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Xandros 4: Home Edition - Premium

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[4]I just received my boxed set of Xandros Desktop Premium Home Edition. The box was heavy. I thought to myself, "the box is heavy!" That's because it contains not only the sealed packet of 3 cds, but also a quick start guide and a rather thick User Guide. I beta tested an early early version of Xandros years ago, so my memory of it has all but faded. I do recall that at that time, it wiped out my entire disk. I'm hoping it has a partitioner this time. A little older and wiser now, I thought I could avoid catastrophe even if it doesn't. So, how did it go?

Packaging

The box itself is a rather enticing package. Presented in primarily shades of blue, the front contains a large xandros logo in blue and gray as the focal point accented by a few graphics of some of the apps awaiting the user. The back of the box depicts a desktop screenshots highlighting some of xandros' multimedia capabilities while pointing out some of the other system traits. Inside the front flap we find a page listing some more capabilities of xandros, such as Music Management, Office Suite, Windows Compatible, Security Suite, and Wireless Networking. The other inside covers features more screenshots emphasizing the point and click capabilities through examples of applications. It's quite an attractive presentation.

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Inside the box we find a packet of 3 cds: Installation CD, Applications CD, and Versora Progression Desktop for Xandros cd. Also included is the Getting Started Guide. This little booklet is a full color summary of the install choices & procedures, howto start the system, and a basic quick introduction to starting applications. In addition, there is this 380-page User Guide. This book is a detailed guide to using the Xandros Desktop. It goes into such detail, any user is almost guaranteed success. One could write a full review just of this book. For example, within its 18 chapters we can find out how to install, use, and customize the desktop, connect to the internet, and manage files and the system. But that's not all. It also details how to use all the various applications. And it all focuses on point and click. I haven't seen a reference to the commandline yet. This book appears to be a wonderful asset. The User Guide alone is probably worth the price of the Xandros package to the new Linux user.

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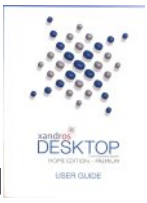

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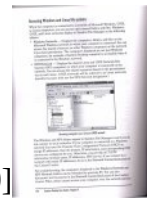
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Bonus: As a surprize I suppose, some other neato stuff in the box are Xandros stickers. One is a computer case sticker. Xandros also gives their new user 30 Skype minutes. Your serial number is also in the cd packet, so look for that and don't lose it. It's also in sticker form, so you can stick it on the side of your monitor, in your User Guide, or on your case.

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The Install

The installer starts off with a text screen telling how to access some Troubleshooting tips. It must default to about 3 seconds tho because the full screen blue splashscreen soon appears. The background looks very much like their wallpaper in the desktop screenshot, with a thin red progress bar marking the progress of the process output in text. The next screen I see is the NVIDIA logo. I thought that was quite interesting. This is the first installer I've seen that uses NVIDIA drivers. The result was amazing. I got a full high res screen with 3D effects. The interactive installer presents its information in a modern looking 3d box of another lovely shade of blue. It looked great. The first screen is a Welcome screen advising the user that the upcoming wizard will guide them through their install. The next is the license agreement. It was relatively short and briefs the user on the concept of gpl'd software and asks one to comply with the rules for it as well as the proprietary software included. Then comes the fun stuff.

On the left side of the interface windows the steps are listed. As each step is begun, the listing bolds. It is organized as follows:

- Welcome
- License
- System
    - Software Selection
    - Disk
    - Network
- Administration
- User Accounts
- Summary

Software Selection is fairly easy as applications are called by task name rather than their actual development name and the list is categorized by broader task-sets such as Accessories, Games, Graphics, or security. I ended up choosing about everything except some printer specific drivers. Full install was about 1.4 gigs.

Under the Disk section, one now has several choices available.

- Use Free Space (which was grayed out on mine)
- Take Over Entire Disk
- Resize Windows Partition (also grayed out)
- Replace Existing Xandros (grayed)
- Manage Disk & Partitions Manually (For Experts)

Since my disks are already sliced up, I chose to manage disks manually. This consistantly attractive screen looks very much like qtparted, but perhaps a bit more simplified. The operations include Assign, Unassign, Edit, Delete, and Browse. I don't believe I've seen a browse option in a partitioner before. How convenient! In case you've forgotten what might be on a particular partition, which I do quite a bit. Another extra found was Xandros amazing ability to detect the operating system or data installed on many of my partitions. Never before has an auto-detect been so complete and correct. So, I chose my target partition and clicked Assign. Under Assign one can choose the filesystem from Ext2, Ext3, Reiserfs, or Reiser4. Having been bit the initrd snake on more than one occasion, I typically choose Ext3 - as I did this time. Next one must confirm their choices and choose a bootloader option. One can 'untick' the box for the option of installing one or choose where to install one. I unticked and was warned that my new system wouldn't boot without manual intervention and confirmed this was correct.

Next came the Network configuration step. I say configuration in that one has edit, add, delete, etc option as well as dhcp or static - all the standard configuration options. However, my on-board Gigabyte chip (that I've been using lately) was auto-detected, set as eth0, and setup as dhcp. This was my desired setup, so all I did was click Next.

Now was Administation time. This is where one sets their root password, as Xandros uses the Linux standard of user/root priviledges as opposed to the new trend of sudo. This is a good thing in my book as I don't like the sudo philosophy of complete system management. To me sudo is something that should be configured by the admin for a few user/command specific tasks if needed. Also at this point one could choose some higher security restrictions such as making users' homes private and enforcing strong passwords). Interestingly, one also sets their hostname during this step.

Next is User Account(s). Then finally a Summary screen outlining all choices for confirmation before making any changes to your disk. Click Finish and we're on our way. Xandros took about 10 or 15 minutes to install and the user is entertained by a lovely slide show, as well as a progress bar with percentage is used to keep the user informed. Then the usual user can reboot into their new system [14].

[15]

The System

- **The Desktop**

[16]The system boots using a nice silent splash screen similar to the desktop wallpaper and identical to the one used for the installer. Then one is presented with a matching login screen. Upon login, the desktop splash is

also wonderful looking and matches the theme quite well. It features the blue and gray logo seen throughout the process. Then the desktop appears. It is a KDE 3.4.2 sitting on Xorg 6.9.0. Under the hood further we find a 2.6.15 preempt kernel. Installable gcc is 3.3.5.

[17]The main wallpaper consists this great rendition of the Xandros logo in 3D and with some great shading effects with the identifying name and version in the upper right hand corner, all in shades of blue. Xandros has set as default different colors of said wallpaper for each desktop. For example on Desktop 2, we find a green version, on desktop 3 we find a yellow version, and on desktop 4 we find a gray version. If one logs in as root, they'll find a red version.

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[20]

Xandros offers a great looking desktop - uncluttered but functional. They use some customized icons, and others that appear from the crystal collection. I think it's unfortunate that they used the basic KDE default window decoration of plastik. They really should design an unique windec for Xandros, or short of that borrow a nicer one from kde-look.org [21]. However, being KDE we're talking about, themes and window decorations abound and are easily implemented.

- **First Run Wizard**

The first thing one sees is a pop up of the First Run Wizard. This is similar to the KDE wizard, but with customized screens and added functionality. It sets up the mouse, regional settings and time & date, and window behavior as found in KDE. It also sets up any printers it detects or you might want to add manually. Mine was detected properly and the driver file offered was a correct gutenprint ppd.

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Then one gets to the Registration screens. When you purchased your Xandros Linux you were provided a serial number either in an email for downloaded copies or in your cd packet with the box purchase. You will use that now. Clicking "Register Online Now" brings up the Firefox browser and takes you to their registration process at the Xandros website. It does require specific personal information like name and address, but when it's over one receives their Activation Code and can now access software and updates from the Xandros software repository. In fact one of the later options during our first run wizard is installing any updates available or other software as well as launching the Control Center for further customizations.

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- **The Menus**

The menus are uncluttered and easy to navigate. On the top level we find Applications, Find, Control Center, File Manager, Xandros Networks, and Help. I think those are insightful starting points. Logically, it's under Applications

we find our applications. Again sorted by category subheadings, we find Accessories, Crossover, Games, Graphics, Internet, Multimedia, System, and Utilities. Under each category we find usually the app named by function (most of the time - games and internet being exceptions). Some examples include: Personal Information Manager (kontact), Text Editor, Screen Capture, Photo Manager, Image Viewer, Music Player, DVD Writer, Video Player, Performance Monitor, and Online Dictionary. I think given some of the cryptic names of our applications in Linux, this is a wonderful idea for new users.

[28] [29] [30]

- **Applications**

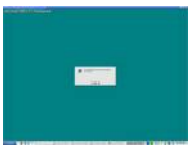
Xandros comes with applications for just about any common computer task. It doesn't confound the user with excessive cryptic choices. Instead it commonly offers one app per given operation, but it frequently offers two. For example there is Kmail and Thunderbird for email or Konqueror and Firebird for web surfing. I found most of the choices in applications quite intuitive. They offer xine for Video Viewing (which did well with avis [31] and mpegs [32] , but not encrypted dvds [33]), KsCD for the Media Player (premium includes Amarok as the Music Manager), an image viewer and photo viewer, Kooka for scanning, Kopete for Instant Messaging, and a nice little selection of games and system utilities. OpenOffice is available to install through the Xandros Networks software manager.

[34] [35] [36]

[37] [38] [39]

- **CrossOver Office**

Crossover Office is one of the commerical applications included with your purchase of Xandros Premium (trial version in the standard home edition). This product normally costs 39.95 usd itself. With this application, one can install any version of the Microsoft Office Suite. As I owned user's rights to MS Office '97, I tested that. Crossover did admirably installing the components desired and then it placed an entry for said component(s) in the menu for easy launching. Mine worked wonderfully here. MS Office 97 under Xandros' Crossover did great in creating a new presentation and as well as could be expected with a ppt that was created mostly in OpenOffice 2.0.2 and edited in Mac OS X Presentation (MS Office app). It was easy peasy - nothing to it.

 [40] [41] [42]

- **Extra Applications**

Included in the Xandros Home Premium Edition is an extra Applications CD. This includes some nice additional applications to install. I inserted the cd and an "install software" screen automagically appeared. It was a typical software installer in that it included the list of available applications as well as a check box for selections. Checking some applications and clicking Install will open the Xandros Networks application screen and confirm your selection

and offer additional information such as disk space required and further dependencies. If one of your selections need some user input for configuration, this is taken care of at this point as well. In my case, I had chosen tvtime. This required the input of my television standard, frequency table, and whether to run as suid.

[43] [44] [45]

- **Xandros Networks**

Xandros' software manager is a complete system application tool. Called Xandros Networks, it incorporates updates, installation, and system upgrades all in one convenient and easy-to-use application. From this one screen one can install critical, security, or recommended updates as well as service packs, new drivers, or additional apps. At the Application Updates screen and the user can click on the different tabs to check for updates. (In addition, there is an update notifier present in the system tray. It will pop up with information about updates too, as well as showing a quick summary with a mouse-over.) Additional software available is listed under similar categories as found during install. In addition, we might find some additional categories such as Business and Finance, Development, Education, Novell Netware, NoMachine, and Servers. One can use the options on screen or through the application menu. Not only that, but one can keep abreast of the latest Xandros news and purchase additional commericial software or services. It even includes a search function. Just input your search term and click Search. It's not only convenient having it all in one application, but cuts down on confusion with the two-paned screen and tabbed window. It seems logical and just plain easy-to-navigate. Just check the boxes beside your desired app, and this tool will download and install them as well as place appropriate menu entries. I had no problems at all when testing this utility.

[46] [47] [48]

- **Security**

The Premium Edition includes Xandros Securty Suite. This consists of Xandros Firewall, Xandros Anti-Virus, System File Protector, and Xandros Networks updates all presented in one "dashboard" screen. The firewall is configured through a wizard asking for services (ports) to allow. After configuration, your new firewall can be enabled or disabled with one click through the Firewall Control button. The antivirus module will download updated signature files and scan the system for viruses. The anti-virus took about 15 minutes to scan the complete system here. I'm assuming it's checking for windows viruses that can commonly be found as email attachments and can easily be forwarded to others. It does not scan email attachments while still in the email application, but it can scan those saved as files. It might perhaps include the few signatures available for the trojans or worms found for Linux as well. It can scan, identify, and remove virus found on NFS mounted Windows filesystems as well. One can manually scan at any given time or set it up to run at a specific future date or re-occurring times. Log files record results of scans as well as signature updates and you can setup how to handle any found virus: automatically quarantine or delete file, or manually. The System file protector is an encryption mechanism.

An indicator resides in the System Tray and blinks when it detects anything unsafe. Clicking on it brings up the Security Suite screen which will provide the user with a summary of unsafe conditions. This is a great suite for the new Linux user providing a one-stop location for setting up or activating the firewall, scanning for viruses, and downloading updates. The Security Suite is a real nice looking application and seems to function very well.

[49] [50] [51]

- **Miscellaneous**

    - File Management

File Management is executed through the Xandros File Manager. Using kfmclient as its base, it is customized to include some advanced features and nicer looks. Default appearance is a two-paned window consisting of one pane for a list of folders on the computer and a second containing the files and folders of the user. You can choose to change this default behaviour, for example just one pane or even 4 panes. Besides the usual move, delete, or open features found in all file managers, some of the advanced features include cdburning capabilities or mounting samba (windows) shares with a click of the mouse. Inserting removeable media gives one the option [52] of opening it in the file manager with a "Eject disc" link in the html view or as a right-click on folders view item (which unmounts the disk for safe removable or actually physically ejects the disk - depending on the type of disk in question). Inserting a music cd automagically opens it in the Music Manager.

[53] [54] [55]

    - Versora Progression Desktop

Versora Progression Desktop is an application included in the Premuim Edition (or available as a separate purchase) for the migration of your windows files and setting to your new Xandros Desktop. It can migrate things like email, bookmarks, wallpapers, sounds, calendars, address book, and other personal files or settings. It currently works for Windows 98, NT, 2000, or XP. One puts the cd into the windows computer cd drive and it will walk the user through making a file that can be extracted and used on Xandros. Then put the versora cd into your Xandros Desktop and it will once again walk the user through the placement of these files and settings.

    - Quick Start Guide

On the desktop is an icon labeled Quick Start Guide. Clicking on this icon opens up a wonderful help file that introduces the user to their new Xandros system. The introduction features a screenshot pointing out some of the desktop features such as desktop Locking button, Xandros Update Systray, menu, and virtual desktops. On the right of the information screen is a menu of contents. Next in line is Desktop Basics describing in more detail each of the desktop features. Next is Control Center, then Adding Printers, and Connecting to the Internet. Xandros File Manager, Working with Multimedia, and Windows Interoperability is 5, 6, and 7 respectively. And finally CodeWeavers Crossover, Office Suite, Xandros Networks, and Getting Help. This is a wonderful asset a mouse click away and easily accessible from the desktop. It doesn't cover quite all the topics or include all the detail found in the printed User Guide, but it's a real nice, easy-to-read, and fairly complete guide with screenshots, images, and illustrations.

[56] [57] [58]

Conclusion

- **Pros:**

I really liked Xandros. From start to finish, I found Xandros 4 Home Premium Edition to be a great looking, wonderfully easy and user-friendly desktop. It looked great and performed very well. Functionality was impeccible and performance was well above average. Applications opened really fast and carried out their operations with no delay. Hardware detection and setup was really good and all but one component worked out of the box. That one was setup through an easy wizard.

Yet despite it being extremely user-friendly, it wasn't dumbed down so that a person of advanced experience would feel alienated.

For newcomers, Xandros Premium is a complete migration package. For all the old arguments we get from Windows users when trying to convert, Xandros has the answer.

> "I can't install Linux" they say. We say Xandros is easier than every windows version I've ever installed or I'll install it for you.
>
> "But what about hardware drivers?" Most common hardware is setup automagically, and most other is setup through a wizard just like in Windows. Most drivers are already included in Linux.
>
> "But I'll never find the applications to do this or that!" Xandros labels applications by task rather than strange application name. The menu is uncluttered and logically designed for easy navigation.
>
> "But I *have* to have Microsoft Office for my job!" OpenOffice is (almost) completely capatible with MS Office, and the Premium Edition can run the actual Microsoft Office suite right there on your Linux Desktop.
>
> "But what about all my email and bookmarks? And my calendar!? I can't lose all those!!!" Versora Progression can migrate all your files and settings to your new Xandros Desktop for you.

- **Cons:**

Some applications are a few versions old and updates seem to focus on security or major breakage. There appears to be no regular application updates for new functionality or just to have newer versions.

Xandros is a commercial product (costs money). For the Windows convert this fee would probably seem completely reasonable and even down right inexpensive, but for the old Linux warhorse it may seem an unnecessary expense.

For the experienced Linux user registration and activation codes can bring back unpleasant memories.

- **Final Thoughts**

It appears the target demographics for Xandros is Windows users and new Linux converts. As such, most of my cons become moot. For this intended user, Xandros is an ideal package. If I was going to recommend a Linux system to a family member (who all use Windows), it'd be Xandros. With the guides and tools it just makes using a computer so easy. With it's auto-setup and wizards, the user won't have to worry about what operating system they are actually running, they can just use their computer. If the new user does find something in question, all the resources readily available can easily alleviate it with little or no real noticeable time investment.

Xandros is available in several configurations:

- Home desktop: Home Edition and the Home Premium Edition.
- Xandros Business: Business Desktop Edition, Desktop Management, Xandros Deployment Management Server, and Xandros Server.
- Education: Education Desktop Edition and Xandros Deployment Management Server.

Xandros Home Page [59].

[60]

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