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2021 Is the Year of Linux on the Desktop

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It's the year of Linux on the desktop! Thirty years into the life of Linux, it seems like people have said that every year. But now it's really true, and it's true because Linux found its real niche?not as a political statement about "free software," but as a practical way to enable capable, low-cost machines for millions.

Linux was founded on the desktop, as one man's project to create an alternative OS for his Intel-based PC. So it's understandable that Linux fans have been focused on desktops and laptops as a sign of success?and not, say, servers, or IoT, or drones. They can finally rest easy. Walk into any school now, and you'll see millions of Linux machines. They're called Chromebooks.

Chrome OS and Android are both based on the Linux kernel. They don't have the extra GNU software that distributions like Ubuntu have, but they're descended from Linus Torvalds' original work. Chromebooks are the fastest growing segment of the traditional PC market, according to Canals. IDC points out that Canals' estimates of 12

million Chromebooks shipped in Q1 2021 are only a fraction of the 63 million notebooks sold that quarter, but once again, they're where the growth is. Much of that is driven by schools, where Chromebooks dominate now.

Schoolkids don't generally need a million apps' worth of generic computing power. They need inexpensive, rugged ways to log into Google Classroom. Linux came to the rescue, enabling cheap, light, easy-to-manage PCs that don't have the Swiss Army Knife craft of Windows or the premium price of Macs.

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