

Apple's Tiger vs. Windows XP 64-Bit Edition vs. Linux

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On Friday Apple released its "Tiger" operating system into the marketplace. Borrowing heavily from what we had seen in Longhorn (Microsoft's next version of Windows) last year, Tiger is an impressive piece of work. I'm not one of those who thinks that using a competitor is a bad idea, particularly if you can get it out first. You play this game to win and, as long as it's legal, in my book anything goes.

Tiger is well-integrated with hardware and provides a solid out-of-box user experience. The user interface is mature and it has a UNIX core that remains one of the most secure on the market. With a good balance of ease of use, performance, and reliability, Tiger would seem to be the OS of choice for most users over a Linux distribution.

Tiger vs. Linux

However, not all users can afford Apple hardware. The Mac Mini, relatively low-cost, can't compare to the price of a low-end Intel, AMD, or VIA-based box running Linux. We have to remember much of the third world makes a fraction of what the Western world makes income and as such those consumers are very price-driven: US\$100 to them may represent as much as a month's salary so every penny counts.

For those that want to get intimate with the code, Linux, because it is fully open-source, is better. This would include both programming professionals looking to create a unique solution as well as software hobbyists. Granted, this second group only constitutes less than one percent of the market, but they, like their "hardware-modder" counterparts are very hands on and often very active in forums, sometimes seeming to be a much larger group than they actually are.

However, when it comes to the average user there really is no comparison. The extra money spent for an Apple machine is well worth the vastly better support an individual will get from Apple over Red Hat or Novell, and virtually none of the hardware vendors is excited about desktop Linux yet (primarily because it isn't profitable).

With servers, where there is a good economic model, Linux would clearly remain favored over Apple because of much deeper support from companies like HP and IBM.

Tiger vs. Windows XP 64-Bit Edition

If this were a competition based simply on names Tiger would get my vote. The Microsoft product name is almost a sentence and the acronym WXP64BA looks like a password I would quickly forget. I don't know who is responsible for naming at Microsoft these days but he, or she, seems to be working way too hard to validate my old axiom: "The only thing people will agree on when it comes to a new product name is that the person who came up with it is an idiot."

I guess we could make it worse by calling it the "Windows XP 64-Bit Addition with SP 2 and knock three times on the ceiling if you want me Edition," but I'm hoping coming up with names like that doesn't become the next big thing in Redmond.

On the product side, Tiger has a number of features that appear to have been pulled from Longhorn's preview last year. The biggest one is "smart search," a feature that allows you to rapidly search a variety of file types to find what you need. With storage approaching a Terabyte now, this is an incredibly useful feature and one Windows users will have to get from a third party until Longhorn ships late next year.

Another is virtual folders. This allows you to group files virtually by author, topic, or other criteria making them a lot easier to find. Finally there is the use of widgets, something you can get in a third-party product called "Window Blinds" and also shown last year by Microsoft. This allows you to put little useful applets on your screen. This last is more eye candy than anything else, but I like it and it makes the OS look cool.

Standout Features

Of the rest of the features, the two that stand out to me is a higher level of security over downloaded applications than Windows currently has and stronger parental controls. While unfortunately parents often don't use the parental controls they have available to them, protecting kids is incredibly important to me and it is nice to know it is important to Apple as well.

On downloaded files you have to put in your ID and password to install an application, and given I used to go into my old boss's office and install joke applications on his machine from time to time (one made the letters of the screen fall off the bottom at an increasing rate, another made it look like he was going through a nuclear meltdown) I'm thinking this is a good idea as well.

Windows XP 64 Bit Addition, which was wrapped with a huge amount of fanfare and hoopla at the launch (er, well, more like if you blinked you missed it), is the most secure desktop OS from Microsoft currently shipping. More of a precursor to Longhorn so that vendors will write the necessary 64-bit drivers, it is available on new hardware and not as an upgrade. It really isn't designed for the home market and the likely targets are those doing specialized research, multi-media authoring, CAD, and complex financial analysis. Mainstream it isn't, but if you need the power of a 64-bit platform and particularly if you like AMD hardware, this is your OS. The majority of us aren't there yet.

Users' Call

What will I use? I'm a gamer, and I love to modify my hardware, but Tiger doesn't support my favorite game and you don't "mod" Apple hardware. Apple has yet to come out with an OS I can use, and until they do, ugly name and all, I'm on Windows and waiting for Longhorn.

[Full commentary](#) [2].

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