

FIRST LOOK



ManageSoft Security Patch Management 7.0

Patch Management is a hot topic these days and in the May issue of *Technology & Business* we looked at patch management packages. Of all the packages that we examined only one was capable of what we would call full patch management. Most packages would only deploy patches or push patches out to client PCs and not actually manage them.

We put ManageSoft's Security Patch Management (SPM) software to the test to see how well it compares against other patch management packages we've looked at before.

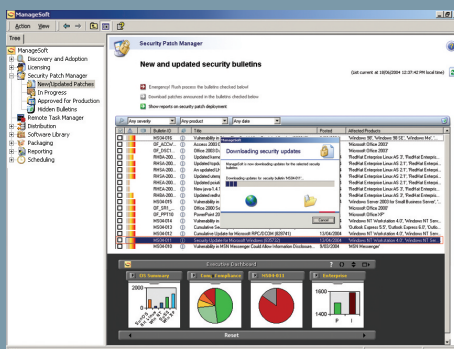
There were two parts to the installation: installing the Central Administration Console and the ManageSoft Security Patch Management and components. The release notes are informative and the prerequisite software utility searches and prompts you for installed components. The main requirements were a Pentium processor or higher, with at least 256MB of RAM running a Windows Server platform, SQL Server 2000 (or you can use MSDE 2000), IIS, .NET Frameworks and a few other odds and ends which are on the CD. The installation was quite painless, all up taking no more than 20 minutes.

ManageSoft says its philosophy is to "put the computational load where the outcomes are needed and where there is computational power available". In practice, this means ManageSoft doesn't need high-specification servers as the processing load is dispersed across its end-user agents. ManageSoft SPM supports a distributed hierarchy that enables those smart agents to access local download locations reducing the network load. These locations can be existing file and print servers or existing file servers from your current infrastructure.

ManageSoft's SPM integrates extremely well with Active Directory (AD), interfacing directly into the Active Directory Group Policy editor. ManageSoft claims this integration doesn't modify the AD schema. This means you don't have to worry about any interoperability issues with AD down the track. ManageSoft SPM also integrates with Microsoft SMS and HP OpenView.

ManageSoft SPM provides patch management for all Windows operating systems across all domain types (AD, NT, Workgroups, and Novell domains). ManageSoft also extend patch management to Unix and Linux-based machines, unlike most of its competitors.

ManageSoft's SPM uses a policy and state-based client-centric approach where it uses group policies to "set and forget" patch management, where an administrator creates a state across an organisation and the software enforces the state via policies.



Price	\$38.50 per seat inc GST
Vendor	ManageSoft
Phone	03 9895 2000
Web	www.managesoft.com.au
Interoperability	Runs on Windows machines, strong support for Active Directory 1/2
Futureproofing	Offers end-to-end patch management; scalable; supports Unix and Linux 1/2
ROI	Well priced; great features and quite easy to manage 1/2
Service	Helpdesk service contract 20 percent of the total managed device cost 1/2
Rating	★★★★1/2

So if a managed client PC doesn't adhere to a particular state, it will bring itself up to the required state automatically. All this happens without the administrator or end user having to do anything. If the first distribution server in its list of servers is not functioning, the client contacts alternative distribution to get to the required state.

ManageSoft's SPM uses a Web interface with two separate windows: the Operational Portal and the Reports Portal. The Operational Portal allows you to access to the ManageSoft console while the Reports Portal allows you to view the software and hardware status of your managed devices, current package rollout data, and the system status.

The overall look and feel of the Web interface was good; but it could be improved by limiting the amount of scrolling you have to do. The Web interface can also be slow loading data in real time.

ManageSoft's SPM is one of the most feature-rich end-to-end patch management products on the market. Not only that but it scales well and is fairly inexpensive. There is currently no cost for the central server console component, but each client costs \$38.50 inc. GST. Volume discounts are available.

Standard support and maintenance includes product updates and access to ManageSoft helpdesk based on 20 percent of the total managed device cost; standard hours are 8x5 with 24x7 available.

—Kire Terzievski

Editor's note: This test was performed by RMIT Labs and commissioned by ManageSoft. We included this review in the magazine because ManageSoft was unable to participate in the original group review; the testing procedures conform to our review standards.