

Windows vs Linux

By [Roger Keays](#), 16 April 2008

So I lie in bed, but sleep doesn't come. There's a little ideas man in my head streaming ceaseless chatter. "What's the point in even trying to sleep?" I ask myself, he just doesn't shut up. Then there's this frog in the neighbour's pond who does a remarkable imitation of somebody playing ping-pong against the wall. It doesn't shut up either - at least not until 4 or 5am. So I do the only sensible thing, and get up and log onto my blog.

Tonight I'm going to share with you a little bit of fun I had installing a new operating system on my desktop. Its called Windows XP and I'm told its fairly cutting edge. Apparently you can send emails and surf the Internet with it. Wow, cool!

Okay, so jokes aside, I've had to install Windows to run some software for automatically scanning and converting old photo negatives to jpegs. The alternative would have been to do it by hand in the Gimp which would have definitely been very boring.

The last time I used Windows as my main OS was in 1996 and since then I've been through Debian, Fedora, and settled on Ubuntu. So here are my impressions of the system from the point of view of a genuine non-Windows user:

- Windows XP takes longer to install than Ubuntu.
- Out of the box, Windows XP still needs a lot of configuration. You have to download and install all the drivers for your hardware, whereas with Ubuntu this is done automatically for you.
- Windows XP keeps telling you to reboot. I don't know why. It even wanted me to reboot after I installed the scanner's PDF manual!
- Windows XP assistance features can be more intrusive than they are helpful. Honestly, I just want to see my folders without any of your suggestions about what else I should be doing.
- Windows XP doesn't include productivity features such as a desktop pager, decent shell or mouse focus-on-hover, although these are available (see below).
- Windows XP is messy! Each application installs several folders and icons into the menu and on the desktop. In contrast, on Ubuntu you have one icon per application in a simple menu.
- Windows XP fonts are ugly. At least on my LCD monitor with the default settings.
- Windows XP unnecessarily complicates tasks such as burning DVDs and creating disc images. You need separate programs for stuff like this. On Ubuntu it's all integrated into the desktop / file manager. I think maybe this is because people kept suing Microsoft?
- You're supposed to use anti-virus software with Windows XP (?!). No such thing on Ubuntu / Linux.

- *Windows XP has wider support from software and hardware vendors than Ubuntu.* Eureka! Finally I understand why so many people use Windows (and hence the reason it has found its way into my desktop).

Naturally, I have used Windows (and Mac) systems intermittently over the years and have collected a handful of essential tools for turning Windows XP into a productive system. They are:

- [Putty](#) - Somehow every Windows box I've used seems to have this one the desktop. Not only is it great for SSH, but you can also use it to set up tunnels via HTTPS proxies to escape stoopid corporate firewall restrictions.
- [Multidesk](#) - This is a great lightweight desktop pager that got lost in cyberspace some years ago, so I've [attached it for future reference](#).
- [Cygwin](#) - I can't live without bash, vim and auto-completion.
- [TweakUI](#) - A Microsoft tool which allows you to set up mouse focus-on-hover amongst other things. Also includes a pager I think, but not as good as Multidesk.
- [Firefox](#) - You wouldn't seriously use Internet Explorer 6.0 right?
- [Thunderbird](#) - Last time I used Outlook there was no real support for identity management or newsgroups, so I just install Thunderbird and get on with it.

After having set up all these my Windows install is technically more productive than my Ubuntu one since I have all my essential tools, plus I can use the scanner software. I'm actually quite happy with my Windows system (so far). Still, I think I'll switch back to Ubuntu once I'm done scanning. It is just so clean and reliable and I've never had any dramas with data loss or security in over 10 years on Linux.

About Roger Keays



Roger Keays is an artist, an engineer, and a student of life. He has no fixed address and has left footprints on 40-something different countries around the world.

Roger is addicted to surfing. His other interests are music, psychology, languages, the proper use of semicolons, and finding good food.