



# BUG-BYTES

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## WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM AN ALTERNATE OPERATING SYSTEM?



Ernie Coffman asked me if I would write an article about alternative operating systems. That is to say to write about Linux and its many different distributions (distros). Up to now I have been curious about what was out there in the Linux world, but I didn't want to take the time to experiment with and to learn Linux. Oh well, I jumped into the pool. Fortunately, it is easy to evaluate Linux (such as Ubuntu) starting the program from a CD.

Linux is based upon the old Unix command line language. There are free versions of Linux, such as the very popular (for Linux) Ubuntu and commercial versions such as Novel's SUSE Linux Enterprise.

What I discovered are the following facts:

There is a bewildering array of different versions of Linux each designed for a particular purpose or platform. For example, some versions are meant mainly for laptops or netbooks. Some are aimed at multimedia users, or for general desktop usage. Some versions are designed to work only on servers with very few applications installed on them.

To get an idea of what you face see the following link.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison\\_of\\_Linux\\_distributions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_Linux_distributions)

Note that Linux versions are designed to work with different computing platforms, and some come with free support and easy access to help while others do not.

In my opinion switching from Windows to Linux can be very frustrating for most users and expensive to boot. If Linux is free, how can it be expensive? The problem is that Linux only works with selected hardware. While you can probably get it to load without any problems and to access the internet, as I did, and to send e-mail, the problems come when you want to use your existing printer, peripherals, and network. Sorry Charlie. I

found that Ubuntu, the version I chose to evaluate, would not work with either my printer or my network. I worked for days trying to get my printer to work with Ubuntu and ditto for my network to communicate with other computers on my network. No such luck.

The user who decides to switch to Linux because it is "free" may be in for a very rude awakening. Before making such a switch, the user is well advised to create a list of their hardware and to check that list against a hardware compatibility list such as this one.

<http://en.opensuse.org/Hardware>

Another problem I found with Linux is that it requires more computer knowledge and knowledge of special terms than will be comfortable for most if not all of our users. In other words, the learning curve can be quite steep.

### THE APPEAL OF SOMETHING "FREE"

In general, Linux distributions rely almost solely on free software programs, or paid programs designed to work with Linux. For instance, they use Firefox or one of the other free web browsers, and free software for graphic editing, etc.

Users with very modest needs may find this very attractive as long as their computer hardware and peripherals are compatible with the version of Linux that they want to run.

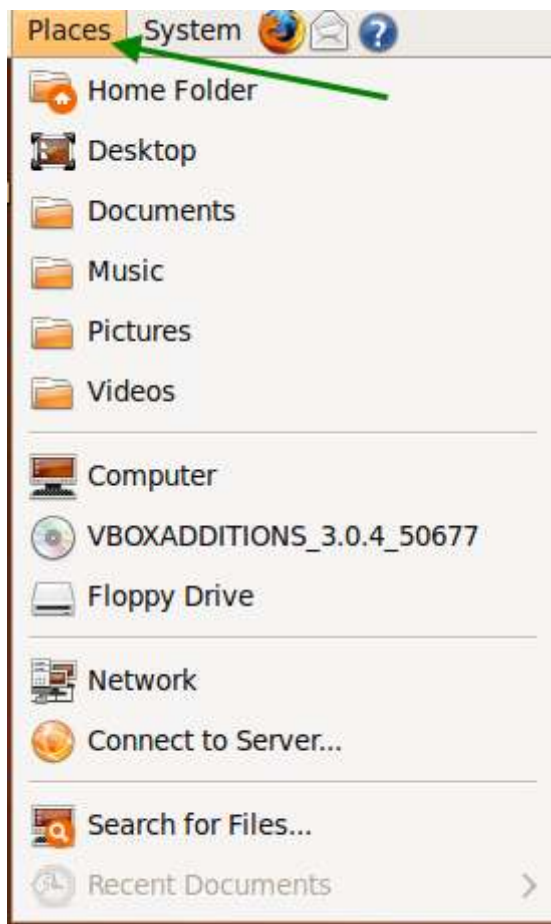
In my opinion, the best approach to Linux is probably to start all over with a new computer, one that is entirely designed for Linux.

This screen shot shows the application menu from *Ubuntu*. The individual menus list free programs that perform the listed functions. For example, Sun's OpenOffice provides free office suite programs.



If you are still interested, download a “Live CD version.” That way you can run the CD version you pick without permanently installing it on your computer. That way you can discover what you like about Linux and also discover any shortcomings. Shortcomings will include any software that you own that you can’t run with Linux, and learning new Linux terms.

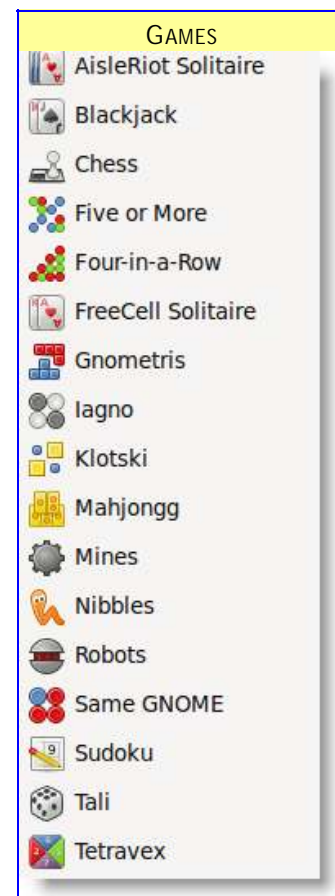
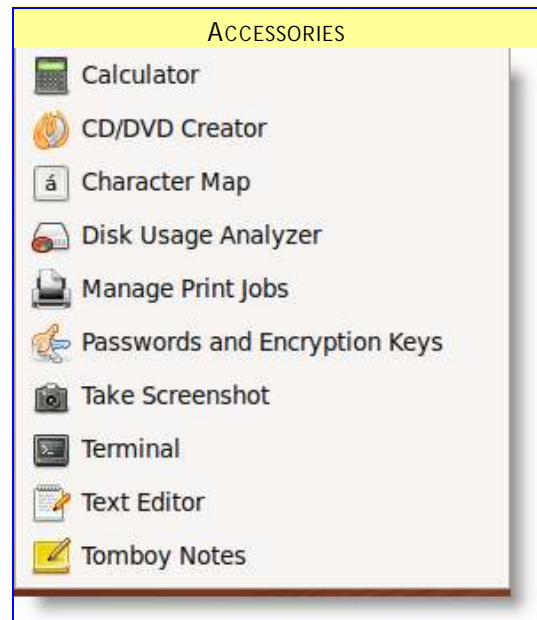
This screen shot shows Ubuntu’s *Places* menu. Places is somewhat like My Computer in Windows.



Go to [www.ubuntu.com](http://www.ubuntu.com) to download a copy. You can even request a free CD or DVD with Ubuntu on it. However, you need to allow up to two months to receive the free CD or DVD.






The following menus demonstrate what you see in Ubuntu.










## GRAPHICS

-  F-Spot Photo Manager
-  GIMP Image Editor
-  OpenOffice.org Drawing
-  XSane Image scanning program

## SOUND AND VIDEO

-  Brasero Disc Burner
-  Movie Player
-  Rhythmbox Music Player
-  Sound Recorder






## NETWORK

-  Ekiga Softphone
-  Evolution Mail
-  Firefox Web Browser
-  Pidgin Internet Messenger
-  Remote Desktop Viewer
-  Terminal Server Client
-  Transmission BitTorrent Client

## System

-  System
-  Preferences >
-  Administration >
-  Help and Support
-  About GNOME
-  About Ubuntu

## OFFICE

-  Dictionary
-  Evolution Mail and Calendar
-  OpenOffice.org Presentation
-  OpenOffice.org Spreadsheet
-  OpenOffice.org Word Processor

As you can see from the Ubuntu menus there are many familiar terms and lots of new terms or program names among the various menus. While the learning curve may be high in the beginning, once you learn how to use a Linux operating system, you can continue to do so for many years to come. On the positive side, there is no cost for the software and upgrades are free. On the negative side, you may have to purchase new hardware

that is compatible with your Linux operating system. In fairness, compatibility can sometimes be an issue with new versions of Windows.

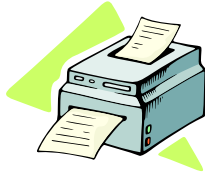
In regard to getting help, while there are help sources for Ubuntu and other Linux operating systems, they are nowhere as plentiful as they are for Windows.

Linux operating systems may be a good choice for users who can get by with the minimum set of programs offered by the Linux distributions. However, users who are used to using a wide range of third-party software products and peripherals will be best served by sticking with Windows.

Much that you take for granted with Windows requires learning new skills with Linux distributions. Generally, you can get there from here, but the ride may be bumpier and less comfortable with Linux. Free can have a price after all.

## PRINTER TIPS AND TRICKS

The following tips and tricks are offered to help you keep printing with as few problems as possible. Most printer problems can be avoided with just a little care.



### PREVENT PAPER JAMS

**Jog** a stack of printer paper before you insert it into your printer. That is, hold the stack of paper in both hands and apply pressure so that the paper squirts out along the long side with each sheet sticking out a little further than the proceeding sheet of paper. This breaks the surface tension of the paper and helps prevent jams. Jog the paper in both directions along the long axis of the paper. Then realign the paper so that all edges align in a single straight stack of paper.

Move the paper guide on your printer following your printer's instructions so that the paper is straight in the document feeder, auto sheet feeder, or drawer.

### HOW TO REMOVE PAPER JAMS

Consult your printer's owner's manual before you attempt to remove paper jams! Each printer manufacturer has their own way of handling paper jams. In some instances it is necessary to open a particular cover in front or back, or both, to gain access to the paper jam. The instructions will tell you whether you should pull the paper out backwards from the sheet feeder or attempt to pull it out from the front of the machine. Doing it the wrong way can make the problem worse.

When you remove a jam per your manufacturer's instructions be sure that you remove any little bits of paper that are left over. **One of the best tools for this is a very long pair of tweezers.** You will find the long tweezers in hardware stores. My tweezers are ten inches long. They are invaluable for tweezing out tiny bits of paper from hard to reach places.

Clean the rollers with a water-moistened (not wet) cloth to remove any paper residue. Sometimes a paper residue build-up lets the paper slip in one direction or another on the rollers resulting in paper jams.

### HOW TO STOP RUNAWAY PRINT JOBS

A runaway print job is one in which the printer starts printing out the same page over and over again. This can happen when something interrupts the computer instructions to your printer.

Press your printer's stop button, to cancel the current print job. Alternatively, open the print dialog from the Start menu, select the print queue. Cancel the job.

### HOW TO CANCEL PRINT JOBS

Be prepared to quickly cancel a print job if you discover an error in the document you are printing. A good way to do this is to create a shortcut to the printer dialog and to drag it either to your desktop or to the quick launch area of your taskbar. The advantage of having a shortcut to the printer dialog is that you do not have to hunt through nested menus to finally reach the print dialog.

Alternatively, add the Printer and Faxes icon to your start menu using the steps discussed in the December issue of Bug-Bytes. (Customize Your Startup Menu, pg 4.)

To create the shortcut, navigate to the Control Panel, and then to Printer (Vista) or Printers and Faxes (XP). Right-click and create a shortcut. Drag the shortcut to either the desktop or the Quick Launch area of your taskbar.

When you need to cancel a job, or all jobs, click on the shortcut or the Printer icon. Right-click on your printer and select Properties. Select to cancel all jobs or just the current job.

### INK SAVER TIP

From the Control Panel print dialog, set your printer to print by default in the draft mode. Draft mode is designed to use less ink than either the standard or high quality mode. If you are like most users, the bulk of your printing is for your own internal use. You can reserve higher quality printing for those occasions when you want to send or share something for business purposes, or you are printing photos.

You can temporarily reset your printer for higher quality printing whenever the need arises rather than printing everything at the best setting. This makes a big difference in how quickly you go through your ink cartridges.

### BUY QUALITY PAPER

Buy quality paper for better looking output and for fewer problems with your printer. All purpose paper is a good choice. The higher the brightness number the whiter will be your paper.

## WIN 7: LITTLE THINGS ADD UP

WINDOWS 7 HAS MANY PLUSES AND SOME MINUSES



You will read a lot of good reviews about Windows 7. However, they concentrate on the big changes in Windows 7 over Vista and upon the new features. Instead, I want to talk about interesting and useful little changes that can positively affect your everyday user experience.

**NEW SEARCH:** The new desktop search engine is much more friendly and powerful. It will even display your e-mail messages, a trick it did not have in the past. For example, let's say you created a Registration folder in Mail to hold all of the messages that relate to your software vendor registration information for your computer. Win 7 Search shows you that folder. Click on it and you can read individual messages in the folder. Or, type \*.eml and Win 7 displays all of your e-mail messages so that you can read. When you select an e-mail folder in Search, the files display as a weird number.eml. As you hover your cursor over a message, a pop up shows you the title of the message. Click on it and you can read the message.

### WINDOWS LIVE MAIL CHANGES:

Mail includes a new look with many new display options, a nifty slide show mode for those long lists of attached photos you receive, new stationery, and the addition of Smileys. Smileys are those cute little icons that you see added to your messages from time to time. This is a sample.



Type the first two or three letters of a mail recipient's name and context-sensitive suggestions pop up. Search for "Mail from so-and-so" and mail from that person is displayed. Wow. This is a big step forward.

Click on Picture. Add a picture. Then click to add a caption. Click to add a clever border. Choose layout and pick how you want the text displayed in relation to the picture.

Want to locate all of your e-mail messages and view them? You can do so from Search in Win 7. Type \*.eml and press the enter key. Search for "mail from so-and-so." Replace so-and-so with a name to be used in the search.

The bad news, for now stationery seems to be limited to what shipped with Windows 7. I am sure that new stationery will soon appear for Windows 7, or is that wishful thinking?

In my opinion, in a big step backward, Windows Live Mail does not allow you to wordwrap text around pictures. Instead, you anchor a picture on the page and tell Mail what size to make the picture and on which side the text is to appear. The anchoring method produces large open spaces between sequential pictures when you insert more than one picture in a row.

Already, I seriously miss the text wrapping control that XP and Vista gave me over working with text and pictures in their respective mail clients. I also miss the ease of adding a horizontal line by just clicking on an icon. Instead, in Win 7, I have to click on a menu and then pick the horizontal line option. Progress is not always positive it seems.

### SPELL CHECK:

Win 7 comes with spell check enabled. You do not have to own Microsoft Outlook Express to get spell check added to your e-mail program, nor do you have to download a third-party spell checker.

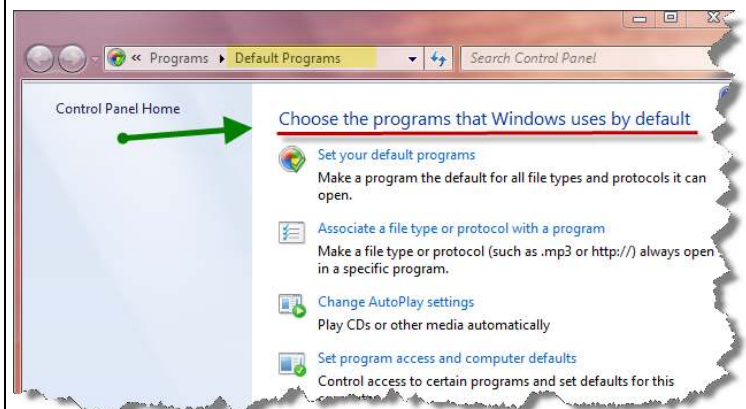
Win 7 adds a custom spelling dictionary. You can manually add special words, like Computerbugs, C-Bugs, Bug-Bytes, etc. Automatically add people to your address book after the third reply.

### DRIVER UPDATES:

Win 7 does a much better job of automatically finding and installing needed drivers than did either XP or Vista. I believe this reflects a changed attitude on the part of hardware vendors as well as Microsoft's efforts to make the out-of-the-box experiences better for all users.

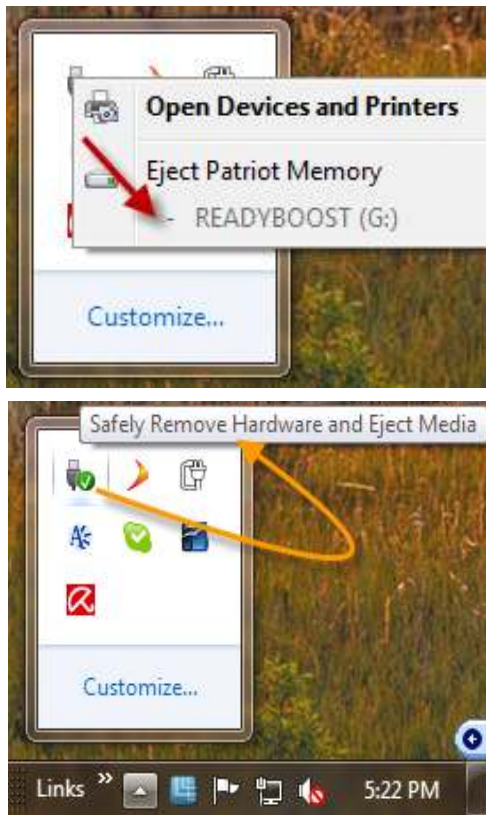
### PROGRAM DEFAULT DATA:

Win 7 consolidates popular program settings in one place.



SAFELY REMOVE HARDWARE

Win 7 makes it much easier to tell which of many different USB items are currently connected to your computer. Thus, it is much clearer which one you want to disconnect when the time comes to remove the device from your computer. Below, see the two screen shots.



VIEW CONTENT:

In Win 7 the OS includes a new view option called Content. It makes it easier to read the very small print of some filename data.

DO YOU NEED A PDF VIEWER?

Yes, you still need a PDF viewer. However, Windows 7 can create and read XPS documents that can take the place of PDF documents. The rub is that it will be quite a while, if ever, that XPS becomes the defacto standard for portable documents. Windows 7 ships with its own XPS viewer.

The good news is that Foxit Reader can read XPS documents. However Adobe Reader could not read a test XPS document that I used as a test document.

DISPLAY A SLIDE SHOW BACKGROUND

Win 7 offers a series of theme slide shows, including the ability to choose from one to many pictures from your own photo collection. It also lets you decide on a default setting for how often to change the slides, such as every 30 minutes. The choices are every 10 seconds to one day. See the following screen shots. You can choose more themes than those show below in the Aero Themes.

