

Re: What is the more popular UNIX flavor?

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- *From:* Mister.Fred.Ma@xxxxxxxxxx
 - *Date:* Tue, 11 Dec 2007 04:20:20 -0800 (PST)
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On Dec 10, 11:02 am, Andrew Smallshaw <andr...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On 2007-12-10, Mister.Fred...@xxxxxxxxxx <Mister.Fred...@xxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

On Dec 8, 2:52 pm, Andrew Smallshaw <andr...@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote:

continual upgrades, but the problem was that a plain user had to go through many hoops to "make" applications of interest and tailor the build process to the environment (details of which the user might not be familiar with). Sometimes, they build is successful, with enough detours to build prerequisite software. At least, that was my experience. Cygwin upgrades and inclusion of packages of interest were really painless.

This is a silly point to argue about. You appear to be complaining that it is easier to install a pre-built package than it is to take a source archive, unpack it, configure and compile it and finally install it. This surprises you? It is like buying a kit car and then complaining that you have to put it together before you can drive it away.

I'm trying to make sense of the above paragraph. On one hand you seem to have a chip on your shoulder about the comparison I make about my experience with Solaris and Cygwin (lord nows why). On

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the other hand, you confirm my opinion that installing things on Solaris is harder, notwithstanding your obfuscating analogy.

Pre-built packages are available for either platform. Source code can be compiled for either platform. Compiling code is harder than installing packages (although you do gain flexibility). The comparison between installing a package on one platform and compiling that program from source on the other is not a fair one.

I've been repeatedly specifying that my account of my experience was from a user perspective. Those two options are in fact a fair comparison of the options faced by a plain ol' user in most (if not all) of the networked environments that I have used in the past two decades. You have no admin rights on the Unix box (understandably), and often have local admin rights on the Windows box (or can get it if you demonstrate the required awareness of the security-related care). My point was that as a user in such an environment, unless you want to be the bane of the existence of the overtasked sysadmin, you compile your own software upgrades or installations, which often can be as arduous as I described for the reasons I described, and might get nothing out at the end of it. You might trash 10 unproductive days trying to compile gcc, to no avail (or was it simply that the testing phase was incomprehensible to a nondeveloper? Can't remember). Or it might fail for some other reason related to admin rights/access.

So no, it doesn't surprise me that building your own can be infinitely more time consuming and riskier, depending on how much one's background leans towards development or sysadmin. And I suppose you can call it a complaint to give a hard-nosed account of that. But bottom line is that is the option faced by the user, versus checking off boxes in the cygwin update.

My complaints about the Unix-on-Windows systems in general is that you simply don't know what they are going to do. Hard links? Sparse files? Most of the systems support these things but you are never quite sure how and if they are really doing the Right Thing or some ugly kludge simply to get things working regardless of what is happening under the hood. Then of course, they are all incomplete to a greater or lesser extent. If you find yourself needing eg tftp you only need to activate on a Unix system. It'll probably need installing first on the equivalent Windows

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system.

Oh, it isn't that hard to figure out what they're doing for a guru like yourself. It's pretty well described in their documentation. What isn't described can be brought up in their forum.

BTW, tftp does show up under a cygwin package search. Installing it involves checking a box. Not sure why this would be considered onerous.

Nice to know, but that was my point. I used tftp as an instance of a tool that isn't needed all that much nowadays

I guess that was part of my point in describing your problem points as apps I've never heard of. For *many* people who want basic computation done, it doesn't matter. For the specialist, it might, but cygwin doesn't claim to be an environment tailored for particular specialists in particular areas — though I find repeatedly find its coverage to be surprisingly complete.

but when you do it is likely to be critical (it is typically used for netbooting systems – that isn't too common today but when you need to do it the nonavailability of tools is likely to be a show stopper). I prefer things like that to be installed as standard rather than have to install them manually. What happens if the machine you need to netboot is the machine that connects you to the internet, for example?

I'm not sure. Being a user rather than sysadmin, it's not an area of my experience, hence the user vantage point from which I posted.

However, one can always create a cygwin installation CD/DVD/mem–stick in advance from any net–connected box, checking off the packages that one wants. You would be the best judge of whether that addresses your problem above.

Anyway, I related my experience, and I'm not claiming that it represents yours. I never ran into the difficulties you describe. My experience with Cygwin has been much better than with Solaris, for the reasons described. Whether you consider Cygwin to be a kluge is not important to many people — whatever is "happening under the hood", it does what is needed/wanted with minimal fuss. Hence, it is doing the Right Thing. I don't see how that can be considered "ugly"; quite the opposite, really.

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Fair comment, although I still would want to know what is happening. The semantics of having a hard link to a file are quite different to having a copy of that file, for instance. If things like that are done without your knowledge then there are all kinds of problems that can crop up later.

Can't say it's ever been a problem in my usage. Then again, I don't know too many unix users who even know what hard links are, much less use them. I would hazard a guess that it falls in the realm of professional applications developers and IT specialists rather than engineers and scientists.

I'd say that if the ratio of users to developers and IT specialists is one-to-one, that's a pretty heavy overhead. Usually, an infrastructure person has many users (or even customers, in the case of a commercial apps developer). So there are many more people who probably don't care *too* much about the internals and just want to get the computation/analysis done. Not knowing what's under the hood will serve this majority of unix users fine.

I haven't checked to see what cygwin does but that is my point – you can't assume anything so you have to check everything.

Yes, well I'd have to do that no matter what system I use, for the details that matter to me.

You've also misinterpreted "never been a problem" to mean "never seen malware". I've advised colleagues to scan for malware, and some relatively innocuous ones were found, and I've received spam apparently from colleagues who I know didn't send them. But nothing that really interrupted everyday activities much.

I would interpret that as being a problem, but of course that is my interpretation, not yours.

If that is considered a problem, then the intruders that set up hidden servers in my comparison example would be something far, far bigger.

Don't forget that when you run something like AdAware or SpyBot, much of the "malware" they come up with is from a just-in-case viewpoint. Many of the hits are not something that a lot of users would want to get rid of.

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Granted, not all businesses are big, but isn't this thread about people interested in using Unix? It is reasonable to assume that they are not the regular end user and have a bit more familiarity with OS's — even with the security paranoia required for Windows. Even if they don't know much about Windows, most are bound to have heard that you need to be careful about security.

For general desktop use I would agree with you that in general a Unix user is more likely to be technically savvy than the equivalent Windows user. However, you also see Unix in semi-embedded environments where there is no-one there who is competent to administer the system. Things like the tills in one of the pubs I frequent are ultimately connected to a Unix server on site, that kind of thing. The bar staff there are using Unix without even being aware of it. There isn't anybody working there that I'd consider a competent computer user.

Would that be cygwin they are using? I was speaking about my experience with unix on Windows, which is limited to cygwin. I can't speak to others. Cygwin is usually sought by unix enthusiasts.

On top of that, I have full and simultaneous access to my Windows XP/2000 environment at the same time. This is utterly invaluable for interactivity with others.

I'm not knocking that for a moment. Personally I find I have only occasional need of a Windows machine. When I do, thanks to Windows Terminal Services I can start rdesktop and have Windows running in a window on my desktop. That is a real Windows machine, not an ugly half-way house. Works great for me, although I'll grant you it will not suit or prove practical for everybody.

Our situations differ alot. I need the full Office Suite, and more, and my bash command line and X-windows, as my native working environment. Not that Office was a choice — when you work with others, it is essential.

Fred

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