

## No. 271: Why you need Linux NOW!

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Microsoft has introduced us to a “new way to build, deploy and service Windows: ***“Windows as a service”*** (bold italics are mine)\*. Prior to the present, Microsoft had to release a new version of Windows every few years. Now, they claim this is no longer needed. Windows 10 will remain Windows 10 for many years, with smaller updates released twice a year, “around March and September” to help meet present needs in a rapidly changing world. Not stated anywhere by Microsoft but something Stan says you can count on will be a monetary charge for the semi-annual updates. Just you wait and see.

Do you think this is good because it will do away with monthly updates? Forget it! They intend to continue with cumulative updates each month for both security and non-security changes. So, you are not off the hook with time-consuming, multiple-reboot updates.

So what is the advantage? There probably is none, other than tightening the control that Microsoft has on its Windows product. But, they have made some changes to assuage the squeeze. They plan on three “servicing channels”, ostensibly so that their customers can decide how often an individual device can be updated. 1. The **Semi-annual Channel** permits twice a year feature updates. The Semi-annual Channel is probably what you and I would get as a non-corporate user. 2. A **Long Term Channel** is for devices that don’t run Office, such as those that control medical equipment or ATM machines. These are only updated every two to three years. 3. Finally, a **Windows Insider** channel permits users to test and provide feedback on features that will be shipped in the next semi-annual release. My question: does this latter channel simply represent a free testing ground for features that should have been thoroughly tested by Microsoft staff?

The obvious (to me) way to avoid any new fees and miss all this nonsense is to use Linux. The latest and greatest (Linux Mint 20, Cinnamon, nickname “Ulyana”) is so easy to use and functionally similar to Windows that a Windows user will hardly know the difference between desktops, and it is easy for users to tweak it until it looks and feels even more like Windows. Ulyana comes with a clone of Microsoft Office (Libre Office) that works just like the Microsoft product and can open and save Microsoft Office documents in Microsoft formats (.doc, .docx, etc.). And it has more of the other programs than even Office has. Besides Writer (for Office documents), it comes with Calc (for spreadsheets), Impress (for presentations), Draw (for drawing), Math (for formulae) and Base (for databases). Each of these can open their Microsoft counterpart files, and save them that way, too. So you can get a presentation file written in Microsoft PowerPoint, open and edit it in Impress, and save it again in PowerPoint (.ppt) format. Sometimes you may find slight differences when you save between versions, but usually these are easily tweaked to the way you want it. And remember, Linux is totally free, comes with free Libre Office, free Firefox browser and a bunch of other free programs, with thousands of others available. It even has Wine available for you to install, a program that lets you run Microsoft programs within Linux. Remember, no fees, no

charges, either for the Linux operating system or for thousands of available free programs. There are some programs you can purchase if you want, but they are not needed for usual operations.

Linux is software the way it was meant to be structured, rather than the way it has evolved under the tutelage of really-big-business Microsoft. Linux was developed by individuals who wanted to share their programming skills rather than to make a profit. And, we can all benefit by this selfless attitude.

So, what do I suggest? One approach would be to add Linux to your existing Windows 10 hard drive in a dual-boot configuration. Then you can get to know Linux, keep it up to date and even use it productively while having the safety net of Windows 10 intact on the same machine and hard drive with the backup of a working Linux installation if you encounter conditions that make you want to abandon Windows. That is what I have done on my main desktop computer. Oh, let me mention this. In a dual-boot arrangement, you can access all your Windows 10 files (letters, pictures, etc.) from Linux. You can, for example, access a Microsoft Word document on your Win10 section of the drive with Linux, suck it into Linux and edit it with Libre office and save it in Linux in Microsoft Word format! Not the other way around, however. While Linux can easily read Microsoft (NTFS) files, Microsoft cannot seem to read files written with the Linux operating system. Or, they don't want to.

Alternatively, you could put Linux on a separate hard drive in your desktop and simply plug that hard drive in (and unplug the Windows hard drive) when you want to work with Linux. That keeps everything separate, and hard drives today are so cheap that this route is very inexpensively done. This ploy also provides some insurance against a hard drive failure because both are not likely to fail at the same time.

Finally, a third ploy would be to have an altogether separate Linux machine (desktop or laptop). That's kinda nice because if you physically arrange things well, you can be working with two machines and two operating systems more or less simultaneously. That is fun and sometimes extremely useful. Have fun finding what works best for you. Happy computing!

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\*Read about this yourself in "Overview of Windows as a service, 15May2020, Microsoft Corporation, <https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/windows/deployment/update/waas-overview>. In case you did not know, you can click on the https address above and it will take you directly to the document in your browser (sometimes ctrl-click instead of just click).