

*Some thoughts from a Linux Geek about getting into close contact with Apple's OS X  
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## Going OS X

Having to choose a new Laptop for my new position at [OTRS](#) I decided to give in to a long term desire to learn more about [Apple's OS X](#) and decided to get a [Apple MacBook](#). The machine arrived a few days before Xmas, so I used the holiday break to accustom myself with OS X and to create a productive environment for myself.

### Focus on Open Source

Being a long time Open Source Fellow, I'm eager to minimize the use of commercial apps as much as possible. So far it worked out well. The only commercial application I purchased is [Parallels Desktop](#) to run [openSUSE](#) in a virtual machine. I was pleasantly surprised by the good availability of OSS for the Mac. Most of my favorite apps are available as OS X (Intel) versions which make the switch so much easier. I compiled a list of the [add-on applications](#) I ended up installing at the bottom of this page. I'll extend the list as time goes by.

### Preinstalled Applications

OS X provides a fair variety of basic applications. Being curious I spent quite some time playing around with most of them. I like [FrontRow](#) for watching DVDs, photo slideshows etc. I never thought a remote control could be a useful accessory for a Laptop, but in combination with this application it actually makes sense. When it comes to productivity apps the most important for me are a good mail tool, a web browser and some kind of Office Suite. Very useful app is Apple's [X11](#) implementation. In combination with Parallels it allows me to run any Linux app on the OS X desktop.

A nice gimmick and a great add-on/replacement for Apple's [System/Activity Monitor](#) is [MenuMeters](#). It displays all system statistics in the menubar and can be customized to fit your individual needs.

- **Mail**

On Linux I'm used to [Evolution](#) and I must say that Apple's [Mail](#) comes pretty close. It lacks PGP support though. But with [GPGMail](#) there is a decent plugin to add this functionality to Mail.

In an earlier incarnation of this article, I wrote *I use Mail on OS X, but I probably would switch back to Evolution if there would be a OS X port..* So people pointed me to the [OS X port of Evolution](#). I just tried it and must say I'm not too impressed. Almost all icons are missing and it's not integrated with the addressbook and the calendar at all. Both I like, as they sync well with my Palm etc. So I guess I'll stay with Apple's Mail for now.

- **Browsing the Web**

I gave Apple's [Safari](#) a fair trial, but quickly made [Firefox](#) my default browser again.

- **Graphics and Media**

[QuickTime 7](#) is nice, but (at least in the preinstalled version) limited in support for different file formats. I found [Mplayer OSX](#) a must have to fill this gap. Another very

nice media player is the [VideoLan](#) VLC media player. For encoding videos, [ffmepegX](#) seems to be a great tool. It comes with a mplayer for playback as well. The preinstalled Preview application provides the most basic image editing capabilities only. To get a much more capable application I looked for and found [GIMP for Mac OS X](#). Isn't OSS great? You can switch your OS and still keep your dearest applications.

- **Communication**

Even though video conferencing with [iChat](#) is cool, iChat misses support for [SIP](#) and [IRC](#). [XMeeting](#) adds SIP support and enables me to make [VoIP](#) calls from the Macbook. For IRC, [X-Chat Aqua](#) seems a good solution. I also found [Chax](#) a plug-in adding some useful features to iChat.

## Integrating with Linux

For the last 10+ years I used Linux exclusively. So my home setup is built from several Linux machines and well networked. As Linux offers good Windows integration and OS X is based on BSD, getting OS X and Linux to talk to each other, share files and allow for remote logins in either direction was not too complicated. What was new however is the use of mostly graphical tools and the different paradigm Apple uses for system administration. I collected the pointers I used to solve some of the mysteries of OS X in [links section](#) below.

But as I do development under Linux, I still need to have a native Linux environment to carry around with me. Enter [Paralles Desktop](#). Using Parallels' virtualization suite, I installed openSUSE as guest on OS X. I also tried Apple's [Bootcamp](#), but a dual-boot setup is not really what I wanted. My current setup uses a virtual Linux instance running in the background. I don't use X11 under Linux, but utilize OS X X11 functionality to run Linux apps on teh OS X desktop ('ssh -X user@virtual-machine application' does the trick). I also exported the root filesystem via NFS to the OS X host to make file sharing an easy task.

The advantage of this solution compared to dual boot are that it pretty much eliminates traditional Linux weaknesses like issues with suspend and wireless networking. The virtual machine goes to sleep when the host goes to sleep and the virtual machine suspends to disk when the host goes down. Using the *shared network* feature Linux piggy backs on OS X' network connection, and doesn't have to care if it's wireless or wired. Performance (2GHz Macbook with 2GB RAM, 120GB HD) is sufficient. I still have a bootcamp partition with Linux installed, but as soon as space on the disk gets tight, it will go away again.

For seamless [ssh](#) integration [SSHKeychain](#) is a must. It links ssh to Apple's keychain to ssh and acts like `ssh-agent` in Linux environments. There also is [Vine Server](#), which allows you to access the OS X desktop remotely using a standard VNC client. Kinda nice if you don't want to work with the small screen and keyboard.

## Even More Software

Even though you get a nice set of applications preinstalled, there are a few things missing. What follows is a list of apps I use frequently.

- **Virtual Desktop**

It must be because I'm using virtual screens for more than ten years now, but it's a miracle to me how one can live with just one screen. Even though Apple build some nice features into OS X to make it easier to stay organized, it's still no match for modern Linux desktops utilizing virtual screens and now getting fancy animations to make those more intuitive to newbies. I found [VirtueDesktops](#) a workable solution for OS X. But I still miss something more complete like [Beryl](#) is on Linux.

- **Office Suite**

I'm not too much into creating presentations and alike but sometimes there is no way around it. Not everything can be done in plain ASCII and some people need to be pleased with colorful documents. I found [NeoOffice](#) a very nice adoption of [OpenOffice.org](#) for OS X. And if you want to get the remote control to work for presentations etc, [iRed Lite](#) is a great add-on to have fun with your remote.

- **Mind Map**

To organizing thoughts and sketch out ideas I like to use [Mind-Maps](#). Even if it's very slow to start, [FreeMind](#) is a workable tool for this. And it being available on OS X, Windows and Linux is an advantage if you like to exchange mind-maps with other folks.

## Final Thoughts

After almost exclusively using the Macbook for two weeks now, I must say I'm pretty satisfied with what it has to offer and am looking forward to have this machine as my primary Laptop for the time to come. I'll try to keep this page up-to-date as I go along and find more useful utilities or ways to get around annoyances. I'm always happy about feedback. So feel free to [drop me a note](#).

## Most Useful Links

English Sites:

- [Dan Rodney's Mac Central Pages](#)  
In particular the list of keyboard shortcuts is a blessing.
- [Keyboard Control](#)  
More Keyboard shortcuts
- [A guide for switching to a Mac](#)  
A similar article as this one, but windows focused. Many useful links.
- [Mac OS X as an NFS Client](#)  
Step by step instruction on mounting NFS shares on OS X.
- [Allowing ssh access](#)  
How to allow remote logins via ssh.

German Sites:

- [MacTechNews.de](#)  
German News site centered around Mac issues

## Add-On Apps I felt I needed

All these apps are free to use, most are OpenSource. Maybe you'll find something that is of use to you...

- [VirtueDesktops](#)  
A virtual desktop manager for Apple's Mac OS.
- [Firefox](#)  
Who can live without it?
- [GPGMail](#)  
A plug-in for Apple's Mail, providing a front-end to gpg.
- [XMeeting](#)  
Powerful Mac OS X video conferencing solutions (SIP client)
- [Mac GNU Privacy Guard](#)  
Mac OS X port of GnuPG.
- [NeoOffice](#)  
An OS X adoption of [OpenOffice.org](#)
- [Mplayer OSX](#)  
MPlayerOSX is binary distribution of MPlayer ([The Movie Player for Linux](#)) and comes with native GUI in MacOSX.
- [ffmpegX](#)  
Encode and author video.
- [Tunnelblick](#)  
A simple graphical user interface for the great VPN software OpenVPN 2.0 and higher.
- [tun/tap driver](#)  
The driver included in Tunnelblick didn't install for me. This one did.
- [FreeMind](#)  
A mind-mapping software written in Java.
- [SSHKeychain](#)  
Painless ssh key management for OS X.
- [GIMP for Mac OS X](#)  
The GIMP for your Macintosh.
- [Chax](#)  
Chax is a collection of minor modifications and additions that make using Apple's iChat more enjoyable.
- [Vine Server \(OSXvnc\)](#)  
A robust, full-featured VNC server for MacOS X.
- [Evolution](#)  
OS X port, requires X11.
- [X-Chat Aqua](#)  
A MacOS X IRC client.
- [VideoLan VLC Media Player](#)  
A free cross-platform media player.
- [Chmox](#)  
Lets you read [chm](#) (compressed HTML) files
- [MenuMeters](#)

A set of CPU, memory, disk, and network monitoring tools for MacOS X.

- [iRed Lite](#)

Makes the most of your Apple Remote