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Fedora 7 "Moonshine": Freedom vs. Ease-of-Use (Part 1)

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History

Red Hat Linux, now Fedora, is one of the oldest surviving distros. Red Hat, the company, was founded in 1994, and its distro gave users a way to install Linux without having to collect and compile all the pieces by themselves. It also gave users a package management system, "RPM" (Red Hat Package Manager), that made installing and removing software relatively easy.

Red Hat Linux was both an officially-supported consumer- and business-oriented OS. Red Hat Linux as a consumer-oriented OS was discontinued in 2003, in favor of a non-supported, community-driven distro named Fedora Core. (Red Hat still offers officially-supported commercial solutions for its business customers.) Fedora Core was a repository of the base system; there was also a "Fedora Extras" repository. The two have now been merged ? thus it's now simply named "Fedora."

Features

⊠ [2]Fedora 7, a.k.a. "Moonshine," released on May 31, is an odd duck. On the one hand, it's hugely popular. If you need to be convinced of that, take a look at the number of people viewing the officially-sanctioned FedoraForum.org [3] at any given time - as I write this, it's almost 7,000 people. Visit your local Barnes & Noble Booksellers (that's a big bookstore chain in the U.S.) and you'll see quite a few books about Fedora on the shelves. (This, by itself, is a big plus for Linux newbies ? Fedora may be the best-documented distro available).

On the other hand, these days, there seems to be an emphasis on being user-friendly (think "Ubuntu"). But Fedora's creators have consciously limited what it can do out of the box. For example:

- Because Fedora includes only software with "free/libre [4]" licenses, the user will not find such popular software such as the Adobe Flash plugin, support for proprietary streaming audio and video drivers, or Microsoft Web fonts in the Fedora repositories.
- Because Fedora includes only software they deem to be free of patent encumbrances, the user will not find MP3 support or support for watching commercial DVDs in the Fedora repositories. Fedora doesn't even include support for read-only access to NTFS partitions.

All this software is available through third-party repositories, such as Livna [5], essentially both a) leaving it up to a

group of volunteers to produce working software for each successive version of Fedora; and 😎 leaving them to "take the heat" for any legal repercussions.

In my opinion, the entire issue of free vs. proprietary and patent-protected vs. patent-free is the biggest one facing Linux as a whole right now. I certainly understand and respect Red Hat's wishes to be free of all the legal repercussions that could arise if they were to be sued; after all, they've got a business to run, and Fedora doesn't earn them any money. I also respect and understand the open-source philosophy. Meanwhile, I want to listen to my MP3s, and watch my movies and YouTube clips, like anyone else.

Fedora 7 includes the following software versions:

- Kernel 2.6.21-1.3194.fc7
- X.org 1.3.0.0-5.fc7
- KDE 3.5.6-9.fc7
- GNOME 2.18.0
- OpenOffice.org 2.2.0
- GCC 4.1.2

Installation

Installation via the Anaconda installer [6] is dead simple. (For a walk-through of the entire installation process, see this series of screenshots [7].) As previously mentioned, there's no support for mounting NTFS partitions. One thing that's new is the opportunity to add third-party repositories [8] before making package selections. I added "http://rpm.livna.org/fedora/7/i386" and was able to select the proprietary NVIDIA driver ? which was configured automagically ? and read-write support for NTFS ("ntfs-3g") ? although I had to manually configure that one later.

There are a few configuration steps to be performed upon first boot. But that's when I encountered a show-stopper: It booted into (the non-existent) runlevel 7! After engaging in some hair-pulling and a furious bout of Google searching, it turned out that the problem was this GRUB entry:

```
title Fedora 7 (on /dev/hda2)
root (hd0,1)
kernel /boot/vmlinuz-2.6.21-1.3194.fc7 ro root=LABEL=/ vga=791 splash=verbose
initrd /boot/initrd-2.6.21-1.3194.fc7.img
```

Long story short, what was happening was that the kernel was picking up the "7 " (that's 7 with a space after it) as a boot parameter, and trying to boot me into runlevel 7! This wasn't exactly Fedora's fault, as I'd changed the "title" value from "Fedora" to "Fedora 7 (on /dev/hda2)" during installation all by myself. After changing the title from "Fedora 7 (on /dev/hda2)" to "Fedora (on /dev/hda2)", it booted normally again.

You are given the option of sending your hardware profile [9] anonymously to Fedora, in order to help them determine what hardware works. (Note that the default is *not* to send it ? you have to choose to do so.)

For the first time since I've been playing with Fedora, my Audigy soundcard actually produced sound when presented with the Sound Card Detection [10] screen. In the past, it didn't work simply because one of the available switches ? the A/D output jack ? was enabled by default, and I'd have to use KMix to turn it off. This was a pleasant surprise.

 [11] [12]

When you boot into Fedora, you're greeted with some very pretty artwork. This is the GDM logon screen.

(End of part 1.)

[>> Part 2 >>](#) [13]

StumbleUpon [14]

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Links:

[1] http://www.tuxmachines.org/taxonomy/term/57
[2] http://www.tuxmachines.org/gallery/v/Fedora_7/1_default-kde-desktop.png.html
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of-Use