INTRODUCING

This is not a war, but we will need a lot of good people not to lose.

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With ideas for a modern Ubuntu Desktop
Vienna/Austria, Oct. 2017

This is part 1 of 3 of my project - "Finding Ubuntu".
Also have a look at the other parts: "Design" and "The Present"

Introducing

Firstly, and that is important: I really appreciate the work of everyone involved in Ubuntu, Gnome, the Linux Kernel and everyone else, building and contributing to the open source and the whole Linux community. I'm not a programmer, but I'm quite good at finding design flaws, logic faults and especially problems in workflows - always the ordinary end-user in mind. At least I try, not because I want to tell the developers everything what's wrong, but to find out what needs to be done, to go further.

> *This is very end-user oriented: The people, who have no idea of the technology behind it, and do not even want to know. They just want a PC to work, play and get stuff done.*

I'm (like many) waiting for "The year of the Linux desktop" for years now, but it does not seem to get off the ground. The Chrome OS is getting more and more users, but like Android, it is a very customized system, not a real Linux anymore.

So, the question was of course: why is that so? There are so many distributions with all the benefits: free, secure, open-source, fast, stable... or, is it? Thanks to Steam, you also can play some more games, the graphics drivers got better and better, a lot of other stuff now just works out of the box, like printers, scanner, webcams, graphics-tablets, touchscreens, touchpads and so on.
But why is there still a problem?

They say Linux is hard to grasp. Not understandable and with all that terminals, complicated. Sure, Linux is just a synonym for the Linux desktop, also I don't find it too complicated to install and work with Ubuntu. But I'm a kind of pro-user, but not a developer or hacker… so I also don't want to spend a lot of time in the terminal. But I do. And I would like to avoid that. And most of the time I work with Microsoft Windows 10, for several reasons. All of this is written and designed in Windows, using Google Drive, Wordpress on my webserver via Chrome and Adobe XD for designing.

The possible problem behind all of this is more: the possible problems. It seems to be a whole series of tasks that need to be done, to get the Linux Desktop on track and a lot of force to move it into the year of the Linux desktop. At least maybe.

But there are a lot of opportunities for the Linux desktop, like the more and more important task of not to spy on the user (before the user finally gets used to it…), to be the system for people who cannot or won't spend money for the OS and for people appreciating the open source thinking. And all three combined: be the free system for companies/governments, that does not spy on you and which you can customize the way you want to.

> *So let's start things, to create the first steps.*

Hope you will understand my point of view and you have a good couple of minutes to read all of my work.

Finding Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an operating system, based on Debian and Gnome, also based on the Linux kernel. There are a number of improvements and changes, the Ubuntu team at Canonical have done to specify and improve the system. It was just a few months ago, that the Ubuntu Team shut down the Unity Ubuntu desktop and switched back to Gnome.

This is, of course, a good step - in a way. It took just a few weeks and they started to change the Gnome Desktop, to be more like the Unity Desktop. This makes the transition easier for the active user, also it looks and feels more like Ubuntu.

But: What is Ubuntu? What is the Ubuntu Desktop like? What was the Ubuntu Desktop like? What functions should it offer? What look? What feel? What colors?

That gave me the thought to search for Ubuntu.

And maybe: "**Finding Ubuntu**".

Words, Design & Usability

The word Ubuntu still means "humanity". So, it's about a Linux desktop environment, made for the ordinary people. That was one of the first issues I found. Because that's not entirely true.

> *Ubuntu should be for the ordinary user, not for the Admin. Not for the Linux community and also not for the Linux experts.*

It is a funny fact that the people who can build their own PC, which can install any operating system on their own and can change every program/app and desktop environment, grumble every time a new Ubuntu release comes our way. Some hate just everything about it, one old example is of course the Unity 7 desktop. But you know what? People have used it and went along with it quite well.

So, why listen to those people? Of course, they are a big part of the community, because they use it, they contribute – therefore, they have great influence. But do they represent the simple day by day user, using the operating system to get things done? Or do they just love to play with the operating

system, like others pimp their cars? Right, you know the answer. Those cars sometimes look amazing, but driving is not the main purpose anymore.

But that should be the target. Like with every other operating system.

It was quite a task, to get to the design part of it. Because, this has maybe the biggest impact.

Modern desktop design should also be useful. And not stuck in 2002.

Yes, it is 2017. Yes, a desktop should be modern, cool and at the same time just work, to fit your needs. Not to be intrusive. Be intuitive, or at least have a good and logical learning curve. And the icing on the cake would be the possibility to personalize it (at least a little) to YOUR needs.

There are a lot of desktops out there, and it is not surprising that alternatives like Elementary OS, Budgie, and Zorin OS find more and more users. That also means that Ubuntu is losing users (even if they still use an Ubuntu base… yes).

Why? Maybe because there is a straight line, the design follows. A line how it works. No obstacles. No design flaws. No inconsistency. Everything out of the box.

A lot of people still like a Gnome 2 design, but going back should not be the way to go. Ubuntu is not Gnome. Ubuntu is not KDE. Ubuntu also is not Windows or macOS. So, please guys - leave Ubuntu be and use whatever you wanna use. But Ubuntu needs to have an own design, an own look and feel.

Using it, doesn't mean understanding it.

Usability is the key. It shapes design and functions into experience.

When you think about what tasks you are doing all day long on your PC, think about what functions do you use, how you perform them, and how they could be easier to achieve. What programs do you use? What information do you need? What "interaction" do you have with the operating system and/or you PC?

Usability is something that is mistaken by a lot of people. Sometimes it is because you are used to perform tasks always the same way, sometimes it is because the design is more important and cannot handle certain tasks right. Sometimes it is the unwillingness to make something different or new. But it's also not the way to reinvent everything, "just because".

Usability - the word - kind of tells us that something is "able to use". But not only that - it should also be easy and logical, repeatable and self-explaining. And much more, of course. Sometimes it is good to get rid of everything and start from scratch - because some things just cannot be adapted from a certain point.

So, where is the sweet-spot? And is there a sweet-spot?

Finding the Ubuntu Desktop

Yes, I think there should be an Ubuntu Desktop. A stand-alone. Maybe because the actual desktop is based on the Gnome project, but it is not Gnome. We can use pure Gnome for that. And the actual desktop is okay, but not really good. Or really pretty. It just is an adoption of Gnome, with some Ubuntu colors (simplified…).

So, what are the conditions?

- **Modern & stylish** - but not overwhelming, or too focused on the OS
- **A unique and complete design** - not just assembled from other distributions
- **Logical and meaningful** - based on workflow and tasks
- **Easy and recurring workflows**
- **Work oriented** - to really work for & with you, to attract more user in companies
- **Content first** - get rid of space-occupying bars, content is king
- **Defining standards** - to have a basic system & to find more developers building apps for it (which also run on other distributions, of course)
- **Re-interpreting old designs** - to convey the known Ubuntu feeling from the beginning
- **Personal** - give the user a bigger role in their own system, like the opportunity to personalize the system more

I like the way the Gnome desktop is going. Not entirely, but I like the apps and the courage, to redefine the desktop (from version 3). But the absence of a "dock" was a big no-go for me and my way of working. It seems, it is made for little screens. Always have to click or tab a key to get to my other open applications, or for an overview is unnecessarily complicated and slows work down. And no ordinary user will come up with the idea to install whatever extensions - this needs to work out of the box. And lastly, it is not as self-explaining, as it needs to be.

So, I see Gnome as a good base for the Desktop. How? Maybe as Gnome-Extensions? But at least it saves work for not having to develop a whole new environment and using the included apps. But like I said before: it must be different.

When you have a look at Windows, macOS and the most used/important Linux desktop environments, you find a lot of nice ideas, a lot of problems and a lot of ways to do things. But you find a lot of stuff that is made the same way. Sometimes things feel as if they are simply there because they have always been. And you find design flaws and inconsistently implemented parts.

For me, KDE is for example interesting to use, but rustic and playful at the same time - I just cannot take it seriously. You can do so much change to it to make it look and feel different - but this is not the way the ordinary user thinks - but professionals can customize the f*ck out of it. And this is what macOS teaches us: users don't want to change anything. At the most they switch the dock to the left or right, when they have figured out how.

Elementary OS is going that way and is successful with it, because it has a simple, useful and stylish (yes, copied) design. In my opinion, Ubuntu Mate/Mint looks outdated in the year 2017 (also like

others). Budgie has nice ideas, but is not right there and sometimes still too complicated - but they will make it. Zorin OS is stylish and fresh, but too much a copy of Windows, which just restricts progress and own ways.

Then there is Deepin Linux. It kind of surprised me to see, what's possible. Elementary OS was already stylish and customized down to many apps, but the top of all, was Deepin. I didn't even know the desktop, I tried and just was surprised by the truly different ways. But also here, there is a "but". It wants to be too easy, which is hardly working for the Control Center or the system settings. And it handles tasks like "shutdown" like apps, which is a little irritating and pro user will have the dock very full in a short time. But still - impressive, let's see where this will lead to.

So: Gnome is and was the way to go, to have a good and stable base. To have nice and useful apps, but there are still some apps and functions missing. This brings me to the other side of using Gnome: to contribute back to the Gnome project.

As the last months showed us it seems to work, that Canonical and the Gnome team work together to get things done. This is so important, because while Windows and macOS are developed down to every little detail (by hundreds of fully-paid developers, of course). A lot of Linux desktops are still having problems on the surface and a lot of them don't feel like they are ready to use. The sometimes weird version numbers don't help with that. Because nobody wants to use the version 0.42 in a productive way. This just makes sense to the developers, but it kind of frightens the end-user.

Also, a very important task to do: To ship every necessary standard app. For the basic work and play. And to give the user a straight and easy line how to handle lot of the day by day tasks. We treat that in detail in "Finding Ubuntu Part 3: The Present".

With that we are back at where I started. How can Ubuntu be an operating system for the masses? For the normal user? For companies, schools and governments? For your mum?

I think:
> *Starting from scratch. Rethink about everything what Ubuntu is. Find an ambitious goal.*
> *Use existing resources and bring resources back to the community. Position Ubuntu as the great end-user operating system it should be.*

That is (of course) my opinion.

Read next: "**Finding Ubuntu Part 2- Design**"