



Novell Challenges Notes, Exchange

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Today as never before, email is the lifeblood of an enterprise. Phone systems can go down, and executives and junior staffers alike will curse briefly, pull out their mobile phones, and get back to work. But when email goes dark, business grinds to a halt. Even if the mail system's host is still running, unplanned outages due to virus attacks, spam overloads, or other mishaps can be costly.

But one vendor, dismissed years ago as an also-ran, provides an enterprise-class collaboration product that has an enviable security track record.

The vendor is Novell. The product is GroupWise.

GroupWise lacks any entry whatsoever in the CERT/CC (Computer Emergency Response Team/Coordination Centre) vulnerability database. Although not an iron-clad guarantee, this offers businesses a reasonable assurance that a GroupWise system is a lot less likely to be compromised than any other product.

This is a big issue for IT leadership, given that many businesses are on their second or third generation of mail systems. Some of these shops — using older versions of IBM/Lotus Notes or Microsoft's Exchange — are choosing to change mail vendors instead of upgrading. Businesses looking for an alternative to these two are looking at GroupWise and liking what they see.

There's a lot to like in GroupWise 6.5, too.

GroupWise 6.5 is a robust and mature collaboration product with spam filtering that's simple to enable and easily tied to blacklisting sites, improved Web access that can be secured at all stages with SSL, and a number of user interface enhancements. The addition of instant messaging capabilities in Novell GroupWise Messenger 1.0 — which, unlike free IM products, is easily secured using SSL and allows corporations to maintain their own IM archives — puts GroupWise back into the collaboration race on all fronts except one.

The one thing that's still missing from the GroupWise picture is an application development environment, such as the one that put Notes on millions of desktops in the 1990s. Customers of Exchange and Notes take tight integration for granted. Future versions of GroupWise may allow such integration with Novell's exteNd Application Server (Version 5 was just recently shipped), but for now that remains nothing more than a hopeful vision.

Nevertheless, in the real world most endusers simply want email, instant messaging, and the ability to share documents and other resources; what GroupWise does, it



does well. From the end-user perspective, GroupWise 6.5 and GroupWise Messenger 1.0 are easy to set up and start using.

Administrators will appreciate the capability to control and secure user environments from the now-familiar ConsoleOne management tool, although the server-side setup does involve its share of bumps and grinds.

GroupWise is a flexible yet powerful product, so installation is a task of some complexity. Thankfully, the process lacks surprises. Assuming server OSes and Novell's NDS/eDirectory — included with NetWare, required for Windows server installations — are already installed and DNS entries are made in advance, it's possible to bring up a GroupWise system with IM capabilities in a couple of days or less, depending on the hours the installers keep.

As noted above, all management of GroupWise is performed through the ConsoleOne tool, that can be run from a client or directly from the NetWare or Windows server where GroupWise runs.

ConsoleOne features a GroupWise-specific view of resources and allows administrators to delegate GroupWise management to mail system administrators while denying them access to other features managed through NDS, including file-system access and security permissions.

The Messenger-related services are also managed through ConsoleOne and can likewise be delegated without unduly compromising security.

Because sensitive data passes through email and IM these days, securing communications is more important than ever. Enterprises using multiple GroupWise servers can now use SSL encryption between post offices and mail transfer agents, as well as when communicating with both fat clients and users accessing mail through a Web browser.

The Messenger components also offer the option of SSL encryption, and for both GroupWise and Messenger clients, secure LDAP authentication is available as an alternative to logging into NDS.

While application services remain a weak spot for GroupWise, Novell has a lot to brag about when it comes to the built-in security of both GroupWise and GroupWise Messenger. Absent an investment in applications relying on Exchange or Notes, the question for CXOs and IT management is not "Should we be using GroupWise in the future?" but rather, "Why aren't we using GroupWise now?"

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