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Ubuntu 5.04 Review/Install

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Can it really be run on PC and Mac platforms?
By TGodfrey

I recently received multiple copies of Ubuntu?s latest distribution, ?The Hoary Hedgehog?. UbuntuLinux?s website claims "Ubuntu" is an ancient African word, meaning "humanity to others". Ubuntu also means "I am what I am because of who we all are". The Ubuntu Linux distribution brings the spirit of Ubuntu to the software world. I do not think this can be anymore true plus my wife thinks its just fun to say.

I received live and installation CD?s for Intel x86, AMD64/EM64T, and PowerPC. The organization believes that anyone who asks, shall receive the distribution. I think this is a great way to get an easy-to-use version out there for those that want to use their computer, not be a slave to it. Ubuntu believes in productivity and ease of use in an operating system regardless of the hardware you own (or what was stuck in a closet). Most of the calls I receive are from customers that have 2-4 year old hardware, so I thought the best place to see if the distro is usable is on an older P3 and Apple iMac.

I am a newly granted Novell CLP (Certified Linux Professional), have been teaching classes in linux administration for quite awhile, and genuinely just like the ?openness? of a wonderful operating system. The best way to introduce linux to your customers, friends, business associates, etc. is just to give them a live CD and let them play with it. I make a lot of copies of live CD?s, but this one has most of the items my associates are looking for. It needs to be easy to use, easy to configure, have some business applications, web browsing, ability to connect to their local network, and print. Ubuntu does this with such ease it is almost scary.

Let?s take a look at Test#1 and Test #2?
Test #1: PC Installation

PC Installation on an IBM PIII-600mhz, 128mb RAM, 15gb hard drive, and Encore 54g wireless card. This installation took less than a half hour even with configuring the printer and wireless. A word to the wise, it is so much easier to

configure the wireless through the PC?s NIC (I did take it out later). My wife wanted to replace our network printer (Epson Stylus Scan 2500 connected to our SuSe Linux 9 server) with a standalone Brother MFC-5840CN printer/fax/scanner/copier/etc. This is a great productivity device for way under $200 and extremely easy to configure.

Initial Installation

Boot from CD and run with the install. The interface is a no-nonsense series of text screens. Just fill in the answers as requested. Ubuntu will want the entire hard drive by default, so make sure to back up any important information before starting the installation. There are ways of setting up multiple partitions, but with this box only having 15gb, it can have the whole thing.

The installation found the correct monitor, mouse, keyboard, and NIC so installation was very quick. I was able to connect to my network drives (SuSe), other shared drives (Mac OS/X and other non-linux), and the internet with no problems. The installation did not see my wireless card or Brother printer automatically. It did see our old Epson without issue and was able to print to it.

The only think I don?t like is that you cannot login as ?root? normally. It just proves we get spoiled and really should use the computer with another login. Only administer the computer with the ?root? privileges. This is easy enough to fix by:

1. go to TERMINAL
2. type: sudo passwd root
3. type in the password you used when first logging in
4. exit TERMINAL
5. Select: [System] ? [Administration] ? [Login Screen Setup]
6. Choose: [Security] tab
7. Check the ?Allow root to login with GDM? box, then [CLOSE]
8. Close out, reboot, login?.

Wireless Configuration

This is easy to do by following the steps from the Ubuntu website. My Encore 54g wireless card is based on the RT2500 Chipset. I just queried the site and it came up with : www.UbuntuLinux.org/wiki/Rt2500WirelessCardsHowTo. Please make sure to use a PCI NIC for easier configuration of the card. You can remove it later. I?ll summarize some of the important steps from Mr. Rob Sharp?s instructions.

1. go to TERMINAL
2. type: wget http://rt2x00.serialmonkey.com/rt2500-cvs-daily.tar.gz
3. type: tar -xzf rt2500-cvs-daily.tar.gz
4. type: sudo apt-get install build-essential linux-headers-$(uname -r)
5. type: cd ./rt2500-cvs-*/Module
6. type: make
7. To test, type: sudo insmod rt2500.ko

Exit TERMINAL

1. Select: [System] ? [Administration] ? [Networking]
2. Find the wireless card, then Select ? [Activate]

To finish up the install

1. go to TERMINAL
2. type: sudo ifdown ra0

3. type: sudo cp ~/rt2500-cvs-daily/Module/rt2500.ko /lib/modules/`uname -r`/kernel/drivers/net/wireless/
4. type: echo "alias ra0 rt2500" | sudo tee /etc/modprobe.d/rt2500

The issue now is that if you restart the computer then you have to do a ?sudo ifup ra0? to bring up the wireless card. Mr. Sharp?s instructions go on stating the user can update the /etc/network/interfaces/ file by defining the IP, subnet, SSID, a wireless key (if any), etc. The last line would be ?auto ra0? to bring up the card when the machine is turned on. All of the above took less than a half-hour and has been working fine for well over a month. I pulled the internal NIC a little later that evening and have not looked back since.

Printer Configuration

This was a little more tricky. Ubuntu does not support this printer on the CD so you will have to access the Brother Solutions site and download the LPR and CUPS drivers (http://solutions.brother.com/linux/sol/printer/linux/cups_drivers.html). I just followed the instructions:

1. Download the LPR driver
2. Download the CUPS/Wrapper driver
3. Basically: rpm -ivh --nodeps drivername
4. Launch your web browser, go to: http://localhost:631
5. Manage / Add / Configure the printer (just follow the screens)

I then used the above to change over my SuSE machines and Fedora 3 box from the Epson to the Brother printer. The Epson will probably go on eBay since it is no longer being used. All has been working well for the past several weeks.

Test #2: PowerPC trial

I really like Macintosh since playing with the different flavors of OS/X. My G3 desktop died a couple of years ago and the only thing I owned with an apple icon is my iPod. I started going through the Mac websites looking for an inexpensive one that did not require much desk space. Like most of you, I?m sure you share an office with multiple computers doing all sorts of ?important things??.that?s what my wife hears anyway. I?m sure she really didn?t want me dragging home yet another machine.

After almost two weeks, I found an Apple iMac G3 (?bondi blue??.was really hoping for ?tangerine??), 350mhz, 128mb RAM, and 6gb hard drive on eBay for under $100 with shipping. It was delivered a few days later and found not to contain a keyboard or mouse. I reread the eBay listing and it did state that the little guy would not be coming home with a keyboard or mouse.

Great.

I didn?t want to wait so I went to the nearest ?computer place? and purchased a Kensington wireless keyboard and mouse for under $60. I figured it could be used with another computer in case it did not work. The installation is basically plugging it in and turning on the Mac. OS/X came up with no problems and recognized the new Kensington hardware with no issues. I then booted the Mac with the Ubuntu PowerPC live CD (remember to hold down the ?C? key) and it came up flawless! This distro configured the monitor, sound, wireless keyboard/mouse, and saw my network through the built-in port. Fantastic!

The screen looks identical to the PC version and works just as well. Since the machine is running from a live CD, it does run slow since the iMac does not have a very fast CD drive. A bigger hard drive will be found in the near future so a proper installation of Ubuntu can be on the iMac. I guess it would be making the little guy into a uMac?

[3]

In conclusion, Ubuntu is a great all-around version of linux. It is easy to load and configure, has many useful business applications, seems to understand just about any type of hardware, and just plain ?works?. When business associates, customers, and friends ask about trying linux, I can see making many copies of the live CD to get them hooked. Then it just a matter of time before they start asking me for installation CD?s. Linux for human beings?.I can see that.

[4]

X86 Version on the left; PowerPC on the right

Reviews Ubuntu

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