

Tanenbaum Outlines His Vision for a Grandma-Proof OS

Computers should have a lifetime failure of zero, just like other electrical appliances such as TVs or stereos, according to operating systems expert Dr. Andrew Tanenbaum, a professor of computer science at Vrije University in Holland.

Speaking at the linux.conf.au last week, Tanenbaum said operating system software would need to be smaller to improve the reliability of today's software. Adding unnecessary features only makes software slower and buggy, he stressed, while noting that RAID arrays and ECC memory as hardware devices are capable of correcting errors on the fly. "So I think we need to go in the direction of self-healing software," explained Tanenbaum. The creator of the MINIX 3 operating system, Tanenbaum said the code in the OS kernel should be limited, and also modular, and he suggested that components such as drives and file systems should be isolated to prevent any problems from spreading. MINIX makes use of many of the features Tanenbaum discussed, and Linux is based on it. "Maybe the direction Linux could go would be [as] the system that is ultra reliable, that works all the time and has not got all the problems that you get in Windows," Tanenbaum noted.

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