

Amanda Doe
English 110
Hale
Evaluation Essay
9/27/07

Feisty and Free: Ubuntu Linux

Today, you turn on your computer, hear the tell-tale Microsoft sound, and get to work, only to find yourself distracted with a million tasks your computer needs your permission to complete. Startup programs clog your system tray, making it hard to find the application you actually need. You've thought about switching to Macintosh, but buying new hardware isn't in the budget. Fortunately, there are many other alternatives you may not have considered in your quest for a better computing experience. You need not be tied down to supporting Microsoft. The Ubuntu Linux operating system (OS) is easy to install and use, secure, compatible with today's standards and most importantly, it is completely free. Switching to Ubuntu Linux is a smart choice for every computer user today.

While in the past Linux was approached only by serious programmer types, nowadays it is much simpler to figure out thanks to the open source community's endless efforts to improve on what they have built. Installation, which can be a nightmare with any OS (especially with older Windows 9x versions), goes through without a hitch in Ubuntu. The installation CD for Ubuntu 7.04 (known as "Feisty Fawn") is a live CD, which means it starts up your system to that OS from the CD so you can test it before you install. Windows Vista does not have this option for installation (Yegulalp 3). Once you are ready to install the OS, you simply click the Install icon and the process begins, only requiring a little input, such as what language you prefer and how much disk space

to partition for Ubuntu. If you have Windows XP installed, Ubuntu will import your files and documents for you (3). As soon as it is finished, you can boot your computer into Ubuntu and start learning your way around. Installing other software is simple as well, using the Add/Remove Programs tool. Simply select the programs you want to install, and Ubuntu will do the rest of the work.

The default user interface in Ubuntu is called Gnome. It is a graphical interface (GUI) environment like Windows, but with a few differences. These differences are mostly organizational and don't make things too difficult, and within a few hours practice one should be able to track down files and applications just as easily as they would on Windows XP. However, if the absence of the familiar Start Menu is too shocking, one can opt to install KDE (K Desktop Environment), which is another user interface. I personally prefer KDE for its similarity to the Windows XP GUI, and the wealth of applications that come included with it. KDE menus are simple to learn, and you can even set it to behave like Windows, or even Macintosh if you prefer. Freddy Martinez, who is involved in the development of the Ubuntu project, says that "Jumping from XP to Vista is as difficult as jumping from Ubuntu to Mac OS X. Yet people notice the buzz around Ubuntu's ease of use and try it."

One other wonderful thing about switching to Ubuntu is that its better security results in fewer annoyances. The computer boots up in less than thirty seconds to a clean login screen, and once logged in you're ready to go. Windows Vista, on the other hand, will take longer than a minute to load all the programs that run in the system tray, slowing down your processor and decreasing your productivity. Many of Windows' famous errors are nonexistent on the Linux platform. Ubuntu is more secure than

Windows XP and will not have “illegal operations” every time you try to run more than one instance of a program, and there is no need to worry about seeing a “Blue Screen of Death.” Although there are viruses that can affect the Linux operating system, it is a lot less likely that your computer will contract a fatal virus while running Linux. To put this in context, in 2003 there were about 60,000 viruses known on Windows versions ,and only about 40 on Linux, which is about the same for Mac OS X (Granneman 1). Gone is also Windows Vista's infamous User Access Control, which would pop up a dialog box every time you try to run a program.

Most people are afraid to make the switch to a new operating system because they don't want to abandon their favorite software. Microsoft Office users don't want to leave all the knowledge they've gained behind when they make the change. Truthfully, most of the commercial software out today will not run on Linux. However, there are several alternatives available. For example, OpenOffice.org is a free software suite that mimics the way Microsoft Office works, and takes very little time to adjust to. I personally run this software on both Ubuntu and Windows Vista and it works wonderfully for all my word processing needs. OpenOffice.org can save in all major file formats used today, so you can easily open your files in different programs. If you need DOS software to run on your Ubuntu computer, there is a freeware tool called DOSBox that helps do that. There are also many emulators out that allow you to run Windows software on Linux, so you can use your old programs. However, I personally think the best option, if you want to use Windows applications, is to dual-boot between Ubuntu and your favorite Windows version. Dual-booting is when you install both operating systems on the same hard drive, and pick the one you want to use at startup. That way, you can still keep all your games

and Office applications on your Windows installation if you need to use them.

While some commercial software has been released for Linux, the majority of the software available for it is open source (meaning that the source programming code is freely distributed) or freeware. Included in the Ubuntu package is GIMP, a wonderful image editing program that can create just as good results as Photoshop with a little practice. Probably the most useful freeware item that comes with Ubuntu is OpenOffice.org, which is a completely Microsoft Office-compatible suite. All of your office needs are met with the spreadsheet, presentation, and word processing applications. It's also useful for converting to less popular file formats like WordPerfect Office. Another superb program included with the OS is GAIM, an instant messenger that can sign you into all your IM accounts simultaneously. Best of all, the entire Ubuntu operating system is free. You could spend nearly two hundred dollars for the newest version of Windows, but you can legally download Ubuntu Linux version 7.04 completely free. While some companies sell commercial versions of Linux, freeware versions really offer about the same features. What is being bought with a Linux distribution like Red Hat is tech support rather than the operating system, since it is basically the same kind of OS that you can get for free elsewhere. Open source software also has its advantages, as new versions are constantly being released, whereas it can take Microsoft as long as six years to package a new Windows version. This is because, according to Martinez, "The Ubuntu community is comprised of a wide variety of individuals that are all devoted to the same goal and under the same values. This allows for a highly diverse, focused group and because of this a large pool of talent comes together to produce a product." Constant upgrades in the software mean that the operating

system is changing just as much as the hardware is, making your computer top of the line in the software world.

Ubuntu Linux is a very good alternative to Windows XP/Vista for many reasons. It's simple to use and painless to install, secure, has many software titles that are fully compatible with Windows applications, and best of all, it is free. You can even set up your computer to dual boot between Windows and Ubuntu if you still need Windows to run some software. Matthew Newton, a writer for PC World magazine, says "Many people, for years now, have predicted the rise of Linux on the desktop. Feisty Fawn is exactly the sort of polished, friendly release that is necessary to make that dream a reality" (1). The only question that remains unanswered now is why more people haven't switched. Take the leap, and experience for yourself just how easy it is to reap the benefits of using Ubuntu Linux.

Works Cited

Granneman, Scott. "Linus vs. Windows Viruses." The Register. 6 Oct 2003.

<http://www.theregister.co.uk/2003/10/06/linux_vs_windows_viruses/>.

Newton, Matthew. "Ubuntu Linux 7.04." PCWorld.com. 14 June 2007.

<<http://www.pcworld.com/printable/article/id,132799/printable.htm>>.

Martinez, Freddy. Personal Interview. 27, Sept. 2007.

Yegulalp, Serdar. "Ubuntu Linux Vs. Windows Vista: The Battle For Your Desktop." InformationWeek. 27 April 2007.

<<http://www.informationweek.com/story/showarticle.jhtml?articleID=199201179>>