CHAPTER 1

Meet Ubuntu Linux

Because you're holding this book in your hands, there is a good chance that you have heard of Ubuntu Linux before. Maybe someone suggested it to you or you have read about it in the media. Anyway, we will try to show you how you can use it to make your life easier. First we point out ten (though there are certainly more) good reasons why you should give it a try. Then we talk about Ubuntu Linux in more detail, showing what it is and what it is like to work with.

We will be happy if, by the end of this chapter, you feel confident enough to install Ubuntu Linux on a PC. Of course, you'll get the maximum benefit from it by reading the rest of the book. Without proper guidance you may sometimes feel that Linux is a wild jungle, but this book can help you become an expert user.

Ten Reasons to Try Ubuntu Linux

In our experience there are at least ten good reasons to try Ubuntu Linux right away:

- You want your computer to boot really fast and to be fully functional after that.
- You want to use a sleek and modern operating system (OS) but are reluctant to buy a Mac.
- You are an idealist who thinks that software should be free ("free as in free speech").
- You are a materialist who would rather have software for free ("free as in free beer").
- You have seen Ubuntu Linux installed in a friend's PC and want the same "wow" computer experience for yourself.
- You are tired of being exposed to hackers and malicious users every time you open Internet Explorer.
- You just bought a netbook and it either (a) comes loaded with an old OS, or (b) has a brand new OS that limits you on what you can do.
- You have an old PC that you don't want to throw away just yet, but which is nearly useless under the latest versions of Windows.
- You are a hardcore Linux user who wants to figure out why Ubuntu has been chosen the best Linux desktop distribution so many times.
- You have been asked by your boss to evaluate Ubuntu Linux as a replacement for Windows on your organization's desktop computers. Or maybe you are the boss and want to motivate your crew with a great project.

This list could go on; we all have good reasons to try Ubuntu Linux on our PCs. More reasons will occur to you once you get to know it.

Of course, if you're already using an older version of Ubuntu (and taking into account that, in Ubuntu's terminology, "older" means six months), you don't need us to point out its virtues, right?

What Is Ubuntu Linux Anyway?

Ubuntu Linux can be defined in many ways and from different angles. First off, it is an operating system (usually shortened to OS). Ubuntu is a distribution of Linux, based on Debian, and that gives it some characteristic features. But to describe it only as an OS would be nothing short of unfair: it also has a wide range of pre-installed applications and many more readily available at the click of the mouse, and an ever-growing user community. Let's talk about what Ubuntu is in a little more depth.

Ubuntu Linux Is an Operating System

Ubuntu Linux, as an OS, is, very simply, what makes your computer work.

A computer is much more versatile than a TV or DVD player. You can plug different input devices into it, run applications, and expect it to do a lot of stuff. To be able to do all this, your computer needs an OS, the underlying software that instructs it in how to perform all its functions.

An OS tells your computer what to do when it starts, for example. Without it, your computer would beep and wait in annoyance when you turned it on. The OS also communicates with your computer's hardware, and with the applications that you use to perform your work. The OS glues together all aspects of your computer.

The first and most important of those components is you, the user. You're the one who chooses which applications to run, what actions to take, and whether the PC should be turned on or off. The OS needs input from you and needs to communicate to you the result of your actions.

Usually, you work with applications, which enable you to do specific tasks, such as writing documents or browsing the web. Applications also need to communicate with your OS, to interact with other applications, and to make the computer's hardware work. How they do this varies by operating system, which is why most Windows applications will not work out of the box with Linux. But, as we will see later, that shouldn't deter you from using Linux.

You also have data, the information you need to perform your work. You might save photos, documents, and other files. In this respect, the OS should provide a means to access storage capacity, whether it is local (a hard disk attached directly to your computer), removable (USB drive), or remote (a file server or online storage system). Data comes in different formats, and each format is usually tied to a specific application, which may even be registered as proprietary. For example, a document with the extension ".doc" or ".docx" has been written and saved with Microsoft Word. This is why interoperability—the ability to use different data formats with various applications—is important. As an analogy, think about a thermometer reading 64° F. We can say that temperature itself is the data, and the measurement unit the format. You can change the format (to degrees Celsius) while keeping the same data, but you can't have measurement of temperature without a measurement unit. An interoperable application would be able to read the temperature whether it is in degrees Fahrenheit or Celsius.

Last but not least, you have the hardware, such as graphic and sound cards, printers, scanners, and many other devices. Usually, to make a specific piece of hardware work, the OS needs a driver, a special piece of code that handles communication with the device. Maybe the greatest challenge you'll face when using Ubuntu Linux will be getting all your hardware up and running. Although most devices should run out-of-the-box with Ubuntu, you might have to follow some additional steps to make some specific pieces of hardware work. That's why we pay so much attention in this book to this topic.

As you can see, an OS does a lot of stuff. On desktop computers, the most popular OS is Microsoft Windows, with Windows 7 being the latest incarnation.[1] Windows is a closed and proprietary OS, which means that nobody outside Microsoft can view or modify its source code (unless you are given permission to do so by Microsoft, and even then you must sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement). It is also "non-free" in the sense that you must pay for it, and depending on the version Windows can be really expensive.[2]

But, as with any other component of your computer, the OS can be swapped out for a better one. Welcome to Ubuntu Linux.

Ubuntu Is a Distribution of Linux, Based on Debian

Ubuntu, as an OS, is part of the larger family of Linux distributions.

You'll find out more about that in Chapter 2. For now, suffice it to say that Ubuntu uses Linux as its kernel. The *kernel*[3] is the portion of the OS that performs the most basic functions, such as memory and process management. Linux is an open and free kernel, strongly based on concepts first sketched up for UNIX, Linux's honorable ancestor. That's why it is said that Linux is a UNIX-like OS.

Linux is one of the flagship developments of the free and open source software movement. It is a very versatile and powerful OS that runs on many different hardware platforms. Although widely adopted in devices such as servers and smartphones, it hasn't yet earned great market share on desktop computers. But that might be about to change—thanks in part to Ubuntu Linux.

Because Linux is just a kernel, it usually needs other programs to run as a full OS. Different Linux distributions (or *distros* for short) package all the other software needed to make an OS, each with a different philosophy in mind. More often than not, there are organizations behind each distribution, and these organizations often drive the development of new packages.

Ubuntu Linux is one such distribution, but it isn't completely original, which is to say it wasn't created from scratch. It is in fact an adaptation of Debian. Debian has been around almost as long as Linux itself, having been founded in 1993, just two years after Linus Torvalds[4] made his initial announcement of the Linux kernel. Debian is widely respected within the Linux community and has some claim to be the definitive Linux distribution.

The Debian project was started by a computer scientist named Ian Murdock, and its name comes from a combination of his Christian name with that of his girlfriend Deborah—hence Deb-Ian (sort of like Brangelina).

Debian is well known for its strict adherence to the spirit of free and open source software, which is embodied in the Debian Social Contract and the Debian Free Software Guidelines (DFSG). These documents[5] lay down rules for the governance of the decentralized worldwide community that is Debian.

Debian is not, like many other Linux distributions, sponsored by any company, but rather by a not-for-profit organization called Software in the Public Interest.[6]

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[1] Windows is of course very popular as a server OS also.

[2] At the time of this writing, the full version of Windows 7 ranged from $199 to $319 (`http://www.microsoft.com/windows/buy/default.aspx`). This price did not include Microsoft Office.

[3] The kernel is commonly presented alongside with the shell, the latter being the interface between the user and the kernel. The traditional shell for Linux is based on the command line.

[4] Linus Torvalds is the original creator of the Linux kernel. See Chapter 2 for more details.

[5] Available here: `http://www.debian.org/social_contract`

[6] `http://www.spi-inc.org/`

Debian is also well known for how it manages its software. Part of the Debian project is to maintain an online database and repository of software, which is available to all Internet users. Today, more than 25,000 free applications are in there, and much care has been taken to make software installation and upgrade as easy as possible.

Ubuntu Linux Is a Full Desktop Solution

But to talk about Ubuntu Linux as just an OS would be unfair. It is much more than that.

Ubuntu Linux is built upon the sound foundation of Debian, and by all standards they are very much alike; however, they do differ in their approaches. Although supremely flexible, Debian is mostly used on servers. Ubuntu, on the other hand, is primarily a desktop distribution, although it also has a Server edition. In terms of their approaches to releasing new software, Debian is extremely cautious and issues a release only after a through bug-testing procedure. In contrast, Ubuntu is very aggressive, which allows it to include more modern software, though sometimes in not-so-stable versions.

Building upon Debian's premise, Ubuntu Linux is a full-featured desktop solution that comes with tons of applications ready to install and use. It is not just the OS that is free and open: you also get, pre-installed, the full productivity suite OpenOffice.org, a browser, a photo manager, mail and messaging clients, and much, much more. Once you install Ubuntu Linux, you will seldom need an application that is not found in its repositories. It's like being granted unrestricted access to a warehouse full of goodies!

Computers can be money pits. But with Ubuntu Linux, you can stop worrying about how much software costs and start thinking what you want to do and how to use the right tools to do it.

The Ubuntu Linux Experience

When you replace your OS, many things change with it. The interface might not look the same, the applications can be different, and you may not be able to ask the same people for help. So you may ask: "What would it be like to work with Ubuntu Linux? What would I be getting into?"

Those are good and legitimate questions. We will try to give you a preliminary impression, but the answers can be truly obtained only when you use Ubuntu yourself for the first time.

"Linux for Human Beings"

If you have heard about Linux before, you might think it is a dull and text-based OS that can only be used by computer geeks. But although the command-line shell has a central role to play, there are many different flavors of Linux (called distributions, as you will see in Chapter 2), and Ubuntu is aimed at being easy to use.

One of the nicknames for Ubuntu is "Linux for human beings."[7] This means that when the developers get together to analyze future directions for the OS, they talk about what people want to use the computer for.

Many of the improvements of Lucid Lynx, the latest version of Ubuntu Linux, are in the area of integration with social networks. It is not that the development team has any special relationship with those applications; it's just that they acknowledge that a great part of our activities with a computer today involves using sites like Facebook and Twitter. Services that so many people use should be simple and straightforward.

Another area of great improvement has been application installation. There is a new concept regarding how applications should be looked for and installed. With other operating systems, you

[7] https://help.ubuntu.com/10.04/about-ubuntu/C/

normally go to the store and buy a box. Then you go home, pull the DVD from the box, and figure out how the software is installed. You even have to store a paper with information about licensing for the rest of your life! The whole process is cumbersome and prone to problems. Ubuntu, with its Software Center, has a completely different approach. Installing applications is as easy as browsing categories and selecting which application best suits your needs. Then it is installed and ready to use. For free.

Those are just two examples of the OS being designed "for human beings." It means, in short, that the user interface is easy and simple and that its features are there only to be of use to you. The ultimate goal of Ubuntu Linux is to make your life easier.

Ubuntu is also meant to communicate in the local language of the user, and that's human-friendly too. It takes into consideration that different people have different abilities. And, as you'll read later in this chapter, it makes you part of a broad community of people sharing knowledge and trying to help other people.

If you take a look at the Table of Contents of this book, you will find that there is no single chapter devoted to working with the command-line shell. Strange in a Linux book, right? It's not that we forgot to write about it! But we think that Ubuntu Linux is such a user-oriented OS that access to the shell can be reduced to a minimum.

■ **Note** Of course, the command-line shell is still an important part of Ubuntu Linux, and it makes a lot of sense to learn about it in depth if you want to become a true guru. We devote an appendix to the subject, and there are also many books on the shell available from Apress if you want to learn more.

A Powerful yet Flexible Operating System

Maybe you're wondering whether Ubuntu Linux is a stable and versatile OS or just one that is free and... you know... better not examined too thoroughly. After all, haven't we all been told that anything free is worth what you paid for it?

If that is your concern, you should worry no further. Ubuntu, as we stated before, is a distribution of Linux. And Linux is running on quite a lot of computing devices, from tiny ones to gigantic ones. One of the smallest computers in the world, CompuLabs fit-PC,[8] runs Ubuntu, and so do many phones. On the other end of the spectrum, the Jaguar,[9] the world's most powerful supercomputer, runs Linux as well. That means it is both flexible and powerful. If you look at the computer market as a whole, it seems that desktop computers are the last stronghold outside of the hands of Linux (the reason for that lies elsewhere, not in technical limitations).

Is it powerful? Of course it is! Of the 500 most powerful computers, as measured by the TOP500 organization in June, 2010,[10] 91% run some version of Linux. Microsoft Windows runs on just 1% of those computers. This dominance wouldn't be possible if Linux weren't a stable and efficient OS.

Once upon a time z/OS, a proprietary OS from IBM, was the only option for the powerful mainframe computers in use today for mission-critical operations in many industries; now, more and more use Linux on System z, accounting today for roughly one third of the mainframes running worldwide.

Linux also drives almost half of the servers that make up the Internet.[11] Together with the Apache HTTP server, the MySQL database engine, and programming languages like PHP, Python, and Perl,

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[8] http://www.fit-pc.com/web/

[9] http://www.nccs.gov/jaguar/

[10] http://www.top500.org/stats/list/35/osfam

[11] https://ssl.netcraft.com/ssl-sample-report//CMatch/osdv_all

Linux forms an open source bundle collectively known as LAMP, which is a free alternative to proprietary (and expensive) solutions. And LAMP is not just for low-traffic web sites: the mighty Wikipedia runs on Linux—on Ubuntu Linux, in fact[12]).

Linux is also hard to beat when it comes to flexibility. It not only runs huge servers hidden in datacenters; many Linux derivatives found their ways into the smartphone market, Google's Android being the most popular but not the only one (and there are plans to use it on more devices, such as TV sets). And after HP's acquisition of Palm in late April, 2010, it has plans to use WebOS, which uses the Linux kernel as well, as a platform for its Tablet PCs and connected mobile devices.[13] This flexibility is what allows Linux to be a serious contender—many would say the perfect option—in the netbook market.

When the first generation of netbooks came out, the concept was nothing short of a revolution. Until that moment, PC manufacturers had thought that users would always be willing to spend money on ever-more powerful computers with a lot of unnecessary software. Windows Vista was the logical conclusion of that line of thought: a bloated OS, hungry for hardware resources. Microsoft seemed to hope that people would buy a new and expensive computer just to be able to run its latest OS, which was full of functionality many did not want or need. What happened was just the opposite: to avoid having to do that, many stuck to Windows XP or turned to Linux. And some even went one step further, by replacing big desktops and notebooks with the smaller netbooks. The unthinkable had happened: people actually wanted *less* than what the market had been providing. What they wanted was a "good enough" computer that allowed them to do their work, while being cheap enough to be affordable in a time of economic uncertainty.

Microsoft was startled. It was obvious by then that Windows Vista was not designed for that kind of device, so it allowed netbook manufacturers to install Windows XP and wait for Windows 7 to save the day. Now that Windows 7 is out, what netbooks have is an artificially reduced version of the Windows OS—reduced not to accommodate the simpler hardware imprint, but to make you pay extra money if you want all the functionality.

Ubuntu Linux sees things differently. Because it is free, it doesn't have to be limited for commercial purposes. Because it needs fewer hardware resources to run, it is natively better suited to small netbooks, and can run more applications on them as a result. And because it is relatively safe, it doesn't need antivirus software running constantly in the background, consuming valuable processor cycles and disk I/O on a computer with limited hardware resources.

Continuous Improvements

One of the things you have to get used to is the frequency with which new versions of Ubuntu Linux appear, each with new features and hardware support. The release cycle of Ubuntu Linux is every six months. The development team follows a time-based release cycle, not a feature-driven one. What does this mean?

Some operating systems, including Microsoft Windows, are launched only when all the planned and committed features are ready. At the beginning of the development cycle, the list of proposed features for the product is set. The company then starts selling the idea of the future product, full of new toys. Because of this, they must finish programming all the new features before launching the product, and a delay in any feature (no matter whether it is important or not) can slow down the whole project. That's why Microsoft Windows delays are so common and launch day announcements are so widely publicized. Sometimes features go live half baked, just to avoid pushing the date still further back, and then a maintenance update has to be made available just after launch.

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[12] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia#Software_and_hardware

[13] http://www.hp.com/hpinfo/newsroom/press/2010/100428xa.html?jumpid=reg_R1002_USEN

Things are different with Ubuntu Linux. From the very beginning, the development team made a commitment to release a new version every six months.[14] Release dates are usually scheduled for April and October. That's why a relatively young OS (born in 2004) is now, six years later, on its 12th release.

How does Ubuntu do this? Are its programmers more responsible or better at project management? Well, that could be part of the explanation, but not all of it. The reason Ubuntu can do it this way is because it follows a completely different release philosophy.

Instead of basing releases on features, Ubuntu bases them on *time*. It is a fine example of the "timebox" method[15] of agile software development. Ubuntu sets a release date for a new version of the OS long before it actually happens, and some guiding goals are given for that version. After that the development works entirely differently, because Ubuntu Linux depends on many unrelated teams of developers working together on some specific piece of software. Those teams have no relationship with Ubuntu or Canonical. They can be as disparate as the GNOME team (developers of the GNOME desktop environment used by Ubuntu), Mozilla (maintainers of the Firefox web browser), and Oracle (home of the OpenOffice.org project).

Canonical, the company behind Ubuntu, can't enforce a release schedule for all those projects. So, as the launch date approaches, Ubuntu enters a "feature freeze" state. All packages are updated to the latest stable version and bundled together to test compatibility. Most problems are fixed, and the product is released right on schedule.

This means that sometimes, if a team is delayed, the price of timely release is that the latest functionality of a certain product will not be included. That is a shame, sure, but then again, with a release cycle of just six months, the updated functionality will be available to Ubuntu Linux users almost immediately when it's ready. And upgrades, like Ubuntu itself, are completely free of charge—and easy to apply as well.

■ **Note** It has become customary that Ubuntu releases are named after animals, preceded by an adjective that suggests the philosophy behind the particular version. At the time of writing, for example, the latest releases were Jaunty Jackalope, Karmic Koala, and Lucid Lynx. The OS also uses a version number that references the year and month of the update. So 10.04 means 2010, April release.

Make features available when they are ready. Have a state-of-the-art OS release every six months. This is such a common-sense approach! Too bad Microsoft will never be able to use it with Windows. Do you think they could convince anybody to buy a new version of Windows every six months?

The Product Family

Since Vista, one of the odd things about Microsoft Windows has been the number of different editions on offer. Windows Starter, Home Basic, Home Premium, Professional, Enterprise, Ultimate... the diversity seemed to be there just to confuse consumers.

But no, that wasn't the goal: it was there to make them pay more. Like a used car salesperson, they first tell you that it is cheap, based on the price of the Starter edition. And then, when you ask why you

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[14] `http://www.ubuntu.com/project/about-ubuntu`

[15] There is plenty of information about timeboxing in the web—for example, here: `http://www.davecheong.com/2006/07/26/time-boxing-is-an-effective-getting-things-done-strategy/`

can't do a certain thing, they say: "Oh, for that you need another edition, available for just a few more bucks." Suddenly you find yourself going up the editions stairway, "few bucks" after "few bucks," ending up having to pay quite a few hundred bucks for the whole experience.

Ubuntu Linux, too, comes in many different editions, but the rationale is quite different. First off, all editions of Ubuntu are free. Technically speaking, these are not different editions of Ubuntu, but derivatives. A *derivative* of Ubuntu means that some people packaged things differently to produce an OS targeted at a specific set of users. For example, some people find the KDE desktop environment more appealing than GNOME. So Canonical provided a new derivative of Ubuntu, which installs KDE by default instead of GNOME. There's nothing more to it than that. It's for simplicity's sake. To make your life easier. Linux for human beings, remember?

There are a lot of derivatives. Some are maintained by Canonical, and some are not. The most common are:

- *Ubuntu:* The well-known, GNOME-based OS.
- *Kubuntu:* Like Ubuntu but with the KDE desktop environment.
- *Edubuntu:* A special derivative loaded with applications for educational purposes.
- *Ubuntu Netbook Remix:* A special version, targeted at mini notebooks. The desktop is somewhat redesigned to fit smaller screens, and special care is taken to have it preloaded with web-enabling technologies such as the Flash plug-in.

But there are many others. There are Ubuntus for Christians and for Muslims, Ubuntus in Chinese and in Italian, Ubuntus for anthropologists and for designers. There is even an Ubuntu for Google employees, called Goobuntu. Because Ubuntu is a full desktop solution with a staggering number of applications, anyone can mix the ingredients the way he likes and share what he has done with the rest of the world.

Just to be clear: it is not that a derivative blocks some features the way Windows Starter does. It's just a customization. If you want KDE, for example, you can start with Ubuntu, install the required packages, and end up with the exact same desktop as you would have if you installed Kubuntu in the first place.

The Ubuntu Linux Community

One of the arguments Microsoft uses to try to scare you away from Linux is that you will have no support. That there's nobody "on the other side of the line" when you have a problem.

It's totally the other way around. Linux is much more than a computer OS. It's an entire community of users all over the globe. When you start to use Linux, you become part of this community (whether you like it or not—although you will!).

One of the benefits of membership is that you're never far from finding a solution to a problem. The community likes to congregate online around forums and newsgroups, which you can join in order to find help.

Your initial placement in the ranks of the community is "*newbie*." This is a popular term for someone who is new to Linux. Although it may sound derisive, it actually helps when you talk to others. Advertising your newbie status encourages people to take the time to help you—after all, they were newbies once upon a time.

There is another reason not to be disheartened by your newbie tag: you'll outgrow it very quickly. By the time you reach the end of this book, you'll be on your way to the other end of the spectrum: guru. You'll be one of those giving out the advice to those newbies, and you'll be 100% confident in your skills.

But being part of a community is not just about getting free technical support. It's about sharing knowledge. Linux was created to be shared among those who want to use it. There are no restrictions, apart from one: any software changes you make and distribute must also be available to others.

The spirit of sharing and collaboration has been there since day one. One of the first things Linus Torvalds did when he produced an early version of the Linux kernel program was to ask for help from others. And he got it. Complete strangers e-mailed him offering to contribute their time, skills, and effort to help him with his project. This has been the way Linux has been developed ever since. Thousands of people around the world contribute their own small pieces, rather than one big company being in charge. And the same concept applies to Linux knowledge. When you learn something, don't be afraid to share this knowledge with others. "Giving something back" is an important part of the Linux community, and that doesn't mean just creating programs—people contribute artwork, documentation, and time to help others.

To understand why Linux is shared, it helps to understand its history, as well as the history of what came before it. You'll learn more about this in Chapter 2.

Praise for Ubuntu Linux

By now, you know a lot of reasons to begin using Ubuntu Linux. We'll wrap up the chapter by highlighting why is wise to stop using Windows and try Ubuntu Linux instead. Many of the topics touched on in this section have already been mentioned; now you have them all together in one place to help you argue with Windows die-hards.

Should I Stop Using Windows?

This question could be split into two smaller problems: why would I want to stop using Windows? And, is it a wise move? There are many reasons to stop using Windows, some of which are:

- *It is insecure:* Security is only a recent concern for Microsoft. And in spite of the many efforts the company claims it is making, new security flaws are detected each and every month, making "patch Tuesday" a nightmare for many system administrators. The lax security also necessitates expensive antivirus programs, which consume precious hardware resources.
- *It is expensive:* Although Windows often comes pre-installed on new computers, its cost is built into the computer price, and it may be in only a limited version. You have to pay more for the advanced versions, for upgrades when a new version is released, and for any additional software you want to install.
- *It is full of bugs:* In his 1999 essay "The Cathedral and the Bazaar," Eric S. Raymond, an open source advocate, stated Linus' Law that goes like this: "Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow." This means that software is less likely to have bugs when more people can review its code. Microsoft Windows is closed source software, so only its own developers get to view the source code. When they overlook a bug, there is no way of detecting it until a problem actually happens. It is not that there are no bugs in open source software, but they are more likely to be found and corrected in a timely manner. You can try to find them yourself!

Now, is it wise to stop using Windows and start using Ubuntu? Let's answer some of the most common questions regarding the move to Ubuntu Linux:

- *I won't be able to run my applications!* This is true at some point, but it has three workarounds: first, you *can* use Windows applications with Wine, an implementation of the Windows API. Second, there are a lot of replacement applications that also happen to be free. And third, there is a strong tendency for applications to become web-based, so what's important then is the web browser, not the API.

- *I need to use Windows for my job!* There are plenty of workarounds if you really can't get away without using Windows from time to time. You could set up dual-booting and use both on one computer. You could use Ubuntu for your everyday tasks and Windows to keep yourself up-to-date with that technology, or you could install Windows in a virtual PC inside Ubuntu with VirtualBox.[16] This way you get the best of both worlds—but remember that you'll need a valid Windows license for either of those scenarios.
- *I will need to get help sometimes!* We have already mentioned the Linux community. Think about it this way: Microsoft has a monopoly over Windows support. Because its source code is closed, they are the only ones that can help you at certain problems. And they are often unwilling to do so, maybe because your product is no longer supported, or because "your problem will be resolved with the next service pack." And what would happen to your support if Microsoft went out of service?

There are many reasons to drop Windows, and there is no good reason to be afraid of doing so. It should be painless if you do it properly.

Ubuntu Linux and its Strengths

"Okay, so I should stop using Windows. Why should I start using Ubuntu and not another operating system?" you might ask. Because:

- *Ubuntu is the best Linux distribution for desktops:* It is Linux, which means it is stable and secure; it is derived from Debian, so it is free, open source, and has a lot of applications available; and it is Ubuntu, a distribution oriented to human beings.
- *It is beautiful:* The aesthetic aspects of the interface are well polished, so your friends will be really surprised by its looks! It is a "wow" operating system.
- *It will make your life easier:* A lot of work has already been done for you. Applications have been catalogued and published. The interface has been tweaked. Hardware has been made compatible. Communities have been formed. All this social capital is there for you to take advantage of it. Wouldn't it be foolish not to?

If we have convinced you to try Ubuntu Linux, let us be your guide on your first baby steps. On the journey, you will feel your strides growing stronger chapter after chapter. By the end of it, you should be able to stand by yourself and on your way to becoming a senior member of the community!

But first let us tell you some more about the history of Ubuntu Linux. That is the subject of Chapter 2, which completes Part I of this book.

Summary

In this Chapter, the first in the book, we introduced you to Ubuntu Linux and pointed out some of its salient features. You learned how it is an OS based on Linux and derived from Debian. We talked about how Ubuntu is developed and why are many different versions or editions, such as Kubuntu or Edubuntu. Finally, we analyzed reasons for making the change to Ubuntu Linux.

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[16] `http://www.virtualbox.org/wiki/VirtualBox`