

NetSupport

Computer Corner Review

Reviewed by Rosemary McDowall and Bill Gillespie

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- Rosemary
McDowall and Bill
Gillespie

Teachers really are a fussy lot. We complain that we have to integrate technology into our teaching programs and that we have far too few resources or time to accomplish the task. On the other hand we complain when the computers we want to use to print out our work, search for a topic on the Internet or write an email don't work properly. Sadly we don't appreciate the person or persons at school who work, often in their own free time, to provide us with this equipment. With this in mind we thought that this issue we would look at a software application that might make things a little easier for that hard working network administrator.

Logical Connections provided us with a copy of NetSupport DNA version 2 so we gave it a run to see how it would work in an educational environment.

NetSupport DNA is a comprehensive desktop management suite offering a range of advanced network tools. While clearly aimed at the business environment, NetSupport DNA contains a number of valuable tools that will aid schools to administrate their network. Tools such as hardware and software inventory, software distribution, remote control functionality and Internet metering will save time and ease network administration.

The hardware inventory module presents information about a specific computer. It provides information such as CPU, BIOS, memory and memory slots. It will even let you know is there are free memory slots that are available for future expansion. The hardware summary can also look at whole departments or labs of computers and provide reports. You can also create summaries of computers by OS, CPU types or memory. It is easy to find all of the old Windows 95 computers that need replacing or which computers only have 128MB of RAM. You can also manually enter peripheral equipment such as printers, scanners, routers or switches and associate them with existing equipment.

The software inventory can report on the number of applications that are installed on the network, be it a specific computer, facility or lab of computers. This makes it easy to monitor the current licence levels and remove any illegal software. You can also view when an application was used, its frequency of use (a good way to determine if you need more licences) or you can restrict applications to periods of time or even to various groups of computers.

We particularly liked the software distribution module. The network manager can decide to distribute either a file, a collection of files or even a complete software package. These can be deployed onto computers without a user's intervention. In an effort to ease congestion and improve the efficiency of distributing packages, NetSupport DNA will allow you to nominate a computer as a "distribution warehouse". The package is then deployed to the "distribution warehouse" and then distributed from there to the local section of the network rather than running directly from the server.

The application packager utility also allows network administrators to record and playback all necessary keystrokes and mouse movements in a script. This means that when an application requires additional installation of programs such as QuickTime or Adobe Reader these can be added without the need for manual intervention by the user.

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