

Member Linux Stories

Editor: In response to my questions of a) What is your favourite Linux distro? b) What is it about this particular distro that makes it your favourite? and c) What originally made you start using Linux and/or why would you recommend someone switch from Windows to Linux? these are what members contributed via Yammer or email. They provide some good views on how to get into using Linux, appropriate distributions to pick and reasons for continuing to use Linux. Please enjoy them, and thank you to all the members who contributed these.

Arch Linux - Roger Brown

Arch Linux because..

...it's always bang up to date (being a rolling distribution) and you can customise it any way you want - simple and fast or flashy with all bells and whistles (or anything between) - it's all up to you.

Not the easiest to install (although there are ways and means to avoid the hard-line "Arch way" - hint: Zen installer) but once done there's nothing to change. And you'll find very little you can't install directly from the Arch repositories.

And Arch has by a country mile, the VERY BEST documentation - pretty nearly any issue you encounter with anything you install under Arch will be dealt with and in a simple easy to follow manner.

People new to the Arch world can also try the excellent Manjaro - a user-friendly version of Arch which is almost perfectly Arch compatible.

I started using Linux out of curiosity initially and in a sense, I started the hard way using Slackware - a distro for which I have a great deal of respect and which taught me a great deal.

Why would I recommend Windows users change to a distro where the updates all work and are locally mirrored so that they all download and install within seconds? And where even relatively modest hardware (mine is all second hand) absolutely flies compared to Windows?

Well, I leave that to you to figure out. I simply fall about laughing every time I read our Windows 10 Yammer group!!

Caveats:

Hardware support is vastly improved in Linux but you can't assume that any device you see on store shelves will necessarily work out of the box. A little research may be needed.

Linux is NOT Windows - it's a separate OS that does some things quite differently. If YOU are not the sort of person who's prepared to take time to learn new tricks, then stick to what you know.

And don't expect your favourite Windows programs to run. There are ways to achieve that but if you are looking at Linux to run Windows programs you're missing the point.

Ubuntu - Greg Eden

I use Ubuntu. I started way back with Red Hat in the late nineties and have used many distros over time. For a while, I ran Gentoo where every part of the system is compiled from source and tailored to the hardware. I have used Debian, mostly Debian Testing. I still run Debian on my Raspberry Pi 4 and my old Acer Chromebook. But on my high-end desktop and Dell Notebook I run Ubuntu. Ubuntu has a huge

ecosystem of variants and backers. All software available for Linux is easily installable on Ubuntu and commercial software is available through the partner repositories. Ubuntu just works.

Mageia - Dennis Parsons

My favourite Linux distribution is Mageia.

I use it out of habit mainly - I started off with Red Hat 20 or so years ago, progressed to Mandrake, which evolved into Mandriva, then Mageia. I continues to work well for me so I don't feel compelled to change.

I started using Linux initially because I liked the open-source ethos & it wasn't Microsoft. Being able to just download software from a repository for whatever task you wanted without having to search & locate a suitable safe download site really appealed.

Learning to use another operating system is a good way to learn about computing concepts rather than just learning to use a particular piece of software by following a recipe.

People complain that Linux is full of obscure commands & such but Windows is worse once you scratch below the surface trying to fix a problem when all the information it provides is a cryptic generic error code. Linux is different, not harder. If you can point & click then you can use Linux - my 86 year old father manages to & he's no computer wizz.

From an older user's perspective

I'll also tell this from my Mum & Dad's perspective as they both use Linux but neither of them could be described as being anything above "basic user" level.

a) What's a "distro".....? (Mageia is what they use)

b) It's what our son installed

c) Dad: My son said I couldn't continue using Windows XP so asked me to try Linux to see how I coped with it. Most of the programs I used like Firefox and Thunderbird were the same and he got my favourite card game running as well so I was happy. I need help with anything more complicated but did on Windows too so there's no difference there.

Mum: My son gave me a laptop running Linux & as I'd never been anything other than a very casual Widows user previously it wasn't any more difficult. I mainly use it for e-mail & now Zoom calls which my son sets up for us via TeamViewer.

Ubuntu - Tim McQueen

Ubuntu is my favourite Linux distribution

I use it mainly out of habit and because I 'can't be bothered' trying anything else.

I originally started using Linux because I have usually been a contrarian. I had early experience with ICL Singer and DG AOS & AOS/VS and Unix systems. I was strongly influenced by Roger Brown and Dennis Parsons's discussions about Linux and decided to give it a try.

I use Windows 8 at Vision Australia and have just bought a Windows 10 laptop. I find using Windows frustrating. Just downloading reasonable software (Zoom, Libre Office) is much more of a chore than it should be. I'm of Scottish ancestry and don't want to spend unnecessarily, and I'm also in favour of the Free Software foundation philosophy.

Lubuntu - Rob Brown

I started out using Linux with baby steps on a disused second PC so I could get used to the environment without breaking anything or losing anything on my main PC. I recommend this approach to any new users.

The initial driver for the move was a desire to use free software for my main computing needs and this kicked off with using Netscape Navigator (a predecessor of Firefox) and then Thunderbird for emails.

Once I discovered OpenOffice, as it was called then, I knew there were free open source options for most of my software needs. The quality of these has continued to improve with each passing year and now most things can be done as efficiently on OpenSource Software (OSS) as on commercial packages.

I tried a number of different Linux variants (called distributions) including Mandriva, OpenSuse, Fedora, Arch, Linux Mint, Peppermint and Ubuntu. After dual booting my favourite distro(s) with Windows for a while the UEFI bios replacement came along and upset the dual boot apple cart. While this situation did improve over a few years it was enough for me and many others to say “you know what I can get by just fine with Linux alone” and so I ditched my dual booting and went solo with Ubuntu as my settled preference for overall ease of use.

Desktop Environment (DE) choices are worth a special mention as there are so many to choose from. LXDE on Linux Mint was a preferred option for a few years until Mint decided to drop LXDE. It was not worth the small effort of installing LXDE over the base Mint distro each time a new version was released especially when a fast efficient lightweight distro called Lubuntu could do the job so nicely.

Most, if not all Linux distributions are based on one of the three earliest ones called Slackware, Debian and Red Hat Linux. But today there are hundreds to choose from each with their own personalities and DEs and the debate about which is best goes on but of course it is a personal choice.

Linux gives the individual freedom to control and use their PC the way they choose and set it up the way that best suits their needs.

A couple of the big things for me are updates and the support community. Updates are regular and are applied to the full set of installed software, not just the operating system files. And they are quick - all done in a few minutes, and can be done when you want them done not when you are keen to start-up the PC to do something urgent or shut it down and head off somewhere.

Knowing there is help available from a vast community of users and developers is very comforting but the need to seek out help these days is rare. Linux computing is amazingly reliable and free of bugs.

Linux Mint - Frank O'Loughlin

I changed over two old HP Laptops from Windows 10 to Linux Mint earlier this year. I did experiment with both Xubuntu & Lubuntu which I had dual booted with Windows 10, but I'm now preferring stand-alone Mint. Both computers are over 10 y/old now, one came with Windows Vista and the other with Windows 7. I am finding that they run better in Linux in that they boot up faster and they're not cluttered up with Windows programs and features that are not necessary for my needs. Linux MInt does everything that Windows did without the hassle of it having to be rebooted regularly because it is losing its WIFI Internet connection and/or not running properly. I am still a novice in the Linux environment but if I can't find what I want in Google there are knowledgeable Linux users on Yammer to guide me along.

I was concerned that the laptops were running hot under Windows, both of which still have their original HDDs and with Yammer personal help the memory was upgraded prior to the changeover. They both seem to cope better in Linux Mint as the fans and drives are not continually running at full speed like they were in Windows. I am expecting that they will both continue to do all that I need them to do for quite a while

yet. I am also much less concerned with getting virus attacks in Linux than I was when they were running Windows 10.

So all round I'm a happy recent convert to Linux.

Linux Mint - David Hatton

My current "daily driver" distribution is Linux Mint. I also have a separate minimal installation of Debian on a different machine which I use only for internet access to sensitive accounts, eg. online banking.

I find Linux Mint to be straightforward to install and, using the MATE desktop, it takes me about 10 minutes to set things up the way I like it. After that, I can just get on with "doing stuff" which, after all, is the reason for using a computer in the first place. And the updates "just work" - if I need to reboot the update software prompts me to do this. Usually, I can just keep working. I have been using various Linux distros as my daily driver for a bit over 20 years now, and I can recall only two occasions where there was a glitch caused by an update. On both occasions, the problem was quickly resolved by the next update.

I switched to Linux, specifically Slackware Linux, when I was using Windows 95. For some reason which is lost in the mists of time, I had needed to reinstall Win 95 - probably due to the upgrade of a hard disk or some other hardware change. At the time, I was using the MelbPC internet service. The Windows 95 re-install worked well, with one exception - I could not get the network connection to work again in spite of spending large chunks of time applying the latest updates and generally faffing around.

Totally frustrated by this situation, I decided to install Slackware from the then-new you beaut CDROM collection of four major distros. I chose Slackware mainly because I could understand the installation instructions better than the other alternatives. After some trial and error, I managed to get Slackware running and was rather surprised to see that the network connection, and hence the MelbPC internet connection, was working by the time the boot sequence had reached the desktop.

My reaction was - why am I messing about with Windows? I switched to Linux and haven't looked back!

For the home user especially, switching to Linux will give a stable computing facility for all the routine computing tasks and most of the more specialised activities. For a modest investment of time and effort, they will be able to concentrate on what they need to get done and won't be distracted by the glitches and seemingly endless fixes and "feature updates" of the current Windows world.

Linux Mint - Gordon Loughnan

I use Linux Mint MATE. It is easy to use and updates are done when I want to do them not at startup. I download free software when I need to do any extra tasks that require software that does not come with my distribution. I now use Windows on a separate notebook as Windows 10 had trouble running on my HP notebook that has no trouble at all with Linux.

Ubuntu - Stephen Zuluaga

Moving away from a pet peeve of Windows

I initially got fed up with Windows installs turning slow after about a year or so, and even though I've probably done tens of thousands of Windows deployments in my IT career, I wanted a computer to use, not a computer to wait for. I also hated the fact that I'd often open up my laptop, only to have a Windows update force itself upon me. This always happened at a bad time such as when I was about to do a presentation, start teaching a class or try to bring a customer's network back online.

With the exception of playing computer games (and I have kids now anyway), Linux is better for all of my purposes.

Trying to be pragmatic

When I jumped over to Linux about 5 years ago, I picked Ubuntu because it had the largest installed base, and it's proven to be compatible with an extremely large range of desktop and server software. Anyone who knows anything about web servers and associated software must understand Linux software, I didn't want to miss out on that skill set.

On my high-performance workstation and my primary laptop, I use Ubuntu, it does a good job of delivering a responsive UI, and I get a very reliable desktop experience. If I need Windows, virtualisation is my answer.

Waste not want not

I like that I can also get ongoing life out of old hardware with Linux distributions, for this Lubuntu is my goto lightweight distro. Windows does a terrible job of running well on old hardware, and if I take care of my computers, I want to continue to get utility out of them even when they aren't the latest and greatest hardware models. In my garage workshop setup, I want a computer I can use to research datasheets and design things on, I'd be too precious to bring my newer laptop into such a rough and ready environment like that with grinders, circular saws and soldering irons and the like.

Influenced by career

Another consideration, which might be a bit specific to me, is that as a systems and network engineering professional, most enterprise-grade networking and firewall equipment I have worked with runs some form of Linux. I didn't like the idea of having an inadequate knowledge of this ubiquitous platform that runs the internet, the cloud, and so much infrastructure, so I wanted to skill up. Also, Microsoft licences are expensive, especially if you scale up use of anything, I love that there are perfectly good database servers for instance that will happily run on free software, all which can have commercial support contracts subject to tight service level agreements. Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer did a good job promoting Fear Uncertainty and Doubt about open source, but today those ideas are not consistent with commercial reality, so we all benefit with an increasing set of options.

Command-line: So many people find CLI scary or difficult, and I totally disagree with that notion. While PowerShell is fantastic and a massive improvement over "DOS prompt", Linux shell is amazing, and so much more powerful for anything substantial. I now resent how fiddly it is to remotely interact with a Windows machine via command line, why can't it be as simple as SSH like it is on Linux?

Computers aren't a matter of religion

I'm not religious about my operating systems, I've supported all 3 major computer OSs, being Mac OS, Windows and Linux, but I would prefer to focus on fitness for purpose. Linux is more fit for a lot of my purposes, but that's not to say it's without its drawbacks when compared to other OSs.

Anyone who says Linux is user-unfriendly is probably holding on to old perceptions from the past based on poorly designed GUIs. All operating systems are dramatically more user friendly than they were in the past.

My Accountant wife and 4 and 6-year-old kids can use Linux and still be productive with their work, life admin and COVID19 homeschooling (and kinder), so I'd suggest anyone else can too.

Ubuntu - Sean Clarke

I'm a bit of an agnostic with regards to what OS or distribution I run. I'll use whatever I consider best suited to the task at hand. Over the years I have run most of the major Linux distributions and many of the specialised ones depending on what I needed.

What do I like about Linux? It's light on resources and long, long on uptimes.

The first Linux distribution I ran was Slackware. I installed it from floppy disks in late 1994 on a recently retired PC. I set it up as a fileserver and used it to teach myself networking.

In the time I've spent looking after MelbPC's servers, we've run Sun Solaris, BSD, Debian, Gentoo, CentOS, Ubuntu, Knoppix & Kali.

My two personal laptops dual boot Windows 7 and Ubuntu 18.04 LTS. I usually carry Knoppix & Kali handy on bootable media. The old family desktop dual boots into Fedora. My daughter has Windows 10 & Ubuntu Studio 18.04 LTS on her laptop. The 2 NAS servers run BSD and the fleet of 10 Raspberry Pis dotted about the place mostly run some variant of Raspbian.

Lubuntu - Aavon Fernando

My first interaction with computers was in 1995, a Pentium III and basically Windows was all my little world knew and all I ever thought I needed.

i just grabbed a mouse and *click click click*.

I started customizing my desktop setup and icons using Rainmaker on a Windows XP machine.

Windows XP was a breakthrough for me at least into the possibilities of what I could get a computer to do.

I first heard about Linux much later in life by reading PC magazines and learning to write executables in Notepad. I realized there was a whole other world I'd never been exposed to. So I tried a few variants of Linux from CDs that came with the magazines by loading them into Virtual Machines. I really liked the variety and ... the command line.

Security and Privacy

What finally made my mind up to go direct-install was updating to Windows 10.

One day I couldn't log in to my laptop: the password was incorrect.

This happened overnight, what was going on? Had I been hacked?

Nope, Microsoft had decided to link my Microsoft account and change my local password to one of that account.

I didn't like this at all. How much control did I really have over my devices?

So I took a deep dive and installed Ubuntu initially, which offered a dual boot option with an easy step by step process.

That started my slow migration away from being Windows dependent.

I now use:

Lubuntu (everyday driver), **Raspbian** (for Pi related projects), **Kali Linux** (for hrrmmmrhmm),

Tsurugi Linux (Computer Forensics focussed Linux variant)

I still use Windows for system administration practice and some applications, but on dual boot on my laptop. I may finally move to full virtualization after some time.

Lubuntu is my favorite as a lightweight distro. The LXDE/LxQt minimal design and simplicity. Everything

I need, every way I want it.

Linux Mint - John Nelson

I currently have a desktop PC, two notebooks and one netbook – all four are dual-booted with Windows 10 and Linux Mint.

I am a Windows user, slowly converting to a Linux user for general functions (emails, Net access, phone/camera downloads, graphics work, word processing).

Long term, I see Windows being used only for speciality programs for which I do not have a true alternative in Linux.

My favourite Linux distribution?

Mint Cinnamon (have also used Mint Mate, Mint Xfce, many versions of Ubuntu, all installed, and many other distros in trial mode)

What is it about this particular distribution that makes it my favourite?

Comes with plenty of programs to help get you started.

Easy to use

Seems very stable for what I do

What originally got me into Linux?

Windows out-grew my old PCs that worked well with Linux.

I was sick and tired of having doubt over Windows stability, particularly around update time.

The Linux domestic users I met seemed to be ‘happy little vegemites’ even though Linux doesn’t have the vast range of programs that exist in the Microsoft world.

Because installed distributions, plus installed applications, need far less storage capacity than Windows it was not a problem to install Ubuntu besides Windows on the same drive and dual-boot with Linux creating the boot menu. Hundreds of distros have been created based on Ubuntu and I found the Mint range to be ideal for my needs.

Why would I recommend someone switch from Windows to Linux?

Make use or better use of an older PC that struggles under Windows. There are many Linux distros designed specifically for low spec PCs.

Programs are Open Source or freeware

The Mint Software Manager makes it easy:

to see what programs are available,

to install them; and

to uninstall them.

Greatly reduced risk of virus/malware infections

To break free of the worry generated by risky Windows updates. There are far too many reports of Windows 10 issues as a result of software/hardware conflicts arising out of Windows 10 updates, with both small and major updates.

To break free of the need to constantly backup Windows OS and installed programs, for recovery purposes following possible system corruption/failure. I can't live without HDD/SSD clones and images – Programs such as Macrium Reflect, Aomei Backupper or Easeus Todo Backup are essential. I have lost track of the number of times I have had to help users whose PCs failed to start because of a Windows problem.

To break free of the need to constantly maintain Windows 10. For example:

Need to create a new Recovery Drive (USB) after a system major update;

Need to reverse program defaults changed by Windows updates;

Need to turn system protection back on and to create a Restore Point after removal by a Windows update;

Need to turn system protection back on and to create a Restore Point after an HDD/SSD change because Restore Points for C Drive are recorded by HDD/SSD serial nbr.

Need to turn-off Fast Start-up if a Windows update to Power settings has turned it on – This is needed off if dual-booting Windows and Linux, to allow Linux to see MS partitions/files.

You can test Linux OSs (and programs) without installing them onto your HDD/SSD, by use of a Live CD/DVD or USB. My preference is a Live USB because it loads quicker, can be used on multiple PCs including those without an optical drive and it can be wiped and used for another purpose.

There are many good sites providing help and guidance in the practical aspects of using Linux.

Extra info

I am very happy with the LibreOffice suite, in both Windows and Linux. I can create PowerPoint compatible presentations, edit pdf versions of Publisher files in Draw, create cards, newsletters and certificates in Writer. Attached are pdf versions of two docs created in Writer – an OBE Certificate and a birthday note. That is, Mint, 'straight out of the box', can create reasonably presentable documents from LO Writer that is included in the distro.

New users need to know how to obtain a distro iso, create a bootable USB and how to boot their PC from it. There are many programs, in both the Windows and Linux worlds, for creating a bootable installation USB. For example: Universal USB Installer, Rufus, Etcher, Unetbootin, Ventoy.

I believe every Windows 10 user should have a Linux Live USB in their repair kit, in addition to a Recovery Drive and Windows 10 Installation DVD/USB. If Windows does not start, and the Startup Repair function on the Recovery Drive or Windows 10 Installation media does not fix the problem, then a Linux Live USB could be used to boot the PC, in trial mode. If Linux runs, it is an indication the motherboard is OK. If Linux can see the HDD/SSD and its files then the drive can be considered to be OK. If the drive cannot be repaired with the MS tools mentioned above and a clone or image is not available then the Linux Live USB can be used to copy off the data files before more strenuous recovery attempts are undertaken.

Freeware versions of Macrium Reflect, Aomei Backupper and EaseUS Todo Backup run from Windows 10 can successfully create clones and images of HDD/SSD drives containing both Windows 10 and Linux OSs.

Installation of Linux might require BIOS/UEFI changes such as:

Turn on Legacy Boot

Turn off Secure Boot

Turn-off Fast Start-up (via Windows 10 if dual booting with Linux)

For a dual-boot system, a Linux-based 'Boot Repair Disk' (a bootable USB stick) comes in handy for repairing the Linux boot files if damaged (say, by a Windows update).

True Type fonts used in Windows installations can be used in Linux. When a .ttf file is opened in the file manager the font set is displayed with an Install button – an easy review and install process.

My process outline for creating a dual boot drive:

Windows 10 installed first;

Boot from Linux Mint Live USB (may need UEFI boot for Linux to see Windows);

Install Mint beside Windows 10. Mint creates the boot menu;

Re-boot PC from Mint Live USB again and, using GParted, create an NTFS data partition that can be used by both systems. I regard this partition to be a temporary storage area with required data copied-off to an external drive.

Linux can see the Windows file structure and can use files created by Windows apps but standard Windows systems cannot currently do the same with Linux systems.

Linux Lite - Neil Barker

Originally LXLE in about 2016 on a 2005 laptop to replace XP. Until an update of that ceased to work on that machine, so I moved to Ubuntu 16.04 LTS. Then through 18.04 LTS until the upgrade to 20.04 caused major issues, mainly due to the move from LXDE to LXQt requiring a new install. And a very different (poorer) experience. So Linux Lite it was from then, and that's now on a 2017 laptop I inherited. Works a treat. Boots in 30 sec and just a matter of setting it up for my user preferences and adding any extra stuff that's needed.

I have to say that Ubuntu 20.04 was a dog compared to Ubuntu 18.04 for older PCs, I think they lost the plot that that was what Ubuntu was supposed to be all about. And my other Linux bugbear is the constant package upgrades and program tweaks. Even though they all seamlessly work, and many are 'security patches', it seems developers have never heard of 'if it's not broken don't fix it' for the look and feel of things

Overall though, Linux just works.