

5 reasons why Linux distros create their own desktop environment

Most of us don't think of the desktop as separate from the operating system. The Desktop is what you see on the screen - as with Windows or macOS. On Linux, desktop options are extremely diverse.

Most people stick with what comes by default, and some Linux distros are choosing to create their own desktops. elementary OS has a Pantheon. Solus has Budgie. System76 has COSMIC. Nitrux Linux has a Maui Shell. Previously, Ubuntu had Unity.

Creating a desktop is no easy task, so why do so many distributions make an effort to do this?

1. Controlling the software experience

In the world of proprietary software, the companies that provide the operating system have control over the majority of the desktop experience. They either develop the code themselves or contract with a third party and have the power to make any changes their development team wants to make.

In the world of free software, all components come from different entities. Display server developers are different from those who create boot screens or package formats. The distribution's development team may lack the knowledge to fix bugs in any of these components, or lack the authority to make the desired changes.

By creating its own desktop environment, a company like System76 can at least control the interface its customers see. This way, they don't have to try to fix extensions or patches that might break every 6 months, when a new version of the GNOME desktop environment arrives (which System76 ships by default before launch). COSMIC development) was released. And they don't give up on hoping that GNOME will incorporate their desired changes.

2. Set your own vision



Having control over the code is only one aspect. It's also important to control the direction the code will develop.

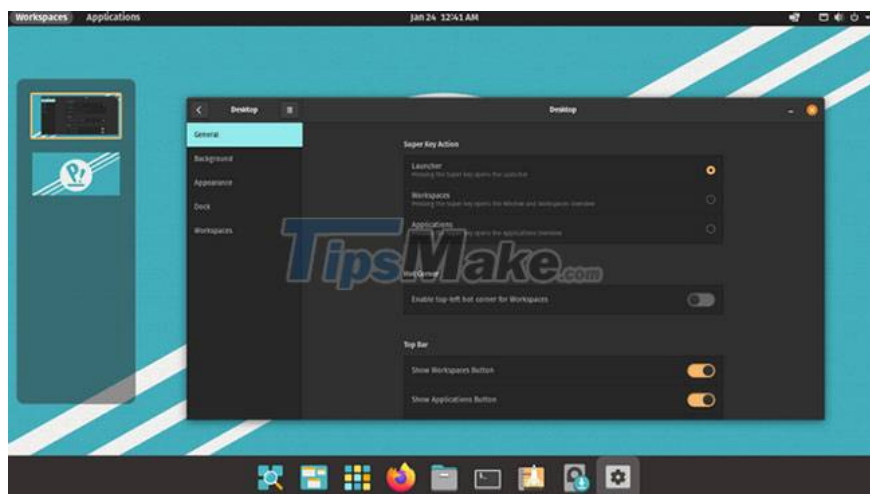
Consider how GNOME commits to showing only the toolbar in the Activities Overview. Distributions like Ubuntu and Pop!_OS want an always visible dock, so developers write extensions to make this change. But while GNOME allows extensions, ensuring that extensions work from one version of GNOME to the next is not a priority.

As a result, Canonical and System76 find themselves dependent on a desktop that does not provide the desired functionality and does not necessarily provide a stable platform for them to patch.

By creating its own desktop environment, System76 is able to create a desktop that works better for the experience it wants to deliver to its customers, rather than reshaping someone else's vision to suit it.

Dock is probably the most preferred element. So does the tile window manager. So it's possible that a custom theme that some GNOME developers aren't particularly fond of, will simply become the default theme. Updates won't disrupt these aspects of the experience.

3. Linux distro must respond to user feedback



Once people start using your project, you'll get feedback on what they like and don't like. Some people like that GNOME has no desktop icons. Others find this unacceptable. This fact gives the impetus for companies like Canonical to keep this functionality as part of Unity and add it back to GNOME via an extension.

As another example, consider how many people find KDE Plasma to have an overwhelming number of options. However, at some point someone will request a feature and another option appears.

System76 occupies a special place in the Linux world. It's a provider of both Linux hardware and software. They have customers who are willing to pay, then express their expectations and desires in return for the company. Customers may not directly ask System76 for a new desktop environment, but creating a new environment can help the company deliver what customers are actually asking for.

4. Volunteers want freedom to grow

GNOME is a very 'stubborn' desktop environment. This is not a criticism. Unlike many traditional Linux desktop environments, the GNOME project has a targeted vision of how its interface should look, function, and integrate. Any contributions that deviate from that are not merged.

So if someone created a way to show thumbnails for each open workspace in the bottom corner of the screen, that's not likely to become part of GNOME.

In the above case, the person might not need to drop his code and instead develop something else for GNOME. Since they are not employees, they can instead move to another desktop where their contributions are welcomed.

Some volunteers have a broader vision of how the entire desktop could work, and no current project gives them the freedom to create things exactly how they want. As a result, they started their own projects.

Whether it's technical or visual, there's always a reason someone would want to try creating a new desktop environment.

5. Want to be different



Canonical's Unity interface was controversial in the Linux world when it first appeared. Many people don't understand why Canonical spends so much time developing it when it already has a working desktop interface.

But part of Ubuntu's mission is to make it easy to access, and this will help it come pre-installed on new computers. And some computer manufacturers weren't particularly enthusiastic about trying to sell computers with outdated-looking interfaces like GNOME 2.

Unity is a different interface, not only when compared to Linux distributions but also compared to Windows and macOS. When you look at the image of the Unity desktop, you know what you're looking at. It's Ubuntu! It has bright vivid icons on the left and a keyboard-controlled HUD feature useful for navigating the application menu. By creating its own desktop environment, Canonical has a unique offering.

Even for traditional Linux users who want to download an ISO file to replace their current operating system, there will be reasons to use one distribution over another. The package format and release schedule were each the main differentiating factors. Over the years, attention has been focused on the desktop environment.

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