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# UNIX moves from Berkeley to Walnut Creek

What does CDROM.com's acquisition of BSDI mean for Slackware?



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The judgement of Microsoft as an outlaw company has become an instant feeding frenzy for journalists, commentators and analysts, which is more than reason enough for me to leave that topic to others, at least until the dust settles.

There are other things worthy of attention in this world. Swimming in our journalistic petri dish this week is a quietly significant merger, of [Walnut Creek CDROM](#) and [BSDI](#). While [another ZDNet story](#) broke the news of the merger and speculated about possible effects on Microsoft, I suggest that this transaction may also have significant effects across the free software world.

Walnut Creek has, for quite some time, been known as a company that produced high-quality CD-ROMs of freely-distributable software. I still have one of its early collections of the old [CICA](#) archives of Microsoft Windows freeware and shareware. Those were the days before the likes of [ZDNet](#) and [Tucows](#) turned download sites into an art form. For people without good FTP connectivity in 1993, Walnut Creek was one of the better sources of such collections.

It was only natural that Walnut Creek would be attracted to Linux and other free software. Even in the early '90s, before Linux was ready for CD-based distribution, Walnut Creek had a [FreeBSD](#) complete OS on CD. It also shipped collections of GNU software for commercial versions of Unix, and was a very early CD producer of the [Slackware](#) distribution.

Now, Slackware is a Linux distribution that defies definition by current standards. It doesn't have much market share or retail shelf space, but people who use it swear by it, and by my estimation still exist in enough numbers to keep Slackware influential beyond its sales figures. Maybe this is also because Slackware attracts what I'd call the "old fart" contingent: long-time diehards who believe that the only real way to learn Linux is to be dragged, kicking and screaming, through its innards. While it has certainly been moving forward, Slackware has been resistant of common packaging schemes such as [RPM](#) or fancy GUI installations. Their logo, which shows [Tux smoking a pipe](#), likely does little to dispel the old-timer image, though my pipe-smoking, Slackware-using friend Bill Duncan would likely disagree.

Eventually, Walnut Creek became not just a packager of Slackware but its definitive source. Slackware founder and focal point, Patrick Volkerding, is on the Walnut



Creek payroll, and the company provides the only boxed-set Slackware package that I know of (though you can get cheap CD snapshots of the downloadable version from a number of sources).

A similar relationship exists between Walnut Creek and FreeBSD. While FreeBSD isn't quite the one-man production that Slackware is, Walnut Creek is considered the definitive source for FreeBSD, is the publisher of the [Complete FreeBSD Manual](#), and employs FreeBSD team leader Jordan Hubbard.

So far, the balance between Slackware and FreeBSD appears to have played well at Walnut Creek. At the last few trade shows the two have co-existed nicely, splitting floor space in the Walnut Creek booth. Walnut Creek's merger with BSDI may very well cause a shift in this balance, and the combined company could lose interest in non-BSD projects. Volkerding doesn't think this will happen; indeed he sees the merger as good news for Slackware and a chance to broaden its appeal beyond its current base.

"We're all pretty excited about how much faster everything is moving now," Volkerding said. "There's already more paid Slackware staff, and we like and work well with the people at BSDI. I've also known many of the top FreeBSD developers for years, so there's a lot of trust there. Good things are in the works."

So the Linux side of Walnut Creek looks like it will benefit from the merger. But what about the BSD side? Will there be a culture clash between the free software ideals of NetBSD versus the hybrid proprietary approach of BSDI? More on that next week. In the meantime, to get you in the BSD mood, have a look at [this clever little BSD comic strip](#), or [User Friendly's](#) spin on BSD.

Do you think the Walnut Creek/BSDI merger will affect the Linux world? Let us know in the Talkback below or in the [ZDNet Linux Forum](#). Or write to Evan directly at [evan@starnix.com](mailto:evan@starnix.com).



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