

Best School Network Administration Software



At a time when insidious computer viruses can wreak havoc on school network infrastructures, and users of all ages open their eMail in-boxes to a seemingly unending barrage of spam, a new breed of network administration tools and customizable software applications is helping school

technology directors better manage, and secure, their increasingly sophisticated networks.

To help school leaders understand which vendors and products their colleagues have enjoyed the greatest success with, *eSchool News* presents its 2006 Readers' Choice Awards for Best Network Administration Software.

More than 600 readers voted at **eSchool News Online** in April for what they considered to be the best products in each of 15 categories, and the results appear below. In perusing these results, keep in mind that quality is subjective, and what might be the best solution for one school or district might not be appropriate for another. Nevertheless, knowing which solutions your peers consider to be the best could prove useful to your own efforts.

Best Server Operating System

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| 1. Windows Server 2003 (Microsoft Corp.) | 46.0% |
| 2. Netware (Novell Inc.) | 15.4% |
| 3. Windows 2000 (Microsoft Corp.) | 11.6% |
| 4. OS X Server (Apple Computer) | 11.4% |
| 5. Linux (various providers) | 6.8% |

Readers chose Microsoft's Windows Server 2003 as the hands-down favorite for school-based server operating systems. The product, which received 46 percent of the online vote, is intended to improve identity and access management of enterprise-level servers, reduce storage costs, provide a rich web platform, and offer cost-effective software virtualization capabilities at an affordable price, according to Microsoft. When asked why they chose Windows Server 2003 over the competition, one reader wrote, "It's stable, popular with area schools, and easy to administrate remotely."

Novell's Netware was the runner-up pick, followed by Windows 2000 and Apple Computer's OS X Server. "Security is what makes [OS X] an extremely viable option for schools," wrote one respondent in favor of Apple's solution. The open-source Linux platform received just 6.8 percent of the vote—perhaps an indication that most readers are still not as familiar with open-source solutions. "Linux is a solid platform, virtually bulletproof from students," wrote one open-source advocate, who added, "Of course, the biggest reason [for choosing Linux] is the cost."

Best Network Asset Management Software

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| 1. ZENworks Asset Management (Novell Inc.) | 26.4% |
| 2. NetSupport DNA (NetSupport Inc.) | 14.8% |
| 3. NetOp Remote Control (CrossTec Corp.) | 10.6% |
| 4. LANDesk Management Suite (LANDesk Software) | 8.4% |
| 5. Altiris Connector (Altiris Inc.) | 7.1% |

The award for Best Network Asset Management solution goes to Novell's ZENworks Asset Management product for its ability to support large-scale technology inventories and enable IT technicians to manage multiple software licenses across school campuses. One survey respondent praised ZENworks for its "compatibility and cost." "We have been using ZENworks for years, and [it] seems to do the job for our district," wrote another long-time education customer.

NetSupport DNA from Georgia-based NetSupport Inc. also received strong support from readers in this year's survey. Calling the product "unbelievably easy to install," one technology director wrote, "We installed it during our recess and had management information available by the time lessons started." Rounding out the top five were CrossTec's NetOp Remote Control, which one respondent called "fast, scalable, and reliable," LANDesk Management Suite from LANDesk Software, and Altiris Connector from Altiris Inc.

Other products receiving support included PC Manifest from Fortres Grand Corp., Apple Remote Desktop, and Microsoft's Systems Management Server (SMS).

Best Remote Client Access and Control Software

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| 1. Windows Terminal Services (Microsoft Corp.) | 18.9% |
| 2. ZENworks Asset Management (Novell Inc.) | 17.0% |
| 3. Apple Remote Desktop (Apple Computer) | 10.5% |
| 4. NetSupport Manager (NetSupport Inc.) | 9.7% |
| 5. Systems Management Server (Microsoft Corp.) | 8.4% |

In the Best Remote Client Access and Control Software category, Microsoft's Windows Terminal Services edged out Novell's ZENworks Asset Management tool by a slim margin. Often used in thin-client environments, these applications provide a means for IT administrators and end-users to access saved information from remote clients, or desktops. One reader said his school chose Windows Terminal Services for two reasons: it was "the simplest to set up" and "the most cost effective."

Readers praised ZENworks Asset Management for its accessibility and transparency. "A plus to [ZENworks] is that the user can watch and can be shown a process remotely," one respondent wrote. Another said, "ZENworks offers the ability to view as well as participate in the actual user experience," whereas "Terminal Services only lets you log in as a client."

Other standouts in this category included Apple Remote Desktop, NetSupport Manager from NetSupport Inc., and Microsoft's SMS. Additional products receiving support included Altiris Client Management Suite, NetOp Remote Control, and Virtual Network Computing from Bell Laboratories.

Best Automatic Software Distribution Tool

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| 1. ZENworks for Desktops (Novell Inc.) | 23.1% |
| 1. (tie) Ghost Enterprise Edition (Symantec Corp.) | 23.1% |
| 3. Windows Software Update Services (Microsoft Corp.) | 15.4% |
| 4. NetSupport DNA (NetSupport Inc.) | 8.5% |
| 5. Systems Management Server (Microsoft Corp.) | 8.4% |

Faced with the daunting task of installing individual software applications on hundreds and sometimes even thousands of desktops, district technology directors have become increasingly reliant on tools that enable their technicians to beam multiple titles to networked machines from a single, centralized location. Among the best of these so-called Software Distribution Tools, according to *eSchool News* readers, are Novell's ZENworks for Desktops and Symantec Corp.'s Ghost Enterprise Edition, which tied for the top spot in our survey.

Both were praised for their affordable price and overall network compatibility. Wrote one respondent about ZENworks: "It boots to an easy-to-use menu and is very user-friendly." Another technology director who prefers the Symantec tool wrote, "Ghost has been around for a while, is reliable, and has a number of functions which can be important when installing on two different types of machines, or doing new setups."

The rest of the products in the top five include two Microsoft offerings—Windows Software Update Services and Systems Management Server—as well as NetSupport DNA, which one reader said was "by far the easiest [software distribution tool] to get up and running." Other notable responses included Altiris Deployment Server, LANDesk Management Suite, and Mac Administrator from Hi Resolution Systems.

Best Bandwidth Allocation and Management Software

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| 1. Total Traffic Control (Lightspeed Systems) | 33.6% |
| 2. PolicyXpert (Hewlett-Packard Co.) | 15.9% |
| 3. Packet Shaper (Packeteer Inc.) | 14.1% |
| 4. PacketSure (Palisade Systems) | 8.7% |
| 5. FortiGate (Fortinet Inc.) | 4.7% |

The runaway favorite for Best Bandwidth Allocation and Management Software was Total Traffic Control from Lightspeed Systems. In a category where products were judged on their ability to detect and resolve problems contributing to slower network speeds, one survey respondent lauded Total Traffic Control as "a great product." Another wrote, "It does so much, does it so well with little or no overhead, and is very easy to manage." "Use it—love it—will keep it for a long time," wrote a third advocate.

Rounding out the top five were HP's PolicyXpert, Packet Shaper from Packeteer Inc. (which one reader called "a great product at a great price point"), PacketSure from Palisade Systems, and FortiGate from Fortinet Inc. "We have always been pleased with Palisade hardware/software," wrote one reader in favor of PacketSure. DerbyTech Inc.'s CIPAFILTER also received considerable support.

Best Help Desk Software

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| 1. ZENworks for Desktops (Novell Inc.) | 21.7% |
| 2. NetSupport DNA (NetSupport Inc.) | 14.7% |
| 3. Track-It! Help Desk (Numara Software) | 13.4% |
| 4. NetOp Remote Control (CrossTec Corp.) | 8.6% |
| 5. HEAT (FrontRange Solutions) | 4.5% |

In school systems—where IT technicians often must provide support for users with a wide range of technology expertise—the integration of effective help-desk software often plays a critical role in solving network-related problems and helping busy IT staff better manage their time. Among the top picks in this year's survey for Best Help Desk Software were Novell's ZENworks for Desktops, NetSupportDNA from NetSupport Inc., and Track-It! Help Desk from Numara Software. One survey respondent called the NetSupport offering "simple to use and easy to get running." Another reader praised Track-It! for its ability to "bill time against a particular desktop."

Rounding out the top five in this category were CrossTec's NetOp Remote Control and HEAT, courtesy of FrontRange Solutions. Additional products garnering attention were SchoolDude's ITDirect, MyTechDesk.org, and Web+Center from Internet Software Sciences. One reader called Web+Center "the best totally web-based product with the lowest cost."

Best Desktop Security Software for Macs

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| 1. Deep Freeze (Faronics Inc.) | 31.3% |
| 2. FoolProof Security (SmartStuff Software) | 9.8% |
| 3. NetOp Security Suite (CrossTec Corp.) | 8.9% |
| 4. MacPrefect (Hi Resolution Systems) | 8.1% |
| 5. On Guard (Power On Software) | 6.1% |

To create safer and more productive computing environments for students, an increasing number of schools are investing in software that enables IT administrators to "lock down" desktops or laptops, thus shielding expensive machines from unwanted attacks or software installations. In the vote for Best Desktop Security Software for Macs, readers chose Deep Freeze from Faronics Inc. as their hands-down favorite. One reader praised the product for its "centralization" and "continuous updates," calling it "very solid in keeping desktops secure." Wrote another satisfied user: "Help-desk calls have decreased significantly as a result of this application." A third advocate called the product both "cheap" and "highly effective."

Other Mac products receiving votes included SmartStuff Software's FoolProof Security, which was praised by one respondent as "easy to install and use," CrossTec's NetOp Security Suite, MacPrefect from Hi Resolution Systems, and On Guard from Power On Software. "I like its performance," wrote one respondent of On Guard.

Best Internet Filtering System

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| 1. Total Traffic Control (Lightspeed Systems) | 25.1% |
| 2. SurfControl Web Filter (SurfControl Inc.) | 10.6% |
| 3. Bess (Secure Computing Corp.) | 9.2% |
| 4. WebSense Enterprise (WebSense Inc.) | 8.9% |
| 5. CIPAFilter (DerbyTech Inc.) | 5.0% |

In the era of the Children's Internet Protection Act, which requires K-12 schools to purchase some form of internet filter as a prerequisite to federal funding, demand for effective filtering solutions built specifically for use in education has never been higher. This year, readers tapped LightSpeed Systems' multi-faceted Total Traffic Control product as the best in a broad category of products that includes offerings from such industry leaders as SurfControl, Secure Computing Corp., and WebSense Inc., among others. One survey respondent called Total Traffic Control "easy to use and install, flexible, and secure."

Finishing behind Lightspeed's product were SurfControl Web Filter, Secure Computing's Bess, and WebSense Enterprise. "WebSense is expensive, but it is a very powerful tool," wrote one respondent, who added, "We rarely get complaints about things that should be blocked or requests to unblock sites." DerbyTech's CIPAFilter also received praise from readers. Said one reader who voted for CIPAFilter: "You don't have to go through 500 categories to block things—it just works." Other products receiving support included CrossTec's NetOp Net Filter, 8e6 Technologies' R3000, Palisade Systems' PacketSure, and St. Bernard Software's iPrism.

Best eMail Filtering System

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| 1. Barracuda Spam Firewall (Barracuda Networks) | 17.2% |
| 2. Total Traffic Control (Lightspeed Systems) | 15.4% |
| 3. ScanMail (TrendMicro) | 11.5% |
| 4. SurfControl eMail Filter (SurfControl Inc.) | 11.1% |
| 5. CIPAFilter (DerbyTech Inc.) | 8.6% |

To keep their employees' and students' eMail in-boxes free from the clutter of unwanted and often offensive spam, school leaders are investing more heavily than ever before in eMail filtering tools designed to help sort, flag, and reject unwanted solicitations before they reach recipients. In one of the closest contests in this year's survey, Barracuda Spam Firewall from Barracuda Networks narrowly beat out Total Traffic Control from LightSpeed Systems to win the title of Best eMail Filtering System. One respondent called Barracuda simply the "best value for [our] dollar." Total Traffic Control, also praised for its "affordable price," won over one customer for including home licenses for school staff members.

The other top five finishers were ScanMail from TrendMicro, SurfControl eMail Filter from Surf Control Inc., and CIPAFilter from DerbyTech Inc. "Since implementing the CIPAFilter, about 80 percent of the messages we receive were rejected as spam," wrote one IT technician whose schools use DerbyTech's product. "We've had no reports at all about anything being blocked erroneously." Other notable responses included eSafe Mail from Aladdin Knowledge Systems, 8e6 Technologies' ES2000, GWAVA (an eMail filtering tool for Novell networks), and SpamAssassin.

Best Virus Protection Software

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| 1. Symantec Antivirus Enterprise Edition (Symantec Corp.) | 35.9% |
| 2. McAfee VirusScan (Network Associates) | 20.6% |
| 3. eTrust Antivirus (Computer Associates) | 7.0% |
| 4. F-Prot (F-Secure Corp.) | 4.8% |
| 5. Sophos Enterprise Edition (Sophos PLC) | 4.4% |

As hackers continue to launch new and ever more dangerous attacks on networks, school network administrators are constantly looking for solutions to guard against the next potentially crippling assault. In the category of Best Virus Protection Software, Symantec's Antivirus Enterprise Edition took home top honors in this year's survey.

Also generating considerable support were McAfee VirusScan from Network Associates, which one reader complimented for its "familiarity and ease of use"; eTrust Antivirus from Computer Associates, which one reader called a "great product at a great price"; F-Prot from F-Secure Corp.; and Sophos Enterprise Edition. After choosing the Sophos product solely for its "competitive price," one reader said school administrators were pleasantly surprised to learn that the deal "included licenses for home installation for staff members." Other notable responses included TrendMicro Control Manager, Faronics' Deep Freeze, Grisoft AVG, and Panda Software's Panda Antivirus.

Best Software Vulnerability Protection System

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| 1. Windows Defender (Microsoft Corp.) | 24.2% |
| 2. McAfee Internet Security (Network Associates) | 17.3% |
| 3. Cisco Security Agent (Cisco Systems) | 14.2% |
| 4. Webroot SpySweeper (Webroot Software) | 8.5% |
| 5. Enterprise Security Manager (Symantec Corp.) | 5.8% |

In keeping machines free from unwanted adware, spyware, and other potentially malicious tracking programs, school IT administrators say there is no substitute for a good vulnerability protection program. The award for Best Software Vulnerability Protection System goes to Microsoft's Windows Defender, followed by McAfee Internet Security from Network Associates; Cisco Security Agent from Cisco Systems, which one respondent said "just works"; SpySweeper, a popular product from Webroot Software; and Symantec's Enterprise Security Manager. "We use this product because the definitions are always up-to-date," wrote one survey respondent of SpySweeper.

Where schools can't afford to pay for advanced vulnerability protection, some administrators have taken to using software available for downloading free of charge from the internet. Among these products is a program called Spybot: Search and Destroy. "It's free and does a good job, given the price," wrote one respondent. Other solutions receiving votes included Total Traffic Control, Fortres 101, and CrossTec's Activeworx Security Center.