


Linux 400 - Why

Dr. Marc & Rosemary Durham, Theway Labs, Bixby, OK © 250111

Frustrated? If you are frustrated with Microsoft Windows, Office, and their practices, there are real alternatives.

If you want to do something about it, read-on. It is relatively simple, once you have done it, and it's open source. The first time anyone does something different, it may seem daunting. Conversion is not difficult and the cost is right. If you passed the ham exam, you can do this, even if you have made nothing else.

Linux is an operating system created by Linus Torvalds in 1991 as a free alternative to Unix. The name  **LINUX** is a combination of his moniker and the inspiration. Originally extremely popular with software developers, it is now the go-to for servers, smartphones, and embedded systems. One of the most stable and reliable operating systems, it is popular for supercomputers and enterprise systems as well as the diminutive Raspberry Pi.

Where does that leave Windows? It is predominantly used with desktops because of the clever marketing and packaging with new personal computers. Unfortunately, it has become bloated making it vulnerable to hacks, viruses, and malware, while demanding newer and costlier computers.

Why change? Recently Microsoft decided to first no longer support older computers and second have recurring charges for their office software. We have three computers with Intel core i7 chips running at 3.4 GHz, 16 GiB ram, and Nvidia graphics. Not slouchy computers. But we cannot upgrade software because of age. That is straight from the Microsoft site.

Besides those machines, we have another smaller PC, a laptop and a Surface Pro. None are upgradeable. All are networked. We also have three Raspberry Pi's for ham activity and another Raspberry for commercial development.

That is a lot of computer oomph to replace because of their business decision to make Mickey-soft more controlling. So being the inveterate nerd, I reverted to my roots and began weaning from the Microsoft udder.


With experience on the Raspberry Pi's, which run a Linux derivative, we decided to consider Linux as an alternative. Why was I so slow to transition? Linux has better security, is cheaper, smaller, faster, and easier to use.

What to use? Because of its inherent design, Linux OS is much smaller without the bloat. It can run on virtually any machine, regardless of age, speed, or size. Conversion is a simple download. A subsequent article gives step by step. Because of independent developers, numerous forks of Linux are available. The Debian project in 1993 was an early developer of Linux, as a universal operating system. It is named for Debra and Ian Murdock, the creators. Within the Linux community, each distribution is called a distro.

Canonical, Ltd. has funded the development of the very popular Debian derivative called Ubuntu. There are flavors of Ubuntu, which predominantly change the desktop experience. My preferred is call Kubuntu, which has a KDE Plasma Desktop. Cool.

As you would expect from this development process, there are myriad variations. At their core, they are fundamentally the same, but different distros and flavors provide a variety of alternative looks, feels, and methods.

Which is best? Do you prefer a Chevy, Ford, or Toyota? Do you prefer white, red, or blue? How do you decide? Take suggestions, read, try. Many distros like Kubuntu, let you try it before installing. These operating systems are small enough that some people use two OS on their disk drive, with a selection option on boot.

FOSS is Free and Open Source Software. Someone has to pay to develop the software in time or money, but  makes it available at no cost to the users. It is a fascinating concept and community. Anyone with reasonable skills to follow instructions can make the conversion to the FOSS world. It does not require an engineering or computer education. If you do not understand something, trust your instincts or search the web with the key words of the distro and flavor. From there, likely you will find multiple ways to do it.

The joke in the community is 'Linux gives you 7-ways to do the same thing.' You are not restricted. Try something.

What now? Two incremental choices are considered. If you want to keep Windows, but eliminate the pay-to-play, install OnlyOffice for all the functions of office and Thunderbird for email. You are just a couple of clicks away. The look is a little different, so it will take a few days to get comfortable. After a month, I am more comfortable than with office. If you use IMAP, all your existing messages will transfer into Thunderbird. Several people in the group have made the move.

To tell Windows goodbye, install a Linux distro. I prefer Kubuntu, which can be configured to look much like the old stuff, if you want that. See the step by step instructions.

To really cut the cord, install Brave browser with Duck-Duck-Go search engine. It is clean, fast, secure. Eliminate all the intrusive widgets, which are potential security leaks.

Welcome to the brave, new world without gates or windows.

