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Genesis of an Operating System

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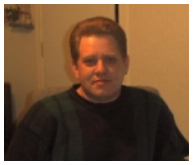
[4]Just say the name Texstar to anyone that runs Linux and see a smile with an expression of recognition and appreciation light their face. When Texstar first began using Linux eight years ago, he had no idea he would someday become an icon of creativity, ingenuity, and self-sacrifice. Eternally humble, he may not agree to this description, but these are just some of the superlatives used to describe him by users of his os [5], visitors to his site [6], and personal friends of the man.

Texstar began to gain recognition approximately five years ago when he began packaging and providing rpms and howtos for current MandrakeLinux releases. Later he began providing these rpms through his website [6]. This website grew in popularity as all of Linuxdom began linking to it. From mailing lists to newsgroups, from discussion forums to websites, pclinuxonline and Texstar were on a roll. This snowball effect has lead him to provide one of the most beautiful, complete, and stable operating systems in existence.

It began with Redhat 5.2 for Texstar, having become disenchanted with Windows. He said, "I wanted to get away from Windows because it wouldn't let me have control over my computer. It was forcing me to install things I didn't want or need." He soon moved on to Mandrake because it was a revolutionary operating system for its time. With its roots in Redhat but featuring KDE [7] instead of Gnome [8] and the ambitious goal of including graphical configuration tools, Texstar and many others were hooked.

However, it wasn't long before stability issues, missing features, and undesired customizations inspired Texstar to begin patching Mandrake's rpms and KDE's sources then repackaging them for himself. When others posted on help forums about some of the same issues he had resolved, he stepped forward to offer advice and assistance. This lead to him offering users the opportunity to install his rpms to fix those pesky bugs and enjoy the extra features so hard for the

newcomer or layperson to implement. He explained, "It was fun and challenging. It was like a puzzle, where all the pieces have to fit just right or the program won't work. Plus there is something satisfying to take raw source code and convert it into something a user can install and use." There were rarely any adverse issues and those rpms reaped more and more praise. Users wanted more. Requests for features and updates soon followed. Texstar and his site grew in popularity.

With management, developer, and philosophical changes afoot in Paris, Texstar felt the time was right to offer his finely tuned and beautifully customized system to others. "I wanted something that a person could boot and know right away if the OS would be compatible with their computer. With so many hardware configurations, it's nice to know right from the start if pclinuxos is right for your system. I saw Jaco was doing livecd scripts and I got involved in the project which gave me an outlet to produce a livecd with my rpm packages. I also enjoy playing with the livecd technology." Thus the PCLinuxOS livecd was born.

The road to producing this livecd hasn't been unencumbered. As with all software there are compatibility issues, bugs, and personnel problems. Previews 1 & 2 were private releases to test hardware detection. Preview 3 was a limited release to guage interest and Tex was not disappointed. People were very interested. Someone, not mentioning any names, posted [9] a manual way of installing the livecd to a harddrive. It and the discussion that followed showed an indication of the interest in installing onto harddrives. This inspired Texstar to implement an easy harddrive installer. Preview 4 featured a harddrive installer but presented trouble for some setups. Texstar and mklivecd developer Jaco worked hard hammering out the kinks on the hardware detection, booting scripts, and harddrive installer until Jaco became too busy in his real life and passed the mantle to Tom.

Tom became interested in working on the PCLinuxOS livecd project because he was "very impressed with the quality of PCLinuxOS and was more comfortable with a Mandrake based livecd than with Knoppix. I also wanted to get a device working in Linux - a magneto optical drive." In February of last year "I asked Tex how I could help, and he told me 'Please help Jaco (with mklivecd).'"

The rest shall we say is history. There have been 4 new releases since featuring better hardware detection and support for more modern and exotic hardware. Newest versions of applications, the latest kernels and related technologies, more customizable features and all the eye candy for which one could hope are the things users get when they download PCLinuxOS. In the future Tom hopes "to see overall continued improvement across the board, more i18n, use of a copy-on-write filesystem such as unionfs. Longer term, possibly a reduction or complete replacement of the Mandrake hardware detection/configuration tools." Tex humbly states "We plan to continue to improve it and hopefully become a major player in the next few years."

PCLinuxOS Preview 8.1 is due out any day now and excitement is in the air. Some of the things that we can expect from it are listed in the comments of this article [10]. As always the project is nothing without its users and their bug reports [11].

PCLOS Interviews -s

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