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Windows Administrators Meeting
December 13, 2002
Minutes (taken by Vince Oliver and Steve Kunz)

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Meeting Started (9:05)

Announcements

- Eudora 5.2 is "in house" right now. Mac version is on the ftp.sitelicensed.iastate.edu software server. The Windows version is in internal testing within the MicroNet Group. New in the Windows version is the ability to store mail either in the program folder (as in the past) or in the user's "Documents and Settings" area. The Windows Scoutkit will "do the right thing" and use the existing mail-store location on upgrades and use "Documents and Settings" on new installations (when appropriate for the OS in use).

- A reminder was given to make sure all users use long/complex passwords for both their individual usernames and any administrative accounts (including the "local administrator") password. "Dictionary" and "brute-force" password crackers have been seen in use on the network against ISU systems. If your password is a dictionary word (even if you change the case of some letters) it can be discovered fairly quickly.

- The "DHCP problem" on campus continues to be investigated. Steve Schallehn (Telecommunications) and Paul Lustgraaf (AIT) continue to trace DHCP traffic at both endpoints trying to solve the problem of "lost responses". This problem seems especially bad in Macintosh systems. For Windows, a "release and renew" will recover, for Macintosh either "reboot" or "change to static IP and back to DHCP" (inconvenient) is a workaround. This is the "number one project" for Schallehn and Lustgraaf at the moment. [Additional information since the meeting: Paul Lustgraaf announced late Friday, Dec 13, that "We believe we have fixed the recent DHCP problems" -- SLK]

Web Browser Opinions (Kunz)

Kunz addressed a question raised in the CCSG mailing list about whether or not Mozilla was considered in addition to Netscape 7.0 as the Scout-distributed web browser. It was recently announced that Netscape 7.0 is available in the "Advanced" Scoutkit lists. Mozilla is a smaller installer and not as "commercialized" (tied to AOL features/products, etc.) as Netscape. Netscape 7.0 is actually "Mozilla 1.0" under the covers. Kunz indicated that the MicroNet Group had actually discussed Mozilla in the past, but Netscape 7.0 was the product most recently requested (in general we don't like to switch products in the middle of an academic year, too).

The Macintosh Admins group was asked their preference and that group indicated that they preferred "Mozilla" over Netscape. The Windows Admins at this meeting appeared to respond the same way, but there were concerns of whether Mozilla would work on sites specifically tailored to Netscape products.

Kunz indicated that both Netscape 7.0 and Mozilla installers would be placed in the "Advanced" Scoutkit area. Admins can test both products over the next few weeks to decide if there is any good reason to stay with Netscape. Both products (Netscape and Mozilla) can be installed at the same time. There will be issues with "plug-ins" in that they will probably have to be installed on both browsers separately. Also, Mozilla will not come with AIM (AOL Instant Messenger) in the distribution, so people who want that product will have to get it on their own.

Mike Long (CARD) indicated that it is possible to disable "pop-up" ad windows with a technique we would email to the mailing list. [Mike Long emailed this the WinAdmin mailing list on Friday – Thanks, Mike. SLK]

Exchange 2000 Status (Oliver – ADP)

We are in the process of renaming Exchange Groups to guarantee uniqueness in Active Directory. Next week we will probably "mail-enable" all users in Active Directory for the enterprise domain. For departments wanting to bring up new Exchange 2000 servers, they can probably do this in January.

Windows Update Recommendations (Kunz)

AIT support staff note that a large number of Windows user systems are not having security hotfixes applied. User Services does "infected machine owner consoling" on several systems per week (it generally entails telling the owner they must reformat and reinstall).

A proposal has surfaced internally that we publicly recommend that users configure their systems to apply Windows "Critical Updates" automatically (at night or at some time convenient to the user) as they become available from Microsoft. Since most users will either "apply all patches" or "apply no patches", the "lesser of two evils" seems to be to "apply all patches". Some Windows admins liked the idea, others didn't like the idea. It seems to be most appropriate for systems directly managed by the owner (i.e. they don't have a departmental IT admin assisting in management of their systems). IT admins remain concerned about hotfixes that will roll out automatically in their department and cause havoc overnight.

It appeared that for "individually managed" systems this proposal may be acceptable, but any wording should emphasize that for systems under departmental IT managers, the user should check with their departmental staff FIRST.

Discussion next turned to the "System Update Service", a product provided by Microsoft to provide a "local cache" of Microsoft updates that are released to local clients after an "approval process". Several ideas were discussed (including having all updates from Microsoft always approved without testing, resulting in a "local cache" only concept). In the end the idea liked by most people was that of a local "SUS" server that had updates "approved" (for installed by clients configured to auto-update off it) after a given number of days ("five" was suggested). Departmental admins would have "test systems" configured to point to Microsoft's update servers. When an update appeared at Microsoft's site, admins know they have five days to "test". If no "bad news" is reported by any departmental admins, then the update would be "approved" automatically after five days (with no discussion).

Kunz will see that this "new service proposal" gets discussed within AIT. It would mean a hardware acquisition and staff-time to monitor the updates on a daily basis. More news as it becomes available.

Open Discussion

Jim Wellman (AE EM) requested that a campus solution (possibly a site-licensed software product) be provided for PDF-creation. Possibilities are 1) an Adobe Acrobat site-license 2) Ghost and 3) a special service machine you could "print" documents to. Most people liked the "site license for Adobe Acrobat" solution. Linda Hutchison (AIT) will research the costs.

Meeting Adjourned (about 9:50)

Next meeting is January 10.