Continuing Wayland breakage

When I learned that David Revoy had almost stopped making Pepper & Carrot, and that a significant part of the reason for that was that he could no longer with good conscience recommend to professional artists to use Linux, partly because Wayland broke too much, it drove home just how much damage Wayland is doing right now.

Contents

1   Cost of breakage

> Users are lost, it doesn't work, and with "the end of Windows 10", I get daily request about it. I published a detailed install guide to address this.
> — David Revoy

WTF are we doing? Tools that just worked don't work anymore after you update something else – that's textbook volatile infrastructure.

Consider that switching from a now broken application to one that works means retraining people. Yes, we usually do that "as a hobby", but to see the time that actually takes away from people's lives, try to think about is as an employer: paying a person to take a one hour tutorial to understand how to map their requirements to new software takes 30 to 200 Euro. Per person. And 30 Euro is for cheapskate exploitative employers.

If even paid devs at major companies have problems, consider what that means for existing tools by hobbyists.

Wayland forces people to change the implementation in mature software, and then Wayland fans blame the mature software that the new implementation isn't as solid as the one that Wayland broke.

Some of those fans are getting outright ugly, and don't even seem to realize it:

> "I'm not going to tell anyone to stop using the thing you support."
> — Brodie in the video "You Control The Future Of Xorg On Linux!!"
> ... also (same video) ...
> "tough shit ... maybe not the distro you want ... maybe not the desktop you want ... go somewhere else."
> — Brodie

Breaking existing systems via an update is always a bad move. Please pledge not to do that. Sign The Software Maintainer's Pledge.

To at least reduce the damage, Wayland could allow package-manager-installed Free Software to capture, because it can be assumed to be trusted. We're crippling Free Software, because proprietary can't be trusted ...

2 Infrastructure is special

This is an answer by Konrad Hinsen that he allowed me to quote here.

> There are a few layers of software between developers of X11 or Wayland and users of desktop (or mobile) computing environments. Most users who depend on X11 are not aware of it, and have probably never heard of X11. That's the nature of infrastructure. Do you know who generates the electricity that comes out of your wall socket? Do you care?
>
> Infrastructure requires its own level of governance, which listens and speaks to both developers and users. We have that governance for electricity, but not for software.
>
> Distros could have taken that role, but they haven't. Their intended audience is still techies. Perhaps systems administrators rather than developers, but certainly not the majority of users of desktop and mobile machines. Which is why Windows and Mac continue to dominate.
>
> FLOSS culture has never cared about the kind of users we have today. It was always about sharing code among techies. About freedom for techies. Which would be fine, if everybody were conscious about it. But if you go around encouraging people to ditch Windows for Linux, without saying that they need to become techies unless they want to suffer one day, that's not fine. But that's what happens.

3 The breakage is real

As was to be expected, in comments many people say "I don't see problems" and "for me it works", as if that had ever proven the absence of problems.

Aside: Yes, there have been recent improvements on Wayland, though not these – you can read up on that in the blog of dudemanguy, an mpv contributor.

At work we recently had "can someone else share, my distro switched to wayland and it doesn't work anymore".

Luckily that wasn't a presentation and others could take over.

My distro switched the default to Wayland about a year ago and I had to switch back, because that doesn't work at all with EXWM. To which I switched, because at some point at work Gnome annoyed me too much.

I had hoped Wayland would be better, but at this point I wish it had been abandoned as sunk cost a decade ago. Wayland is 17 years of time that would have been better spent on improving Xorg incrementally. Even if only half the people had done that.

4 The core of the problem

I think the core problem is that they thought they'd change things and then every program using Xorg would be adapted **by others**. Wayland wasn't less work. It just put the burden on others.

The same mistake Python made with the 2 to 3 transition.

A fact is that in Free Software a third of maintained programs have up to one maintainer.

They work and solve real problems, but they are in "if something breaks, someone provides a patch and a new bugfix version gets released" mode – that's for the ones that aren't maintained via distro-specific patches.

The Wayland developers expect applications to adapt to the new way of doing things. With the assumption that that would be easy.

They initially thought they'd reach the state today after 5 years. The benefits/costs analysis may have been valid for that.

But – as always – the rewrite took a lot longer than expected and the devs didn't actually understand the breadth of the requirements.

KDE and Gnome both tried to chip in for tools using kde libs and gnome libs, but all the independent tools are left out. Independent tools are the ones that used to work for everyone.

And I personally think that the Wayland devs massively underestimated the complexity of mature multimedia programs.

Pulseaudio broke Audacity,[1] now Wayland broke OBS: those infrastructure changes hit mature apps the worst.

5 Damage that's being done

What the Wayland-by-default Linux Distros did is to expose all their users to the Wayland bugs – and Wayland fans now say: if you use a no longer working application, just use a different application, because it's a problem of the application.

I read just that in comments today

But Wayland caused the problem.

And maintenance load like the load Wayland puts on other Free Software developers is a major contributor to FOSS dev burnout.

Such changes create eternal state of breakage that makes it much harder to advocate for switching to fully free systems.

To get back to the start:

> It's really difficult to advocate professional Digital Painting nowadays because of some massive bugs and regressions. Users are lost, it doesn't work, and with "the end of Windows 10", I get daily request about it.
> — David Revoy: Production conditions are tougher than ever

What have we done? I should have warned much earlier.

6 Sustainability needs care

Infrastructure does not get more reliable with the next big rewrite, but by **not** doing the next big rewrite. Volatile Infrastructure is worse than volatile applications and we cannot stand on the shoulders of giants if we constantly break old tools.

So please support Free Software sustainability and sign The Software Maintainer's Pledge. I can't force you, and if I could, it would be wrong,[2] but I can try to convince you.

I hope I did.

---

[1] Audacity by now mostly recovered from the pulseaudio-induced breakage – a decade after that breakage I could finally use it to record with my USB pre-amp again. It took longer to get fixed than the next breakage took to hit.

[2] And to make it clear: Telling a dev that you hate them is always a bad move. You have no claim to their time.