

PCLinuxOS, Distros, and 10 reasons to try PCLinuxOS.

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When I first started experimenting with Linux, it was quite primitive. I waited a couple of years, and tried it again. I purchased a bunch of distros from cheapbytes.com, and tried them all in various computers.

Only one of those distros worked on the majority of machines (where all the devices functioned properly). That distro was Mandrake 7.0. I think it was KDE 2.0 or 2.1 at the time. I stayed with Mandrake for several years (who bought out Connectiva Linux and changed its name to Mandriva Linux).

Through the years, I found some version releases were wonderful (Mandriva 8.2 was remarkably stable on a server for me, as well being a fine desktop).

For Mandriva in a desktop role, I discovered this guy who went by the handle of Texstar was taking the latest KDE releases and producing RPM packages to work with Mandriva. Mandriva even mentioned on their web pages that a person could find updated KDE RPMs created by a guy named Textar [sic]. Yes, here was a guy who was single-handedly keeping the Mandriva distro's primary GUI up to date, and they incorrectly spell his name.

More Mandriva versions were released, and Texstar relentlessly kept issuing updated KDE RPMs for each version. He did an incredible amount of very high quality work, and made the Mandriva experience much better than it would otherwise have been.

On Tex's web site (pclinuxonline.com) I read messages in the forums where folks were encouraging Tex to fork Mandriva and do his own distribution. Sal was one of the guys urging Tex to do his own distro. I was skeptical--although Tex had proved to be an incredibly talented and hard-working maker of KDE RPM's specific to the Mandrake/Mandriva distro, I thought that doing your own complete distro (even with forking Mandriva's source code) was too arduous and difficult a task.

So Tex stopped doing Mandriva KDE packages, and was reputed to be working (with a few others) on a new distro to be called PCLinuxOS. Frankly, I didn't pay much attention--I kept using Mandriva in both server and desktop roles.

Mandriva 10.0 came and went, then 10.1, and Mandriva 10.2/2005, 2006, and now 2007. Mandriva fired Gael Duval. Although I thought he was treated badly, I stuck with Mandriva. But I was becoming increasingly frustrated with Mandriva not officially releasing KDE updates. And while other 3rd parties jumped in to provide KDE updates, they didn't (particularly at first) have the quality and reliability of Tex's RPMs.

And Mandriva's software updater was often unreliable. They changed the organization and structure of their repositories (more than once). It was becoming increasingly difficult to keep a release updated.

Finally, when PCLinuxOS .92 came out, I made the switch from Mandriva. In a way, it was a sad time for me. I had been a silver edition Mandriva club member for several years. I thought Mandriva, as a company, was faithful to Open Source ideals. I had, for many years, paid my club membership *and* purchased boxed sets of each new release.

When PCLinuxOS .93a came out, I upgraded to it. This distro version has been wonderful--a real sweet spot. And on the rare occasion that Tex and the gang didn't have an RPM package for what I wanted, I'd compile my own.

However, there were a few things that just wouldn't compile. They needed the newer C/C++ development libraries, (and libraries that depended on those libraries). And, of course, other distros were starting to introduce new 3D accelerated effects with Compiz and Beryl.

The forums at pclinuxos.com mentioned that Tex and the gang were working on a new release. So, a version of PCLinuxOS 2007 was released internally. About a month later, PCLinuxOS 2007 Test Release 1 was released for widespread testing. For me, this version worked fine, with no issues--it is equivalent to, say, a Release Candidate version 2. After further testing and debugging, PCLinuxOS final is due out at the end of January.

What do I think of PCLinuxOS 2007 Test Release 1? I find it stunning. When the final 2007 release version comes out, I think it will skyrocket in popularity. Already, PCLinux OS has taken over 5th place (from Mandriva) on the distrowatch.com hit parade.

So, a couple of caveats--while PCLinuxOS contains quite a bit of server stuff in its repositories, it is primarily a desktop oriented distro.

Secondly, there are some non-free packages in the distro. You will get all the audio and video codecs and drivers you need. This distro is not for FOSS purists.

Top Ten reasons to install and use PCLinuxOS:

1. It's drop dead gorgeous, and very professional looking.
2. The Beryl/Compiz 3D acceleration effects are terrific--much better than any other distro I've tried.
3. The repository has over 5000 packages, and updates are incredibly prompt, smooth, and easy to do. Synaptic, the GUI package manager works easily and reliably with the repository's RPM packages. Dependency issues are usually well handled. All the development programs and libraries are up to date.
4. An up to date KDE version (3.5.6).
5. Bugs, problems, and issues are promptly fixed.
6. The PCLinuxOS community is positive and helpful. Documentation is excellent. Support is excellent.
7. It's quick and snappy.
8. Everything works.
9. Its very easy to install ... and ...
10. It doesn't require the largess and financial backing of a millionaire to keep it going.

So, yes, the former child (PCLinuxOS) has grown up to supersede its parent (Mandriva). Put simply, for a desktop Linux distro, it's the best.

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