

Linux on the Desktop: Still Not Booming Despite Continuous Wins

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Linux is one of the most popular operating systems in the world — except when it comes to desktop environments. The Linux community has long held out hope that the 'year of the Linux desktop' will come, when Linux will surpass Windows and macOS to become the most popular operating system on personal computers.

When will the 'Year of the Linux desktop' really arrive?

This concept is more of a hope and a prediction. It is a belief that one day a 'savior' will appear and take us all to 'Linux heaven'.

That may sound plausible, but the reality is that Linux's advances over the years haven't been enough to attract Windows and macOS users. Linux keeps winning on many fronts, but are those the battles that matter?

Every time a computer comes out with Linux pre-installed, or a new distro is hailed as 'user-friendly', people say: 'This is it, this is the year of the Linux desktop!'. But the reality is not as dreamy as it seems.

If you look closely, Linux is still improving — just not in the areas that made it possible for the platform to explode on the desktop.

1. **Gaming** : Thanks to Proton and Steam Deck, gaming on Linux has never been easier.
2. **Hardware compatibility** : More and more devices run smoothly without requiring users to manually install drivers.
3. **More accessible experience** : Distros like Pop!_OS, Fedora, or Ubuntu are now much more accessible.

These are successes, but most of these 'victories' revolve around... catching up to Windows or macOS. In one case, it was even about running Windows software on Linux. Impressive, but are these the paths to a leading operating system? Or are they just 'big sacrifices for little gain' victories?



The Wrong Battles

Meanwhile, the Linux community spends too much energy on 'academic' debates, such as:

1. '**Init wars**': the argument over systemd and how to boot Linux.
2. '**Desktop wars**': KDE vs GNOME vs XFCE, each side has its own argument.
3. '**Package formats**': Snap vs Flatpak, then release philosophy...

But they forget one simple thing: whether or not ordinary users will accept Linux. None of these things matter much to most users. They only care about: whether the software they need runs, whether the machine is stable, and most importantly, not having to learn a bunch of commands just to do a few basic things.

For Linux to truly take off on the desktop, four key areas need to be focused on: **user experience, applications, hardware, and seamlessness**.

Users want an operating system that 'just works', that can run apps as soon as they're installed. Look at how Windows on Arm chips failed because of incompatible apps. In contrast, Apple's Rosetta 2 has been a huge success, because almost all old Intel apps run smoothly on the M1 chip without users caring how they were 'translated'.

Linux is different: every distro is different, with no unified direction. This is a consequence of the community development model, but that doesn't mean vision isn't possible. Valve has proven otherwise with Steam Deck: with a clear direction, Linux can deliver a seamless, cohesive experience to a wide audience.

When will Linux really win?

To become the most popular desktop operating system, Linux needs more than just 'running software'. It needs close cooperation with hardware and software companies, and a unified strategy from the development community.

Until then, Linux will continue to dominate servers, embedded devices, and a small portion of gaming rigs, while the desktop will be a playground of 'technical victories' — victories that few people care about.

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