

Teamware Office 5.3 for Linux

GROUP THERAPY

Good communications are an essential aid to efficient teamwork, and this means more than just using the phone and email. Teamware Office may not be as well known as products such as Lotus Notes but it has been around almost as long and has recently been released in a Linux version.

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The fact that the Linux port is new is apparent from the moment you start to install it. The server software is packaged as a binary RPM but is accompanied by a shell script which is used to perform the installation. The script creates a special Teamware administrator user and a directory owned by the user into which the software is installed. Although the option of changing the default user and directory names is offered, the script made a hash of it, resulting in our first non-working installation.

After the server has been installed, it must be configured using a console-mode program which you must supply with the answers to various questions. This type of configuration utility isn't unusual in the UNIX world, but the inappropriate defaults and lack of sufficient guidance in the documenta-

tion led eventually to our second abortive installation. Further attempts to re-run the configuration always resulted in an error. Uninstalling and then reinstalling the software didn't solve the problem either. Finally we uninstalled the server and then manually deleted all the leftover files and directories before reinstalling again: we were then able to set up a server that worked. This aspect of the product could definitely use some improvement.

Hardware requirements

The Teamware server is supported on most major distributions: Caldera Open Linux, Red Hat Linux 6.1 or later, TurboLinux 4.0 or later, or SuSE Linux 6.3 or later. Kernel 2.2.12 and glibc 2.12 are required. We installed it under Linux Mandrake 7.1 and, once the installation difficulties had been overcome, it ran just fine. Teamware recommends a minimum of 64MB of RAM for the server, and 100MB of disk space for the server. A further 120MB of disk space is needed for the web server cache. This is small beer these days, and unlikely to present a problem to most users.

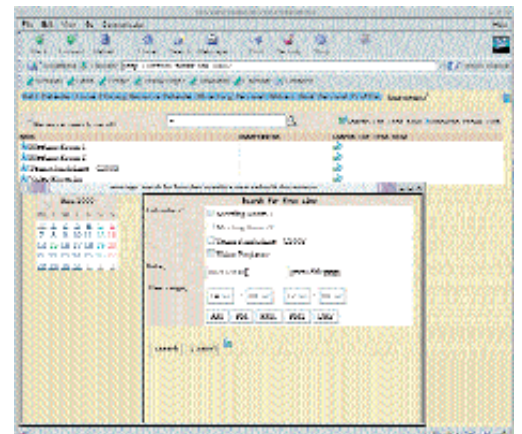
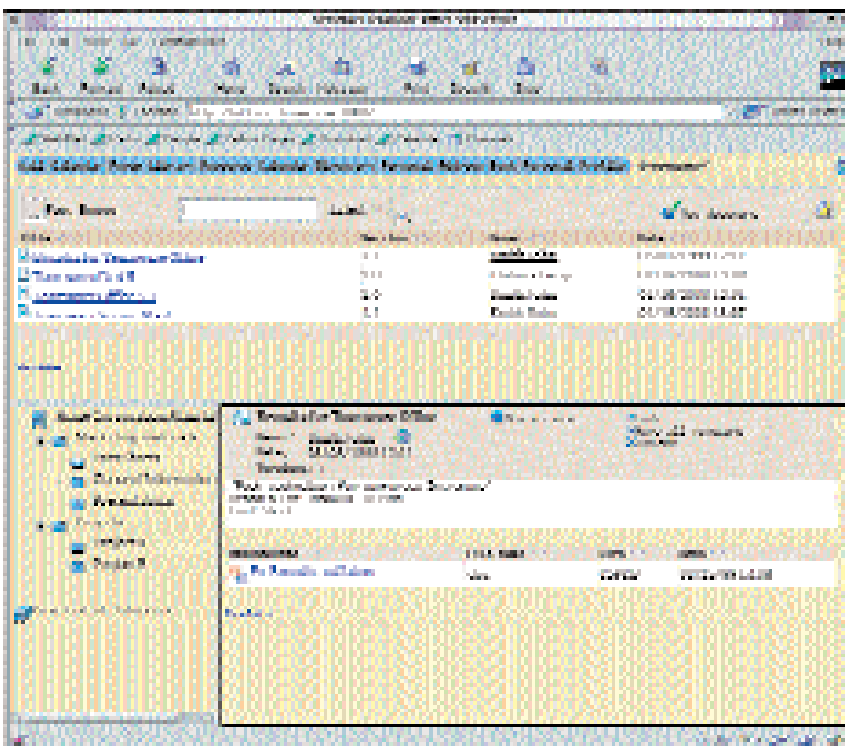
The name of the product may be "Teamware Office for Linux" but this refers to the server.

[left]

Teamware Library can be used to store electronic documents

[right]

Using Resource Calendar you can find out when meeting rooms and projectors are free



Teamware has no native Linux clients. The product is accessed under Linux – as it can be from any platform – using a web browser. Unfortunately, certain administration functions – in particular, the facility for adding new users – are not yet supported using the web browser interface. Although a command line tool that runs on the server can be used to add users in bulk, this isn't very easy to do. The only alternative, however, is to attach a Windows box to your network and use the Windows administration client software. Again, few users in the real world will find this to be a problem.

Before you can add any users you must set up some user templates. These determine what users can do and avoid the need to specify each user's rights individually as you add each one. This is fairly easy to do using the Windows-based administration client. However, quite a lot of work is needed to set up a useful working Teamware Office server, and quite a bit of thought needs to go into your planning before you even start. The lack of any wizards or other setup aids, nor any demo data, means that this isn't a product you can simply sit down, set up some dummy users and play with for the purposes of a trial evaluation. Although you can download the software and try it out using a 30-day evaluation key, you can get a good feel for what it does and how it works without all the installation hassle by accessing Teamware's live demo system on the Internet at <http://office.teamw.com:8080/>.

Teamware's web interface supports even text-only browsers so it can be accessed using Lynx or devices like the Nokia Communicator PDA. The interface is pretty intuitive although it certainly benefits from the ability to display graphics. One thing that the Internet demo shows very well is that the product is very usable over a low-bandwidth dial-up connection, making it ideal for use by companies whose employees travel a lot. Teamware's web server is a secure server so there's no need to worry about data and passwords travelling across the Net. Incidentally, you can't use another web server such as Apache to serve up Teamware Office pages so if you want to install Teamware on an existing web server you'll have to configure it to use a different HTTP port to avoid conflicts.

Services

Teamware Office users have access to a range of services that provide all they need for effective collaborative working. Teamware Mail is an electronic messaging service that can be accessed using standard Internet mail clients via the POP3 or IMAP4 protocols, or using a web browser. The browser interface provides a simple but functional mail client. There's an Inbox, an Outbox and a Wastebasket and you can create your own message folders. Teamware Mail supports Internet standard, X.400 and SMS messaging. It uses its own message routing protocol which can be used to link Teamware



Teamware's web service can be used with a text-mode browser

servers within an organisation, and can transfer mail to and from the Internet either by way of *sendmail* or, if you install the Teamware Connector for MIME module, direct SMTP.

Teamware Mail is linked to Teamware Directory which provides a personal address book for storing email addresses and other details of contacts. Teamware Directory supports LDAP allowing external directories to be searched. From the Directory you can also view another Teamware user's schedule which they have updated using Teamware Calendar, the personal time management module. This module provides all the features you would expect, such as the ability to find periods of unallocated time shared by a group of people in order to schedule meetings. It also includes a resource calendar which allows you to manage the availability of resources such as meeting rooms and overhead projectors.

Teamware Library is a document management system with a search capability that uses fields in each document's profile, and support for version control. You can set up one or more libraries, under which documents are organised in a multi-level tree structure. Last, though by no means least, is Teamware Forum. This is an electronic discussion board to which users can post messages that can be read and responded to by other participants. Forum supports NNTP, allowing selected newsgroups to be made available to Teamware Office users.

Verdict

Teamware Office may lack the bells and whistles of some of its better-known rivals but it has everything you need for effective collaborative working, and the fact that the server runs on Linux must give it the edge when it comes to reliability. It's easy to use through its web browser interface, if somewhat less easy to install and initially configure. If you work in a team and currently use email as your sole form of electronic communication you should find Teamware Office a big improvement. ■ ■

Info

Price: \$1,000 for 100-user server package

Teamware Tel: 01344 472068
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Teamware Office Demo
<http://office.teamw.com/>