TM's Top 10 Linux Distributions of 2009

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Daniweb published their list of Top 10 Linux Distributions for 2009 and unfortunately I and not-just-I didn't agree with his list. I don't want to detract from the hard working folks on those projects, but some won't even run on modern hardware too well. One has turned into a specialty distro, although much of world keeps ignoring that fact. Another needs a Windows install to use. Anyway, so here's our Top 10 List:

1. openSUSE - Always in my Top 10 is openSUSE, despite any contracts signed by corporate with large monopolistic companies because it's just a really great distro. It's rock solid, I've never had a crash of even an application on openSUSE! It always looks great out of the box. It's a large corporate sponsored distro with a paid support version employing some of the most talented, and famous for being talented, developers in our community. It always has a professional look and feel, highly polished and overall just a really excellent example of what a Linux distribution can be.

2. Gentoo - Here I agree with Daniweb, it's one of the few source-based distributions aimed at the power user. In today's climate of dumbing down everything for the lowest-common-denominator, Gentoo is a cleansing breath of lack-of-ease air. Despite that, it still can and is used by new Linux users all the time. They've had their problems here and there over the years but hung-in there and recently celebrated 10 years of custom compiling goodness. It was a pioneer in its heyday and is still unique today.

3. Mandriva - Another commercial distribution who was the leader in ease-of-use when every other Linux distribution was still difficult to install and even use. They were the original pop-in-the-cd-and-click-next distro and yet always maintained a very large repository of software. I don't think I ever tried to install an application that wasn't found in its repos. Despite not always being the most stable distro available, they were commonly the first distro to support the very latest hardware. And it's also become of most beautiful in recent years.

4. Puppy Linux - DSL was one of the pioneers of the tiny distro, but they've seemed to stagnate in recent years. Although that decision was a conscious strategy in order to maintain a distro for those older machines, Puppy has come along and swiped the crown from them. They are very small and yet modern. They support a wide-range of hardware and only the very ancient may have issues. It comes with scripts to install on about any medium out there as well. They have their own package management and lots of original tools as well. I see a lot of talent behind the creation of Puppy.

5. Sam Linux - While Sam is a derivative of a derivative, they seem to have taken the art to a new level. By applying some common sense logic with some handy little apps, they've created one nice all-around desktop distro. It comes with support for video and audio playback as well as some proprietary hardware drivers, so there's very little tweaking required. The desktop offers some cool and useful little extras that add functionality without cluttering the workspace

or distracting the user. For me, it's just install and enjoy.

6. Linux Mint - is another derivative that improves upon its base by leaps and bounds. Again, by providing an almost complete out-of-the-box experience with little or no tweaking required, it's another install and go distro. Linux Mint is the distro I usually choose when I need a solution and I need it *now*.

7. Slackware - Slackware is always a favorite for its rich heritage and for staying true to its straight and narrow vision of keeping it simple. Even though the modern kernel and hardware detection has taken most of the fun out of running Slackware, making it practically an install and go distro, it's still high on the nostalgic scale. And it gets points for still being developed by a small handful of developers with most of the work still being done by the original founder. And it's the oldest living distribution.

8. Debian - is the original go anywhere do anything distro. It's an all around universal operating system suitable for the smallest embedded gadget to the largest cluster of mainframes. It was really the only choice for me when looking for a server distro because of its commitment to security and stability. It is also the base of some of the most popular desktop distributions available today - and many say it's a fine desktop distro itself.

9. SimplyMepis - This is one of the Debian derivatives that takes a stable base and builds it into one mighty fine desktop distributions. It was one of the first to offer one of those install and go solutions. It was the first to include that proprietary code others avoided for legal reasons. They offer paid support options, but not on the scale of Novell, Red Hat, or Mandriva. And it always looks pretty too. SimplyMepis is another one that pops into mind if I need a quick, easy, and guaranteed successful system.

10. Ubuntu - I hesitantly have to include Ubuntu on this list for the sheer number of loyal and sometimes rabid users all over the world. Ubuntu is by far the most popular and has taken Linux onto mainstream hardware offerings. It has introduced Linux to many people who may otherwise would have never heard of it. Like it or not, Ubuntu is a Top 10.

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Honorable Mention. PCLinuxOS - PCLOS was one of the first to take a large unstable distro and recompile it into a complete and highly stable out-of-box offering. It became very popular and many users remain hooked today. They've had some personnel issues, but somehow maintained the distro with little or no evidence to the outside user. It was also the first distro to show it believes a computer interface can be pretty as well as useful.

HM 2. Red Hat - For being the largest commercial Linux entity and proving a Linux distribution can be as viable or even more viable than Windows in an enterprise setting. Probably the first name in Linux.

HM 3. Sabayon - For being a great distro from a talented developer. Complete is the word that comes to mind when I think of Sabayon. Points for writing an original package management suite. And I just like it.

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