Why Linux?

Jim Quinn, Vice President, Under the Computer Hood User Group

In 2008 we (my wife & I) decided to do the 5-year plan to retire in 2012. We calculated our retirement income and expenses (including taxes) to make sure we could live satisfactory on that amount.

This forced me to think about technology for us and our two daughters, and how to support them with hardware, software (Win 7), tech support, and what it would cost. I was always helping my daughters with problems fixing Windows 7 and computer hardware. So, I built 2 new computers for myself, specifications listed below, one was for Linux and one for Windows 7 (hardware to replace current Win 7 machine).

I also had to face the issue of software. A problem with propriety software is that updates to the Operating System (OS) and applications may prevent them from running on your current hardware. Also, propriety applications may no longer be supported by the OS (security updates) or abandoned.

Linux offers free software (the OS and the applications) with many choices of OS (distributions aka distros) and applications. That way, if either becomes unavailable or unsupported there are many alternatives available. Linux distros vary from the highly technical (you choose what is included and you compile your own) to ready to use distros (Linux Mint and many others, aka many flavors). You also have a choice of desktops; you can use a distro that looks like Windows, Mac, or any other desktop styles. The good thing about Linux is you have many choices of distros, desktops, and applications.

In 2010 I found Linux Mint 9 and started my quest to see if it would work for me and my daughters, as I'm the tech support for them. I finally settled on Mint 9 Maté as the replacement for Win 7 as it seemed to have all the software applications the daughters would need and hopefully would also meet my needs. The Linux Mint 9 Maté interface was easy to learn and I really liked the multiple workspaces.

Within about a year, the daughters' computers started having Win 7 problems and hardware issues.

I started looking around for replacement computers and ordered a refurbished computer to test out Mint 9. TigerDirect & Newegg seemed to have good prices for prior models, so I ordered one. The testing went great, so I added a second hard drive (for automated backups) and a USB drive backup for the daughter to use.

Since moving my daughter's computers to Linux, my support calls have gone to almost nil. Most of the questions are related to how to accomplish a task with the applications. Linux is a multiuser system.

My daughters and I have been using the long-term support (LTS) releases (around 5 years) of Linux Mint. The current release of Mint (LTS) is 20. The only time-consuming support with my daughter's computers is when I upgrade to a new release of the long- term support distro. This is due to both my daughters having multiple users. It requires backing up their home folders, creating users with the same id, restoring their home folders, and changing back the ownership of their respective files because my backup is done with admin rights. I'm seriously considering creating an application to perform this automatically or finding a backup program that will do this.

SO WHY LINUX?

Windows 7 is no longer supported; this requires the possibility of purchasing a new computer as it wouldn't update my machine and definitely not my daughter's computers. This would also require purchasing new versions of the programs we need as they are not supported under Windows 7.

Now that Windows 10 is in full swing there have been many problems when installing updates. Also, Microsoft states this is the last version of Windows. It appears that most commercial programs are going to a monthly subscription or yearly subscription, which benefits them but not the user. For most of us, this means you cannot continue to use a program for years even if you do not need the updated features (lack of choice forced upgrades). Windows feature updates are only supported for two years, so does that indicate that you'll need to update your computer, or are they preparing to implement a subscription service for Windows?

I'll step down from my soapbox now.

Jim Quinn

Each of my 2 new computers specifications:

Corsair Case Black, 300R

Motherboard: ASUS P8Z77-V Deluxe

CPU: Intel i7-3770K

Memory: G.Skill, F3-1866C10D-16GSR – total 32GB

Asus DRW-24B1ST

Pioneer DVD BDR-207UBK

Western Digital, WD1003FZEX (2 each) for windows RAID 1 and 1 for Linux Computer

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