Neuberger and Hughes Easygate Workgroup Server

Semi-easy, Semi-free

Easygate Server provides Internet access for the corporate network and can even replace Exchange given an additional Open Source component called Bill Workgroup.

BY FRED ANDRESEN

The version number has gone up by four tenths since our last lab test and the asking price for the software has actually fallen without comprising the product's ergonomics.

Neuberger & Hughes' [1], Easygate Workgroup Server 4.5 is a combination of the Easygate Internet Access Gateway [2] Software and the Bill Workgroup Data Exchange [3] server. The Easygate component connects corporate networks with up to 200 users onto the Internet via ISDN and/or DSL, and the Bill server acts as an MS Exchange Server for MAPI clients, that add on to Microsoft Outlook's functionality. The bundle does not include an IMAP4 server.

An ISO image of the current version 4.5.74 is publicly available on the manufacturer's site [2]. The hardware requirements are moderate: 64 Mbytes of main memory, an empty (!) 2 Gbyte hard disk, a network interface, and an additional Internet connection – all based on PC architecture. In fact, any computer capable of running Debian 3.0 should suffice, as Debian is the operating system that the Easygate installation will automatically place on your hard disk. Note: The customized Debian Linux version does not support SCSI hard disks.

Speedy Install

The installation requires virtually no user interaction: the computer boots from the CD, tells you that it is booting Linux, prompts you to enter the hard disk for the installation and displays a warning to the effect that it intends to format the disk.

The system is up and running in next to no time. The network and ISDN adapter configuration uses curses and is dialog based. After a few progress messages the system reboots, and Lynx is used to configure the basic network preferences for Easymail.

Easygate comes up with a DHCP server running and should not be attached to production networks that use DHCP without prior attention. After customizing Easygate to reflect your own network settings, you will need to reboot the server.

The character based "Service" menu can be accessed via the console and allows you to check the numerous partitions, */dev/hda1* through */dev/hda13*, manage profiles, and create or restore system backups. Shell access is provided; to quit the shell and return to the menu, simply press [Alt] + [F2]).

The system applies restrictions to the administrators user's privileges; permitting access to only five of the thirteen available drives with the root file system, working and configuration directories for the file server, with the other partitions remaining out of bounds for the admin user.

Web Interface

The administration of a newly created system is not restricted to those with

Easygate Workgroup VPN 4.5

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Manufacturer:	Neuberger & Hughes
Internet:	*http://www.n-h.com*
Pricing:	
Easygate Workgroup	Package incl. 5 MAPI Clients approx. 1,300 Euro
Per additional client:	39 Euro
1 year Basic Support	600 Euro
24/7 Monitoring/Autoupdate	150 Euro
Including Security Check	400 Euro
Alternative without the communication server:	
Bill Workgroup Server incl. 5 MAPI Clients	approx. 500 Euro
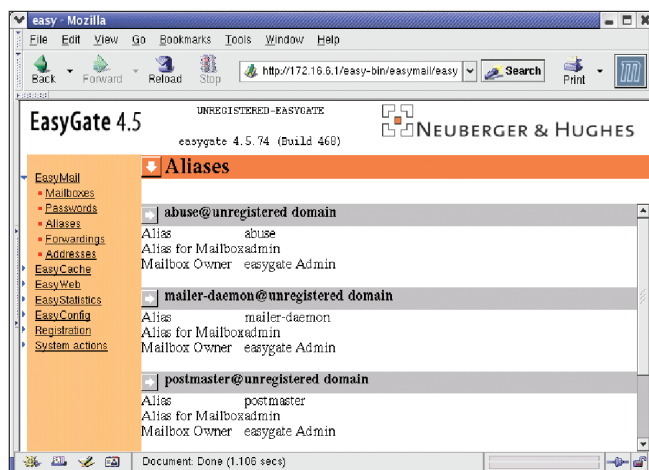
Figure 1: Handling aliases is straightforward with the use of the web interface

physical access to the machine – any further configuration steps can be performed remotely using a Web interface with nested configuration levels.

To prevent the administrator from becoming completely lost, the submenus stay open and visible when preferences are modified. This may not be aesthetically pleasing, but it does at least work.

The main menu comprises the items *EasyMail*, *EasyCache*, *EasyWeb*, *EasyStatistik*, and *EasyConfig*. The registry and basic system preferences are also stored here.

EasyMail provides access to user accounts and aliases, and allows you to co-ordinate forwarding and vacancies, passwords and external mail addresses. *EasyCache* allows you to configure Internet access control and logging for individual clients. Access can be globally allowed or denied, restricted to specific times or to a specific time limit.

EasyWeb controls access to individual websites. The system provides three pages by default: *Intranet*, *Test* and *Publication*; you can add more sites and map them to internal addresses to provide read and write access for all of your clients.

The *EasyStatistik* menu provides access to logfiles for client Internet access and ISDN connections. Things start to get interesting in the *EasyConfig* menu (see Figure 1). The first of the two options available in the menu, *System configuration* and *System diagnosis* takes you down into the depths of the system.

Unfortunately, the whole configuration process is confused by redundant menu

options, with access to Licensing forms and client Internet access logfiles being made available from several points on the menu tree. The EasyCache proxy server is not configured in the *EasyCache*, as you would expect, but in an *EasyConfig* submenu a few levels lower down. The most annoying aspect of the configuration is that you have to reboot the system after every modification. For a workgroup server designed, according to the manufacturer, to serve 200 clients (and one that is running Debian), this kind of behavior is simply unacceptable.

The Bill Open Workgroup sourcecode is free, available under GPL, and can be downloaded from [3] along with an installation guide. However, MAPI services for Outlook clients are only available on commercial license. MAPI clients use a connector and Corba to emulate Outlook commands on the Bill server. The Bill server, which was written in Python, speaks Corba and saves your users' Outlook Groupware objects with very little administrative interaction, saving to time.

Conclusion

The GUI provided by the Easygate administration software is similar to other tools, such as Webmin. The package does make sense for commercial users, as a uniform desktop does save time – or at least it would, if you didn't need to keep rebooting.

The manufacturer also offers 24 by 7 remote monitoring, including security monitoring, if required.   ■

INFO

[1] Neuberger & Hughes: *http://www.n-h.com*

[2] Internet access gateway: *http://download.Easygaten-h.com*

[3] Bill Workgroup Server: *http://www.billworkgroup.org/billworkgroup/home/*