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# Linux on the desktop: are we nearly there yet?

We are, but the “nearly” at the moment is the problem.

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**A**lright, I admit it, up ‘til a couple of weeks ago I was still running Windows 2000 Professional. In my defence, I have been using all the free software I could on Windows—primarily Open Office, Firefox and Thunderbird. I was a bit reluctant to go through all the trouble of migrating across to a GNU/Linux distribution for two reasons. First, because my PDA and stereo bluetooth headset require software which doesn’t run on Linux. Secondly, I was a little intimidated by having to go back to using a command line after so long just using a GUI.

After becoming sick of Windows running so badly and some advice and encouragement from Tony (FSM’s Editor In Chief), I decided to install Ubuntu. From what we could tell it promised to be the easiest of the GNU/Linux distributions to install. I was pleasantly surprised, it was up and running in less than hour. However, not everything went as smoothly as it should have.

The first thing I noticed was that there was no sound. I had to have sound—I don’t have a stereo my computer *is* my stereo. I have 5.1 speakers and an Audigy2 ZS soundcard, there was no way I wanted all of that equipment going to waste. I had to do a few Google searches to find that I needed to use the command-line to install some patches and then use some more code to store my settings before I finally had sound. This took me a couple of hours to work out. I’m sure it would have been faster for someone who knew their way around Linux, but I’m only just getting started. Even after I got it working, there wasn’t the nice graphical interface to the speakers and soundcard that I had running on Windows. The software that came with the soundcard wasn’t available on Ubuntu.

While I was doing all of the searching around on Google, I noticed that the back and forward buttons on my Logitech optical mouse weren’t working. It took me several days to crack this one. I got Tony to look at it too but even he couldn’t help. I once

again looked around on-line and found some people who had had the same problem. The advice they were giving suggested that some files need editing but the code they had didn’t match mine. Eventually, through a combination of the advice, guess work and dumb luck, I got the buttons working.

During the few days it took for me to get the buttons working, I had been getting to know Ubuntu and I tried to do some printing... here we go again. My printer—an Epson Stylus CX6500 multifunction centre—wasn’t recognised. Tony came around and after a couple of hours in front of my computer, I’d fallen asleep and he’d managed to get it running. However, the scanner still wasn’t being recognised. Back to Google! Another couple of days later and after a lot of searching I finally found that, once again, I needed to modify some files by putting code that I didn’t understand into a file that was full of code and comments I also didn’t understand. Basically, I had to force the SANE software to recognise the scanner’s device ID.

Finally, I had a functioning computer with functioning hardware. I am very grateful there were people out there who’d had the same problems that I had, because there was no way in the world I could have solved them on my own.

But what about all those people who aren’t as persistent as me? What about all of those people who wouldn’t or couldn’t go through all of this so they can run a free software OS? What about all of those people who don’t have a friend like Tony? Why does it have to be so difficult? Why should I be forced to use the command-line and edit files that I don’t understand?

I still had to do lot of mucking around using the command-line to get everything detected and configured just right. I think there are a lot of people—average computer users—who still couldn’t do this. Ubuntu is definitely well on the path to making Linux available to—and, more importantly, usable by—everyone. But it won’t be usable by everyone until the command-line is an *op-*

*tional* extra that *can*—rather than *must*—be used for tweaking a system. The Ubuntu project should be applauded for getting us this far, but we are still not quite there. Now there's only one more step to achieving world domination. Let's take it.

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