

Zenwalk GNU/Linux 3

[Zenwalk](#) 3 is an operating system based on Patrick Volkerding's Slackware GNU/Linux distribution, version 10.2. The entire operating system fits on a single CD, and stays true to what the author calls the "Zen philosophy". This philosophy, as it has been coined, refers to Zenwalk's policy of including one application per task. I've had a few problems with Slackware and Slackware-related systems in the past, but Zenwalk has alleviated all of my stress regarding those issues. Here's why:

New Linux, more modern apps

Slackware has always seemed to have some twisted view as to how "stable" a software package really is after its release. While having a cantankerous view concerning stability is not necessarily a negative aspect of any particular operating system, it does make for older, outdated packages. Ultimately, this results in an old kernel. Even at the current release (11.0), Slackware still features Linux 2.4.33.3. (2.6.17.13 is available as an optional installation method, but the fact that it still remains optional is disconcerting. What's wrong with 2.6.x?)

Slackware 11.0 contains the 2.4.33.3 Linux kernel, 2.6.17.13 in /extra and 2.6.18 in the /testing directory; the default boot option is the dependable 2.4.33.3 kernel, but this time we included more choices and support for 2.6.x kernels.

As long as it works...

Zenwalk is more lenient when it comes to package stability. Thus, Zenwalk features a newer version of Linux, version 2.6.17.11. Everything is running smoothly, and Zenwalk boots really fast. Zenwalk 3 is currently based on Slackware 10.2, but as far as I can remember, Zenwalk boots far quicker by default.

Booting Zenwalk: Desktop versus Laptop

Booting Zenwalk on desktop hardware has been a fairly quick task: Waiting anywhere from 10 to 13 seconds on average is not long at all. On the other end of the spectrum, my laptop running the same version of Zenwalk sometimes does not boot for more than 25 to 30 seconds. This probably has something to do with initrd, as I've never had such a monumental difference in boot times between machines I own.

Aside from a newer Linux, Zenwalk also includes more modern versions of many of your favorite day-to-day desktop apps. This means a newer Firefox, Gaim, Graveman, Gxine, Thunderbird, Grip, etc.

Multimedia

Zenwalk has great support for multimedia, and all from a single, centralized application: Gxine. I can play QuickTime, (very little) Windows Media, MPEG, OGG (of course), among many other file formats. There's really not much else to say about multimedia, other than the fact that most of it works in an exemplary fashion.

I do have one, small problem with multimedia, but this is not an isolated incident with Zenwalk alone, as many other GNU/Linux systems have a similar issue. I simply cannot get Gxine to play media embedded within a browser. I've done the cycle of installing and un-installing 'plugger' to see if I could watch my daily Show with Ze Frank, but to no avail. If anybody knows of the specific program or quick-and-dirty hack that is required to get this to work properly, I'd sure like to know.

Desktop Environment

Zenwalk uses XFCE, which is very GNOME-like, but very more mouse-driven (in every sense of the word). I'm beginning to enjoy XFCE the more I use it. In my opinion, it is faster and cleaner than GNOME, and doesn't seem to get in your face as much. Think GNOME, only faster and less cluttered, if you can. Good news for GNOME, however: It's catching up in these areas fairly quickly.

Liberating Zenwalk

Unfortunately, Zenwalk is not a free-by-default GNU/Linux system. Luckily, this is easy to fix, as I am informed that the Java Runtime Environment, or JRE is the only non-free component of the system. As root, perform the following command in a terminal window:

```
removepkg jre
```

Done. Zenwalk is liberated.

The Final Score

Overall, Zenwalk 3 has been an excellent GNU/Linux distribution. It performs extremely well, has never crashed or hung, and is fairly multimedia-centric, which I enjoy.

I think I've found my new home.

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