

OpenSUSE 11.2



It's lean, green, clean and has a lizard for a logo. No, not **Nick Veitch**, this is the latest version of Novell's open source distro...

In brief...

» One of the big three (four?) Linux distros, it's more akin to Mandriva than it is to Ubuntu.

Core software

- » Kernel 2.6.31.5
- » KDE 4.3.3
- » Gnome 2.28
- » OpenOffice 3.1.1
- » Firefox 3.5.4
- » GCC 4.4

The last iteration of OpenSUSE saw great leaps forward for the installer, in terms of ease of use, attractiveness and functionality. Though it was pretty solid already, it's seen some improvement, to the extent that a default install should take no more than a few minutes to initiate. It handles different input devices, all sorts of disk configurations and crucially, has the level of detail there to reassure you that you're about to amend/reformat the right device.

The install DVD doubles as a driver tester and rescue disk, but the ease of use doesn't really extend to these – you need to know your way around *Bash* to get much use out of either.

The usual problem with installing a distro is the packages that aren't included, but are required to make life better for the user. This is no fault of SUSE: things such as firmware and



» KDE 4.3.3 in all its glory – the theme has been greenified, but there's little else messed with. If you don't like KDE 4, OpenSUSE works on Gnome as well.

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proprietary plugins (we're looking at you, Flash) can't be included because of licensing issues. What distros can do to make things easier is to provide post-install ways of getting this stuff to work painlessly. The SUSE team have pulled out all the stops to make installing Nvidia drivers, for example, really

straightforward. Unfortunately, it's only easy when you're following instructions from the page on the support website, which you have to find by yourself. This is a bit of a slip-up, because some may not know that the best driver isn't installed and won't go looking for it.

For similar reasons, it's well worth running an update immediately after you install. For one thing, the pretty-much essential MS core web fonts aren't part of the DVD install package, but an update will fix that.

Desktop experience

The latest iterations of the KDE desktop have had a mixed reception, which is perhaps why OpenSUSE is keen to point out during installation that it works just as happily on the latest Gnome release too (2.28, reviewed last issue). OpenSUSE is well integrated with both, so you'll find everything where you expect without a great deal of struggle. Although OpenSUSE is probably the best-delivered KDE desktop, it still feels unfinished, but if you're used to KDE 4.x, it should be fine.

Gnome 2.28 comes late to SUSE, as the last releases of both didn't come near enough together, but the time has been well spent integrating it properly. In both environments, the default web browser is still *Firefox* (3.5.4) which is welcomed by most, but apart from this and a few more areas, OpenSUSE stays

close to the individual defaults for both desktops. Except of course, for *Slab*, the OpenSUSE software launcher, which has taken a while to win fans. *Yast* is perhaps a little too well integrated, as it looks confusingly similar to Gnome Control Centre, though both use different apps for the same job.

A tip of the hat to microblogging now sees *Choqok* installed by default – a combination desktop interface for Identica and Twitter with some nice features, but OpenSUSE still uses *Pidgin* for multi-format messaging.

Most of the work on this release has been behind the scenes and OpenSUSE continues to deliver a solid, well-maintained desktop. **LXF**

Features at a glance



Huge Yast

Gaze at *Yast's* vastness (not to be confused with the Gnome Control Centre). Any more options and you'll need a bigger screen.



Gnome support

Gnome might not be the default, but it's just as well supported by SUSE, with a few tweaks such as *Slab*.

LINUX FORMAT Verdict

OpenSUSE 11.2

Developer: Novell/OpenSUSE community
Web: www.opensuse.org
Price: Free under open source licences

Features	8/10
Performance	9/10
Ease of use	8/10
Documentation	9/10

» It isn't going to initiate global conflagrations, but it's stable, up to date and reliable.

Rating 8/10