

Integrate your task view using IDEAL Administration

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Printer management, file and share management, distribution list modifications, network configuration, software distribution... each of these tasks require a different administrative tool in order to accomplish the goal. While identifying and running the right tool doesn't add a ton of time to a task, the time spent can add up. What if you could pull just about every need you have into a single administrative tool available right at your fingertips? Scott Lowe identifies one such tool — IDEAL Administration — and explains some of its capabilities.

Lately, I've been on a kick to find tools that simply make the day to day a little easier. Last week, I discussed Remote Desktop Manager from Devolutions. Since then, I've looked at some other products and have run across another very cool utility that will save Windows administrators countless hours of time.

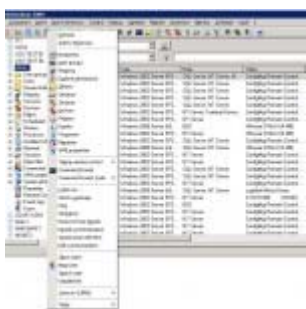
Personally, I like utilities that don't necessarily introduce radically different ways to perform common tasks. Ideally, a utility will simply make it easier for me to perform common tasks in ways that are already familiar to me. This is where IDEAL Administration (IA) 2009 comes in. IA brings dozens of common (and some not so common) administrative functions into a central management console with visibility into all of your domain-joined computers and servers.

These are some of the things IA enables in the centralized management pane:

- Management of both domain and local users and groups
- Service management for services running on managed systems
- Registry management for managed systems
- Viewing event logs
- Remote software deployment
- Migration and consolidation of existing file servers to other servers
- User group and shared folder migration between servers
- Mailbox creation, deletion, and management for Exchange systems
- Ability to record file usage and logon session statistics throughout the network
- Creation of a centrally managed network database that includes files, directories, printers, network configuration, software, patches, and more
- Modification of file and folder permissions
- Management of shared folders

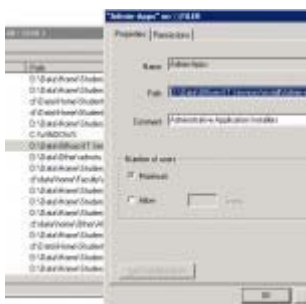
The screenshot below gives you a look at a fresh installation of IA on a Windows Server 2003 box that is a part of a domain. The screenshot is a bit busy, as I wanted to show you the sheer scope of what this tool does. In the left hand part of the screen, you'll see a list of servers in this organization. I've expanded one server so you can see a list of the available options. I've also right-clicked that server so you can see a more complete list of the options available to you. From the shortcut menu, you can open a command prompt, send a message to the system, remove it from the domain, synchronize it with AD, get a list of users connected to the server, and a whole lot

more. Under the shortcut menu, you would see another list of server names. In this window, you get a list of servers, along with information about each server, such as Windows version and service pack, role (i.e., server, SQL, etc.), video type, and CPU information. As you scroll to the right, a lot of other information is also available.



IDEAL Administration capabilities. Click the image to enlarge.

IA provides central administrative capability for a wide variety of administrative functions. Suppose, for example, your tasks for the day include managing a shared folder's location and adding a user to an AD group; both tasks are easily accomplished from within the confines of IA. To manage a shared folder, right-click the name of the server on which the shared folder resides and, from the shortcut menu, choose Shares. In the resulting Shares dialog box, choose the share you'd like to modify, right-click it, and choose Properties. On the Properties page, make the desired changes and click OK. You can also create a new share by choosing Advanced | New from within the Shares window.



Managing a shared folder. Click the image to enlarge.

I mentioned that your other task for the day is to add a user account to an existing AD user group. From within IA, expand your domain node as well as the User Groups node. Right-click the group you'd like to modify and choose Manage. In the resulting window, double-click the object from the NOT Member side of the screen that you'd like to add to the group. This will move the object to the left-hand side of the screen and add it to the selected group. When you're done, click the Modify button. The two screenshots below give you a look at this functionality.



Managing groups - first look. Click the image to enlarge.



Adding users to a group. Click the image to enlarge.

IA also includes a low level Active Directory editor that gives you the ability to manage individual attributes for any Active Directory object. This type of editor in the wrong hands can be a dangerous tool. Using this is akin to individually modifying sectors of a disk rather than using the tools intended to modify files, so use it with caution.

Below, note that the Attribute Information window is open and allowing me to change the name of an Active Directory group. You can tell it's an Active Directory group by virtue of the ObjectClass attribute entry in the Managing Active Directory attributes window in the background.



Managing an Active Directory group. Click the image to enlarge.

IA's Active Directory management capabilities include a lot more than just the low-level editing function that I just described — just about any common AD functionality is included in this centralized tool.

Available for just under US\$600 (399 Euros), IA does much more than I've presented in this overview. The tool is freely available for a 30 day evaluation, which allows you to get a really good look at it before you commit to spending any money.

Not all rosy

No tool is perfect. In my short time using IA, I have run into a few problems, none of which are show stoppers, although one comes close.

In my case, in the navigation pane, when I mouse over the server housing my Exchange 2007 installation, IA simply quits — no warning and no error. Further, there was some minor functionality that simply did not appear to function, although it looked like it should have. However, if the tool performs very well in other ways and can address 95% of my administration needs, I can work around these issues, report them to support, and await an update.

Give your opinion about IA

Any time you can consolidate a bunch of tools into one, you don't need to hunt around for "the right tool for the job" and can focus on the task at hand. Give IA a whirl and see what you think. I look forward to hearing your thoughts on IA in the comments section.

TechRepublic's Servers and Storage newsletter, delivered on Monday and Wednesday, offers tips that will help you manage and optimize your data center. Automatically sign up today!

While I was at the TechRepublic Community Event, Jason Hiner and Rick Vanover talked me into using Twitter. Want to follow me and know when new posts are added to IT Leadership and Servers & Storage? Look for me on Twitter <http://twitter.com/scottdlowe>.



***Scott Lowe** has spent 15 years in the IT world and is currently the Chief Information Officer for Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri. He is also a regular contributor to TechRepublic and has authored one book, *Home Networking: The Missing Manual* (O'Reilly), and coauthored the *Microsoft Exchange Server 2007 Administrator's Companion* (MS Press). Read his full bio and profile.*

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