Admittedly this experiment didn't really get off the ground and I questioned whether to write about Zenwalk at all. Were it a stand-alone review I probably wouldn't have shared my thoughts on this distribution with the world. However, I felt it worthwhile because my main motivation for trying Zenwalk was to see how it would compare to Slackware Linux 15.0. Slackware felt overly large, overly generic, and overly complicated to use compared to mainstream distributions and I was curious to see how Zenwalk would work given its more specific mission of being a desktop operating system.

What I found interesting was that while Slackware set up a desktop environment and worked in multiple test environments as a desktop system without problems, Zenwalk could not. On the flip side, Slackware's package management failed completely for me while Zenwalk offered two package managers (slackpkg and Flatpak) which worked passably well.

In other words, while I had problems with both, they were entirely different issues. And, to make matters stranger, the two distributions mostly run the same software, use the same repositories, and are binary compatible.

Ultimately, while I think Zenwalk does some good work to narrow the focus of its parent and streamlines things, it also runs into similar setbacks. It's still using a verbose, text-based installer, it still forgoes using HTTPS on its website, it doesn't have a live desktop edition, and still relies on third-party efforts to fill in the package management gaps. I'm sure Zenwalk's simple engineering under the hood still appeals to some people, but I think it involves more manual work and more legacy technology than most computer users will want to deal with at this point in time.