Thoughts: Where is Linux Going?

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My first ventures into Linux were way back in 1995 with a copy of Red Hat, and i'll put my hands up, i just didn't get it, command line, when Windows had a GUI, nothing seemed to work, and a strange command set, but even back then, not understanding Linux, and wondering what the fuss was about, i will say, i was very aware of what this ment to the industry, and knew it was important.

I have always had a penchant for "Alternative Operating systems" when people i worked with were using Windows, i would insist on using OS2, even back in the days of DOS, i was an avid Gem user.

It wasn't really until 2000 that i got an opportunity to really get my teeth into Linux, working on a project to get IT into a school, there was no buget, and Fedora solved many problems, and caused many more, however something i learnt with this mini project of setting up a SMB server, 4 Windows PC's which needed to attach to a Domain Controller (SMB Server on Fedora) and a LAMPP stack to run Moodle. has stuck with me ever since.

Linux is not Windows, you do not sit down at a Linux PC, and expect everything to work, you do not have an expectation with new hardware that the install will go a smooth as an OEM windows install. this is just a basic fact of life with Linux, and if Linux users are brutally honest, its half the appeal to Linux as an OS, it makes you think, its why we got into IT to start with, the challenge.

Linux in recent years however seems to, and this is Desktop Linux i'm referring to, taken a turn for th worst, and there is a simple reason for this.. Windows Users.

Windows is an OS found on the vast majority of PC's out in the wild, its got many well documented issues, poor security model, bugs, virus and spyware prone, apps crash and take out the whole system. However it is used by just about every company out there, because the untrained PC user, knows how to grab a mouse, double click, and open an application, and this is expected of users.

The problem starts however when it comes to general maintenance of their systems, be it in the office or at home. Most home users will be logging into thier system as Administrator, even it that account is hidden by another name, so have the ability to do most things on thier PC's and are used to that.

Also when most Windows users buy a PC, it is delivered them, if not with Windows preinstalled, then most of the system is, and its just a few licence questions on the OEM version they are using.

Microsoft does a very good job of shielding the user in the first instance from the workings of a PC.

However, the 7 year old XP system, which most computer users who are not IT related consider to be "the only OS" because they don't really know of anything else, was superseded by Vista, and this introduced a whole subsection of novice PC users to the Upgrade, which in most cases did not go very well, 20hrs, system failures, and drivers not working, cobbled together with even the popular press slating the OS in the newspapers, created a strange phenomenon, compared to the previous few years in the IT industry.

USer shift, suddenly users who were Windows XP lovers, were having issues with Vista, and started, slowly at first looking for alternatives.. and not wanting to buy new hardware, found Ubuntu, which has become the byword for Linux amongst the non technical computer user community.

This was seen as great for the Linux community, as a whole, groups of Windows users coming over to Linux, Vista was a nightmare, and on the whole all good.

Indeed there have been more improvements in the last 3 years to Desktop Linux distributions i would personally say, than in the many years before, by which i'm referring to usability enhancements, the simple things, Codecs being installed on GNOME, restricted hardware being detected on install, and downloaded and installed for you, and the recent Ubuntu 100 paper-cuts project will improve usability even further.

However, all is not good across the board, rom where i sit, this influx of Windows users coming over to the Linux world, has cause issues as well, Windows users are not used to the ways of the Penguin, you see things are different for Linux Users,

- Systems don't come with Linux preinstalled
- Drivers may not have been written for all the hardware on your PC
- Codecs, we use many more than just the WMV and FLASH you may have been used to
- The Kid next door, might not be able to tweak Linux the same way he could XP

Essentially you are now in a situation where the availability of help requires you to look on the internet, ask well formed questions, and not tell everyone how Linux should be more like Windows.

This has resulted in many people, who don't know better slating Linux/Ubuntu because it involves thinking, and they don't want to do this, it has also meant that netbooks are not the golden hardware of the Linux world.

And this has prompted my question "Where is linux going?"

It seems to me that Linux wishes to compete with Windows on Microsofts terms, it seems to be playing the trumpet of Linux if better, use it, or be stupid, and this is all wrong. in my opinion anyway.

Remember what i said before about Linux, you don't install it and expect it just to work, that is the strength of the OS as a whole, it was used by technical people, and focused on what they wanted from a desktop, and lets face it, being told by a Windows user that Linux wasn't very good, wasn't an issue, because you knew the windows user was a plank.

However in competing with Windows, Linux/Ubuntu is becoming windows, and by doing that, is going to cuase itself many problems.

Most people started to use Ubuntu back in the early days because it was innovating, changing, different at a desktop level, the last few releases however, have been unimpressive service packs, nothing providing the must have that factor, sure many fixes, under the hood improvements, but nothing WOW!!! Just when Linux needed those industry lines, conversations and plaudits, for doing it better, different and cleaner, the flagship distro seems to have decided to just roll out bland updates.

I wonder if this is a reaction to all those converts of Windows users looking to dumb down our OS, and slow down

those revolutionary updates?

I also read fears of botnets based on Linux, because we have dumbed the security model down on desktop Linux to accommodate those Windows users who don't understand security models (remember, the dault user is setup as admin).

If Ubuntu, and i will say ubuntu, as it is the defacto linux "brand" Distro, keeps dumbing down the desktop, security and OS as a whole, they are going to lose those users who made it so popular, and be stuck with a whole bunch of users who want a Windows replacement.

Linux is a tech persons distro, not a home users, it requires thought, and patience. because it provides security, and peace of mind.. Linux is not Windows.

For me, BSD and Opensolaris are both looking like alternatives to Linux..

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