A month of openSUSE: my personal experiences

Long time no see! I finally decided to create a whole new blog post, after rumbling with thoughts about it. Mainly I lost focus on writing new posts because of shifting focus between archiving operating systems, and schoolwork. After a busy first week of another school year, I guess it's time to have my opinions on a distro called openSUSE.

It's been a month after I daily drive this Linux distribution, with me using Windows, mainly for either gaming incompatible games or maintenance.

And yes, I use KDE. Now stop rallying because I mainly use it for integrating well into a normal Windows 10 desktop, and since I'm probably the sole user of Linux in my circle, it's also for familiarity. I might use dwm again, who knows but for now, KDE it is.

Also, please stop complaining bloat, like I mistakenly did a year ago. It's expected that application sizes would grow to have room for new features, and that's okay. Bloat in software terms is defined as unnecessary features inside a piece of software or the software itself. Examples include Norton or McAfee antivirus software.

Okay, I wanted that to cleared up. Now back to our post.

What's openSUSE?

openSUSE is a (GNU/)Linux distribution made by the openSUSE project since 2005, replacing SUSE Linux (not Enterprise), after Novell (then parent of SUSE) discontinued the boxed Personal editions of said distribution. It started as a beta of SUSE Linux 10 but eventually evolved into a more refined distribution.

Since 2014, there are two primary variants of openSUSE aimed on Desktop users, Tumbleweed (the one I use) is a rolling release distribution, where bleeding edge software that passes OpenQA would eventually released almost daily, and Leap, following a more traditional 18-month release schedule and is the base for SUSE Linux Enterprise versions.

Tumbleweed is aimed on people who are technical enough, had strong and consistent internet, and for people who had at least an experience on Arch. Leap is aimed on servers where downtime isn't needed, a beginner, or a simple desktop.

For my experiences, I used openSUSE Tumbleweed, with a consistent update schedule.

Installation

For the most part, the YaST2 based installer setup is pretty straightforward, the disk partition tool is a bit of getting used to, with me double-checking if I installed this on the correct drive. After that, it's all smooth sailing. The process took me like 15-20 minutes in my setup.

After all's done, I immediately upgraded the system to get the latest available software and features in openSUSE. Everything's setup after that, I installed necessary programs via `zypper` and it's done. Straightforward as that.

My experiences

openSUSE for me is smooth, fast and also could do mundane tasks off everyday use. In my usecase, I use it similarly to Windows, a general workstation/gaming/education PC. Features are great, especially the ones exclusive to openSUSE itself, including `zypper`, YaST2, and `snapper`.

Overall, the system runs on high performance, it could handle Minecraft on default without stuttering unlike on Windows 10, and also given me the chance to run one thing, KVM.

I'll list my own opinions about the openSUSE features that isn't on Windows 10 or is a hassle to do so.

Btrfs and snapshotting

Btrfs is a file system, just like NTFS or APFS, but it's main selling point is the ability to create subvolumes inside of that drive. Let's say in Windows terms, `C:\` is the root volume, while `C:\Users` is the `/home` subvolume, you should get the point.

This is where `snapper` comes in. Snapper is an utility to snapshot drives after an event, such as changing settings on YaST2, updating or installing packages on `zypper`. That means, if an update broke your system, it's a matter of a reboot, selecting "Show read-only snapshots" on grub, boot to the snapshot, open terminal and run `snapper rollback xxx`. After a reboot, it's working back again!

By default, it only configures snapshotting on the `/` partition, you could set up snapshotting on `/home` if `/home` is on the `/` partition or if it's Btrfs formatted. It's also recommended to use 16GB to enable it by default on setup.

Most of the time, `snapper` also cleans up the snapshots (except user generated ones) to avoid filling up space immediately, which is a cool feature too of `snapper`.

Man, I wish we could have this on Windows too, instead of having huge backups, we could have such incremental backups officially, not using 3rd party applications.

Zypp package management

The zypp package manager (`zypper`) is a versatile package management tool. It could handle dependencies as well as, among others, could add OBS (Open Build Services) repos, 1-click install (in GUI), and more.

I have a semi-bad habit of using `sudo zypper dup` which I should prolly avoid but the Update applet on KDE probably uses it.

It's basically just an another package management tool in the surface but it has some good features under the hood. The disadvantages, I think was the lack of an equivalent of `apt autoremove` but it's working as advertised.

YaST2

YaST2 is a beast, I admit. YaST2 centralizes many things a sysadmin would like to do in a nice interface, such as firewall, partitioning, software management and more.

It also powers the 1-click Install applet in GUI equipped systems, and also the installation setup whenever a fresh install is initiated. It's a powerful swiss-army tool for system administrators, and a good one at that.

I often do software management on that as it has a simple and straightforward interface. I do find the partitioning tool a bit confusing but it's okay if you get used to it.

Overall, YaST2 is a powerful tool, but most of the time in openSUSE, I use 2-3 tools on average, in a daily basis. It's a must-have on openSUSE systems.

Open Build Service

Open Build Service or OBS, is an equivalent of Arch's AUR. It hosts programs that are unavailable on the main repos. You could package, manage, build or install packages on OBS. I wouldn't go too deep with how to create a package in OBS though.

OBS packages are different to the main repos, and might introduce conflict to other packages, but if the program you install actually needs a specific dependency, then you could install on the Open Build Service.

Personally, I use it whenever I need a specific program like Waydroid, or something else. Other than that, it's a cool perk on openSUSE.

Desktop Environments

The choices of desktops and window managers in openSUSE is diverse, with KDE being always the default (which I currently use). You could install other desktop environments like GNOME, Xfce, MATE, LXQT, LXDE, Budgie, Cinnammon or window managers such as IceWM, dwm, sway, hyprland and the like.

The desktop environment I use is KDE Plasma 5.27. It's sleek, modern, and also, especially in openSUSE, it's well integrated in the distribution. It reminds me of Windows 10 for a bit, with the default theme being switched to Breeze Dark. I also have fun customizing and adding more functionality to the system via widgets, such as a weather widget that could have precise locations (instead of having Manila or Cebu by default), a fork of the old kickoff (KDE equivalent for the Start menu), and more!

Of course we have our own pick, I respect it, I tried GNOME on other distributions and it isn't familiar but nice (also the "bloat" but I'll refrain to use that term anymore, also have a case of the "Control Panel syndrome" where a particular DE or operating system have two or more setting applications, just like Windows 8+)

Another nice thing it has was the ability to have more panels, something Windows 11 doesn't have, which means, you could remake either Windows or macOS.

Overall, KDE is a nice desktop environment. But you could choose others too via the setup process, which is kinda provided. By default, you could choose KDE, GNOME and Xfce, with others hidden under some options.

Gaming capabilities

I could tell that openSUSE could run games well or better than my Windows installation. Granted, it varies on many variables, such as how old the installation is, as well as how many programs are there in Windows, among others.

But I could still compare some games, for example, Minecraft: Java Edition runs well within default settings inside Linux compared to Windows, which whenever an attempt is made to reset the default graphic settings would make the game stutter.

Other games, GTA San Andreas for example, is nearly identical to it running on Wine compared to it running on Windows. I tried native games such as SuperTuxKart and the Super Mario 64 decompilation port.

Proton is nice, being the backend of Steam Deck's ability to play Windows-only titles, and it's actually a nice lifesaver from overconfiguring Wine. I heard of Lutris too but it didn't work so,

Proton it is.

Downsides I experienced

There are downsides that I experienced during the duration of the month, some were outside of my own, some were my own fault. One of it was whenever the WiFi was down (which happened for 3 days) and so, updating it using mobile data. God it was slow. Luckily, I updated after the WiFi returned.

I also have recent problems with Packman and Mesa, prompting me to downgrade and switch vendors then do it again 2 days later.

I see the lack for Waydroid in the repos disappointing, with guides supplementing it. I happen to have issues with the prerequisites and so didn't do it further.

But overall, it's nice and stable most of the time.

KVM, the one that I'm intrigued with

Usually, I use VMWare, VirtualBox or 86Box whenever I need to try out an operating system, especially x86 based ones. But sometimes, some operating systems are picky about which virtualizer should it use.

For example, ChromeOS doesn't work on VMware on the latest versions, or something like an Android-based operating system would struggle under Windows.

For that, I need something like KVM. KVM is different to other virtualizer solutions, I wouldn't like to explain it deeply, but basically, it's a Linux kernel module to add the functionality of virtualizing different operating systems directly, with near-native speeds. It is commonly partnered with QEMU.

For managing those, I use Virtual Machine Manager that enables management of KVM machines, as well as others such as Linux Containers. It's a nice GUI to easily modify machines with it. Additionally, I have Boxes (from Flathub) for certain operating systems such as GNOME OS (which is a reference platform).

Honestly, having this on my arsenal would be a great help on starting the GUI page.

Drawing my conclusions

openSUSE is versatile at what it's worth as a distribution. The community is great (especially the Discord community), the distribution is stable, the added benefit of a traditional release schedule operating system really adds to the integrity of the distribution.

I hope I could use it in the long run for more general purpose tasks. I would like to switch completely eventually but since I would eventually need some applications (such as Adobe Creative Cloud) for school related tasks, I wouldn't make the jump immediately.

This might be my longest post yet, and I hope you didn't get bored. I got things to do, so we would end this blog post here. See ya, and be safe.