

PC-BSD 9.2

Can BSD – the operating system that strikes fear into the hearts of many Linux users – ever be easy to use? **Ben Everard** investigates...

In brief...

» A user-friendly desktop-oriented BSD OS. Also consider: FreeBSD, NetBSD, OpenBSD, DragonflyBSD.

BSD is often seen as Linux's scarier cousin. Its name is mentioned in hushed tones and its users are thought of as elite programmers and über sysadmins. However, when we went to the PC-BSD website to download the latest ISO, we saw the main screenshot featured Facebook and a YouTube video of funny cats. Not exactly leet browsing material. Perhaps it is for mere mortals after all.

PC-BSD aims to be user-friendly, like a BSD equivalent of Linux Mint. Of course, BSDs aren't like Linux distros because they don't all share kernel – though their features are broadly similar, the main projects all maintain their own. You could perhaps think of PC-BSD, though, as a distro of FreeBSD.

Installation couldn't have been easier: just select Desktop or Server and set it to work. Once it's done, the system walks you through creating a user and you're done. Frankly, a few popular Linux distros could learn a thing or two about user-friendly installation

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from PC-BSD. The install gives you a KDE desktop, though other environments are available. The only slight blip was a warning message telling us that we had less than 50GB of hard drive space. This seemed a little excessive, given that the install only took up 7.2GB, and a message like this might cause people to worry that the install will fail. We ignored the warning and it worked fine on our 20GB disk.

If it weren't for the logo on the desktop, many Linux users wouldn't realise they weren't using a penguin-flavoured OS. The range of apps installed by default seems a little light, though, considering the 3.4GB download. There's no office suite, Konqueror is the only web browser, and there's little else of interest – you have to install everything you need.

PC-BSD comes with the famous ports package management system,



» It may carry the cute exterior of KDE (pun intended), but underneath beats the heart of a BSD.

but GUI-loving users needn't be afraid. There's also *AppCafe* which is a fully graphical software installation that's one of the best we've come across. There's only about 1,100 apps here – we say *only* because there's almost 70,000 on the Ubuntu Software Centre – but you should find software for most common tasks. There were a few surprises, like *Apache OpenOffice* instead of the more popular *LibreOffice* (or even *Calligra Suite* given the OS's predilection for KDE). As we said, there's software to suit most tasks, but you don't have as much choice as you may be used to. You still have the option of installing open source software the old fashioned way, and most Linux software should compile on BSD.

On files

For years, the biggest difference between BSD and Linux has been the way they deal with filesystems. BSD's *ZFS* has long been the envy of Linux sysadmins. This version of PC-BSD comes with *lpresnap* which simplifies the process of taking *ZFS* snapshots, though at the moment it's only available on the command line. A graphical version is promised for the next version.

ZFS now works on Linux, and *BTRFS* is also starting to be used, so the

technical gap between the two systems is closing. At the same time, though, some of the BSDs (especially PC-BSD) have become easier to use, closing the game on Linux in that respect.

Unless you have an ideological preference for the BSD licence over the GPL, it's hard to give you a specific reason to give BSD a try – but we highly recommend that you take it for a spin anyway. Not because of any great technical difference, but because it gives you another view of a free Unix-like OS – and it's easy enough to whip up in a virtual machine or on a spare computer. **LXF**

LINUX Verdict

PC-BSD 9.2

Developer: PC-BSD Software

Web: www.pcbsd.org

Licence: Various, but the core is BSD

Features 9/10

Performance 9/10

Ease of use 10/10

Documentation 8/10

» Without a doubt it's the most simple introduction to the often confusing world of BSD.

Rating 9/10