

JACK WALLEN (/USERS/JLWALLEN) | JANUARY 20, 2017

# 5 Linux Desktop Environments on the Rise for 2017



Jack Wallen looks at top desktop environments with the following characteristics in mind: evolution, usability, and modernity.

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With each passing year, the Linux desktop ecosystem shifts and morphs from one darling to the next. Although it's sometimes challenging to tell, from month to month, which desktop will reign as the fan favorite, there are always signs that a particular desktop is going to rise in market share.

Three trends I always examine are evolution, usability, and modernity. I prefer my desktops to have evolved along with the needs of current trends and users, to be

for a high range of flexibility.


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Currently, the Linux desktop environment is dominated by [Cinnamon](http://developer.linuxmint.com/) (<http://developer.linuxmint.com/>), [Xfce](https://www.xfce.org/) (<https://www.xfce.org/>), [GNOME](https://www.gnome.org/) (<https://www.gnome.org/>), and [Ubuntu Unity](https://unity.ubuntu.com/) (<https://unity.ubuntu.com/>). Of those four, I believe only one will see a sharp rise in market share in 2017. Which one? Let's dive in and see which five desktops, I think will climb the rank and file.

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## KDE Plasma

For the longest time I ignored KDE, thinking it too unstable, too clunky, and too tied to the old-school desktop metaphor. With the advent of Plasma 5 (and distributions like [Neon](https://neon.kde.org/) (<https://neon.kde.org/>)) all bets were off. With each new iteration of KDE (Figure 1), the desktop improves in every possible area. It's not only an elegant improvement over the old Start button/taskbar metaphor, it's become incredibly stable and the responsiveness has improved dramatically.

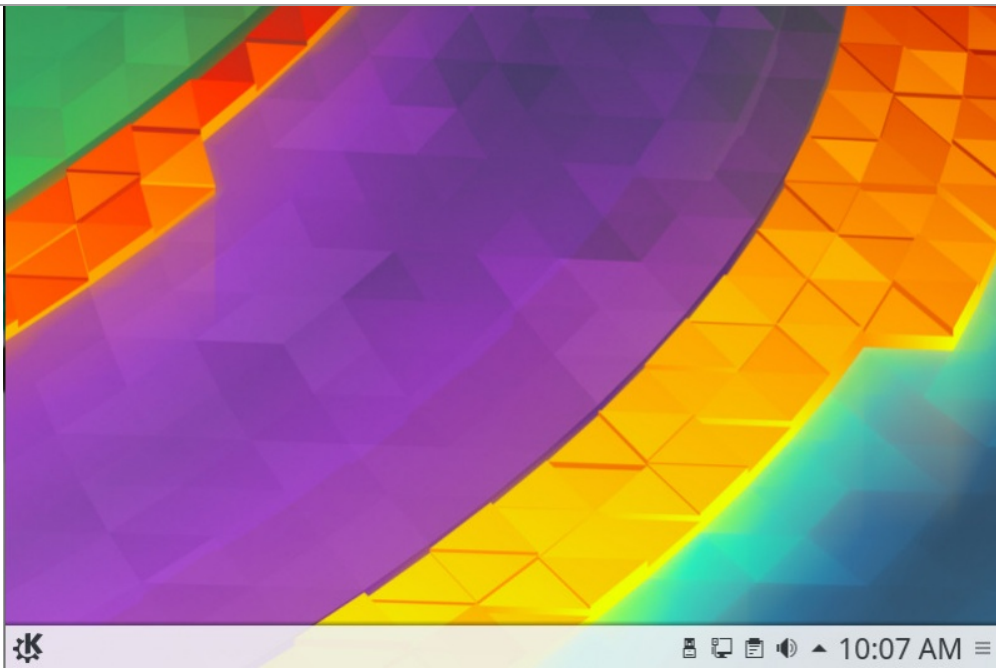


Figure 1: The latest KDE is as beautiful as it is solid.

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One of the reasons why I believe KDE will rise in popularity this year is that the developers get the needs of the user. They've held onto the old ways, all the while managing to evolve that same take on the desktop in such a way as to make it look and feel modern. From the eyes of the typical end user, KDE is perfect amalgam of what they need (ease of use) vs. what they want (something easy on the eyes).

If you want to install KDE, it can be easily done. For example, on a Ubuntu 16.04 desktop, open up a terminal window and issue the following commands:

```
sudo add-apt-repository ppa:kubuntu-ppa/backports
sudo apt-get update && sudo apt-get dist-upgrade
sudo apt-get install kubuntu-desktop
```

Note: During the installation, you'll be prompted to select a display manager. Make sure to select lightdm for this, and you'll be good to go.

The installation will take some time; in the end, you'll wind up with a perfectly functioning KDE desktop.

## Pantheon Desktop

Pantheon happens to be the desktop environment for my daily driver, [Elementary OS \(https://elementary.io/\)](https://elementary.io/). Not only is this desktop a thing of elegant simplicity, it is incredibly easy to use (on a level even the Mac desktop couldn't achieve). The

looks great doing so). With plenty of configuration options, you can make Pantheon look and feel exactly how you like (with a few limitations—such as with the Applications menu being locked down and the now-defunct Super Wingpanel). Even with these slight limitations, Pantheon is as solid and easy to use as any desktop you will ever experience.

But why will this particular take on the desktop experience see an expanded user base in 2017? The answer to that is simple: Elementary OS Loki. The combination of the rock solid Ubuntu platform with a clean (almost minimal) desktop makes for a winning combination any level of user could take advantage of. Pantheon is the desktop environment that could easily win over new users like no other Linux interface.

If you'd like to try Pantheon (without installing Elementary), it's possible. To install on Ubuntu 16.04, open up a terminal and issue the following commands:

```
sudo add-apt-repository ppa:elementary-os/stable
sudo apt-get update
sudo apt-get install elementary-desktop
```

Logout, select Pantheon, and log back in (Figure 2).

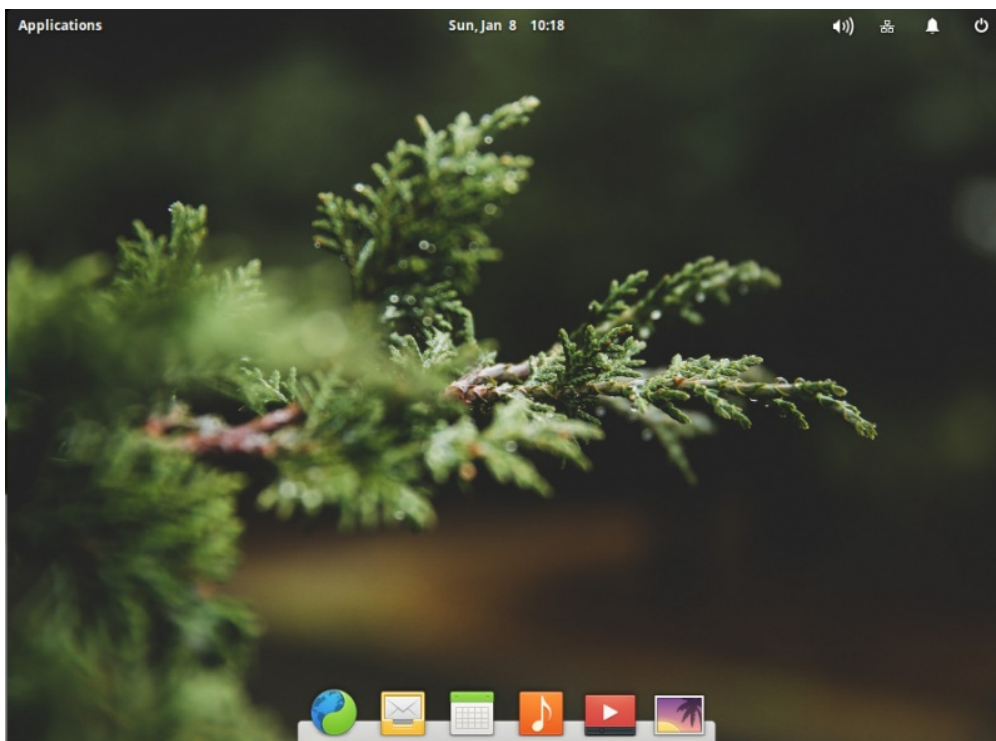


Figure 2: Pantheon running on top of Ubuntu 16.04.

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when I think of the [Enlightenment \(https://www.enlightenment.org/\)](https://www.enlightenment.org/) desktop environment, I am reminded of some of my first steps with the Linux desktop. The first time I logged into Enlightenment, I thought I was working with something incredibly special. It was the single most configurable desktop interface I'd ever used and could be made to look exactly how I wanted it.

Since then, Enlightenment seemed to fade into the background. However, it is currently undergoing a transition to Wayland, which should mean big things for this unique desktop (even more compositing effects with smoother transitions, etc.). I believe it will be that migration to Wayland that will give Enlightenment a boost in popularity. Considering it is already a full-featured desktop environment (Figure 3) that runs lightning fast and offers some of the coolest window animations, once it makes the transition to the next-gen compositor...look out!

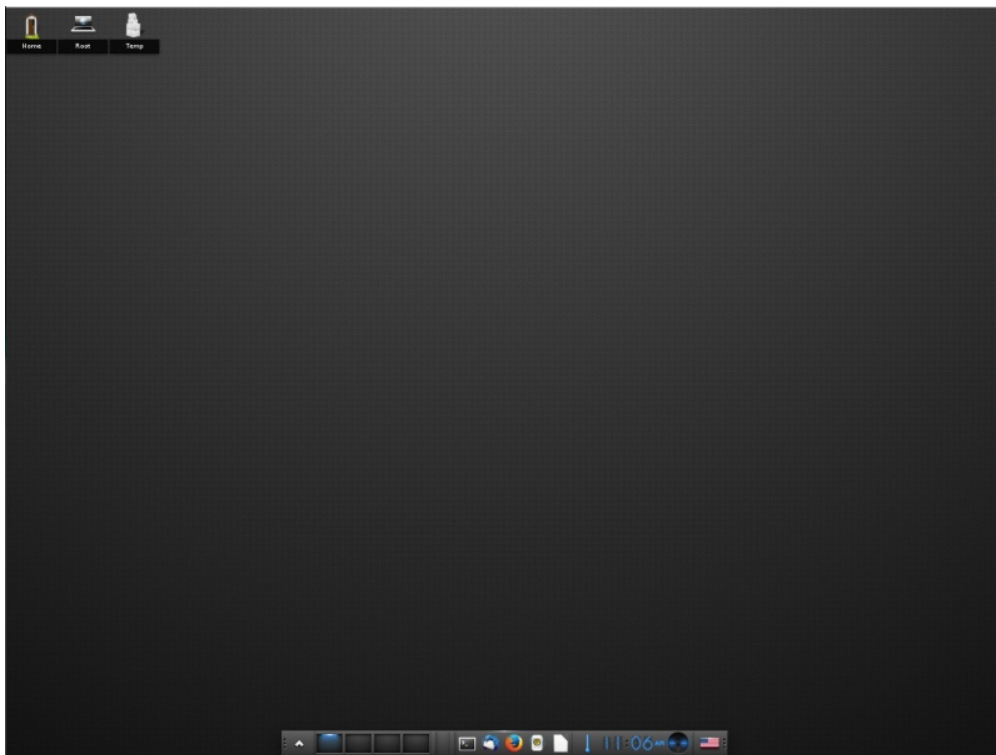




Figure 3: The default Enlightenment desktop.

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If you want to kick the Enlightenment tires, it is fairly simple to install. On a Ubuntu 16.04 machine, open up a terminal window and issue the following commands:

```
sudo add-apt-repository ppa:niko2040/e19
sudo apt-get update
sudo apt-get install enlightenment
```

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## GNOME

GNOME went through a brief period (after evolving from 2.x to 3.x) where the general consensus was that the developers had made a massive mistake in leaving behind the look and feel of the previous iteration. That was then, this is now. The current release of GNOME is not your parents' GNOME 3; it's incredibly fast, stable, and user-friendly (Figure 4). This is especially true for any touch-centric hardware. However, don't think you have to upgrade your monitor to a touch-enabled device, as even standard hardware can get the most out of this particular desktop.

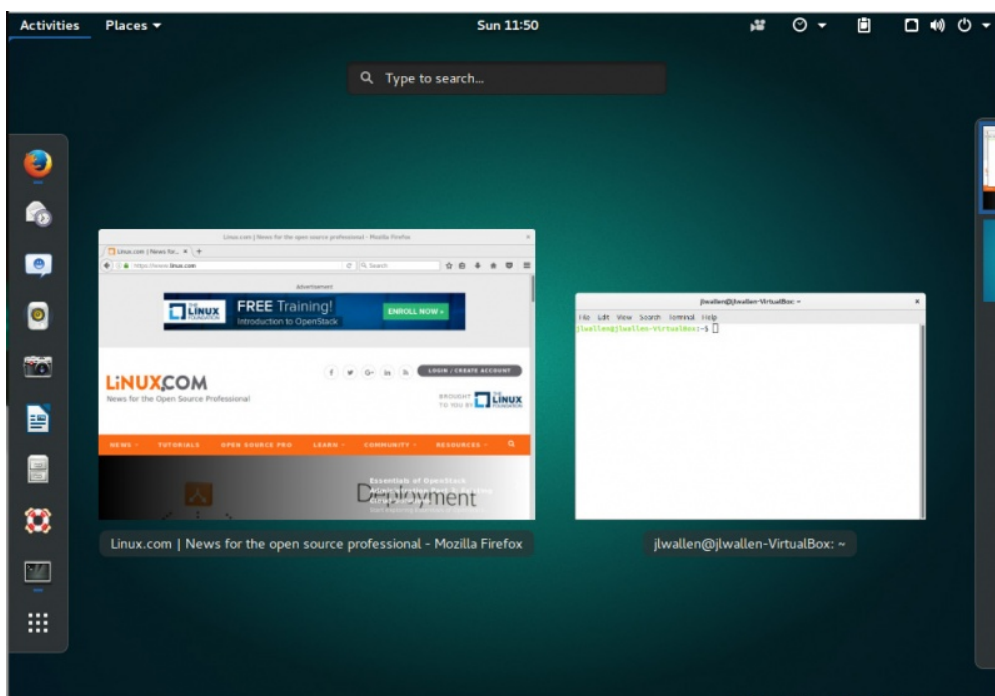


Figure 4: The GNOME desktop running on Ubuntu 16.04.

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How can a desktop that has already been around for some time start gaining market share? I believe the key lies in Ubuntu migrating from Unity 7 to 8. With that change

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~~GNOME (<https://ubuntu-gnome.org/>) a distribution that should be considered a best~~  
in breed.

If you want to give the latest version of GNOME a try (3.22), on Ubuntu 16.04 issue the following commands:

```
sudo add-apt-repository ppa:gnome3-team/gnome3-staging
sudo add-apt-repository ppa:gnome3-team/gnome3
sudo apt update
sudo apt dist-upgrade
sudo apt install ubuntu-gnome-desktop
```

During the installation, make sure to select lightdm as your default display manager. Once installed, logout, select GNOME, and login to experience what GNOME has to offer.

## Budgie Desktop

The Budgie Desktop is the flagship of the [Solus project \(https://solus-project.com/budgie/\)](https://solus-project.com/budgie/). Budgie was written from scratch, but tightly integrates with the GNOME stack. With this particular desktop, users will feel perfectly at home (especially if they've worked with the Chrome OS platform).

Budgie has come a long way fast (more so than any desktop I can think of). I remember when I first used the environment, it was fairly basic. Now, it includes a really handy dock, and a slide-out panel called Raven (Figure 5), that gives the user:

- Easy access to calendar information, sound volume, media player controls, and more (via Widgets view).
- The simple means to manage incoming application and system notifications (via Notifications view)
- Quick access to Budgie customizations

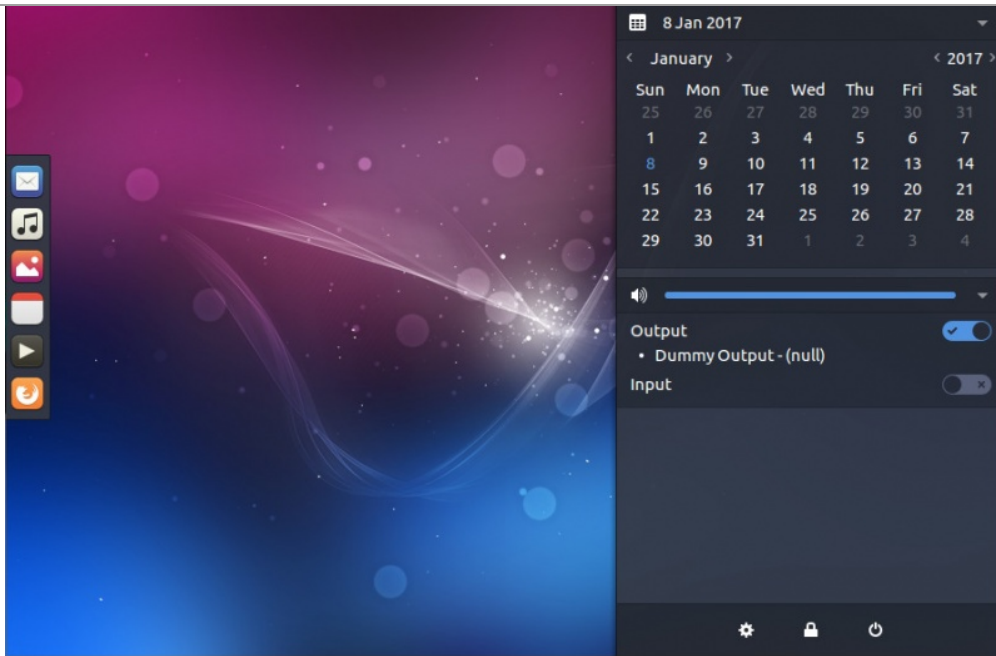


Figure 5: Raven in action on Budgie.

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Budgie will see a rise in usage by way of the Solus distribution—a great project with a solid community.

If you want to experience Budgie, you can either install the Solus distribution, or you can install it on an existing Ubuntu platform with the following commands:

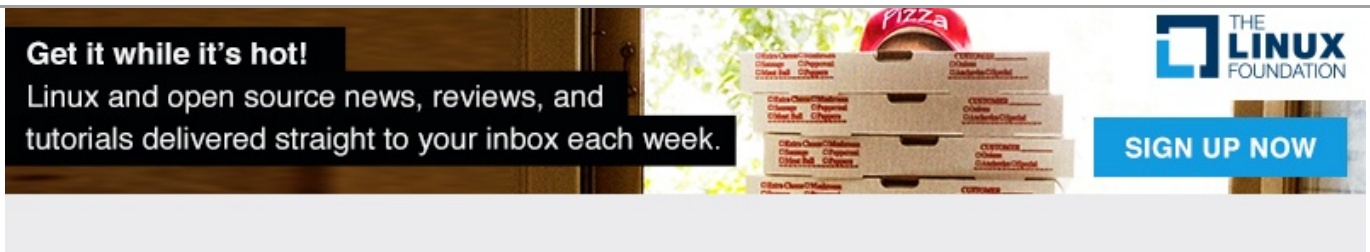
```
sudo add-apt-repository ppa:budgie-remix/ppa
sudo apt update
sudo apt install budgie-desktop-environment
```

Once installed, logout, select Budgie, and log back in.

## The choice is yours

There are so many desktop environments available to the Linux platform; which one you use is up to you. However, if you're looking for a desktop environment that might well enjoy significant rise in popularity during 2017, look no further than any of the above. Each has something special to offer and should help make your Linux experience even better.





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6 Comments

## Comments

**GODOT11 (/USERS/GODOT11) | AUGUST 27, 2017**

[Permalink \(/comment/18025#comment-18025\)](/comment/18025#comment-18025)

I tried KDE Plasma on Linux Mint. I'm sorry, but it's a fancy-looking bugpack. It has so much glitches I couldn't use it more than half an hour.

Widget managing is buggy as shit, full of glitches. That thing on the desktop which opens the widget selector overlaps the unmoveable desktop icons, and after I moved it I failed to put it back to the edge of the screen ever. If I put it in the corner, it keeps rotating, even after you let it go. Pictures in the theme store are unusably small. E.T.C.

So no Plasma is any good until they fix all these extreme bugs. It feels like an early-stage beta stuff, nowhere near release.

**DECLANMARKS (/USERS/DECLANMARKS) | SEPTEMBER 12, 2017**

[Permalink \(/comment/18071#comment-18071\)](/comment/18071#comment-18071)

I don't know what version you were using. I have been using KDE on manjaro for about 6 months and haven't experienced any problems. I love KDE. I have used Unity,

**DECLANMARKS (/USERS/DECLANMARKS) | SEPTEMBER 12, 2017**

[Permalink \(/comment/18070#comment-18070\)](#)

I don't know what version you were using. I have been using KDE on manjaro for about 6 months and haven't experienced any problems. I love KDE. I have used Unity, xfce, Gnome, cinnamon and in my opinion I prefer KDE over all the others.

**DENILSONMARCOS (/USERS/DENILSONMARCOS) | FEBRUARY 3, 2017**

[Permalink \(/comment/17051#comment-17051\)](#)

Great content, I still have a very great preference for using Gnome.

I will take the time to test these options, in many cases it is necessary!

**GUY FROMKCMO (/USERS/GUY-FROMKCMO) | JANUARY 24, 2017**

[Permalink \(/comment/16965#comment-16965\)](#)

I just can't believe MATE isn't on here...

**ALMAWILKINSON (/USERS/ALMAWILKINSON) | JANUARY 22, 2017**

[Permalink \(/comment/16961#comment-16961\)](#)

Fails to address, much less compare and discuss, the relative CPU and RAM usage. Assumes facts not in evidence as it were. ANY of the DE's mentioned will run perfectly wonderful with a 6th Gen i5 and 16GB RAM, even 8. But what if you don't have a PC like that? Only pre-Wayland Enlightenment is then worth considering. And he COMPLETELY IGNORES XFCE.

Excuse much--your user prejudice is showing--how about setting up some impartial judgment criteria? You can cherry pick things to judge a DE by so as to cast ANY FAVORITE in a superior light, but doing so is unhelpful for the NEEDS of most readers.

