

Operating system: Replace Windows?

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Will Windows users find happiness in another environment? Windows causes us a lot of trouble, its security issues are just enough of a headache. This makes the user 'look' into other operating systems.

If you like open source software, like the Firefox browser, you must wonder if you should try Linux? In addition, the attraction of Mac OS X with splendid interface.

However, switching to a new operating system is not simple. Is it possible to do everything on Linux or Mac OS,

and can switch back to Windows when needed? Does the new OS cause other troubles?

To evaluate, the testing team (NTN) spent several weeks working with Xandros (Linux) and Mac OS X 10.4 (codename Tiger). At the same time, NTN explores some common notions about Linux, Mac OS and Windows, re-evaluating the notions that people often think about these operating systems.

Xandros OS 3 Deluxe

As a free OS that can run on your current PC, this Linux version has obvious advantages over Tiger. The first step in installing Linux is to choose the distribution that comes with the key components of the OS (utility tool, device driver .). Most Linux versions come with many free open source applications, from office software and web browsers to photo and game editors.

Many Linux versions are free to download, usually in the form of a .iso file for you to burn to a CD. However, here is a problem: free Linux versions rarely have technical support other than the information you find on online forums and FAQ pages (frequently asked questions) on the website. Linux distribution

Commercial Linux versions, such as SuSE Professional 9.3 (\$ 60, www.suse.com) or Xandros Desktop OS Version 3 Deluxe Edition (\$ 90, www.xandros.com), often provide technical support. The linux version is chosen here - Xandros - also has thoughtful print material and clear FAQ pages on its website.

After installing Xandros, familiarizing yourself with the Linux work environment is surprisingly easy, except for some minor issues that will be mentioned below. We can do all the usual work, such as editing Word and Excel files, browsing the web, copying files over local networks, using email and chat (IM). The KDE desktop is user-friendly and easy to use, it also offers a few small enhancements such as enabling multiple desktops. In this respect, Xandros proved stronger than Windows.

Although the Xandros work environment is simple, it is not convincing enough to give up Windows. Low prices and high security are the biggest advantages of Linux, making it the first choice if you need a solid machine. Budget-minded gamers can also try dual-boot settings: boot into Windows to play games, and boot into Linux to do other tasks.

In addition to the above two situations, there is no convincing reason for average to high-end users to give up Windows. Windows software, you have paid, supplemented with effective firewall, good anti-virus measures and security for sensitive information, you do not have to bother much about your Windows PC being attacked. However, it is necessary to mention some common concepts about Linux.

• Common concepts: Linux is difficult to install and use.

Reality: Not really, the basic installation is easy. First, I set up the PC's BIOS to boot from the optical drive (you may not need to do this step). Insert the first CD Xandros, reboot the machine and the installation procedure will guide you through the steps of installing any operating system, such as time zone declaration, network support and machine drivers. print.

Xandros gives the option to 'get rid of' Windows from the hard disk and start completely new, or set up a dual boot system to run both Windows and Xandros. We chose dual boot mode; and less than 30 minutes after starting the installation, the PC is ready to work.

There are some problems after installing: The HP Laserjet 5si (quite old) does not print, although the driver

seems to be installed correctly. However, with newer HP printers, Linux drivers from HP work well. Xandros could not identify the 21-inch ViewSonic screen. Changing the settings in the KDE Control Center solved the problem. (Control Center has the same function as Windows Control Panel).

Testing here uses standard PC hardware, but you should check your hardware for Linux compatibility before installing a new OS. For example, wireless network device (adapter) support is still not good.

- **Common perception: Linux is safer than Windows.**

Reality: This is true. Currently, it's easy to run Windows without installing patches, and not using anti-virus software, firewalls and spyware checks. Linux and Mac users rarely have to worry about these tools. Most viruses, spyware and adware focus on attacking Windows.

So does Linux and other open source systems have security weaknesses? Definitely yes. For example, the Mozilla Foundation has released many updates to 'patch' the vulnerabilities discovered in Firefox. Open source software is not entirely 'immune', but developers often fix bugs, serious vulnerabilities can be patched after only a few hours of detection.

Linux is an operating system designed to serve many users, so security issues are particularly focused. Using a firewall on a Linux system is still necessary, and the Xandros Deluxe version is available with this tool (but not enabled by default). Xandros Deluxe also includes the KDE Password Wallet tool, which saves website logins in encrypted files. XP's password management tool doesn't have the same security for your password.

- **Common perception: Data exchange between Windows and Linux is not simple.**

Reality: It's not as hard as you think. OpenOffice.org works quite well and can replace Microsoft Office. NTN hardly had any problems, even when editing a Word document using 'save traces' mode (used to track document editing) - the problem often makes it difficult for 'fake' software. Office before.

If OpenOffice.org doesn't satisfy you, you can always install Microsoft Office with the help of CodeWeaver's CrossOver Office, which creates a Windows emulation environment to run Office (and other Windows applications) on Linux. Version 4.1 of this software is provided with Xandros Deluxe.

There are some applications that don't work well. For example, iTunes is in the list of supported applications but NTN cannot make the sound 'speak' in Crossover.

Mac OS X

Mac OS X 10.4, or Tiger, is a different environment. The most obvious difference is the hardware. The 20-inch iMac is used to test Mac OS as the first impressive hardware design. However, the new OS is the main issue to mention.

Graphically, Tiger goes far beyond Windows and Linux. Transparent effects, elegant and unique color schemes, along with sharp icons. Often, the flashy 'wings' are uncomfortable for users, but with Tiger most of the interface effects look natural and make users feel excited when working.

Just like the Linux testing machine, iMac is easily connected to the network and we can use the Office and Firefox versions for Mac to perform normal tasks. However, there should be adjustment to work with Tiger and iMac. Minimalist Mac mouse can be frustrating and must find alternate USB mouse or any mouse as long as

there are at least 2 buttons and 1 scroll wheel. The wireless keyboard equipped with the device is the next thing to change after NTN repeatedly confuses the F13 key with Delete.

After changing the mouse and keyboard, NTN really enjoyed Tiger. While moving to Linux is easy but doesn't bring much value, switching to Tiger shows many advantages immediately. The task conversion feature Exposé is very convenient. When you have multiple open windows, simply click on the top corner of the screen or press the hotkey to display the thumbnails of each window, and you just need to click to switch to the window to work. This is an effective way to work with multiple windows at once.

Spotlight, Apple's new desktop search feature, is another advantage of Tiger. Click the small magnifying glass icon in the upper right corner of the screen to open the search dialog. Spotlight will immediately give you a list of conveniently grouped results such as apps, documents and emails. You can save Spotlight queries as smart folders (Smart Folders) that are self-updating. Another cool feature, Dashboard, provides tools to simplify desktop tasks.

Finally, considering the better security and the risk of less virus attacks, the Mac is more attractive. But first you need to consider the price. First you need to buy new hardware, followed by peripherals and Mac compatible software, adding more Macs to your network is quite expensive. Is it worth the price? Let's see some concepts about Mac.

- **Common sense: Mac OS is intuitive but not powerful.**

Reality: False. Mac OS is always ahead of Windows in applying intuitive interface design ideas; Its compliance with Fitts law is an example. Fitts's law says that the corners and edges of the screen are the easiest to reach, because no matter how far you move the mouse, the cursor stays on the edge of the screen. Mac OS menus take advantage of Fitts law. At first Windows taskbar did not follow this law, but it has now changed.

But the real power of Tiger lies in features like Spotlight and Exposé - excellent tools that you won't find in Windows. Automator, an easy-to-use scripting utility, helps simplify repetitive tasks. Like Linux, Mac OS is built on a Unix-like platform so all command line access you need is available.

- **Common perception: Mac hardware has a high price.**

Reality: Sadly this is true, especially if you only compare hardware parameters. The cheapest Mac you can buy today is the \$ 499 Mac Mini (in the US), while the high-end Power Mac system uses the G5 dual processor for up to \$ 2999. That money yet! The Mac has a great design and often has impressive features, for example, the G5 premium product line is cooled with ultra-smooth water. When Apple switched to Intel processors the following year, Mac prices could fall.

In addition to hardware, Windows users must also consider software prices when switching to Mac. Microsoft Office (\$ 400) is definitely indispensable, and other commercial software is needed.

- **Common perception: Mac OS lacks an application.**

Reality: Yes. Obviously the number of applications on Windows far exceeds those on Mac. However, nearly all important applications have Mac versions. Microsoft Office, Adobe Photoshop and InDesign, Macromedia's web design tools and video editing tools like Adobe Premier, not to mention Apple's Final Cut tool.

But a huge flaw in Mac software is the game. While some popular games like World of Warcraft, Doom 3 and

many other real-time strategy games have Mac versions, you won't find the Mac version of Half-Life 2, Tom Clancys Splinter Cell or many games. Other popular PC. Often the Mac version is released after months of PC version.

Looking to the future

Currently, getting rid of Windows troubles seems to be positive. You will have to adjust a lot when choosing Mac or Linux, but adding another operating system to the computing environment has never been easier!

Stable Linux versions like Xandros provide an alternative working environment for Windows that you can install on your current PC. But when it takes time and money to switch to another operating system, you expect it to bring real improvement. This is what NTN found with Tiger. Great interface and useful tools like Spotlight provide benefits over Windows.

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