How to Install a GUI on an Ubuntu Server

As a Systems Engineer specialising in Windows environments, you might occasionally encounter situations where you need to work with Linux servers, such as Ubuntu. While Windows Server environments typically come with a graphical user interface (GUI) by default, Ubuntu Server is generally configured to run without a GUI to conserve resources. However, there are scenarios where having a GUI can be beneficial, such as for users who are more comfortable with graphical interfaces or for specific applications that require a GUI.

This article will guide you through the steps to install a GUI on an Ubuntu Server. Although this process is specific to Ubuntu, I will also provide Windows Server equivalents where applicable.

Step-by-Step Guide to Installing a GUI on Ubuntu Server

1. **Update the Package List** First, ensure that your package list is up to date. Open a terminal and execute the following command:

   ```
   sudo apt update
   ```

2. **Install the Desktop Environment** You can choose from several desktop environments, such as GNOME, KDE, or XFCE. For this example, we will install the GNOME desktop environment:

   ```
   sudo apt install ubuntu-desktop
   ```

3. **Install a Display Manager** A display manager is responsible for starting the display server and managing user sessions. LightDM is a popular choice:

   ```
   sudo apt install lightdm
   ```

4. **Configure the Display Manager** During the installation, you will be prompted to choose a default display manager. Select LightDM from the list.

5. **Reboot the Server** Finally, reboot your server to apply the changes:

   ```
   sudo reboot
   ```

After the reboot, your Ubuntu Server should start with a graphical user interface.

Windows Server Equivalent

In Windows Server environments, the GUI is typically installed by default. However, if you are using a version of Windows Server that was installed without a GUI (Server Core), you can add the GUI

features using PowerShell:

1. **Open PowerShell** Open a PowerShell session with administrative privileges.

2. **Install the GUI Features** Execute the following commands to install the GUI features:

   ```
   Install-WindowsFeature Server-Gui-Mgmt-Infra, Server-Gui-
   Shell -Restart
   ```

3. **Reboot the Server** The server will automatically reboot after the installation. If it does not, you can manually reboot it using:

   ```
   Restart-Computer
   ```

After the reboot, your Windows Server Core should have a graphical user interface.

Conclusion

While Ubuntu Server is designed to be lightweight and efficient without a GUI, there are times when a graphical interface is necessary. This guide provides a straightforward method to install a GUI on an Ubuntu Server. For Windows Server environments, the process is even simpler and can be done using PowerShell commands.