Rethinking the Linux Distribution

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This article ties together a number of exciting ideas in the Free/Open Source (FOSS) community, to suggest a new direction for the Linux distribution. Many of these ideas are also applicable to BSD-based systems.

Although there are several mature, high quality distributions available, Linux has had a very hard time breaking through in certain markets, such as the desktop. In addition, the internet, which has already dramatically transformed the environment for other content-creating industries, may now alter the established methods for software packaging and installation.

The activities around Web 2.0 are giving rise to Software as a Service (SaaS). For example, Google claims that more than 100,000 small businesses, as well as a few large ones, have signed up for Google Apps. Of course, Microsoft is trying to build its own SaaS offering, Windows Live. Meanwhile, many categories of Web applications are already mature, including email, social networking, and e-commerce. The next step is the Web OS; a race that, in the end, may go to a startup company.

As I hope to demonstrate in this article, FOSS tools are the right technology to define the post-PC software era, and not merely as a backend platform for someone else's proprietary SaaS suite. Today's typical Linux distribution, however, follows a design that resembles a legacy Unix system with a Windows-style front end bolted on. This is a competitor to products such as Vista, which may actually be the last of its kind, even for Microsoft. It would be unfortunate indeed to suddenly find ourselves stuck with yesterday's business model.

Here is a list of topics covered in the article:

- Reconsidering system administration and related tools, the "glue" that holds a distribution together.
- Combining local and remote applications under a single UI.
- The emergence of a free Web OS.
- A model for governance of FOSS projects, and online collaboration generally.

[Full Story](#) [2].

[Linux](#)

Links:

[1] http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/63
[2] http://www.onlamp.com/pub/a/onlamp/2007/05/10/rethinking-the-linux-distribution.html