

# THE COMPUTER CORNER

## No. 296: LINUX: INTRODUCTION

de Stan Kaplan, WB9RQR, 715 N. Dries Street, Saukville, WI 53080

[wb9rqr@gmail.com](mailto:wb9rqr@gmail.com)

**WHY YOU ARE READING THIS.** Bill Shadid (W9MXQ), our editor for the ORC Newsletter, suggested it. He proposed articles on Linux covering such stuff as file management (including saving files), updating and running of programs, creating directories and finding applications (programs) on line. Seemingly simple stuff, but also mystifying for long-time Microsoft Windows users trying to get themselves introduced to Linux for the first time. So, with those suggestions in mind, plus lots of background info to cover it all properly, I have enough topics to fill the remainder of this year and all of the next with articles. Now, all I need to do is to write them! Next month's topic, most logically, will be on acquiring and installing Linux.

**WHY USE LINUX?** First, you can do anything with Linux that you can do with Windows. As I personally discovered early on, you can even pull document files from Windows into Linux, then modify and save them, pretty much to your heart's content, *even on the same computer!* I have done that myself using dual-boot computers, directly, after booting from the Linux side (these are machines with both Windows and Linux on the same computer, but in separate areas of the hard drive). For example, a letter written in Microsoft Word can be ported directly from the Windows files on the Windows side into Libre Office in Linux on the Linux side (Libre is a stand-alone substitute for Word that comes with my favorite version of Linux). There, the letter can be modified, expanded, rewritten, saved and printed, as you like. So with Linux you can read Windows directories (folders), and the files inside them, from a single hard drive where both exist. But not the other way. Microsoft refuses to read files from Linux when both exist on the same machine.

So you are not constrained by using Linux. Indeed, your horizons are expanded. Moreover, Linux is free of charge. That means using it separates you from the marketing whims and monetary charges of commercial providers such as Microsoft. So you are not locked into paying for upgrades every few years or paying yearly sums to keep using what you already have. Many of us old timers remember that computing started as a no-cost, shared adventure and we feel it should still be that way today. The source code for Linux itself is freely available (and it must legally stay that way), so you can actually change the Linux operating system (OS) to fit your personal needs if you have a bit of programming skill. Many users have done just that, and the result is that there are dozens of versions of Linux to pick from when you get started. Some view this as a disadvantage, with too many choices. True enough, it can sometimes be dizzying and confusing, but can be avoided by simply picking a good version. Later, if you find a version that you like better, you can always switch. You have no such choices when you pick Microsoft Windows!

**WHAT VERSION SHOULD I USE?** You want something that looks and feels a lot like Microsoft Windows, so the learning curve is as easy as possible. There are a couple of versions that could easily fit this bill. My favorite is **Linux Mint Cinnamon, version 21, 64-bit**, nickname "**Vanessa**". That version is a pleasure to install and use, and it has provisions

to find and install all the drivers (software to run the hardware in or attached to your computer) you might need. Once it is installed, it also has slick provisions for keeping your software updated to the latest and greatest with the least pain and time expenditure.

**WHAT SHOULD I NOT GET?** Don't bother looking for a Microsoft Office substitute. **Libre Office** comes with Vanessa and is even more complete than MS Office (see the following table).

Table 1: Windows versus Linux Software

COMPONENT	MICROSOFT (WINDOWS)	LIBRE OFFICE (LINUX)
spreadsheet	Excel	Calc
drawing	---	Draw
presentation	Powerpoint	Impress
formula	---	Math
document	Word	Write
database	Access	Base

Most people will want software to create or open, modify and save and print documents in the same way as Microsoft Word. Libre Office Write will do that. But all the others (Calc, Draw, Impress, etc.) are also all in your machine and ready to go when you install Vanessa.

*[As an aside, Libre Office even comes in a free Windows version that works fine to sub for Microsoft Word, so you don't need to buy MS Office even for Windows. Libre will even save documents in MS Word format (.doc, .docx and several others) so they can be read and edited in Word.] You can get Libre for Windows from MajorGeeks.*

Actually, you will find there are thousands of free programs available through Vanessa after you install it. Want to run Winlink? Software is available to do it. Mine is already up and running on a Linux machine in my basement, operating 24/7. Mostly, I run it remotely, from a main machine in my office, using remote control software called AnyDesk that works beautifully on both Windows and Linux. That is, I run Winlink (Telnet) on a Linux machine in my basement using AnyDesk on a Windows machine in my office, two floors up, via either wired or wireless network. It works fine.

**SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS.** Let me close this introduction with a few words about collecting things you need. If you have an older computer that works well, it would be an ideal candidate to install and play with Linux, so long as it meet certain base requirements for Vanessa (which I recommend). Pretty much anything you find that was built around 2014 or later should work, maybe even before that. It must be a 64-bit desktop or laptop computer for Vanessa. Vanessa will work with at least 2 GB of memory (RAM - Random Access Memory, those memory sticks) but 4 GB would be much better. It will work with as small as an 80 or 100 GB hard drive, but more is better. Given you have those minimum requirements, you can install a system that will be supported to at least April 2027.

**GETTING A LINUX 21 DISK.** The other thing you need is the software itself. You can download the *iso* file of Linux Mint Cinnamon, version 21, 64-bit, nickname "Vanessa" at:

[https://www.majorgeeks.com/files/details/linux\\_mint.html](https://www.majorgeeks.com/files/details/linux_mint.html)

Be sure to select *download (Cinnamon)* to start the download. It will take some time since it is 2.4 GB in size. Once downloaded, you must use this file, named:

linuxmint-21-cinnamon-64bit.iso

to burn an actual bootable DVD with all the installation files on it. Pop this bootable disk in a drive, reboot, and up will come a live copy of Linux desktop that you can play with at your leisure. Shut it all down when you are done and no changes will have been made to the hard drive. On the other hand, click the desktop icon "Install Linux 21" that comes up after reboot, and you will start the program that installs Vanessa to your hard drive. See next month's article for details.

**AN ALTERNATE TO ALL THAT.** If you are a member of the ORC, WiARC or LeFrog, you can get that installation DVD free from me, just for the asking and a pick up. Contact me by email or phone and we can arrange a mutually agreeable time and day for you to pick up the disk at my QTH in Saukville. Give me a bit of time (2 days) to prepare a disk, in case I am swamped or have a bunch of other commitments. Fair enough?