

FINDING THE RIGHT LINUX DISTRIBUTION

Many people who first make the switch to Linux search for quite some time before they find the version of Linux that is just right for them. There are many different versions of Linux, each distributed with different features and applications. Some are even configured for a particular purpose, like media production or system rescue. Listener Ken Blackwell shared with us, his decision process in his journey to find a better Linux distribution (distro) for home use -- and how he ended up going back to his original choice.

Ken's Journey

The following is provided mostly as an FYI, based on my experiences of late with Linux. In my quest for totally "Going Linux" I have been working it in two ways. First, I have been testing several distributions of Linux. Then I've been looking for ways to replace Windows programs, ACDSee photo manager editor and Ashlar Graphite for CAD. The following is a bit of what I've found along the way.

I have been using Linux of some version or another, but it's been Linux Mint Cinnamon 16 for the last year or so. I have been satisfied with Mint 16, but decided to test the grass on the other side of the fence.

Here's my list:

1. Ubuntu MATE 14.04
2. Mint MATE 17.1_64
3. Mint KDE 17.1_64
4. Mint Cinnamon 17.1_64
5. Mint XFCE 17.1_64

First, using the "[Going Linux Screencast](#)", I learned to use Gparted to create a separate /home partition on a fresh HD before installing the above distributions. This was only partly successful, because I had to rework the partitions during the installation process. The partitions were OK, but I had to release them for the particular installation, set the file type, designate format, etc. After the first installation, I automatically went to manual partition to set it up and overwrote the previous installation.

Dual Monitors:

I run dual monitors, one DVI and the other HDMI, so this is important to me, especially since Cinnamon 16 had not worked perfectly. It didn't allow the second monitor to awake from autosleep. All of the newer distros fixed this. But, only Cinnamon works smoothly in dual-monitor setup. The others, having a display setup screen that looks about the same, do not work so well. I like to have

my main screen on the left with the extended display on the right. But with Cinnamon and XFCE, I could never get the main screen menu on the left screen -- unless maybe I swapped the physical monitor position. I didn't try that. On XFCE, the dual screen setup was a bit difficult and I could never get both screens set with the same background.

Desktop Menu:

I have been using Cinnamon for quite a while, so naturally it seemed more comfortable to me. I still feel that Cinnamon provides the best and most logical interface for the user, especially newbies. I didn't see a lot of difference between Ubuntu MATE and Mint MATE. No surprise I guess. I loaded Mint KDE chasing after DigiKam which is preloaded there. I didn't like the KDE feel and function. The XFCE menu was nice. I liked the simple clean approach next to that of Cinnamon, but the dual screen problem would make it not usable for me at this time.

Browsers:

I use Chrome and not Firefox. (Though I did use Firefox extensively years ago.) Making the change in Linux is a little infuriating due to the manners of Yahoo search in Firefox and the fact that there seems to be no way to set Google as your search engine. When, I searched for Chrome with the Yahoo. I got gibberish. So, I found it easier to go to Google.com, then search for the Chrome download. Once at the Chrome site, it was easy. Google has it all nicely setup to get Chrome installed in Linux. I know some folks don't like Chrome, but it is MY choice.

Software Installation Process:

Newbies may still be confused when trying to install some software packages into Linux as pointed out in the [Datamation article](#) that Larry referenced. During this exercise, I have found several packages that I wanted to try. In many cases, I had to dig around to find out how to install them. For those packages that come with the distro, the process is easy, but in other cases it can be quite difficult -- and the method is totally different in each case. Until the various Linux distros get this worked out, to include commercial software, Linux will remain the purview of more experienced computer drivers.

VM Trial:

At Bill's suggestion, I loaded VMWare Player with Win 7 installed on top of it. Then I loaded ACDSee photo manager. It all worked very nicely. But as it turns out, I have a second computer sitting here, so in the end, it makes more sense for me to just use two computers with less complexity. If a person had only one machine, then VM would probably make more sense. But, in my case VM doesn't move me any closer to a pure Linux operation.

Photo Management and Editing for Linux:

As I have stated, my favorite photo management and editing program is ACDSee. Cinnamon comes with gThumb and GIMP installed. Paired, these two come the closest of anything that I've seen that would allow me to operate as I do with ACDSee, but still no banana. Many of the other photo management programs like DigiKam, Picasa, Apple's iPhoto, Adobe Lightroom, etc. do not work well, or at all, with folders. As a result you can end up with all your files in one big folder "pit". I'll never allow that to happen. Their only organization is within their own software framework. YUK!

When that program dies or I chuck it, I want to go to my computer's file system and be able to still find my photos. It turns out that gThumb does work with folders, but doesn't have all the organizational skills of ACDSee. But it may be workable. By using gThumb as the organizer and director, you can sort through your photos and directly open GIMP to do the editing. I don't like the way GIMP works. To get a file saved as .jpg the way I work, I have to use "export" and that takes extra steps just to "save as". Yes I know about layers, RAW and all the fancy stuff for which I have no need. So the combo of gThumb and GIMP are much less efficient than ACDSee in processing large numbers of photos as I usually do.

CAD for Linux:

I have looked at several programs, and so far Qcad seems the best under Linux. It, and most other CAD programs, follow the Auto CAD process which is cumbersome and slow compared to my beloved Ashlar Graphite. I have about 15+ years invested in Graphite, so I guess that I'm still stuck with Windows for that.

My Vote for Distro:

After a short trial with the five distros, I remain in the Mint Cinnamon camp and I think that among these that I have tested, it is the best for a newbie and certainly great for the more experienced user.

Ken submitted this update since he wrote the original article:

Here are a few other things that may be of interest.

1. I have since tried Ubuntu Unity. And like everyone says, "It's terrible." In a short period of time I couldn't figure out how to use it -- even opening programs that weren't in the Unity Bar.
2. Another good note for Cinnamon: I have Mint Cinnamon installed on my Acer Laptop (Aspire 5535-5452). When using Ver 16, I couldn't get it to awake from autosleep. However, with Ver 17 it awakes nicely with just a touch of the Enter key. Cinnamon is getting better 'n better.
3. Chromebook. About 6 months ago, I bought a Chromebook and it has become heavily used at home and when traveling. I use it for 99 percent of my Internet searching and emailing, but I also, use it for letter

writing, calendar updates and other office type stuff. Since, I have been a Drive user for some time so, this cloud operation is no problem for me. One the the things that I like about it is the quick boot time. You can be working on something, close it up (shutdown). Then later open the cover and be right back where you were. Then, there is no software maintenance, no security software to keep up, no MS trying to update when you want to do something else. It's light, my Toshiba Chromebook 2 w/13.3" screen weighs 3.3 lb. Battery life is great. I typically use it all day then put it on the charger at night. It meets and exceeds my expectations. I have no reason to use programs from other OS's on it. The Apps that are available on line are more than sufficient for the way that I use this computer.

I use Chrome on all my computers and Android phone, so all the Internet stuff is right at my fingertips on any of the devices. I love sitting on the sofa using the Chromebook to cast to my Chromecast on the TV. After you get the video cast to the TV, you can open another tab and be doing anything else, write a letter, ck the movie database to see who is playing in the movie, etc. I believe that this is a great device for the experienced user and especially the first time computer user. Finally, the price is absolutely right.

Source : http://goinglinux.com/articles/FindingTheRightDistribution_en.htm