

Linux



I my 40 some years I have witnessed and used many PC operating systems. Some of these have been from almost the beginning of time (computing) itself (man am I old). I have used almost all OS flavors at one time or another since the start of the PC revolution. My son, now 15, often wonders how we could survive without a computer as he has never know life without one. In any case most of the original operating systems were burned into what most of you younger folk would know as the BIOS or CMOS...the BIOS WAS the OS. Those PCs like the Timex Sinclair, TI 99-4a , etc. were very limited in RAM and CPU speed. My very first PC was the TI 99-4a it had 16k.....yes I said 16k...of RAM, the first 16 bit processor..WOW!! It ran at a whooping 3 MHz and I LOVED it...It had a form of BASIC programming built in and I could make use of every single bit available to me...In those days the OS was just that, an Operating System. It handled the memory, external media (tape drive in the olden days, I did not even have a floppy) and the CPU...The OS made the PC OPERATE.



Today an operating system is much more than that. What is thought of as an operating system now is not just the ability to handle the PC hardware and storage but also the applications it is bundled with. Email, Web browsers, Word Processors, Office applications and the like. Windows has been by far the dominant player in this current definition of the operating system, but is it really the best? For the average user in the office, or at home the answer to date has been yes. By in large a non-technical person could install and use programs in Windows, after all that is what they wanted. The average person just wants to use their PC to get done what they want and move on to the next task. They are not really all that interested in programming or how it all really works but they do take pride and think of themselves as tech savvy when they get the computer to do what they want. Linux/Unix has been this thing that guys in labs with white coats, thick glasses and pocket protectors use. I will admit that in the past this was not totally false. To use Linux you really did need to know more than the average Joe and installing software and configuring the system could be a real challenge. In the last few years the gap between Windows ease of use and Linux has dramatically closed.

I will focus on one flavor of Linux, Ubuntu, but there are others such as Red Hat, Fedora etc. that are good as well. I have been using Linux as long as it has been around and it is my OS of choice. I also use Windows, Unix, MAC but when I sit down at home I usually choose to boot

into Linux. Ubuntu Linux has really closed the tech gap with Windows with respect to ease of install and use. I have installed it on many PCs and usually it goes without a hitch, all of the hardware and drivers work when the install is complete...a far cry from yesteryear and setting interrupts, I/O ports etc..... I can just install and start using the OS right away. I would actually say it is also easier than Windows to install. There is also a feature you can use in which you make a boot-able CD and run it that way. This works very well for those who want to test drive it or to retrieve data from a dead system that will not boot. I have used it in laptops and PCs and never had an issue.

As for ease of use of the OS itself I installed Ubuntu on my mothers PC when she had her Windows system die due to viruses (God I hope she was not browsing porn sites). My mother is the typical 60ish grandmother who treats the PC like a toaster. She knows where the power button is and that is about as technical as it gets. She liked Windows because she can point and click, get her email, run some office applications and browse the Internet. When I installed Ubuntu for her the environment was very familiar to her and she was soon pointing and clicking away. She has been using it for a year now and is very happy...As an added benefit she has not gotten one virus. Of course that makes me happy because now I don't have to constantly fix her computer any more. So for those who think Linux is too technical or hard to use, it is not. It is very much like Windows now, but also has many advantages.

Linux comes bundled with many programs that you would have to pay extra for with Windows. The OS itself is free, Office applications such as presentations, word processing, spreadsheets are included. Virtually every application that is available on Windows is available on Linux and most of the time it is free. So is Linux ready for prime time? Well if an OS has to be easy to install, not intimidating, easy to use and well supported then yes, Linux is ready for prime time.

If you have not tried it yet you need to do yourself a favor and at least make a Linux Boot disk and give it a try. I think you will be very surprised at how easy it is to use now. Is it exactly like Windows.... no. But you will quickly learn what is different and once you are used to it you will wonder why anyone would use Windows, and pay for the privilege.