Linux Distros in use?
Originated by: Robert Hagg (WHOI) on Mon, 25 Mar 2013

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I was wondering what the more common Linux Distros are in use around the fleet.

Is Fedora your favorite for servers...

Has anyone implemented Poseidon - workstations, servers?

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Reply From: Jules Hummon (U. Hawaii) on Sun, 24 Mar 2013

Robb

I think the first UHDAS machines were "Mandriva", a Red Hat derivative.
We switched to Ubuntu (Debian derivative) about 5 years ago.
Re-evaluation is important, but switching takes time.

Jules

Reply From: Robert Hagg (WHOI) on Mon, 25 Mar 2013

Jules~

I agree, switching takes time, and effort.
My instinct is to reach for Fedora, since it's what I'm most familiar with.
I started wondering if there may be a better, (more popular) choice.

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Reply From: Steve Poulos (U. Hawaii) on Sun, 24 Mar 2013

Robert,

Not sure if you have migrated to the later version of Fedora like version 17. If not, be aware that Version 17 is very different in many respects from its earlier versions. It seems to install very well, but the designers of this version seem to have decided to do some fundamental changes with regard to how things run - with regard to the kernel. Also, The desktop layout is different, and the serial port handling is very different. So if you want to stick with Fedora and if you are doing I/O with the PC it might be best to bring up a 'test' pc and install there first to check out the look and feel of it out prior to production use.

If I am on a 'Fedora OS', I prefer the look, feel, and design of the earlier versions.

Steve Poulos
Univ of Hawaii

Reply From: Trevor Young (U. Hawaii) on Sun, 24 Mar 2013

I am a debian fan personally. I think centos is currently the popular free redhat based distro.

Reply From: Webb Pinner on Mon, 25 Mar 2013

Second vote for Debian. Been using it for years to build firewalls and data servers.

It's usually a few minor versions behind on everything but that's to improve system stability. Documentation and support community are great too. And the package management system is hard to beat.

- Webb

Reply From: Trevor Young (U. Hawaii) on Mon, 25 Mar 2013

The stable branch of debian can be up to a couple years old but you can enable the backports repositories or use one of the newer branches. I usually stick with stable + backports for servers and use testing for desktops. Testing could also be used for servers. Ubuntu typically pulls its packages from Unstable, though I think for some of the LTS releases they pull packages from testing.

For anyone interested but not familiar with debian. There are three official branches which you can direct your installation to pull packages from (and tons of third party repositories).

Stable - Packages which have had a long period of bug squashing, but may be a bit moldy. Recommended for servers (still gets security updates!). This is the default on the installation cd.

Testing - Packages which have had most bugs worked out. Is periodically frozen, worked on some more, and becomes the next Debian Stable. Must be manually enabled.

Unstable - Newer and less polished than Debian Testing. Must be manually enabled. Ubuntu typically pulls from here. Not the wisest choice for a server unless you really know what you are doing.

There is also an Experimental branch with nightly builds for those who love to live on the edge and then crash and burn.

You can have multiple branches enabled at the same time. If you prefer to use debian stable but the stable branch version of some piece of software doesn't have a feature you need which is present in the newer versions, you can pull that particular package and dependencies from one of the newer branches (can cause "dependency hell" so be careful).

If you use ubuntu and dread the periodic choice of re-installation vs update roulette whenever a new version comes out, going up the family tree to debian might be a good choice. I've experienced much less breakage with debian upgrades than with ubuntu. If you use debian testing or unstable, you may never have to do another re-install and can keep relatively up to date with some simple apt-get commands. Stable does get bug fixes and security updates but only gets new packages every couple years or so after a freeze of testing.

Trevor

Reply From: Toby Martin (OSU) on Wed, 27 Mar 2013

Another vote for Debian: stable for servers; whatever works for netbooks :-=)

In the server environment the default desktop is not a big deal, if it is even installed, but I REALLY dislike Unity, the current Ubuntu selection.

I switched from Red Hat to Debian back around Fedora 2. It seemed that
Red Hat was trying to become the Microsoft of the Linux world: the OS knows what is best, the user should not ask questions; more effort was going into Desktop development rather than stability; screw the standards, if we do it then everyone else will have to do it our way.

That said, Ubuntu and OSX are making a good living from the above stance.

This seems like a good time to bring up that RVTEC has a sysadmin mailinglist, for those that want to continue debating their favorite distribution =


I would also like a spark a few discussions on the sysadmin list regarding:
firewalls/routers, R2DB (R2R Drop Box), and a few other geeky topics.

The sysadmin mailing list can be subscribed to at
<https://siomail.ucsd.edu/mailman/listinfo/rvtec-sysadmin>

Thanks,

Toby

Reply From: John Haverlack (U. Alaska) on Thu, 28 Mar 2013

We will be standardizing on a kickstart installed an configuration managed CentOS 6.x x86_64 platform for SIKULIAQ servers and virtual machines. This will help us to maintain a coherent environment across installations, and test patch updates before deploying toproduction.

Fedora provides some advantages for the most recent hardware, like that which is found in new laptops. However is notoriously difficult to sustain in production environments because of the frequent development cycle, and short support period for patch updates.

Personally I've also been working with a few Debian based distributions lately including:
 * Raspbian - for Raspberry Pi
 * LinuxMint - For desktop systems
 * Ubuntu Server 12.04.2 - For long term stable server support.

For production environments I think the most important considerations are:
 * the ability to configuration manage installation and software configurations
 * long term patch support

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John Haverlack
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