

Desktop Linux

Linux on the Desktop

Just 12 months back, few of the Linux distribution companies would have admitted to our favorite OS being a likely candidate to fill the demanding role of a desktop operating system.

Desktop users are not fickle creatures. They only want applications that work and that they know how to work. Such users do not want to spend time, or waste time as they see it, trying out new packages just to see if they are better. They would much rather stick to what they know. This entrenched view proved to be a major challenge.

SuSE Linux Desktop

SuSE Linux Desktop is not limited to those that are already running Linux servers. The system goes to great lengths to make sure it works seamlessly with more frequently found systems, like those running on Microsoft Windows 2000 servers or those set-up to use SAP or Citrix servers to exchange information. It will also work as a thin-wire client, supporting X3270 and X5250 terminal emulation, amongst others.

Half way

Almost all Enterprise customers are going to have access to Microsoft products. They can take the opportunity of running these applications on a Linux

Linux is now making for the hard push to take a share of the desktop market.

SuSE have recently brought out their boxed set offering, with their SuSE Linux Office Desktop. We'll look at the practicalities of running such software in an enterprise environment. **BY COLIN MURPHY**

Desktop with the aid of CrossOver Office, a suite of software included, with full license, in the SuSE Desktop package. CrossOver is not limited to MS Office though, it will help provide access to a number of different applications, such as Internet Explorer 6 and perhaps most usefully will get access to the client to IBM Lotus Notes.

CrossOver Office

Some Windows products work better than others and this is highlighted on the CodeWeaver site by awarding products medals, Gold medals work flawlessly, Silver medals have some problems, and so on. Microsoft Word, Excel and PowerPoint are all rated with Gold medals. Adobe Photoshop 7.0 and Internet Explorer, as well as many others, are rated at Silver level. CodeWeavers has declared its commitment to bring the support for these applications up to Gold level in future releases.



devices, like enterprise level support and training packages. Unfortunately, for the Microsoft Excel power user there are slight differences in features. Reliance on the fonts that are supplied by Microsoft means the rendering of some documents, especially those that rely heavily of tables and frames can be upset and badly aligned. Because of a licensing arrangement with Agfa for their Monotype fonts, SuSE ensures the original format of a Word document is now displayed and printed from StarOffice, or OpenOffice.

Installation

The installation process is very straightforward, a simple point and click affair which will allow you to get a desktop system up and running with the minimum of fuss. Network installations could help an IT department and the ability to monitor and configure the installation process from one location

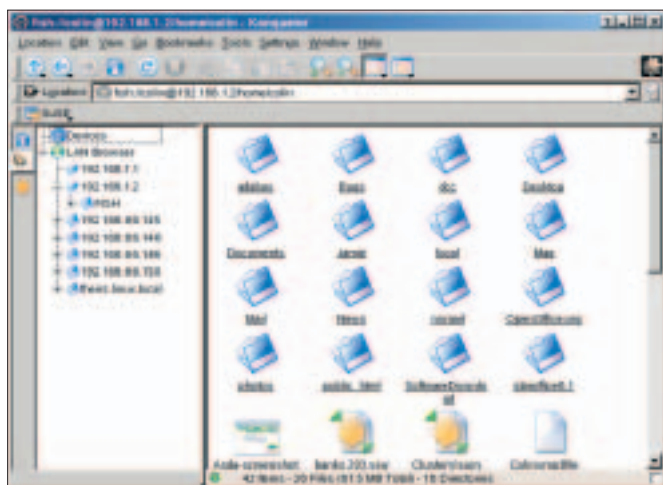


Figure 1: Browsing files on those machines in your network is simple, even if they are Windows machines

Office alternatives

StarOffice and OpenOffice are forever entwined, one relying on the other. The innovation and fast development that can only come from the Open Source community gets passed up the chain into Sun's StarOffice, which can add the professional ser-

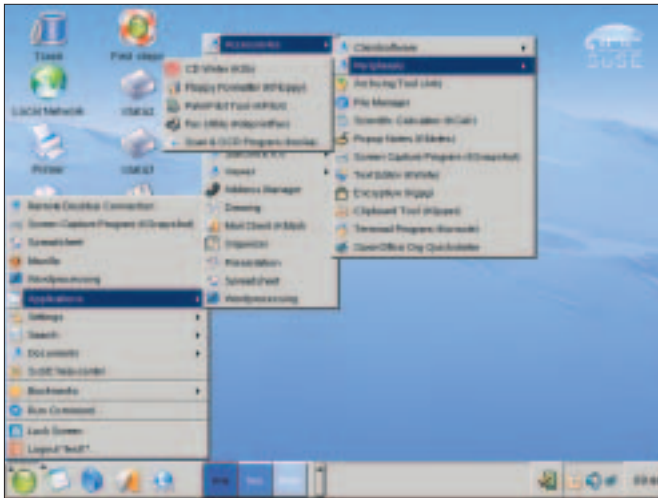


Figure 2: Controlling the peripherals that you might need for your day to day work is convenient



Figure 3: There might still be Windows programs you want to use. With CrossOver Office, installing them is straightforward

could speed up the process, which is possible through the VNC options.

There are new feature selections to be made during the installation:

- A stand alone PC or a machine running in a small Office Network
- A Template for an Enterprise customer
- A Template for a Thin Client or Slow Computer

There is also the *Desktop* option:

- KDE
- KDE customized for Windows Users
- GNOME

Many of the features which will make it easy to use are modifications to KDE features.

On the Desktop

One such feature is that of network browsing, the equivalent to the *Network Neighborhood* that Windows users will have been accustomed to. Network browsing will work across the range of machines including those still hooked up to existing Windows 2000 servers as well as to network printers and other devices.

SuSE Linux Desktop – Prices

SuSE Linux Desktop basic package

5 CDs, 2 manuals

(User Guide, Administration Guide)

Maintenance Program

Up to 5 workstations £ 410, EUR 544

1 year/5 clients £ 335, EUR 445

1 year/10 clients £ 659, EUR 879

1 year/25 clients £ 1,635, EUR 2,179

1 year/50 clients £ 3,200, EUR 4,268

The KDE productivity tools are still available, so CD burning or document scanning is still possible with applications like K3b and Kooka respectively.

By default there are even some of the usual distractions. The IT management might consider this a bad thing though. To stop people playing Kmines at 9.30 in the morning the systems can be configured into *Kiosk* mode with suitable, corporate restrictions.

One of the highlights of KDE is that of user configurability. This is what the Kiosk mode allows sysadmins to avoid, by locking away the configuration features of the desktop.

Long term investment

While the lowering of costs is important, having the costs fixed up front is more so because it is on this basis that budgeting forecasts are made. SuSE Linux Desktop, along with the other Enterprise class products have a five year maintenance clause, where there is a commitment from SuSE that they will continue to produce updates and bug fixes for that length of time.

Businesses may not want to tie themselves up for five years though and they certainly don't want to pay up front for five years worth of support. This is something that SuSE manage through their Maintenance Program, the name given to their support model. This can be bought in yearly blocks, per licensed product or in bundles of 5 or 25 systems, with appropriate bulk cost savings. The first year's maintenance is included in

the price of the package. Enterprise clients can opt for a Standard Support package with a response within 4 hours during the working day. For more critical systems there is also the Premium Support package which caters for around the clock support with a two hour response time.

Is it the solutions?

Is this going to be the start of the Linux desktop revolution? The only answer I can give you is it deserves to be. With it you get a fully featured system with all of the elements an Enterprise environment could call for, from software to infrastructure elements, like support. Giving control over the purchase and running costs.

Against it is the fact that it's not a Microsoft product, many people do not appreciate that alternatives are available, if they can just be persuaded to take a look. SuSE's advice, which is made obvious in their new logo is to "Just do it!". The pressure is starting to increase now, with Microsoft's new licenses and the general need for businesses to cut costs.

So yes, I think the revolution is on the way, but it will not be an overnight revolution, more a gradual, sustainable change. One for the better. ■

INFO

[1] SuSE: <http://www.suse.co.uk/>

[2] CrossOver Office: <http://www.codeweavers.com/>

[3] StarOffice: <http://www.sun.com/software/star/>