Smart tools for sys admins

TRAFFIC SHAPING

This month we check out some new tools and take a closer look at some classic system administration utilities. **BY JOE CASAD**

System administrators have been around as long as we've had computer systems. In the old days, it took several attendants to operate one computer. In today's world, one admin might be responsible for dozens of different computers. How is this possible? Many experts will tell you that smart tools are the difference between getting behind and staying ahead. This month we take a fresh look at some important apps in the system administrator's trick bag, and we also examine some new tools that might not have made it to your network yet.

Our leadoff article looks at FreeNAS, a BSD-based distro that turns your computer into the equivalent of a modern-day Network Area Storage device. You'll learn why a home-built NAS device is an effective alternative to a conventional file server system, and we'll show you how to set up a network storage system with nothing more than a 133MHz, 128MB RAM system.

The next story, which is also featured on this month's cover, looks at the fascinating field of traffic shaping and describes an ingenious tool called Wondershaper that packages the power of traffic shaping in a simple and easy-to-configure form.

Next up, Marcel Gagné shows you around some important tools of the system admin trade, including several members of the Top family, as well as Pstree, Krunner, Gnome System Monitor, and LavaPS. And to close out the set, we study some pitfalls and best practices for using Sudo to change the user security context.

Read on for an in-depth look at some great tools for monitoring and managing your network. ■