SolarWinds Makes Waves in Network Management

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SolarWinds, a successful network management tools provider that few have heard of, will stop flying under the radar May 21 at Interop when it launches the latest release of its Engineer's Toolset and announces the acquisition of Neon Software.

The 9-year-old company, whose flagship network management software has an installed base of about 40,000 copies despite its not having done any marketing, upgraded its set of network management utilities with new NetFlow analysis and support for SNMP V3 and Microsoft's Windows Vista.

"We build products by engineers, for engineers, and sell over the Web at low price points. We have a strong brand name amongst network engineers without the fanfare because of word of mouth," said Kenny Van Zant, chief product strategist for SolarWinds Network Management Solutions, in Austin, Texas.

"I ran into them about five years ago. At the time I needed a little extra help to maintain the different network nodes I had. Their tool set had a unique mix of Cisco-specific and generic tools, and it fit the bill," said longtime user Scott Andrews, senior network engineer at Network Engineering and Support Group in Lakewood, Wash.

The Engineer's Toolset gathers availability and performance data about the network using several mechanisms, including ICMP, SNMP, DNS (Domain Name System) and Syslog. The diagnostic data it collects is

automatically stored in a database for additional analysis.

Van Zant described it as a "Swiss Army Knife for the network engineer. It has 48 different utilities that do network discovery, diagnostics, monitoring, configuration management—everything you want to do in real time as a network manager," he said.

The tool set is typically used with other monitoring systems such as Hewlett-Packard's OpenView Network Node Manager. "Once you spot a problem you use the toolset to debug it in real time," Van Zant said.

The new NetFlow support allows the Engineer's Toolset to gather captured traffic flow statistics, including bandwidth usage and consumption by protocol, application and individual user.

"Maybe a router interface is congested, so you can jump in and with a couple of clicks see what's going on in that interface. There's no need for an expensive server to do that data collection," Van Zant said.

"I do lot of SNMP monitoring, but it misses the granularity you get with NetFlow information," said Andrews, who described SolarWinds' implementation as "pretty good." He is beta testing the new release.

Andrews, who said he uses the Toolset at least every other day if not more often, was pleased to see the SNMP V3 support and described the latest version as "a lot more polished now."

Engineer's Toolset 9.0 is available now for $995 plus maintenance.

SolarWinds on May 21 at Interop will also announce that it has acquired privately held Neon Software, which is best known for its LANsurveyor network asset discovery, mapping and topology visualization offering.

"It's about documenting what the network looks like for an accurate topology map of the network. It can say what switch port every device is connected to," Van Zant said.

LANsurveyor 10.0, a new version of the tool, is available from SolarWinds now. It was enhanced to provide real-time updates with continuous scan, support for new discovery mechanisms including SNMP V 2 and V 3 as well as Active Directory, automated Visio diagram generation and spanning tree support. It is priced at $1,995.

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