The Linus Tech Tips YouTube channel has been putting out a series of videos called the Switching to Linux Challenge that has been causing a bit of a stir in the Linux community. I've been keeping an eye on these developments, and thought it was a good time to weigh in with my thoughts. This article focuses on what Linux needs to do better? I have also written a companion article, 'How new Linux users can increase their odds of success?', which looks at the other side of the problem.

Linux is not accessible to the average user today, and I didn't need to watch these videos to understand that. I do not think that it is reasonable today to expect a non-expert user to successfully install and use Linux for their daily needs without a Linux friend? holding their hand every step of the way.

This is not a problem unless we want it to be. It is entirely valid to build software which is accommodating of experts only, and in fact this is the kind of software I focus on in my own work. I occasionally use the racecar analogy: you would not expect the average driver to be able to drive a Formula 1 racecar. It is silly to suggest that Formula 1 vehicle designs ought to accommodate non-expert drivers, or that professional racecar drivers should be driving mini-vans on the circuit. However, it is equally silly to design a professional racing vehicle and market it to soccer moms.

I am one of the original developers of the Sway desktop environment for Linux. I am very proud of Sway, and I believe that it represents one of the best desktop experiences on Linux. It is a rock-solid, high-performance, extremely stable desktop which is polished on a level that is competitive with commercial products. However, it is designed for me: a professional, expert-level Linux user. I am under no illusions that it is suitable for my grandmother.
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