

VitAL

Inspiration for the modern business

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Counting the cost of energy consumption

Helping to count the cost of PC energy consumption across your enterprise, NetSupport launches DNA v3.



HOT ON the heels of the article in the May/June issue VitAL, 'Delivering eco-friendly IT', it's nice to be able to report that vendors are starting to provide innovative additions to their solutions designed to give business leaders a helping hand towards delivering on their corporate social responsibility (CSR) strategy.

Now in its 20th year, NetSupport is a leading player in the field of network management software and the latest update to its IT asset management offering, NetSupport DNA, builds on the product's core Inventory technology to incorporate a new 'Energy Monitoring' component, more of which later. While this may be the headline grabbing feature of version 3, there's plenty more to whet the appetite and draw you to the 30-day free trial available on the NetSupport website (see below).

For many organisations IT asset management has become a critical function in recent years. The simple premise being that if you don't know how many desktops you have, where they are located and what hardware and software is installed, it stands to reason that they can't possibly be managed and supported efficiently. For those who still doubt the relevance of this sort of technology, seeing it as an expensive luxury rather than a necessity, you are overlooking one important factor: TCO (total cost of ownership). Companies who focus solely on the initial purchase price of IT assets

are ignoring the fact that this can pale into insignificance when compared to the ongoing support costs.

Managing your assets

Asset management software can pay big dividends, automating the data gathering process and easily identifying areas of wastage and overspend, so how does NetSupport feel DNA3 will give it the edge in this competitive market?

First off the company should be commended for not resting on its laurels. NetSupport's established expertise in the remote PC support arena, thanks to products like NetSupport Manager, meant that when NetSupport DNA was introduced in 2003 it had a head start by being able to provide one of the most comprehensive and detailed hardware and software Inventory components available. But, coming back to the issue of this type of software being seen as an expensive luxury, NetSupport recognised that organisations have differing requirements so it made the product modular, enabling companies to buy only those features that were relevant.

With version 3 NetSupport has identified some key areas where the role of network management has evolved in recent years. Established components such as hardware/software inventory, system & PC alerting, software distribution and Internet and application metering & control still provide the

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product's backbone but these have now been supplemented with some new and highly relevant additions.

New additions

The installation is neatly streamlined, even more so than in past releases, and the resource overheads are more modest than many competing products. So a network manager can run the NetSupport DNA 'Console' on their local Windows machine (including Vista) and still perform other tasks rather than setting aside a dedicated server!

The first clue to version 3's new functionality comes part way through the installation when you choose the program features. In addition to the usual options, Console, Client (the handy Deploy tool is best used to push out the Client program to end-user machines) and the location of the DNA Server, NetSupport have introduced their Internet Gateway technology, a connectivity feature users of NetSupport Manager will be familiar with.

An IT Asset Management tool that only provides half the picture isn't much use to anyone but with today's dispersed networks it's not always easy to gather the required data beyond the local environment. Realising the complexities of the modern enterprise, NetSupport's communication Gateway enables you to manage any number of separate networks over the internet. By installing a dedicated Gateway Server, data can be communicated back to this central area from multiple locations. It's certainly reassuring to know that decisions on upgrades and the roll-out of new technology are being made from a completely informed position!

Gathering the information

The installation complete and we're ready to start collecting the asset information from the remote client machines. The fact that the NetSupport DNA Client program supports the major Linux distributions in addition to Windows platforms makes the product a lot more versatile than some.

As soon as the remote clients have been loaded they start communicating with the server which in turn makes the information available at the DNA Console (which has

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also undergone a complete transformation). Network managers are presented with a totally fresh and more appealing UI. Beyond just the physical appearance and the way on-screen reports are displayed, it now includes the introduction of separate PC and User tree views, making it easier to distinguish between the physical asset and items associated with the user (such as Internet and application usage), as well as a completely new navigation bar and dynamic component "action panels".

The initial, often time consuming, user management tasks such as grouping clients by department, have been simplified by the inclusion of active directory support. You can now configure the PCs and users within the DNA console to mirror their relative position within the AD container structure, with changes to that structure being immediately updated in DNA.

The interface

NetSupport's newly beautified interface is still as intuitive as ever. Access to features simply involves clicking the appropriate component tab and you are immediately presented with the relevant information. On-screen graphs make it easy to interpret the data and by clicking on the different levels in the User tree view, you can drill-down by specific groups, departments or users. DNA also includes a

great query-based reporting tool enabling you to produce your own customised reports.

The Inventory component has traditionally been the mainstay of DNA and comes as standard in each of the different modular packs. Mainstay it may be but it hasn't been ignored in the latest raft of enhancements. The Software Inventory tool now includes an 'installed programs' option which mirrors the 'add/remove programs' structure of your client machines, making it easier to identify and manage license levels.

Green IT

To finish, we return to the new and innovative Energy Monitor component mentioned at the start of this piece. The efficient use of energy delivers two key operational requirements: cost reductions and improved environmental responsibility, the two elements combined being considered "Green IT".

There is much talk about reducing CO2 emissions and in the current economic climate, reducing energy bills is an equally appealing target. Industry analysts show that IT energy costs are often one of the highest on the company's IT budget and one that is most overlooked for efficiency management.

DNA's Energy Monitor component enables you to identify potential areas of energy wastage, primarily because most of us are too lazy to power down our machines when we go home!

By specifying the operational hours of systems across the enterprise, an average and customisable power consumption figure is calculated by DNA which, when combined with the company's own energy rates, allows DNA to work out the overall cost of the identified systems. By providing managers with this high level summary of energy usage you can easily track where 'out of hours' usage is at its highest and decide if this is a result of diligent staff working late or simply systems that have been left switched on overnight.

A lot of work has obviously gone into making DNA3 relevant for the modern enterprise and if you're new to IT asset management or looking to upgrade, this is well worth a look. [U.F.A.L](http://www.netsupportdna.com)

A free 30-day 50-PC trial can be downloaded at: www.netsupportdna.com