Thoughts On OS Betas

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How well one is served by a beta distribution (of nearly everything, but especially an OS distribution) depends on two major factors: (1) how much of the system you actually use, and (2) how important the particular machine is to you.

With regard to (1), the less of a system you actually use, the more likely a beta distribution will work just fine. One of my laptops gets used very lightly, for occasional email and web browsing. 10.3 Beta 1 was great on it. More drivers that I needed were built into the kernel, and there was way less fussing around to get things working than with the 10.2 release.

On another machine, 10.3 Beta 1 gave me sound from the onboard sound card, which I never had been able to get working with 10.2. For the first time, I was able to rip some of my CDs to .ogg files and enjoy them through the fairly high-quality speakers connected to that machine. On another laptop, 10.3 Beta 2 has enabled wireless connectivity for the first time. That's a serious advantage for a computer that I can't really use very well connected to an Ethernet cable.

With regard to (2), life in the fast lane definitely comes with risks. Although being an early adopter of the newest distribution can be exciting and rewarding, it doesn't make sense to install a beta on a machine that's needed for serious work. Unless, that is, you're willing to risk trashing a file system, or have a great backup system in place.

All it takes is common sense, and reasonable precautions. I just finished reinstalling 10.2 on my Linux desktop machine, after I managed to trash one of the disks with 10.3 Beta 1. For me, that computer is a toy, one I built for the express purpose of experimenting with Linux. With my /user area backed up on a separate drive, I was able to restore my email and documents fairly easily.

Would I install a beta on a machine I use for serious work, and that I can't afford to have out of operation? Heh. I'm not that dumb. But I sure am enjoying the new openSuSE bits. I can't wait for the stable release!

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