

Re: Linux clients in network – experiences?

Source: <http://linux.derkeiler.com/Mailing-Lists/Debian/2004-03/3284.html>

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To: debian-user@lists.debian.org, debian-security@lists.debian.org

Hello,

> [debian-security CC:ed since people there certainly have experience in the
> 'Server/network set up' section below. Please don't crosspost when you reply.

Well, what about people subscribed to only one list but interested in both aspects of your message? :-)

The main point I'd think of and that you may have missed would be software installation and maintenance. Don't assume it's something you only do once as you're bound to buy more machines, deal with hardware failures, etc. Centralize your logs, automate everything you can. Ideally your OS install procedure should be like "network boot or pop in floppy; enter install password; check back half an hour later", which should take care of all configuration and customization.

I suggest reading through <http://www.infrastructures.org/> — this would probably have saved me years of accumulated time since I reached a similar situation to yours in 1996, although the initial development effort could have been very hard to accomodate.

If Debian is your only OS, FAI (<http://www.informatik.uni-koeln.de/fai/>) can deal with installation, though you may want to hack it so that most packages are simply copied verbatim (like a bigger basedebs.tar) and then upgraded, instead of apt-get'ing everything, which takes a lot longer. Also, if sensitive information is to be exchanged (e.g. ssh host keys), you'll need a secure channel to the install server (we use a dedicated ssh key, protected by the installation password, to scp a few files).

Standard security updates can be done with cron-apt, and you may either use apt-proxy or set up a Debian mirror. In case you want to use testing rather than stable, some packages will inevitably be broken, so I'd suggest a semi-manual mirror: the Packages.gz lists that apt-get uses on "normal" machines should be updated only when the "test" machine, which "cron-apt"s the regular package list, updates successfully with no broken dependencies.

Debian–User: Re: Linux clients in network – experiences?

This doesn't solve the problem of installing new software / updating the configuration on multiple machines. A shared /usr/local can help for non–packaged software and for part of the configuration (symlinks from /etc for selected files). For the rest, one could use a special .deb whose installation scripts and dependen