

Ricochets

Hacking on <nixos> default channel for machine herd management, fun
and non-profit

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The problem

Non-tech-savvy friends want to switch to Linux¹, and they expect their computers to keep working for years².

NixOS is great, **but there's no LTS**, and upgrading to the next stable version often requires writing a bit of Nix code.

¹e.g., because of the EOL of Windows 10

²but I (hopefully) don't want to end up as their technical hotline

The *magic* solution

Use the default NixOS graphical installer³. Then, open a terminal and paste the line that installs Ricochets⁴!

³choose GNOME or KDE, set your language/timezone/keymap, configure full-disk encryption, etc.

⁴it even includes a user-friendly TUI to help set up NixOS hardware customizations

How does that work?

It keeps the `/etc/nixos/configuration.nix` that was generated but replaces the `<nixos>` channel⁵ with a custom one⁶.

Please look up the sources at

<https://git.sr.ht/~yvan-sraka/ricochets>

⁵I know Nix channels are a bit cursed

⁶<https://ricochets.stoemp.club/main.tar.gz>

How does it keep working?

I've set up some self-hosted⁷ CI that auto-updates the channel but validates it against some example configs⁸.

The channel also serves as a placeholder to redefine options that could be deprecated in `nixpkg`⁹, e.g., `sound.enable` in > 24.05, `services.xserver.displayManager` in > 25.05, etc.¹⁰

⁷bye-bye GitHub Actions, hello IPv6

⁸using `nixos-vm`

⁹recall I don't want the user to have to edit their `configuration.nix`

¹⁰it's not a lot of backporting, not the full release notes, just the options that are used in the `configuration.nix` generated by the installer

Can I do that?

The channel sets different defaults than `nixpkgs`: `AppImage`, `Flatpaks`, `envfs` and `nix-ld`¹¹.

So, we got some kind of super handy machine herd management, still without asking users¹² to add a module to their `configuration.nix`.

¹¹and of course, automatic upgrade and garbage-collection

¹²or e.g., using some nix-manipulator-based automation

Questions?

Feel free to ping me on Mastodon @yvan@functional.cafe ;)