Most computer users simply close the lid of their laptop when they are finished working on it. Doing so puts the computer into standby (also known as sleep or suspend) mode—provided, of course, its power-management utility has been set up appropriately. This only works, however, only if the laptop is plugged into the *mains supply*. Otherwise, its small battery would be drained before the day was out—and any unfinished work lost *for good*.

On your office workstation, you simply press the off-switch briefly, having set its power management to make the machines go straight into standby mode instead of shutting down. No matter what the setting, holding the power button down for more than a few seconds will switch any computer off completely.

Most modern operating systems—whether Windows, Macintosh or Linux—let you also set a computer’s power management so it will switch from standby to hibernation after a number of minutes or hours. Though it takes longer to wake a machine that has been hibernating rather than simply on standby, it is still much quicker than having to boot the machine *from scratch*.

It is also a safety precaution. When a computer hibernates, all the open files are written to the hard-drive, instead of being held temporarily in volatile random-access memory (RAM)—as is the case when in standby mode. If there’s a power failure while a computer is on standby, any unsaved work is completely lost.

The point of using the standby mode—instead of going through the whole *rigmarole* of shutting the computer down and then having to reboot it the next time it is needed—is to make the machine more of an "instant-on" appliance. Nothing is quite so frustrating as having to *twiddle your thumbs* for several minutes while waiting for a computer loaded with numerous services to *start up from cold*—especially when you need to check for urgent e-mail messages or grab an important document while in a hurry to get out of the door.

But there is a price to pay. All operating systems accumulate *junk* during the hours they are in use. The computer’s RAM gets stuffed with temporary files, and few programs fully remove themselves from memory when closed. Also, patches for fixing *glitches* in the computer’s software, along with updates for antivirus programs, that are downloaded automatically tend not to take effect until the machine has been restarted. So, it pays to reboot a computer at least once every couple of days, if only to clean it up.

It would be better, of course, if operating systems took only seconds to load themselves afresh into memory rather than the minutes they take at present. Ten years ago, Hewlett-Packard were selling a palmtop computer with a Windows CE operating system, a seven-inch screen, a two-thirds-size qwerty keyboard, an 802.11 wireless card and a 12-hour battery life that would switch on and be synchronizing files and downloading e-mail all within two or three seconds. Today’s smart phones don’t even come close. Let’s hope that the next generation of netbooks and tablet computers do a better job.

*mains supply presa di rete*

*for good for ever*

*from scratch da zero; da fermo; dall’inizio*

*rigmarole a complicated, petty set of procedures; “putecarella”*

*twiddle your thumbs girare i pollici*

*start up from cold partire a freddo, partire da freddo*

*junk robaccia, spazzatura*

*glitches small bugs; minor defects; minor falts*

1 What normally happens when you close a laptop?

2 How do you do this on an office workstation?

3 How is power management set in most computers?

4 Why is hibernation better than leaving the computer in sleep mode?

5 What is the disadvantage of using the standby mode

6 Why should one reboot a computer?

7 How long did it take the ten year old Hewlett-Packard laptop to turn on?

8 Are smart phones able to do this?

**Part 2**

A glimmer of hope comes from remarks recently made by Mark Shuttleworth in his blog. Mr Shuttleworth, the first African in space and the entrepreneurial force behind the successful Ubuntu flavour of Linux, has a new mission in life: to give long-suffering Windows users a chance to be surfing the web within ten seconds of turning on their computers.

Canonical, the South African entrepreneur’s privately held software company, based in Britain but with offices in Canada, America and Taiwan, has started work on a minimalist version of its Ubuntu operating system for the dual-boot, instant-on market. Others have tried similar things before, *although* with limited success.

One of the first with an instant operating system was Good OS of Los . The attraction of its gOS was the way it worked *seamlessly* with Google Apps—the search company’s free online alternative to Microsoft Office. Another instant-on operating system was Jolicloud, a development from France that likewise used bits of Linux adapted to run on netbooks with tiny screens and limited storage. Then, there is Google’s much *trumpeted* Chrome OS, a minimalist operating system based on the Chrome browser and the Linux kernel, and designed also to run on netbooks *and the like*.

But even Google cannot claim to have the consistency of Canonical. The Ubuntu developer has regularly delivered a major new version of its main product every six months. In the six years the company has been in business, it has made Ubuntu (and its many derivatives) the most popular version of Linux in the world of technology—and done more than any other Linux distributor to force the free operating system out of the workplace and into peoples’ homes.

Ubuntu Light, as it is to be known, is not to be confused with the company’s existing Ubuntu Netbook Remix—a slightly more compact version of its main offering, but optimised for netbooks with small screens, modest processors and limited storage space. In contrast, Ubuntu Light is for situations where you want to *be up and running* in a web browser as quickly as possible to do just a few simple things, and don’t need the full power of the main operating system capable of accessing hundreds of other applications. The slimmed down Linux shell, along with its *nifty* new user-interface called Unity, will reside in a second partition on the hard drives of computers that use Windows as their main operating system.

Mr Shuttleworth is adamant that Ubuntu Light—with its rapid start-up and touch-screen capabilities—is not only for netbooks, tablets and other portable little things. It will work just as well, he insists, on large desktop computers. That may be true. But the Unity interface seems to have been designed largely for the ten-inch format of netbook screens today.

For instance, instead of running across the bottom (or top) of the screen, the docking panel (task bar) has been moved to the left-hand edge—to conserve valuable vertical space so as much of a web page as possible can be viewed without having to scroll down. Meanwhile, because horizontal space is less critical than vertical space on a netbook screen, the icons in the docking panel for the handful of applications used most frequently are larger than normal—to make them easier to locate and switch between. The overall effect is a bit like a Macintosh’s user-interface turned on its side.

However, do not expect to be able to download a general-purpose copy of Ubuntu Light and install it on your own netbook or even desktop. The software is being designed solely for original-equipment manufacturers to *customise* for various computers they sell. Companies such as Dell and Hewlett-Packard are always looking for ways to differentiate their computers from Chinese offerings.

Netbooks or laptops that boot directly into Windows for heavy-duty work, or alternatively into a lightweight version of Ubuntu that gets users onto the internet in a hurry, could have special appeal for computer makers seeking to exploit market niches. The advantage for Linux, not to mention the public in general, is that Ubuntu Light could introduce a generation of Windows users to a free and robust form of computing they would never normally meet. That would no doubt be the reward the philanthropic Mr Shuttleworth would appreciate most of all.

*Although benchè*

*Seamlessly senza interruzioni, dolcemente, in maniera liscia*

*Trumpeted strombazzato*

*and the like e simili*

*be up and running pronto a partire; operativo*

*nifty agile, svelto*

*customize adattare, adattare al cliente*

1 Who is Mark Shuttleworth?

2 What is his aim?

3Who else has tried to do the same?

4 What operating system did they use?

5 What are some of Ubuntu’s achievements in the last couple of years?

6 What is the difference between Ubuntu Netbook Remix and Ubuntu Light?

7 Why can’t you just download a copy of Ubuntu Light and install it on your notebook?