

## Book Review: Test Driving Linux

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*Test Driving Linux: From Windows to Linux in 60 Seconds*, David Brickner, O'Reilly Media, 341 pages (Including Linux CD), \$34.95 (CDN) 24.95 (US)

This is obviously not a book for the dedicated Linux user but will be useful for the Windows user who is considering moving to Linux. The version of Linux that accompanies this book runs entirely from the CD, allowing you to test drive Linux without having to install the operating system on your hard drive.

As a web developer and parent of teenage children, I'm adept at removing viruses and spyware from Windows machines but am getting fed up with doing so. It must be much worse for those who don't know their way around a computer. What better motivation to migrate to Linux, an operating system that is virtually virus-free? This book not only details how Linux handles familiar computer tasks from word processing through instant messaging but allows you to see exactly what you are getting. Let's see if it disproves the teenage mantra, "Dad, Linux is for geeks".

Basically, any computer running Windows will work with this Linux CD. You will, of course, get superior performance from a newer and faster machine but you'll have no trouble using an old Pentium II if you want. However, because you will be running from a CD the lack of speed will be noticeable. Also, having a memory key that plugs into a USB port will save you having to reconfigure Linux each time you start up the CD.

Read the text along with the on-screen instructions and you'll soon be running Linux. Getting online is seamlessly integrated with installation. However, if you are using a router to share your internet connection with other computers in your household, a bit more effort may be required.

Okay, you're connected but what about surfing the web? There's no point in being on line if you don't have a serviceable browser. If you are only familiar with Internet Explorer (IE) then get ready for Konqueror. It is a full-featured, configurable browser and once you get used to it you may have trouble going back to IE.

Instant messaging is as important to your teenager as browsing the internet. The Kopete instant messaging tool supports all the major messaging services - connecting to Microsoft Messenger took a mere matter of seconds. Of course the interface is different and not as slick as Microsoft's but it is every bit as functional.

If you use web-based email such as hotmail then an email client won't be a concern. For a local email client similar to Outlook, follow the easy instructions for setting up KMail.

Most of your multimedia needs can be met with Linux, though if you use your computer for playing DVDs, you may have problems with some video formats.

All the important computing tasks have been covered – at least as far as your teenager is concerned. But in order to do their homework they'll also need a word processor. This distribution of Linux comes with the OpenOffice suite of products and its word processing capabilities are every bit as sophisticated as Microsoft Word with the added bonus that you can save documents in Word format, allowing for file sharing with Windows.

### **A Few Caveats**

Don't be surprised if the driver for the wireless card in your newly purchased laptop isn't supported. Likewise, I had problems with USB audio. But let's not be too critical – only so much will fit on one CD so support for some devices has deliberately been left out.

Remember too that the software available on this particular distribution of Linux is only a fraction of what is available. If you don't like Konqueror you can always download Firefox. If Kopete doesn't satisfy your instant messaging needs try Gaim. Finally, if spyware and viruses have made your Windows computer virtually unusable then you have everything to gain by switching.

All in all this is a well written book that does a good job of reviewing the major applications that most users regularly require. It is easily understood by non-geeks and, with the accompanying live CD, you can see exactly what you're getting beforehand.

### **About the Author**

Peter Lavin runs a Web Design/Development firm in Toronto, Canada. For more information visit <http://www.softcoded.com>.