

Why Ubuntu Is a Good Alternative to Replace Windows XP

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Lubuntu | Source

Windows XP has become an orphan.

No, its parent is not dead. But Microsoft essentially disowned its progeny as of April 8, 2014. From that date, no WinXP security updates from Microsoft will ever again be available.

Use of Windows XP Is Now a Big Risk

Computer security experts are agreed that the loss of ongoing Microsoft support makes WinXP far more vulnerable to attacks by hackers than it was when its parent was plugging security gaps on a weekly basis. They are almost unanimous in their recommendation that the millions of current users of WinXP move as soon as possible to an alternative operating system.

But where can beleaguered WinXP users go? Many have neither the desire nor the means to buy the new hardware and software that would be required to follow Microsoft's approved migration path and upgrade to Windows 7, 8.1, or 10.

My church is in that category. We have developed a plan that involves continuing to use WinXP in the short term, while gradually changing over to a new OS for long term stability. (See [How To Safely Use Windows XP After Microsoft Ends Support](#)).

The operating system we plan to migrate to is Lubuntu Linux. Lubuntu is a member of the UNIX family of operating systems, and is a direct derivative of Ubuntu.



What are Ubuntu and Lubuntu?

The philosophy behind Ubuntu is to provide a freely available, open source operating system that includes the most used capabilities of Windows without the expense and disruption involved in having to keep up with the Microsoft product cycle.

Like Windows, Ubuntu and Lubuntu have a graphical user interface (GUI) that makes it easy for non-technical users to navigate. Anyone familiar with Windows in its various incarnations already understands the concept of how the Ubuntu GUI functions, though, as we'll see, the details can be quite different.

Advantages of the Ubuntu Family

The entire Ubuntu family has some unique features that make it a great alternative for those looking to migrate from Windows XP.

- Linux is inherently a more secure environment than Windows. It has built-in protections against hacker intrusions that make it far less vulnerable than WinXP.
- Ubuntu and its derivatives are open source and entirely free, though paid commercial support is also available.
- Ubuntu comes with a wide selection of free software preinstalled, including such apps as the Firefox or Chromium browsers (Chromium is a Linux implementation of Google's Chrome), and many others.
- In addition, there's a Software Center where any of hundreds of free apps, such as the LibreOffice suite (an open source equivalent of Microsoft Office), can be quickly and easily downloaded and installed without having to individually hunt for them. In my opinion, this is one area where Ubuntu and its derivatives far outshine WinXP.
- The Ubuntu family is stable and well supported, with more than 20 million users world wide.

Advantages of Lubuntu Over Ubuntu

Lubuntu is simply a lighter, less resource intensive descendant of Ubuntu. Ubuntu already requires far fewer resources than Windows. Lubuntu takes that philosophy to the next level. It is specifically designed to run on outmoded hardware with limited memory and cpu resources.

Lubuntu Runs Great on Older Computers

For my church, the ability of Lubuntu to run on vintage computers that would otherwise be obsolete is crucial.

We have Dell laptops and desktops that are more than a decade old. They are entirely adequate for the applications we run. Yet we couldn't upgrade from WinXP to Windows 7 or 8.1 if we wanted to – our old hardware can't run the new Windows versions.

Our Dell Latitude D600 laptops are too old even for Ubuntu, because they lack a feature called the PAE extension, which allows the cpu to address more than 4 GB of RAM. But here's where Lubuntu (version 12.04) shines. I was able to install it on the laptops with no problems, and it runs perfectly.

In fact, if I wanted to run Ubuntu on our laptops, I could do so by first installing Lubuntu to get a “kernel” that doesn’t require PAE, and then installing Ubuntu over top of it. (See [Using Lubuntu to Install Ubuntu Unix on an Older Computer](#)). But I won’t bother to do that. Here’s why:

Note that Lubuntu 13.10 requires PAE, but can still be installed on non-PAE machines by first installing Lubuntu 12.04, then upgrading to 13.10.

VIDEO: A Tour of Lubuntu 13.10

Lubuntu Will Seem More Familiar to WinXP Users Than Ubuntu

I installed Lubuntu on a laptop and Ubuntu on a desktop PC. After working with each implementation for a while, I much prefer the Lubuntu incarnation. That’s basically because the GUI is closer to what I’m used to on WinXP.

The Lubuntu desktop looks pretty much like the WinXP desktop. Programs can be launched by double-clicking icons on the desktop, or from Lubuntu’s equivalent of the Start button. You can also install shortcuts in folders and launch programs from there.

Lubuntu desktop with one open window. The arrow at bottom left functions like the WinXP Start button | Source

In contrast, the Ubuntu desktop is not intended to function as a program launcher. There’s no equivalent to the Start button, although the most frequently used apps are lined up along the left edge of the desktop. Other programs must be accessed by opening an application launcher window and searching for them.

Ubuntu desktop. The button at top left (“Dash home”) opens the application launcher. | Source

It’s not easy (apparently by design) to place shortcuts on the Ubuntu desktop so programs can be launched from there. In fact, I have yet to figure out how to do it. And for me, that’s the point: I have to invest far less “figuring out” time with Lubuntu than with Ubuntu.

One of the great things about all members of the Ubuntu family is that you can usually find a way to configure their look and feel pretty much any way you want. (See [How To Make Lubuntu Look Like Windows XP](#)). So I’m sure I could get the Ubuntu GUI to look more XP-like if I made the effort. But Lubuntu presents a more familiar interface from the beginning.

This is very important for our church because our volunteer workers are not, for the most part, very tech-savvy. So our goal is to minimize the “strangeness” factor in the switchover from WinXP to Linux. Lubuntu, in my opinion, makes that task much easier than does Ubuntu.

What do you think is the best alternative to WinXP?

- Windows 7
- Windows 8.1
- Ubuntu
- Lubuntu
- Kubuntu or other Ubuntu derivative
- Another Linux distribution (please specify in the comments)
- Mac OS X

[See results](#)

I Don't Drink, but I Love Wine!

Almost every commercial application that runs on Windows has an equivalent in the Linux world. And many times the Linux apps are open source and free. But for some specialized applications, Linux alternatives may not be available. For example, both for administrative tasks and for recording our worship services and producing sermon CDs, our church has several critical Windows apps we developed ourselves. Obviously, no Linux-based equivalents are available.

That's why, for us, one of the greatest advantages of both Ubuntu and Lubuntu is the availability of Wine, which originally stood for Windows Emulator. Wine is a Linux environment that allows the execution of Windows applications.

Wine | Source

Despite the original meaning of its name, Wine is not actually an emulator, but rather an independent implementation of the Windows API (Application Programming Interface). It translates, in real time, a program's API calls into Linux commands. Thus, Wine can execute Windows programs just as fast (and in some cases actually faster) as they run under Windows itself.

Although there are some Windows applications that won't run under Wine, most do. The [Wine application database](#) now lists over 21,000 Windows programs that can be used with Wine.

I tested Wine on my Lubuntu 12.04 laptop and found that it runs the Windows apps our church uses with no apparent problems. These include Open Song, which we use project songs, announcements, etc., during worship services, as well as the home-grown apps mentioned above.

One of our church's Windows apps running on Wine | Source

I also wanted to test some commercial products. I have an old MS Word 97 CD and was able to successfully install and run it under Wine. And here's a way in which Wine actually surpasses WinXP for running Windows programs. Unlike the newer Windows offerings from Microsoft, Wine is backward compatible all the way back to Windows 3.1. So, I was able to run an old Windows 95 app, Calendar Creator 6.0, which won't run in WinXP at all.

Once Windows apps are installed in Lubuntu under Wine, they can be accessed via shortcuts on the desktop or in a window. When such apps are launched, Lubuntu recognizes them as Windows executables and automatically invokes Wine to run them.

The great thing for our church in using Wine is that our technically unsophisticated volunteers will be able to run the same apps they always have, and may not even notice that the underlying operating system is totally different.

A Potentially Big Lubuntu Negative

The major disadvantage of Lubuntu for a small organization like our church is that the level of technical knowledge required to set up and maintain a Linux-based system is far greater than is normally required for Windows. If you are anything like me, just getting started is going to take a lot of online research, a lot of stumbles and mistakes, and a lot of pain.

One reason for this is that Linux remains much closer to its command line roots than is Windows. In both systems the user interface is designed to allow tasks to be accomplished just by pointing and clicking with a mouse. But there are many functions in Linux that are more quickly performed by entering esoteric commands in a terminal session. In fact, there are some things that can only be done that way.

Here, for example, is what my stumbling attempts to install the driver for my Brother HL-2270DW printer looked like:

My terminal session entering commands to install a printer driver

To get that printer driver installed and functioning took me hours. First I had to do all the internet research required to find out what to do. Then more time was required to work through all the information gaps, oversights, and mistakes I had to overcome in order to finally get it to work. And I'm someone who not only has a technical background, but who actually worked as a UNIX System Administrator at one time in my engineering career! (But, to be fair, that was decades ago).

Part of the issue, from my perspective, is that the Linux community seems very technically (rather than user) oriented. There's plenty of information and help available; but, in my opinion, it's not coherently organized, and much of it assumes that users are both sophisticated about Linux and comfortable entering cryptic commands at the keyboard. You will be required to learn about kernels, tars, and torrents, and any number of other things you never heard of before. For Linux novices trying to make the transition from Windows to Lubuntu, it can all be a bit daunting.

But it's doable. It just takes commitment and time.

Most Workers Will See Lubuntu As User-Friendly

The great advantage of deploying Ubuntu as our church's desktop standard is that regular users don't have to get into all these technical details. Someone will have to get their hands dirty to set up and maintain the system, but not everyone. That's why I think it's reasonable to aim at making the transition from WinXP to Ubuntu one our average user hardly notices.

For more information...

If you're interested in trying Ubuntu, you'll need to do some homework. Here are some information resources to help you get started:

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