

# RANDOM

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COMMUNICATIONS WITH A PURPOSE

# THOUGHTS

## Linux: Ankle-biter or real threat?

If you're a Windows 98 or Windows Me user, you're an orphan. This is something Microsoft wanted to do in 2004 but put off until now to give users time to upgrade. The problem is that several million users (maybe 50 million) didn't. And now those users have an operating system that Microsoft no longer supports. And they probably also have older computers that would run Windows XP slowly, if at all.

Linux distribution provider Xandros sees this as a window of opportunity and it might be just the encouragement some people need to make the switch.

### Why I don't (yet) use Linux

The problem with Linux is that Microsoft Office doesn't run on Linux. Open Office does, of course, but there's no equivalent to Access (a relatively easy to use relational database) on Linux. If you don't need access to Access, though, Open Office provides most of the other features you need. Except Powerpoint. Open Office does have a Powerpoint-like application, but the problem is that it's not really very much like Powerpoint. What it comes down to is this: If you need a word processor and a spreadsheet, Open Office will do the job for you.

If you need Access or Adobe InDesign or any of the other applications that aren't replicated on the Linux platform, Linux isn't for you.

Those who use a computer for Web browsing, e-mail, writing letters, and reviewing numbers in spreadsheets will be well served by Linux.

### Xandros is different

This week, the company fired a warning shot over Microsoft's bow in announcing a solution for the 50 million "disenfranchised" Windows 98, Windows 98SE, and Windows Me customers left without support and security patches.

Xandros says Windows users can "upgrade" unsupported Windows systems to the Xandros Desktop Home Edition or Home Edition Premium at half price. You'll pay full price for the operating system, but there's a mail-in rebate for half the cost. Both Xandros Desktop Home Edition and Home Edition Premium can be installed alongside ("dual boot") Windows, even on older hardware.

By itself, that's not enough to interest users. But this distribution goes further. Corel embraced Linux, perhaps irrationally, in trying to compete with Microsoft in 1999. It was a bad decision for Corel, but Corel's Linux was uncommonly easy to install and use. Those who have seen Xandros say it has the same ease of installation and much more functionality.

*Xandros announces a solution for the 50 million "disenfranchised" Windows 98, Windows 98SE, and Windows Me customers left without support and security patches.*

Xandros is designed to look and feel like Windows. It starts with the KDE desktop interface, but enhances it with techniques that make the distribution look and feel like Windows. The Home Premium Edition includes CodeWeaver's Crossover Office 5.03 Standard Edition, which can run many Windows applications. Users have reported being able to run Office 2000, Office 2003, Quicken 2004, iTunes 5.01 (not the latest version), and Macromedia Dreamweaver MX (not the latest version) under Linux.

Linux should worry Microsoft in the long term. Maybe it should now also worry Microsoft in the short term. This is a distribution that includes a lot of features that will appeal to home and small office users: Wireless networking and virtual private networks, a music manager with Ipod support, the Xandros Photo Manager, a RealPlayer installation, Firefox tabbed browsing, and the Xandros File Manager that includes drag-and-drop DVD burning.

You'll find details at [www.Xandros.com](http://www.Xandros.com). 

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## Same pony, new tricks

You already know not to follow a link that's supposedly from your bank, PayPal, or a store – even if it claims that you should "confirm" your information. Especially if it claims that you should "confirm" your information! But what about calling

a telephone number, giving information to a caller, or entering your information using the telephone's keypad?

A new batch of e-mail messages that claim to come from PayPal say that the recipient's account has been used fraudulently. But there's no link. Instead, the message tells the recipient to call a phone number to verify their account information.

Call the number and you'll hear an automated voice: "Welcome to account verification. Please type your 16 digit card number." Presumably, once you do that you'll be asked other questions (PIN, security code, and such) so that the criminal can make purchases using your credit card.

Instead of clicking the link in a standard phishing e-mail, you know to type the appropriate URL into your browser. Instead of calling a phone number in a questionable e-mail, look up the number. If the message purports to be from your bank, look on the back of your credit or debit card and call the number that's there. If the message claims to be from some other organization, visit their website and obtain the number from there. **B**

## Speeding silicon

**I**BM and the Georgia Institute of Technology say they've developed technology that will allow semiconductors to operate more than 200 times faster than today's chips. Usually advances increase the speed of a chip by half. Occasionally, improvements double the speed. But increasing the speed from 2.5GHz, which is common today, to 500GHz is astounding.

And this isn't something that might show up in equipment 20 years from now. The researchers are talking about 1 to 2 years. The researchers cooled the chip to near absolute zero in liquid helium.

With a CPU that runs 200 times faster than today's CPUs, even Microsoft Vista would be speedy. **B**

## A better Google Earth

**G**oogle has new versions of Google Earth – version 4 beta. The existing version 3 is still available. Google Earth is usable only by people who have fast computers and high-speed Internet connections, but in the past year, the application has been downloaded more than 100,000,000 times. Google makes the application programming interface (API) information public, which has allowed 30,000 websites to add geographic information of their own.

### New in this version

**S**atellite imagery update: A significant high-resolution imagery update for Google Earth increases the product's index of high-resolution imagery by four times. This makes sub-meter high-resolution imagery available for more than one third of the world's population. While initially



Insets show how the combination zoom, pan, tilt, and rotate control shrinks when it's not needed and grows when the user hovers the mouse near it.

available only in Google Earth, this database will also be accessible in Google Maps shortly.

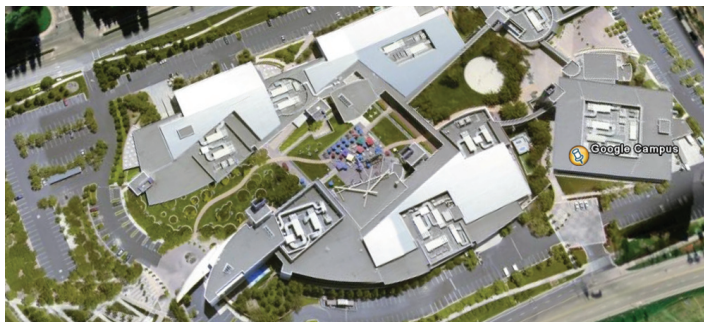
Improved interface: Google Earth now features a more streamlined user interface and new tools that enable the creation and display of third-party and user-generated content.

Available for Linux: In addition to being available for Windows and Mac users, Google Earth will now run on Linux operating platforms.

Google SketchUp with textured buildings: In coordination with the release of Google Earth, Google SketchUp now enables the creation of textured buildings for visualization in Google Earth and the Google 3D Warehouse.

The API has been updated, too, and Google says the new programming tools make the process of embedding Google's interactive, dynamic maps into websites even easier.

Obtain the download from <http://earth.google.com/>. **B**



Google's campus in Palo Alto from Google Earth.

## on the market by A.J. Stinnett

**CORNER**

*"Objectives without action plans  
are incomplete.  
Action plans without a follow-up step  
are also incomplete."*