

Big Game Hunt: Can 3D Graphics Give Linux An Edge On The Desktop?

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Open-source developers look to NVIDIA and ATI for all-important hardware driver support.

Never underestimate the selling power of eye candy: The 3D graphics card makers generally design and sell their products for the PC gaming market based on this quality alone.

At first glance, this may look like a temptation Linux can afford to pass up: 3D graphics are a low priority in the enterprise server market, and in any case, few popular game titles today run natively on Linux systems. Yet among Linux supporters, high-end graphics support creates a classic Catch-22. The ability to run the latest 3D graphics cards is a key feature to an important segment of the consumer PC market -- and they, in turn, represent a major draw for the developers who create games and other graphics-intensive applications.

The good news is that given reliable Linux driver support, 3D graphics code looks pretty much the same, whether a developer is programming for Windows, Linux, or some other operating system. "If you use OpenGL, then it is exactly the same," said Jorrit Tyberghein, creator of the open-source 3D graphics engine, Crystal Space 3D. "OpenGL is also slightly easier to use than Direct3D."

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