

# HAT HOPES

Dear Linux Magazine Reader,

**T**he very day this magazine goes to print, Fedora 18 is enjoying its official release. I have watched the first official reviews come online gradually over the course of the day, as they always do with such events. The extensive Linux blog and tweet engine is always waiting for the next big topic, and it is always ready to lend some content space for anything new.

Although my position demands that I maintain strict impartiality, I must admit that I have always secretly cheered for Fedora. I'm not sure why – I just like it. The people I meet from the Fedora project seem really smart and articulate. Fedora always seems to work when I try it – which is admittedly less remarkable for a Linux than it used to be. Fedora is also the inheritor of the great Red Hat Linux legacy – the old Red Hat Linux I mean: the one they used to give away.

Sometimes I wonder what Fedora is and where it is going. The Internet is full of hype artists and sideshow barkers who want to tell you their product is more than it is. Fedora, on the other hand, has always seemed like something *more* than they say it is. It is a great distro, that no one seems inclined to get everyone psyched up about in a way that rings bells with the public.

I went to a page on their website titled “Fedora 18 Talking Points” and it didn't have any talking points on it. (Sure F18 is new, but most distros get their marketing materials ready to drop by the release date.)

Their release nicknames are neither pithy, nor macho, nor cuddly – they sound more like an utterance mumbled from the dream of someone who ate too much, translated into Japanese and then back into English using 1970s-era auto-translation technology. (The last one was called “Beefy Miracle” and the latest is “Spherical Cow.”)

The “About Fedora” page on their website has a section called “What Makes Fedora Different.” It contains three generic paragraphs on freedom and community that apply to every other Linux distribution as well as Fedora.

I've sometimes wondered if Fedora is actually not supposed to take on independent momentum that would distance it from Red Hat Enterprise Linux and potentially overshadow the older sibling – that the current arrangement of professional engineering with minimal attention to identity or message is an active strategy to harness the power of community without ever leaving the impression that the free version is equivalent to the paid RHEL breadwinner.

Still, it seems like Fedora has never had a better opportunity to claim a preeminent place in the free Linux community. Mandriva and OpenSuse have lost much of their market presence due to acquisitions and changing business plans. Ubuntu is locked in a self-created race to be everything – spreading its attention into phones, clouds, and even TV. Mint has slipped in

from nowhere to fill the niche of the restless Ubuntu, with a well tooled system and a disciplined desktop message. But what is Mint doing that Fedora couldn't be doing right now – if not with its main trunk, at least through its sophisticated system of alternative “spin” distros tailored to specific needs?

It is fair to say that Fedora isn't about the dainty desktop – that they have solid reasons for wanting to focus on management tools and other enterprise features, and newcomers like Ubuntu are only now coming around to what Fedora already knew about the need to build for the enterprise. Still, the Fedora team does indeed put out a “Desktop Edition,” so it isn't like they are ignoring this market.

I dug around a little more on the Fedora website and found another section titled “Why is the Fedora Project Different” that lists some of the important open source tools that Fedora has helped to incubate, including D-Bus, PolicyKit, FreeIPA, PulseAudio, and SELinux – an impressive list that should perhaps be on the main website instead of buried down in the developer wiki.

As it would happen, Fedora's FUDCon conference is in my hometown this week, and I plan to stop in. I will ask them what Fedora is and where they think it is going, and I might know a whole lot more about Fedora a week from now. Still, I won't be able to stop this magazine from going to print, so this column will serve as a snapshot of a point of view at a point in time.

If they ask me what I think they should do, I will say they should keep being who they are on the technical end; but maybe if they get a spare moment, they should go back to that About Fedora page, and, under the heading that says “What Makes Fedora Different,” they should work on crafting a much better and more insightful answer.

*Joe*

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