Linux is looking ready for mainstream users

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A review of alternative operating systems is really a look at the latest flavors of Linux. And with so many varieties of Linux to choose from, finding the best for your agency can be a challenge.

During the past five years, Linux designers have made strides in creating an interface that is more intuitive, standard and user-friendly. Additionally, Mac OS X?s popularity has reached a point that many users no longer see a Windows-based platform as the only way to do office work. People are subsequently less intimidated by different operating system environments. In fact, one of the best operating systems in this roundup, Xandros, offers the ability to switch the interface to resemble Mac OS X or Windows XP.

The changes in operating systems and overall more tech-savvy crowd are reshaping the Microsoft-only landscape on a daily basis. At my office, I have recently noticed the water cooler talk gravitate more toward root issues and Linux or Mac tools instead of .dll horror stories, future service pack wish lists, and comparisons of different versions of Microsoft operating systems. As this review will demonstrate, a lot of Linux manufacturers are taking on Microsoft by producing solid desktop versions of their operating systems.

I reviewed four of the most popular Linux operating systems and judged them on ease of use, performance, functionality and price. My test bed for the roundup was a 1.7 GHz Pentium M Panasonic CF-51 with 512M of RAM and a 40G hard drive.

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