
Managing a Network with Freeware: Who's the Man?

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Abstract

Managing a Local Area Network (LAN), where students have administrative privileges to both client and server machines, raises some interesting challenges. The risk of 'breaking' the LAN is high, especially where students are required to install and configure networks as a component of their specialist computing and IT courses. A freeware network monitoring application, "The Dude", is used by the school's network technician to assist in managing the network and for locating problems as they arise.

Keywords

The Dude, freeware, network monitoring

Introduction

Interest in using free and open source software is growing worldwide and this includes network monitoring and analysis tools. The Dude is a freeware network monitoring application designed to be run on Windows and is made by the MikroTik Company. It will also run on Linux, using Wine. A main point of difference, in comparison to other network monitoring applications that display device lists, is the creation of a visual map of the network.

This poster explains the reasons behind the Wintec School of IT decision to use this tool, the benefits associated with its use, and illustrates some of its key features.

Content

There are a number of benefits associated with using [The Dude](#). It can monitor any network device or

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protocol that uses SNMP, with the ability to build new probes that allow the user to monitor other areas; e.g. applications. Link speeds between devices can be checked with a quick glance at the map, and alerts can be configured in a variety of ways to alert network administrators to potential faults on the network. The history for each device, including outages, CPU usage, HDD usage, etc. are all stored and can be brought up in list or graph format, as desired.

The Dude has built in tools, such as SNMP walk and telnet, to administer devices and it has a web-based interface that enables remote viewing and configuring of network maps. The application includes full back-up and restore tools, along with the ability to customise any section of the user interface.

Some of the tool's key strengths include the following:

- It's free and is a very small application (3.6 KB)
- A Unique map layout, which allows for quick updates on hardware and network states

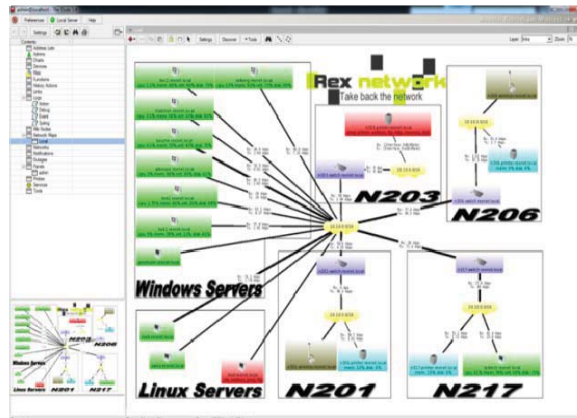


Fig. 1 Screenshot of 'The Dude' monitoring a network

- Comprehensive configuration available for

- setting up monitoring and alerts
- Connection to and administration of devices on the LAN using telnet, Winbox, etc.
- An array of tools that can be used for diagnosis, control, and testing of network components and devices
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Some of the limitations are:

- No native support for Linux or Mac
- Minimal official documentation
- Limited group control from inside The Dude; e.g. it's not possible to reboot multiple computers at once
- No authentication option available when using SMTP for sending emails
- No proper database solution in place for storing device histories (this is currently in development)

Conclusion

In spite of its limitations the fact that The Dude is free and meets our requirements makes it an attractive proposition. While not as easy to set up as some of the mainstream, licensed network monitors, it has many great features and has proven itself to be very reliable. The Dude clearly shows that just because a program is free, it doesn't mean it has to be inferior.

References

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