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## **2005 the Year For Linux on the Desktop?**

Is 2005 going to be the year for Linux on the desktop? Signs point to a continuation of the steady growth that the open source Linux operating system is experiencing.

For several years now, the Linux desktop has been developing toward a greater usability level and a greater presence on the desktops of average users. Signs are that this trend is going to continue to gain momentum in 2005. The major signs are greater adoption of open source programs as solutions for average users, and the increase in malware effecting the average user's ability to get simple computing done. If you couple that with the level of progress that the Linux distributions are making towards usability, then Linux user will continue to see greater momentum in 2005. Firefox, the open source web browser based on Mozilla, and the new Thunderbird (an open source e-mail client, part of the same project family) releases are seeing adoption by users all over the globe. Some statistics put Firefox web browser use at over 4%, a mere 5 months or so after it began to roll out. It seems that Microsoft is again putting attention on its Internet Explorer web browser as a result of the pressure that it is seeing from the Firefox project. Firefox has features that the average user wants. It is resistant to pop-up advertisements that populate the web. It is also resistant to installation of malware through the loading of those programs. Since it is not tightly integrated into the operating system, it does not serve as a conduit to infect the base operating system with malware. In all, it does everything the average user wants out of a browser, plus it is free. It is not just free as in cost, but it is free as in open, as in open source. Anyone who wants to inspect Firefox code, needs only to download it for themselves. They can then make changes or develop add-ons to their heart's content. Firefox looks to be poised to take the place of IE in the hearts of corporate IT executives who want to build custom interfaces to their intranets and extranets. Thunderbird seems positioned to do the same for e-mail clients what Firefox did for browsers. OpenOffice.org, the free office suite is another splendid example of this. OpenOffice does everything that Microsoft Office did a few years back with none of the added bloat that has come with newer versions. Its open source nature makes it an ideal candidate for integrating with third party applications for such things as document generation and publication. With its built in ability to export standard Adobe PDF files (standard open format version), it is a superb way for individuals to output documents that resist alteration by the reader. Microsoft executives must be in cold sweats. Their grip on the throats of the computing populace is slipping. Malware has taken an unprecedented hold on the computing populace's machines. One needs only talk to a few friends and co-workers to learn of infections by adware, spyware, viruses and trojan horses. Common knowledge tells us that an unprotected Microsoft Windows XP system on broadband internet will become infected within approximately four hours. Firewalls and virus scanners have done something to help prevent the spread, but these efforts are leading people to the inevitable conclusion; Microsoft security is severely lacking and is essentially locking the barn door after the horse has escaped. People are becoming increasingly frustrated and concerned. This concern stifles e-commerce and prevents the full use and enjoyment of the Internet. And,... what any salesman knows is that buying into a new solution is not a matter of weighing the facts. It is, however, all about how people feel about their situation. Microsoft itself, through its "too little, too late" approach to online security, and the poor design philosophy of their operating system and other products, has created the environment for change. People want to be safe, they want to enjoy their technology, and they want it to work like it is supposed to. Microsoft products fail here. Linux (as well as each of the other open source solutions) succeeds. Linux usability has increased in recent years. Install routines for the major distributions have become at least as easy, if not easier than Microsoft's. More and more machines are being sold with various Linux distributions already installed on them. While the average pre-installed Linux machine is not a speed demon of a machine, nor is the distribution of the manufacturer's choice usually a choice distribution, they are often better served by installing more complete distributions on them. Novell, with its recently acquired SuSE Linux, Mandrakesoft with its Mandrake Linux, and RedHat's Fedora Core spin-off project all have positioned themselves as outstanding commercial oriented distributions. Pure open source solutions such as Debian and Slackware are often popular choices. Users can get help for free on websites like LinuxQuestions.org. Most Linux users can operate a home Linux machine that can surf the web, serve as a home server (Internet firewall, file server, print server, etc.), and do all the simple things that they want (including play games, both native and under various emulation projects). Linux is being pushed in the embeded marketplace as well. Developers of computing appliances are apt to seek an open source solution because they can scale it to any architecture they want, rely on the efforts of the open source developer community to solve critical problems, and do it all without paying license fees to anyone. Linux looks here to stay. The Google search engine works on Linux servers. Linux is going to show up in the new version of the Palm operating system. If you believe you will not be using Linux in the new year, in at least some capacity,... well,... you might just be Bill Gates or Steve Ballmer.