For and Against debian

/ch/open Open Business Lunch

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There are no exact numbers of the number of users and fans in the Debian community. Some institutions and companies who swear by Debian have published their reasons at `http://www.debian.org/users/`. With this text, I would like to give you an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of operating system Debian GNU/Linux.

Debian is a non-profit community that flourishes by word of mouth. I would thus like to express my gratitude to you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today. I will do my best to not only concentrate on the advantages, but also to give you a set of criteria that might help to decide against Debian.

Advantages

Free of Charge Linux is said to be free of charge. Most distributions, however, restrict this free-ness to private or non-commercial usage. The usage in a commercial environment has to be expensively licensed. In addition, the update service included with the initial purchase is limited to one year most of the time. Debian is free of charge, no matter whether you plan to use it privately, at university, commercially, or in the government. Moreover, we guarantee a free update service without limitations on time.

Stable & Secure Debian is not steered by the market. We publish our software when it is ready to meet the high expectations of our users, not a second earlier. As a result of this, Debian systems count as some of the most stable systems of the world. Our competent and restless security team takes care to fix all security problems in a flash and pays special attention not to endanger this stability with security upgrades.

Professional On a Debian system, nothing will happen unless the user has explicitly requested it. This may not make it easy for beginners, but it establishes the necessary foundation for the experienced to operate and understand a system for years. Moreover, every package abides to strict rules (FHS), therefore guaranteeing a tidy cleanliness of the system.

Simple No system of the world makes software administration as simple as Debian. New versions of programs may be seamlessly integrated into the system without endangering or changing the previous configuration. Dependencies on other programs are automatically resolved and installed straight via the internet, if the user so desires. No matter how aged a Debian system may be, two commands suffice to bring it up to date.

Versatile The 1 000 active developers come from all sectors of the industry. At Debian, you can find subprojects that aim to provide specialised Debian releases for e.g. the medical sector, education, research, law, as well as the children at home. Over 12 000 packages leave almost no wish ungranted. And Debian's threefold version structure helps to meet all requirements: `stable` for the productive environment, `testing` for the balance between stability and timeliness, and `unstable` for those, who want to live on the cutting edge and are willing to endure a problem here and there.

Universal Debian is the only Linux system which supports eleven architectures equally well. No matter whether your system is powered by x86, ia64, PowerPC, Sparc, Alpha, m86k, ARM, MIPS/MIPSEL, HP-PA oder S/390, Debian will work the same on each (Hitachi's SuperH architecture is currently being worked on). Furthermore, Debian is independent of the Linux kernel. Instead of Linux, you may use e.g. the GNU/Hurd micro kernel, or the kernels of the NetBSD and FreeBSD (x86 only) projects.

Supported Debian's community is mainly organised around mailing lists. On these lists, we coordinate the project publicly, and here, most problems are quickly and professionally solved. On the most popular list, `debian-user`, more than 2 000 people are discussing problems and improvements to the system on a daily basis. Everybody is equal on these lists, and frequently, one can find "advanced" folks helping the "newbies" patiently in finding the solution to their problems. No other forums exist on the Internet or Usenet to my knowledge, which are as highly focused as Debian's mailing lists.

Free You may do with Debian whatever you wish, as long as you do not offend the basic principles of the project. You may use it, change it, embed it in your own devices, professionally install and administer it for others, modify it, and even sell it under your own name . . .

Democratic Every decision at Debian is a democratic decision of the developers. Furthermore, everybody may become a developer and thus take influence in the future of the project.

Open Debian keeps no secrets from its users. Be it administration and coordination of the project, the development of software, or the disclosure of bugs, concerning information about the project, everybody is equal – user or developer – and has the same rights for information.

International Debian is international. On the one hand it it translated into many different language and thus can be used in areas, where English is not the preferred language. On the other hand it is politically independent. No government of this world can influence Debian. Furthermore, Debian honours all opinions, and nobody is discriminated in any form.

Disadvantages

Complexity One of the main arguments for Debian is also one of its main shortcomings. Debian is a very complex system, which gives full control to the user. Integrated management tools, such as known from RedHat and SuSE platforms do not exist. Therefore, new users are frequently swamped with Debian's paradigms of system administration. We recommend that users new to Linux first gain some experience with another distribution (such as RedHat), but to not loose contact with Debian. In our experience, most users will return to Debian within 6 to 18 months on their own.

Drowning Having 12,000 packages available for immediate installation may often drown the user in a sea of choices. Experienced users do not bother with the entire list but simply make use of the package management system to install whatever they need on demand, rather than trying to decide what to install at installation time. Nevertheless, often two solutions to one problem are too much as the inexperienced frequently do not want to make decisions.

Outdated Debian has the reputation of being out of date. While SuSE and RedHat jump through hoops to have the newest software available on their systems, and try to sell new cutting-edge revisions every ssix months, Debian's last official release dates back to the summer of 2002, and we don't expect the next stable release to take place before 2004. `testing` and `unstable` offer more current versions of software, but due to our quality standards, it may take a couple of weeks for a new version to even make it into unstable. Those who want to ride the cutting edge and prefer not to compile the newest versions themselves are probably better off with commercial distributions. Debian ranks stability before timeliness.

Incomplete There are a number of good programs for Linux, which Debian does not include in its archive because of licensing issues. Pertinent examples include the integrated video player `mplayer` as well as Sun's Java. Of course, one may install these from third-party archives (`http::/apt-get.org` provides an ever-growing list of software collections, which may be seamlessly integrated into Debian's package management system), but many users opt against such archives as the third parties are often not willing or capable to abide to Debian's quality warranty.

Sparse In comparison to consultants for Windows and professional supporters of Linux, there are only a few out there advertising support for Debian. This is improving every day, and you may find a comprehensive list of consultants for Debian at `http://www.debian.org/consultants/`. These people offer commercial and non-commercial support and help for Debian. Most of the time, however, it is the people on the Debian mailing lists, who offer the fastest and best support (at no cost). This has the added advantage of being didactically more valuable.

This list may well be incomplete. In general, we recommend that you simply try Debian and hope to facilitate this step with the CD that you should find with this package. If you have further questions, do not hesitate to contact me, or the `debian-user` mailing list.

I Thank You for Your Attention and Interest!