

## ComputerWeekly – Simplified systems management for SMEs

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How do you take the complexity out of systems management, to make it easy enough for small and medium size enterprises (SMEs) to use?

There are lower-end products around such as Ipswitch WhatsUp Gold, those that scale through the mid-market such as NTRGlobal and NetIQ, and there are even freeware systems such as Spiceworks.

Microsoft can play pretty well with its Microsoft Management Console (MMC) system - admittedly more within its own purview, although it does provide a little bit of support for non-Microsoft environments with available extensions.

For those wanting a pure software approach, there would seem to be a reasonably broad set of different offers.

However, many mid-market companies struggle to find, install and manage suitable systems management software, perceiving the whole process as being too complex for them, and relying more on discrete, disparate point systems or just trying to be highly responsive to issues as and when they arise.

KACE appliance

KACE, a relatively new entrant in to Europe, has decided to take a different approach through the use of an appliance to provide as much within the systems management area as it possibly can in one easy-to-use box.

Available as either a physical appliance built around a white-label Linux-based system or as a virtual appliance currently based on VMware, the KACE system is positioned as a plug in and run system.

Just a couple of settings need putting in place, and then the IT person responsible can just access everything through a web browser.

Discovery and inventory, asset management, operating system (OS) imaging and migration, software distribution, configuration management, patch management, and reporting and alerts are all there in the one box.

Alongside this comes integrated security with remediation, as well as a basic help desk capability, including remote control and recovery capabilities.

The box manages automated upgrades to itself - KACE pushes through the upgrades but they are held in check until someone tells it that it is OK to install.

OS, Basic Input/Output System, application and other upgrades are all collated and managed by KACE, and a policy engine enables a reasonable level of granularity to be applied as to how these are pushed out to devices under management.

A level of intelligence is used to cut down on network traffic - for example, if there are 20 machines in a branch office, only one set of updates is pushed across to a machine which then acts as a "slave" to feed the other machines, so the Wide Area Network gets hit by only one set of updates.

The database that KACE creates is not a "standard" configuration management database, and its help desk is not ITIL 3 compliant.

But, at the mid-market level, this will be a problem only if you are planning on becoming a far larger organisation in a short period of time. The entry level price includes the first 100 devices under control, and then new packs of licences can be bought for 50 devices at a time.

An additional add-on gives control over iPhones, something that Apple has decided organisations do not really need, as the iPhone is obviously just a consumer device. It is surprising that you see so many in business meetings, then.

Blackberries are on the roadmap - at the moment, it is felt that the Blackberry Enterprise Server provides sufficient control capabilities for most organisations. However, the current lack of support for Windows Mobile (again, on the roadmap) does seem a little strange.

KACE is pretty new in Europe, and we all know that times are tough, which could make generating sales a lot more difficult than it would have been a year ago.

But, there are opportunities, and with so many European companies being in the mid-market, it is likely to be here where sales can be made.

There is competition around for KACE, but no real 500-pound gorillas.

It is likely the larger suppliers will try to muscle into the market - but they have tried before, and struggled with offerings that can be perceived to be trying to do too much for the needs of the target market.

KACE's solution looks good - but to make the most of it, it will need to provide compelling value propositions to the target audiences outside of a standard technical or pure cost saving play. Yes, the KACE solution makes things very easy and does save costs, but it also frees up valuable resource for what is really required - investing effort in the business processes, rather than running around dealing with low-level issues: and it does this fast, with very little time or effort needed for installation and maintenance. In a market that looks like struggling for some time, enabling such investment could be what creates the difference between survival and failure: surely something that is a compelling value proposition.

## About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation’s environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca’s mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca’s clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca’s work and the services it offers can be found at  
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