

Sony removes PS3 Linux support

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So, even if you haven't heard the [latest news regarding Sony and the PlayStation 3](#) [1] (additional discussion on [Slashdot](#) [2]), it will come as no surprise that they're up to their anti-consumer practices once again. According to a [blog entry](#) [3] on the official Sony web site, they have released a new firmware version (3.21) today (which, coincidentally, is April Fool's Day; however in their post which was written on March 27th they insist that it is not a joke). This new "update" removes the 'Other OS' feature that is present on older PS3s (any model released prior to the 'Slim PS3'). This feature is the one that allows you to run Linux on your console and use it as a computer as well as a game console.

I turned my console on this morning and, sure enough, I cannot sign onto PSN (which means no online games, store, trials, etc.) Clicking through to the upgrade page and its associated legal agreement **makes no mention of the feature removal at all**. Sony is hoping that everyone who uses a PS3 will simply assume it's a routine update that includes new features and will simply install it without thinking, thus permanently crippling their system. I declined the user agreement and refused to install the update; so I can still use Linux but can no longer access any online PSN features.



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Sony cites “security concerns” for removing the feature, but a short analysis of the issue makes it clear that they’re protecting their own interests, rather than the customer’s interests as they imply in their announcement. At issue is the [Geohot exploit](#) [4] (which only allows access to the hypervisor which is a layer above the operating system, it does **not** allow any games to be pirated). Sony believes that allowing continued access to the Linux operating system on the PS3 will allow for piracy of their games. Rather than deal with the issue, they’ve decided to simply remove the Linux feature from everyone’s PS3. As usual, Sony is treating their paying customers as criminals. That approach usually does not result in increased sales, as many customers will first begin stealing their content after they’ve been negatively affected by such moves after paying for legitimate content.

Sony is hoping that nobody will care about this change, as very few people utilize this function of their consoles. I have experimented with Linux installation on the PS3, and while it does have some limitations, there are a lot of possibilities for the system. The PS3 possesses a powerful Cell processor and can be used for many interesting computational tasks. There have been many stories in the news recently regarding various agencies that are using the consoles for just that. (The [U.S. Air Force](#) [5] is a prime example, others are listed [here](#) [6].) Sony even promised that the [feature would not be going away](#) [7].

The problem with this whole affair is that Sony is removing a core feature from a product that customers have already paid for. The feature is clearly advertised, both at the time of purchase and on [Sony’s website itself](#) [8] (They added the part about the feature no longer being available this morning.) Should a company be allowed to remove a core function of a product without compensating paying customers for its loss? I think not.

Sony maintains that you can simply not install the update, and will then be able to retain the ‘Other OS’ feature. This is untrue; however; since if you refuse to update you will no longer be permitted to connect to the PSN (PlayStation Network), which means no online games or access to the PlayStation Store. Some new games will refuse to run at all without first installing the update. Therefore, the update is mandatory, not optional, and you’re forced to lose either the ‘Other OS’ feature or the ability to use the console for its other primary purpose.

It seems that Sony (of [rootkit](#) [9] fame) is now planning to follow in Amazon.com’s footsteps of removing a digital item that the customer has already paid for from their possession. At least Amazon refunded people’s money when they [took back 1984](#) [10] and ultimately made good and apologized and returned the digital book to the customers. I fear Sony will simply continue to ignore their customers and proceed with this and similar changes.

I encourage you to file complaints with the FTC, BBB, and your state’s attorney general’s office regarding this matter if it affects you. I would not be surprised if a class action suit appears; although that would have minimal benefit to consumers.

In the meantime, do not install the firmware update. There may be [other methods](#)

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[around the problem](#) [11] soon.

See the original post [here](#) [12].

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Links:

- [1] <http://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2010/03/sony-steals-feature-from-your-playstation-3>
- [2] <http://games.slashdot.org/story/10/03/29/0227251/Install-Other-OS-Feature-Removed-From-the-PS3>
- [3] <http://blog.us.playstation.com/2010/03/28/ps3-firmware-v3-21-update>
- [4] <http://geohotps3.blogspot.com/2010/02/on-isolated-spus.html>
- [5] http://www.computerworld.com/s/article/345642/Air_Force_Taps_PlayStation_3_f_or_Research
- [6] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PlayStation_3_cluster
- [7] <http://lists.ozlabs.org/pipermail/cbe-oss-dev/2010-February/007202.html>
- [8] <http://www.playstation.com/ps3-openplatform/index.html>
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- [11] <http://geohotps3.blogspot.com/2010/03/dont-update.html>
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