

Migrating from Windows to Linux

Moving Forward

maddog looks at the progress Linux has made in the past 12 years and considers what it would take to move Windows XP users to FOSS. *By Jon "maddog" Hall*

Recently I noticed that Microsoft had put a stake in the sand and (once again) announced the retirement of Windows XP, this time with a target date of April 8, 2014. Given all the other times Microsoft has announced the retirement of Windows XP, I suppose they wanted to avoid April 1st. But I digress.

In light of this announcement, I wondered how the FOSS community could leverage that large number of Windows XP customers who have not migrated to another Microsoft product, such as Vista, Windows 7 or Windows 8. Those users had many different Microsoft alternatives from which to choose, but they stayed with Windows XP. Since Windows XP was released in 2001, that means they are using the same Microsoft operating system technology that existed when *Linux Pro Magazine* was young.

When Microsoft users start planning to move to newer Microsoft technology, updating their (very expensive) operating systems and apps, getting new hardware on which to run their Microsoft software, paying for ever more restrictive Microsoft upgrade licenses, getting the training needed for the new versions of proprietary software, and making sure their data and applications all migrate properly – that might be the time to suggest a migration to Free and Open Source Software.

Of course, there are some nay-sayers. One friend explained that he uses Linux on his servers and Linux at home, but he needs Windows for three things: those odd devices that he uses on his desktop (e.g., a SIM Card reader/writer and apps), the PowerPoint documents that he receives and presents, and (of course) games. So, he “stays with Windows” for some of his professional work.

I have bad news for my friend because someday in the future his SIM Card reader/writer and apps will probably no longer work on Windows, or else that version of Windows will become so old and vulnerable to virus infection that it will become unusable. My friend will have to move forward, and he has no guarantee that the company that made those closed-source apps will have ported their drivers and apps to the next version of Windows – or to any version of Windows – or even still exists as a company. Of course, he can try to run older versions of Windows and applications under various emulators and virtual machines, but sooner or later this will become a management nightmare, even if it is only his own personal bad dream.

I acknowledge that at times I have envied people who bought desktop software that “just worked.” On the other

hand, as the software became more complex and grew older, I also noticed that the software often did not just work any more, until they bought a new copy. That is when I returned to appreciating FOSS.

This is, however, the 150th issue of *Linux Pro*, so I think it is worthwhile to stop and think about how far we have come in the past 12 years. Twelve years ago, a lot of people still could not even pronounce “Linux,” and if they could, they were laughed at for using that “toy operating system.” It was only a couple years earlier that major database companies started porting their database engines to GNU/Linux. Embedded systems companies had just started using various flavors of FOSS instead of creating their own operating systems and compilers. Virtualization was just visible on the horizon (Xen was released in 2003, and VMware was released in 1999), and the only clouds were those up in the sky.

Twelve years ago, people were still struggling a LOT with getting device drivers. Today, there are more boxes and advertisements for hardware that show not only the Microsoft and Apple logos, but also mention Linux or show a cute Tux penguin.

Twelve years ago, GNU/Linux was not considered a “mission critical” operating system platform. Today, people run their “mission critical” applications using FOSS. These days, people are using FOSS (and at least the Linux kernel) in many places that were only dreamed about in 2001, which is why we need to make a big push during this coming year.

The FOSS community needs to put its best foot forward and mend the issues that keep people from migrating, particularly from Windows XP to GNU/Linux; we need to fix some of the real issues and address the imaginary ones. There is a lot of “low-hanging Windows XP fruit,” and if we could convince these people to use FOSS instead of moving to yet another proprietary operating system and its related applications, it would be good for all of FOSS. We have a little more than a year to make it so. ■■■

