

Ubuntu: the good and the bad

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Created 22/09/2009 - 5:04am

Submitted by kwr2k on Tuesday 22nd of September 2009 05:04:58 AM Filed under [Linux](#) [1]

Last Sunday, at a friend's party, someone started a discussion on the impending release of Windows 7. Most of us being from IT, it was a "hot" topic to discuss.

Before I could mention that I use Linux for 99.9% of my tasks at home and at work, a non-IT guy, said he used Ubuntu on his Sony VAIO. Predictably I was pleasantly surprised as Linux is something my friends and acquaintances know the merits of, but do not wish to (yet) deploy on their PCs or laptops.

As the conversation progressed, it was apparent that the non-IT guy had a Macbook, on which he ended up pouring his precious favourite spirit. So, he switched to Ubuntu rather than go back to Windows.

So, here is my personal analysis of what is good and not-so-good about Ubuntu:

The Good

Its great to see that almost a joe-average user decided to install Ubuntu Jaunty rather than revert to the "comfort" of Windows. This clearly implies that the user migration to Linux has started trickling. Full marks to Ubuntu for making the system easy enough.

The Bad

When I asked the guy why he chose Ubuntu, the answer was that he was used to MacOS X interface and Ubuntu provided a much similar look and feel. I couldn't help wondering if this is the cause of few Windows users migrating to Ubuntu. Take, for example, Kubuntu. It comes with KDE and (as numerous reports and rants on the internet say) provides a Windows-like look and feel.

Would the statistics for migration to Linux look any different if Canonical had gone with KDE/4 and provided a Windows-lookalike desktop? We have had 10 iterations of admittedly the most popular Linux distributions out there. Maybe its time to switch the strategy and target users who want the familiar look of Windows without its legendary ills. If that's too radical now, why not provide an option to choose the look-and-feel during installation (and during Live-CD startup) by showing the user screenshots of KDE and GNOME (looking similar to Windows and MacOS X respectively)?

Disclaimer: This is not a rant against any particular desktop, although I do prefer KDE over GNOME. Its simply offering users what they seem to want.

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