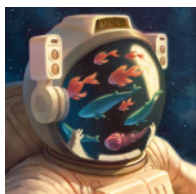


Developers: Let distros do their job

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I wrote a post some time ago titled *Developers shouldn't distribute their own software*, and after a discussion on the `#tuxmachines` IRC channel today, the topic seems worthy of renewed mention. Let's start with this: what exactly is a software distribution, anyway?

I use *software distribution* here, rather than *Linux distribution*, because it generalizes better. For example, all of the major BSD systems, plus Illumos and others besides, are software distributions, but don't involve Linux. Some differ further still, sitting on top of another operating system, such as Nix or pkgsrc. What these systems all have in common is that they concern themselves with the distribution of software, and thus are a software distribution.

An important trait of these systems is that they function independently of the development of the software they distribute, and are overseen by a third party. For the purpose of this discussion, I will rule out package repositories which are not curated by the third-party in question, such as npm or PyPI. It is no coincidence that such repositories often end up distributing malware.

Software distributions are often volunteer-run and represent the interests of the users; in a sense they are a kind of union of users. They handle building your software for their system, and come to the table with domain-specific knowledge about the concerns of the platform that they're working with. There are hundreds of Linux distros and each

does things differently ? the package maintainers are the experts who save you the burden of learning how all of them work. Instead of cramming all of your files into /opt, they will carefully sort it into the right place, make sure all of your dependencies are sorted upon installation, and make the installation of your software a single command (or click) away.

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