Identifying the World's Best Operating System

ARGUMENTS ABOUT OPERATING SYSTEMS ARE A LOT LIKE ARGUMENTS ABOUT CATS AND DOGS. CAT OWNERS SAY CATS ARE BETTER AND DOG OWNERS SAY THE SAME ABOUT DOGS. BUT ...

... some people have both — maybe even a pet lizard — and love them all. Too many Mac users scorn Windows computers, too many Windows users scorn Macs, and too many Linux users scorn both Windows computers and Macs. What they miss is that today's operating systems have more things in common than they the fans like to admit.
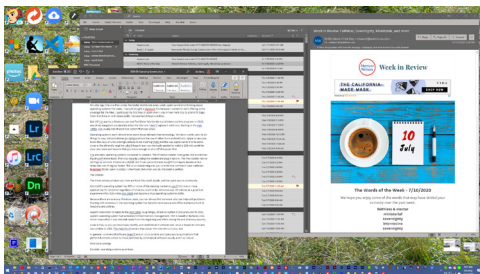
My wife uses a Windows computer, but both daughters have Macs. Each operating system does some things better than the others, which means that each also does some tasks worse than the others.

Line up three computers, each running a different operating system, and observe. The first thing you'll notice is how similar they appear:
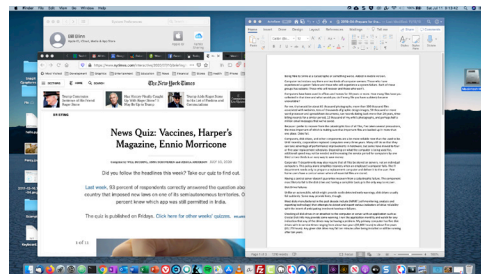
And the Point Is?

THE POINT IS THAT OPERATING SYSTEM ARGUMENTS ARE POINTLESS. SOMETIMES IT SEEMS TO BE MORE ABOUT ATTITUDE THAN TECHNOLOGY.
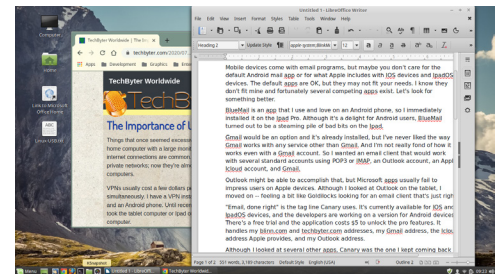
- Microsoft wants users to do things the Windows way, but is generally willing to step aside after warning that you're about to do something that will be detrimental to your data.

WINDOWS 1.0 WAS PANNED WHEN IT WAS RELEASED IN NOVEMBER 1985, BUT HAD GAINED A FOLLOWING BY THE TIME WINDOWS 95 WAS RELEASED. THE CURRENT VERSION IS WINDOWS 10.

APPLE'S GRAPHICAL INTERFACE WAS RELEASED IN 1984 AND WAS FOLLOWED BY OSX IN 2000. THE OPERATING SYSTEM IS NOW KNOWN AS MACOS AND THE CURRENT VERSION IS BIG SUR (11.0).

LINUX WAS WRITTEN BY LINUS TORVALDS IN 1991 BECAUSE HE COULDN'T AFFORD UNIX. VERSION 5 OF THE KERNEL WAS RELEASED IN 2019 AND MORE THAN 100 VARIANTS EXIST.

Windows, MacOS, and many variants of Linux are the primary operating systems, but Chrome has adherents, and the same old arguments divide users of Android mobile systems from those who use IOS and IpadOS on Apple devices.

Although I'm primarily a Windows user, it's not because I think Windows is better than Linux or the MacOS. My Lenovo Windows computer shares desk space with a Macbook and a Toshiba computer that runs Linux Mint. As the computer equivalent of the person who owns cats, dogs, and lizards, I'm puzzled by the argument about which operating system is the best.

There's a menu, icons on the desktop, and multiple windows that contain running applications. You may have to remember that the Control key on Windows and Linux systems corresponds with Command on a Mac, and those who use a Windows keyboard with a Mac will need to also remember that the Windows key serves as the Mac's Command key.

Disk drives on Windows computers have letters, but they have mount points and names on Linux and MacOS computers.

All of the operating systems have a way to modify settings, but similar controls may have differing names.

Similarities outnumber differences.

- Apple will smile and then refuse to do something that's not the MacOS way; but those who know Unix can override the operating system and do things the way they prefer.
- Linux will happily hand you the tools needed delete every file on the computer, including the operating system itself, and won't warn you that the outcome of the operation may not be to your liking. It assumes you'll know that.

One of the better comparisons likens operating systems to airlines:

- **MacOS Air:** All the stewards, captains, baggage handlers, and ticket agents look and act alike. When you ask questions, they

tell you gently but firmly that you don't need to know and don't want to know because everything will be done for you and you don't have to know why or how.

- **Windows Air:** The bright, colorful terminal leads to the largest planes you have ever seen. Every 10 feet a security officer asks you if you are sure you want to continue walking to your plane or if you would like to cancel. Once on the plane, every passenger will be asked individually if they are sure they want to take this flight.
- **Linux Airlines:** Volunteers build the planes and ticket counters, then charge a small fee to cover the cost of printing the ticket; but you can also download and print the ticket yourself for free. When you board the plane, you are given a seat, four bolts, a wrench and a copy of the seat-HOWTO.html.

This joke dates back a couple of decades and is actually much longer, but you get the idea.

Differences to Consider

There are a few practical differences between operating systems that should be considered.

Windows 10

Microsoft's operating system has approximately 85% of the desktop market share as of mid 2020, so you'll find more applications for Windows regardless of what you want to do. Windows is also the primary choice for enterprise use even though top managers are more likely to have MacOS computers. Because there are so many Windows users, it's usually easy to find someone who can help with problems.

macOS

Apple's MacOS dates to the mid 1980s. As late as System 9 (the precursor to OSX, which later became MacOS), Apple's operating system had limited memory management. MacOS is based on Berkeley Unix, which means that it was network ready from the beginning and offers strong file and directory security. The MacOS has approximately

a 10% market share generally, but the design and graphics industries use Macs almost exclusively.

LiNUX

Linux is free and more than 100 variants exist, so you can download, modify, and redistribute Linux without cost. It's also possible to purchase Linux from vendors who package it with support programs. As of mid 2020, Linux has a little less than a 3% market share for desktop systems. Most commercial software doesn't run on Linux, and open source applications that perform functions similar to those provided by commercial software often lack some features.

What About Chrome?

There is one additional specialized operating system that you might want to consider.

Google's Chrome OS is a simplified operating system that's little more than the Chrome web browser, a few desktop applets, and some browser apps. Derived from the free software Chromium OS, it uses the Google Chrome web browser as its main user interface.

Chromebooks are small, light, and generally inexpensive. If all you need is email and a web browser, Chrome is a great choice.

Security is good on these systems, too, and some desktop-like applications are available for word processing, spreadsheets, and the like. Just keep in mind that a Chromebook can't run Windows or MacOS applications.

Android applications started to become available for Chrome in 2014. By 2016, access was available to most Android apps in Google's Play store.

Support for a Linux terminal and applications has been added to give Chromebooks a lightweight Linux kernel that runs containers inside a virtual machine.

Chromebooks receive updates and support for a limited period. When the support period ends, updates are no longer available. All Chromebooks manufactured in 2020 should receive updates and support for eight years.

Your Best Operating System

No operating system is really better than any other operating system. The right operating system is the one that fits your needs.

Programmers who work with Perl and other languages that are linked historically with Unix and Linux systems, may prefer Linux. Or maybe the right choice would be Windows. I'm familiar with a software development firm where the applications run on Linux systems, but the developers all have Windows computers.

Game creators often prefer Windows machines and hard core gamers tend to favor Windows computers. Windows is the choice of most businesses, large and small, and Microsoft has put a lot of effort into developing enterprise-scale tools.

Graphic designers, animators, advertising firms, and motion picture producers generally prefer Macs, but Windows systems compete well in this area.

Several decades ago, the guy who hired me to establish an advertising and marketing program for a company that specialized in accounting applications for small and medium businesses explained that selecting hardware should be the second part of automating an office.

His advice: *Find the applications that perform the tasks you need to have done and then buy the hardware that runs those applications.* Because many applications run on both Windows and MacOS computers, that advice is less important than in was in the 1980s, but it's still valid.

Back then we sometimes had potential clients who didn't quite understand what they needed to do or why, but they thought that computers would magically transform their operations.

When you try to automate a manual system that's a mess, all you get is an automated mess. That's another of my old employer's comments that I internalized, and I've seen its accuracy time after time.

So don't choose an operating system based on some anticipated magic that's being pushed by a marketing department. Instead, figure out what you need to have done; then buy the hardware and software that do it. Ω