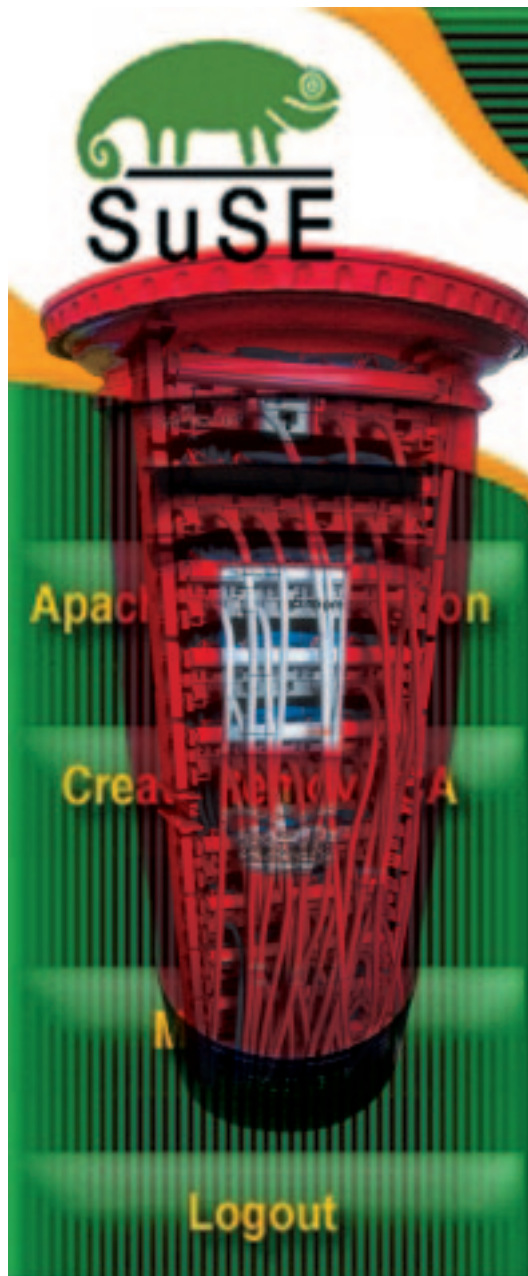EMAIL SERVER

SUSE EMAIL SERVER III

SuSE have recently produced a very glossy and highly desirable range of commercial products which neatly undercut the prices of most other similar products. Richard Ibbotson takes a long hard look at the latest SuSE eMail Server

Why me?

What is it that the SuSE eMail Server has to offer you? Apart from the absolute reliability of Linux software and the present day fact that there are not many viruses that will attack it, there is also the extremely user friendly Web-based interface that you can use to perform all of the many tasks required from a mail server on a daily basis in a busy commercial or academic environment.

The eMail server supports all of the usual Internet standards such as IMAP, LDAP, POP3, TLS and SASL. All common email clients can be administered from the workstation that's connected to the server, which provides a central administration point for a commercial organisation. Dedicated workgroups and all of the things that you might associate with proprietary software are available. Internal and external lists can also be set up and administered.

What SuSE Linux UK Ltd has done is take some free software and written some high quality software to compliment it. The end result is that the user only has to click on a Web page and fill in some easy to understand values for user and group configurations.

SuSE has also populated the boxed product with some excellent manuals. The first part of the installation manual is easy to understand: If you can install a Microsoft product then you can use YasT2 and install the eMail server. Many commercial and even Government organisations that we have spoken to have said that they want this kind of commercial product and they are willing to pay good money for it. Quite a few of them also say that proprietary software is becoming prohibitively expensive due to the cost of licences. They also say that Linux is a viable alternative and they want more of it.

The eMail Server III that was reviewed for this magazine was tested on i386 hardware, which is the kind of hardware you can find in most small companies worldwide. A 450MHz AMD K6-2 CPU and 128Mb of 100MHz RAM was the hardware used

Apache configuration.

User account control

to install the server into the i386 architecture. The installation was over in less than ten minutes and after fifteen minutes an IBM notebook was connected to the networked server so that administration and configuration of the new accounts could begin.

Configuration of a single account took only a few minutes and we noticed that the server and the Web browser that we were using both moved like lightning across the screen. This was also tested across the Internet with an ISDN link and little or no loss of speed was experienced. Most commercial organisations use digital communications and so there should not be a problem with remote administration and configuration.

Reasons to use?

How does it work and what makes it better than some of the others? To be honest it may not be better than some of the others, but there are a lot of people out there who do not want to hack a command line in the middle of a busy schedule or be involved in administering several hundred machines that crash all of the time. Let's face it: we've all had that problem at one time or another with internal or remote computers that need that demon tweak or an account adding/removing on the one day of the year when everything else has gone wrong.

To use the eMail server for the purposes of configuration and administration, all you need is a Java-enabled Web browser on any machine in your own internal network. You can also connect to the same machine with SSH if you prefer command line. The eMail server is basically a cut-down version of the ordinary SuSE distribution and so any secure session that you might wish to establish over an internal network or across an untrusted network is possible with the eMail server. This means that an SSL connection can be made with Samba as well, if you

Configuring Fetchmail from the frontend.

Postfix configuration
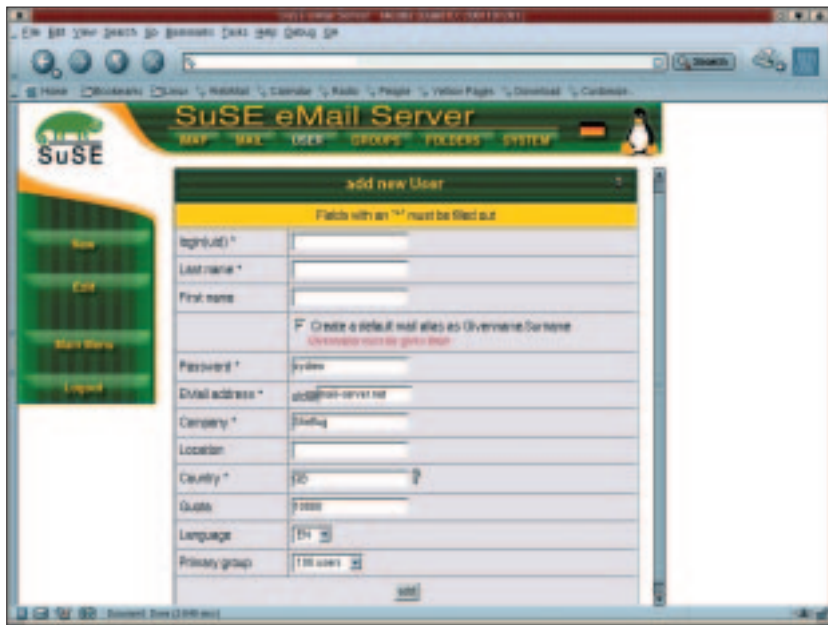
Creating a new user account to receive email

Postfix mail queue

Expert mode Postfix configuration

want to do that. Apache configuration can be done with the addition of a CA.

After the initial login the user or admin person is pointed by the graphical interface towards the first time configuration of a single user or complete group. There is also provision for browser-based configuration of postfix, procmail and fetchmail. If you have hacked these on the command line as much as I have then you'll probably prefer a graphical approach.

The actual Web forms that you are asked to complete vary in complexity and sophistication. If you are confused by first time configuration the manual should help you out and if that doesn't work then support by fax or email is easily obtained. The first part of the manual gives easy to understand graphical instructions on how to install. The later pages (starting at chapter five) explain the simple task of logging in as an administrator and configuration. This part also shows pictures of what you can see on the screen so there shouldn't be any problems. There are also complete descriptions of how to use various mail applications with the eMail server and how to

configure those as well. Finally there is a section on how to use the Arkeia backup software to make a copy of your mail folders so that nothing is lost in the event of a disaster. Arkeia is the software that is included on the installation CD that comes in the box so that you can make your backups.

As well as the installation manual there is also a cut down version of the original SuSE manual. Those of us who know about this will be aware that the SuSE manual is one of the best books about Linux that has been produced. If you don't like paper you will find that you can install the same documents into your own local hard drive for further reading from the CD. If you are short on disk space you can also connect via the Internet to the SuSE site where you will find the same documentation as well as the SuSE support and hardware database. A second CD contains the source code for the eMail server. So, if you are a developer or if you just want to change the way that the eMail server runs on your network you can do that.

What about viruses?

Amavis is included with the CD. There is a very good SuSE security team who are paid to look after you and a security list if you wish to discuss any security issues. You can get the kind of support for virus and other security issues that will make sure that your server will run for a very long time without interruptions and without intruders. If you don't like Amavis you will find email virus scanners out there on the Internet, which are commercial in nature and you will have to pay for them.

If you want a reliable and virus-free mail server then the SuSE eMail server is for you. You can find more info about the eMail server by visiting the useful links.

The author

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