



MARKETING INSIGHTS

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Marketing Mayhem

13 Reasons why Linux won't make it to a desktop near you

You're a marketer who finds an exciting new product developed by some really smart people. A great product few people have heard of is the Holy Grail of marketing – all you have to do is tell everyone about it, and the world will beat a path to your door. Isn't that the theory?

When you look more closely, you find it's not that simple. In fact, you find a set of insurmountable obstacles. Here's a short list:

- 1 The people who make the product have no money for marketing.
- 2 The reason they have no money is that they give the product away.
- 3 Since they give the product away, people never see it in shops.
- 4 Because people never see the product in shops or advertised, they don't know it exists.
- 5 The makers of the product rely on word of mouth to attract more customers, but their customers only talk to each other.
- 6 On closer inspection, you find that there are 500 versions of the product. When you try to understand the subtle differences between them, you become confused. Your enthusiasm starts to flag.
- 7 When you install the product and try to use it, you strike unexpected problems. You also find some nice surprises, which boosts your flagging enthusiasm a little.
- 8 When you ask the product's maker for help, he suggests you talk to other users. They welcome you with open arms but answer your questions in a strange language.
- 9 When you admit that you have trouble understanding their language, you're told you'd better learn it, or you won't appreciate the product.
- 10 When you tell the designers that their product isn't marketable in its present form, they say that's okay, since they only wrote it to share with their friends.
- 11 As you wonder what to make of it all, you watch the designers and their supporters squabble among themselves over all kinds of trivia. As you realize that their collective focus isn't on fighting their real competitors, what's left of your enthusiasm ebbs further away.
- 12 When you ask the people in charge why they don't show more leadership, they say they have no power to unite the squabbling communities. They add that disagreement and vigorous debate were the very fires that forged the great product in the first place.
- 13 When you discover that some of the designers have made deals with their biggest competitor, the last drop of your enthusiasm drains away.

The ship that launched a thousand faces

Linux is a beautiful woman of enormous intelligence.
Linux is a precocious child with very bad manners.
Linux is a teenager who needs patience and understanding.
Linux is a sullen geek who refuses to speak to ordinary people.

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All these statements are true and explain why the messages Linux sends to the market tend to be as incoherent as the utterances of George Bush or Phillip Ruddock.

Some Linux designers and supporters want to take on the world. Their product is better than Vista, they say, and as good as anything Apple has to offer. Others say the world should come to them, on their terms.

Others again say they don't care what the hell the world does, and start work on yet another version of Linux. They say that's the kind of freedom only Linux gives you, and that's the whole point.

It's hard to argue with any of them. When a man gives you a free book, do you complain that the print is hard to read? Or that the paper isn't smooth enough? Or that you don't like the way the story ends?

In this case, you get a 'Live CD' or, rather, you burn it yourself after downloading the software. The advent of 'live' (take me for a spin) Linux CDs has tempted some of us to have a look, and a few of us to put our toes in the water. Just diving in is out of the question, since there are more versions of Linux than there are books in a library, but Live CDs enable you to see many faces and read many stories without the need to pay for them.

Conversion and Baptism

In this case it's not about money. It's like the old days when people used to hand you a book of revelations at the airport and mention in passing that recipients usually give something in return. Donations are welcome but it's more about conversion to a new faith than money.

The baptism is difficult, and there is a real risk of drowning. A quip trip to the main Linux market place shows why - <http://www.distrowatch.com> .

[Linux Mint 3.0 \(\\$1.95\)](#)
[Mandriva 2007.1 \(\\$5.25\)](#)
[openSUSE 10.2 \(\\$5.25\)](#)
[PCLinuxOS 2007 \(\\$1.75\)](#)
[SimplyMEPIS 6.5 \(\\$1.75\)](#)
[Slackware 12.0 \(\\$5.75\)](#)

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[Linux Tip: Job Scheduling with Cron and At](#)

[Sabayon Linux x86/x86-64 3.4 \[Stable Release\]](#)

Clement Lefebvre has announced the availability of a development release of the new KDE Community Edition of Linux Mint 3.0 "Cassandra": "The KDE Edition of Linux Mint is now a Community project and it is maintained by Jamie Boo. A stable release is expected next week. If you are interested in the KDE Edition, please test this BETA release... This release is based on Bianca-KDE and compatible with all Feisty repositories. It comes with KDE 3.5.6 and a Linux kernel 2.6.20-15. Openoffice, Thunderbird and Sunbird replaced Koffice and Kontact. Beryl 0.2.1 is included with Beryl-Manager." Read the brief [announcement](#) and the [release notes](#). [Download \(MD5\)](#) via BitTorrent: [LinuxMint-3.0-KDE-BETA-013.iso](#) (952MB).

2007-07-24

Distribution Release: Sabayon Linux 3.4

After 4 months of hard and deep development, the Sabayon Linux Crew is happy to [announce](#) the immediate availability of [Sabayon Linux 3.4](#)! Distribution Features: "The most advanced: Linux Kernel 2.6.22 with extra Power Management (PowerTop), Wireless (mac80211), Ext4 Filesystem, Scheduler (CFS) and Virtualization (KVM,Virt-Manager,VirtualBox) support. Gaming oriented: featuring Savage 2, FlightGear, DangerDeep, Warsaw, Nexuiz, Torcs, Battle of Wesnoth, Second Life; Latest NVIDIA (100.14.11) and AMD (8.38.6) GPU drivers..." Read the [release notes](#) for further details. [Download](#) the DVD images via BitTorrent: [SabayonLinux-x86-3.4a.iso](#) (4,239MB), [SabayonLinux-x86_64-3.4a.iso](#) (4,433MB).

SimplyMEPIS 6.5	\$1.95
Debian 4.0	\$9.95
Sabayon 3.3	\$7.95
Linux Mint 3.0	\$1.95
Mandriva 2007.1	\$7.95
Elive 1.0	\$1.95
Slackware 12.0	\$5.95

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Page Hit Ranking

Data span: Refresh

Rank	Distribution	H.P.
1	Ubuntu	279
2	PCLinuxOS	238
3	openSUSE	161
4	Fedora	141.

That's just a small portion of what you see before you feel a dizzy spell coming on, and the choices don't end with picking a distro. There are Windows Managers and File Managers and thousands of programs with strange names. The descriptions and reviews are written in English, but the words are as easy to read as those signs in Wales that point to unpronounceable villages.

Its champions will argue that the history of Linux is at least as interesting as that of Wales, and that choice is what Linux is about. They should add that Windows users, like the citizens of Eastern Block countries after glasnost, will need time to adjust. Careful guidance is required to avoid sudden shock or complete disorientation.

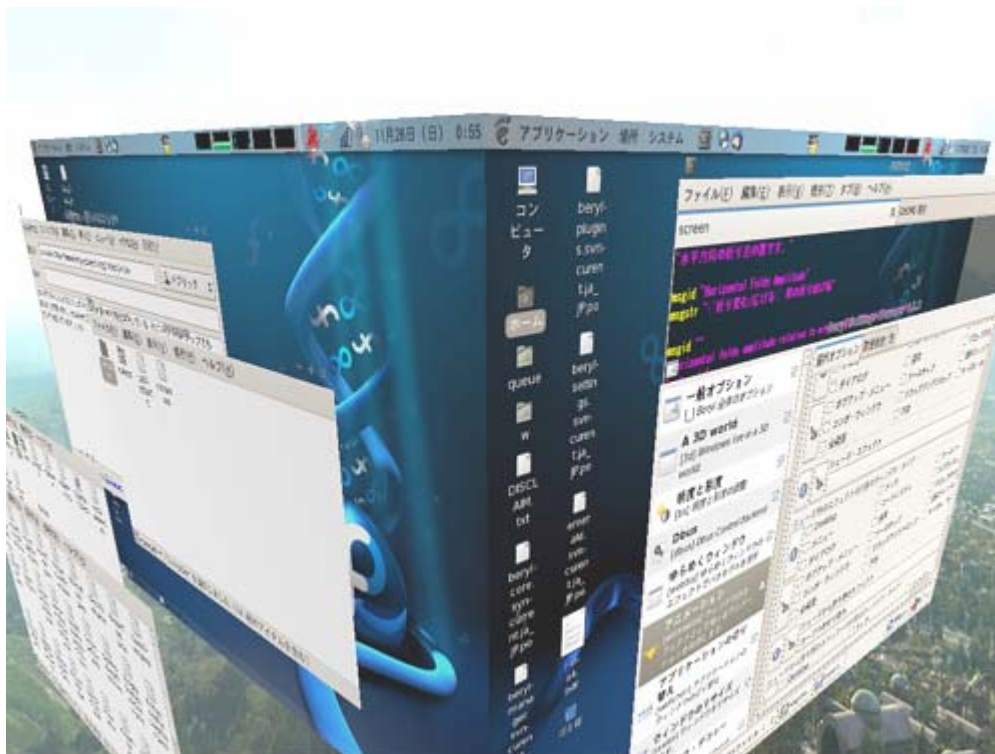
There are as many Linux websites as there are distributions, and even those that claim to make life easy for new converts tend to be heavy going, incomplete or out of date. These websites, like the distros and the help manuals that come with them, are created by devoted people in their spare time. Everything is a work in progress.

The Linux value proposition

In the last year or two, a few Linux makers have designed desktops expressly for PC users, not geeks. The main contenders are: **LinuxMint**, **Linspire**, **Mandriva**, **Novell's SUSE Linux Enterprise Desktop** (SLED to its friends), **PCLinuxOS**, **SimplyMepis**, **Ubuntu**, **Linspire** and **Xandros**.

They all include the operating system, a host of utilities and a full suite of Office, Internet, Graphics and Multimedia applications. You can check the goods on offer with the Live CD, and installing a full system can take as little as half an hour.

Getting there is not beyond the scope of a competent Windows user. The install is mostly automatic and includes setting up the internet connection. Common printers, scanners and faxes take a few clicks and a few minutes to install. These desktops offer 3D graphics that rival Vista and OS X in terms of 'eye candy'. Software updates are semi-automatic, and that includes **all applications** on the system. And Linux never asks you to reboot.



You can make this cube spin and you can make the panels transparent, and you can do all this on an ordinary PC with a basic Intel graphics card.

The value proposition becomes irresistible when we consider that most of these Linux desktops cost nothing, including all the applications. They come from the Open Source community, a group of very smart people spread all over the world who contribute their skills, energy and time to the endeavour of creating software for people to share.

The Catch

There's an old joke that begins like this: *What if operating systems were airlines?*

Windows Air

The terminal is pretty and colourful, with friendly stewards, easy baggage check and boarding, and a smooth take-off. After about 10 minutes in the air, the plane explodes with no warning whatsoever.

Mac Airlines

All the stewards, stewardesses, captains, baggage handlers and ticket agents look the same, act the same, and talk the same. Every time you ask questions about details, you are told you don't need to know, don't want to know, and would you please return to your seat and watch the movie.

Linux Airlines

Disgruntled employees of all the other OS airlines decide to start their own airline. They build the planes, ticket counters, and pave the runways themselves. They charge a small fee to cover the cost of printing the ticket, but you can also download and print the ticket yourself.

*When you board the plane, you are given a seat, four bolts, a wrench and a copy of the seat-HOWTO.html. Once settled, the fully adjustable seat is very comfortable, the plane leaves and arrives on time without a single problem, the in-flight meal is wonderful. You try to tell customers of the other airlines about the great trip, but all they can say is, **'You had to do what with the seat?'***

There's truth in jokes

Even basic things like partitioning, windows managers, file managers and software update processes are not standardized across our shortlist of user-friendly Linux distros. To varying degrees, you will strike problems getting Linux set up correctly if your PC has an LCD screen that is large or wide, or if you have a fancy graphics card (NVIDIA or ATI) or you want to set up WI-FI or play video clips out of the box.

And if you're installing Linux on the same hard drive as Windows XP, you'll need to create a new partition or two. That's a knee trembler for simple users, a leap of faith of the white knuckle kind. It's a good idea to make full backups before you do this, yet the process can be quite straightforward. For example, Ubuntu offers to shrink your Windows partition to your chosen size and to create the additional partitions you need automatically.

It's not that it's hard, just that it's unfamiliar. Linux doesn't know about C, D and E drives and Windows will show up as sda1/dev or hda1/dev in the partitioning table. What's missing is a simple explanation of these basics, and none of the Linux desktops provide that. You're travelling in a foreign country and you have trouble reading the road signs, and there's no helpful traffic cop to be found. It spoils your trip.

If you persevere, you'll find answers to all your questions on the web – eventually. Linux is a loose confederation of geeks and zealots, all keen to help, but to a Windows user it's

mayhem. Novell is something of a safe haven here, with a solid product and superb documentation that is worth the nominal \$50 charge. The DVDs are shipped in a neat package, which gets around that burning issue.

SimplyMepis, LinuxMint and PCLinuxOS are the easiest for newcomers from the Windows realm, but no one tells you these things. There's no road sign that says: Newbies this way; these are the simplest products for you; here's an easy introduction to Linux; here's where you get help. Instead, you find you have to develop hunter-gatherer skills to make it through this terrain. It's a shame because the product has so much going for it.

The Opportunity

It's also a shame because it's a perfect time for Linux to make serious inroads on its major competitors. Windows Vista caused gasps of dismay when Microsoft announced its price earlier this year, and people took to the streets in non-US countries claiming they were being ripped off.

Office 2007 is another big ticket upgrade, and the full combo demands twin overhead Intel cores, 2gb of RAM, 15gb of disk space and a fancy graphics card to work well. That's an expensive hardware upgrade, just to accommodate a couple of seriously obese passengers.

Apple has expensive tastes as well - you have to buy the company's hardware at a premium and pay serious money to get serious applications. By contrast, Linux Desktop is largely free, makes few demands and runs on Windows XP-spec PCs without complaints.

The obvious drawback is that you can't just choose your new PC at your favourite store and tick the Linux box in the software options. Dell has begun shipping PCs with Ubuntu installed, and Lenovo, HP and Acer are rumoured to follow. The problem for them is which distro to choose, the very same problem adventurous users have.

Support from major PC vendors is what Linux desktop needs to get noticed by the millions who shop for new PCs. Right now, its broader market exposure is close to zero, and the Linux community has to shoulder part of the burden for this. If some of the developers had combined their resources to produce and market a single desktop product, Linux would be ready to steal serious market share from Microsoft and Apple.

As it stands, it's marketing mayhem.

Linux Labours

Read about Briard's hilarious fumbles and stumbles in coming to grips with Linux Desktop:

- [Part 1—In Search of freedom](#)
- [Part 2—On a Clear Day](#)
- [Part 3—Linux Means Business](#)
- [Part 4—Taking Stock](#)