



Samsung SDS Contact

Contact Sport

If you are looking to support thousands of mailboxes, operate multiple sites and at the same time provides redundancy, quick response times and protecting your investment, you tend to turn to tried and trusted manufacturers first. Contact, despite having been renamed, is one of them.

BY STEPHAN KAUFHOLD

In large scale IT environments the decision to invest in a software package is influenced by both the product's maturity and its potential to protect your investment, which depends mainly on its pervasiveness on the current market.

Contact is a promising alternative to Exchange for this target group, and this prompted us to put its 15 years of experience in the data exchange area on test in our lab. It might surprise you to hear that Contact has been around for so long – but of course, it did used to be called HP Openmail.

Due to closer cooperation with the IT giant Microsoft, Hewlett Packard decided to discontinue the development of Openmail and in November 2001 Openmail was taken over by Samsung SDS, who belong to the Korean Samsung concern and are Asia's largest IT Solution Provider, employing a staff of 6700. The Openmail homepage [4] provides more historical detail.

According to Samsung, some 15 million mailboxes run on Contact and Openmail, mainly in large scale companies and banks. Since Samsung SDS took over the reins, they have been looking to recruit more small and mid-range business.

Wizard based Installation

The list of supported platforms includes Linux and – surprise, surprise – HP-UX, IBM AIX, and Sun Solaris. Official Linux support is provided only for Red Hat Version 7.2 or later. SuSE is currently going through certification, and work is in progress at Debian, although Debian users may have to wait a little longer for official SDS support.

Of course, you do not need to certify to evaluate a test version, available on the

Internet, and Contact will run on almost any Linux server. If you do not like surprises or dissecting programs, you might like to keep to the steps described in the documentation and use the Installation Wizards to put Contact through its installation paces. This runs in a graphical mode and seems to do a good job.

Preferences

The installation defines the IP, hostname and domain; other details can be changed later. Sendmail and *apache.conf* are automatically configured by the

Contact 8.0

Manufacturer:	Samsung SDS
Internet:	http://www.samsungcontact.com/
Prices: (Examples)	
Mailboxes/Client Licenses	
50 Users	approx. 3,950 Euro/1,050 Euro
1,000 Users	approx. 66,100 Euro/16,200 Euro
10,000 Users	approx. 452,000 Euro/116,000 Euro
The client license is payable for Webmail and the Java client. IMAP/POP clients or MAPI access via Outlook is free.	
Support: (Examples)	
Mailboxes/Clients Support (8x5)	
50 User	approx. 1,330 Euro/330 Euro
1,000 Users	approx. 18,600 Euro/5,500 Euro
10,000 Users	approx. 139,000 Euro/37,600 Euro

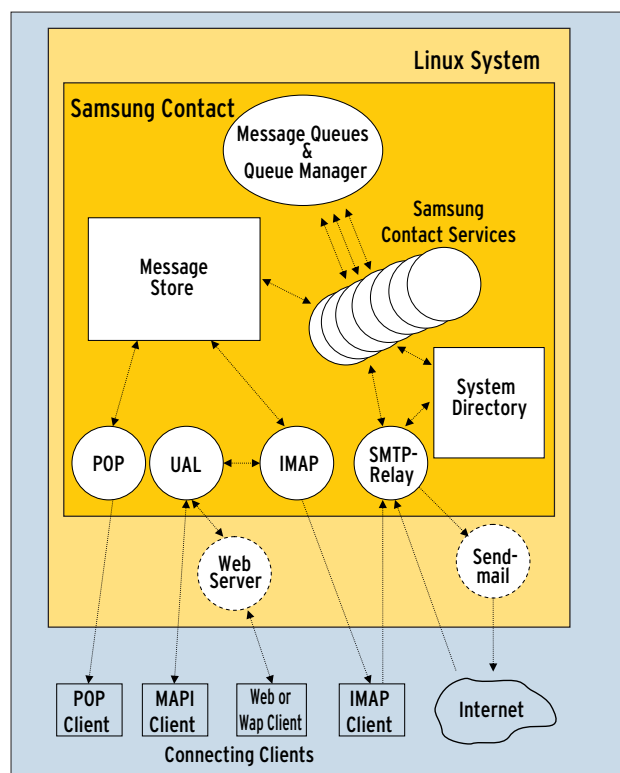


Figure 1: The LDAP based organizational structure give you some idea of the functional scope and scalability of the system

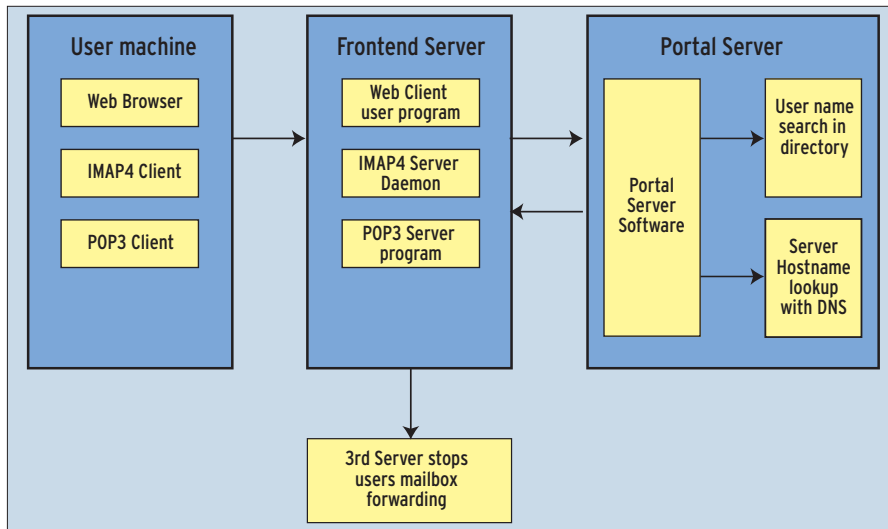


Figure 2: The admin can distribute heavy loads; in this example the admin distributes the load over three Contact servers. This does not provide redundancy

installation routine. Do not make the mistake of blindly trusting the configuration files; take a look at the contents of the `/opt/openmail/examples` directory to double-check.

System integrators should ensure that the hardware reflects the expected volume of data and the number of mailboxes. A Pentium class PC with a clock speed of 500 MHz should be fine for 20 users.

As the server uses a file based repository rather than a database, multiprocessor RAID systems should be capable of reducing the average response time for several thousand mailboxes with a traffic volume of several terabytes to less than a second.

Cluster Systems

Mailbox size is not the real issue when planning and dimensioning a system. Instead you should establish the number of simultaneous requests, and will need

to distinguish between the load caused by programs that mainly work offline and only open a connection to fetch or send mail, such as Netscape and KMail, and programs such as Outlook with its permanent open connections.

Less frequently used systems will be perfectly happy running the server on a single machine. The LDAP based organizational framework and the 28 services and daemons that the kernel server comprises do give you some idea of the functionality, scope and potential scalability of the system (see Figure 1). Almost all of these services can be customized.

Services responsible for heavily used queues can be configured to initiate a response to increasing loads, spawning a maximum of 21 instances per service. Additionally, multiple servers can run simultaneously on a single server, but clustering does not make sense unless the machines can synchronize, or that

one machine uses the data stored on another. Contact is capable of all kinds of combinations.

Examples: The setup in Figure 2 distributes the tasks assigned to a heavily loaded system to three machines. Figure 3 shows two possible network topologies, allowing multiple sites with single servers to synchronize. Figure 4 shows a possible high-availability cluster scenario. No tools are supplied to manage the two servers in this scenario, although third-party management tools are available.

Administration and Backup

Contact comes with an SMTP daemon of its own, although it can be disabled and replaced by an external MTA, such as sendmail, postfix or exim, if required. In fact, this is common practice and helps to optimize mail routing.

Contact uses Fetchmail to retrieve messages from external accounts and forward them to its own mail system. Apache, the tried and trusted http server, is used as to provide Webmail functionality; Contact does not provide a HTTP service of its own. A variety of command-line tools are available for configuration and management tasks. They lend themselves to scripting and can thus be used to automate commonly recurring tasks.

A Web front-end is also available for management tasks. Although its capabilities are restricted, it is useful for performing typical user, directory and mail node management tasks (see Figure 5). You can even customize the browser based tool, although you will need Tcl/Tk skills to do so. Further information is available from [1].

The server provides its own tools for backing up and restoring individual user

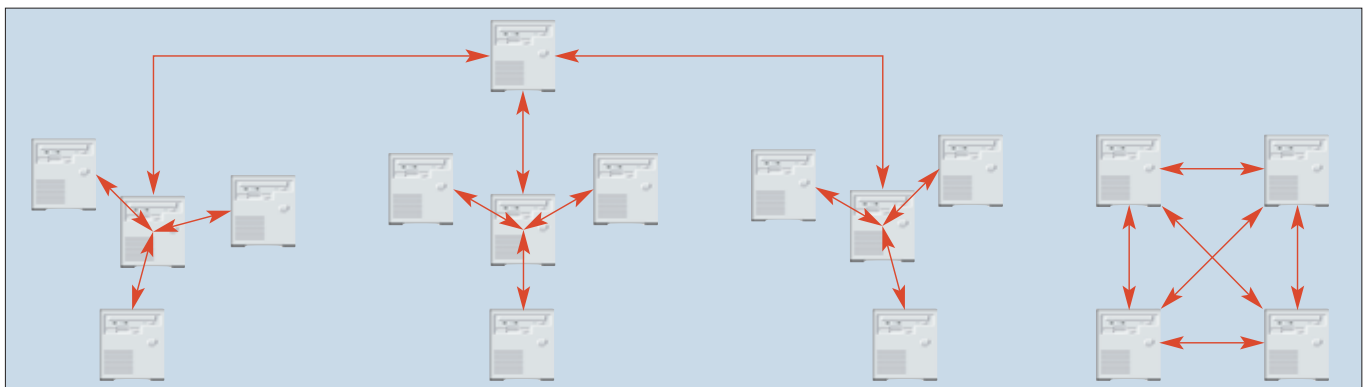


Figure 3: Two possible network topologies that synchronize multiple sites with single Contact servers

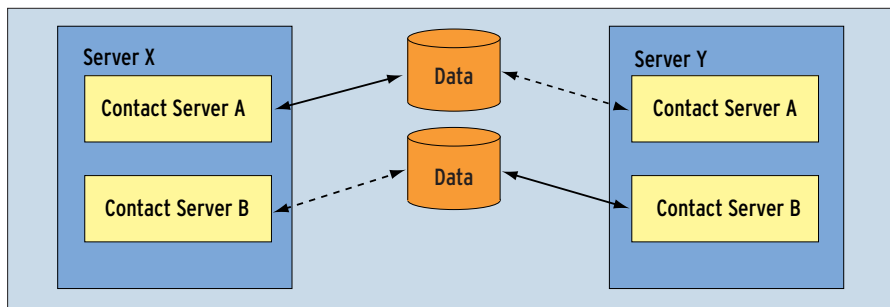


Figure 4: Possible high availability cluster where two servers access a single data repository

mailboxes. You can even backup a running system; this merely entails stopping client access for the duration of the backup.

Third Party Software & APIs

Third party support is excellent due to the global pervasiveness of the predecessor to Contact. Yomi [2] provide an example in the Unified Communication area. HP offer MC/Serviceguard [3] for managing high availability cluster systems. As the SMTP server is open, you can use any anti-virus software that runs on Linux.

We were particularly impressed by the fact that the package includes an Application Link Server that allows applications to use Contact to exchange data. The daemon comes with a proxy server that provides connectivity to platforms that Contact does not support. A well documented C interface is available for a number of programs to round off the usefulness of this service.

Non-Outlook Clients

Samsung Contact supports a full range of IP based clients, provided they can speak SMTP, POP3, IMAP4, IMAP4rev1, HTTP, HTTPS, WAP or LDAP. They even provide a Client package of its own, including a Web client that dates back to the days of Openmail.

Where version 5.10 is a somewhat Spartan, some would say uncluttered, Webmailer, while Version 6.0 is a highly non-

intuitive designer tool. Diary and calendar support is sadly missing from both.

This is why we recommend a third Web client, developed by Samsung, that includes functions for appointment management, calendar, info boards and business cards. The user interface, that looks like a mixture of Outlook and KOrganizer, makes the Web front-end a really useful application. PC desktops using the Web front-end should be able to do without other client programs.

Samsung also supply a Java client with similar look and feel as part of the client package. Of course, the Java client runs on both Windows and Linux desktops. Contact also has a PDA and WAP interface that provides email access for these device types.

The Licensing Model: Fairly Straightforward

Samsung Contact is a commercial product. In contrast to its competitor Microsoft Exchange the licensing policy for Contact is fairly straightforward, and refers only to the number of mailboxes required. Samsung are not interested in the number of devices that will access a

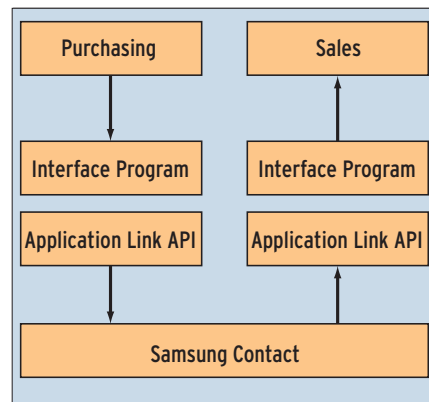


Figure 6: Contact's ability to exchange data between applications

mailbox, although there is an extra charge for the client package discussed above.

The server itself – and even a multiple server cluster – with five mailboxes are free. Schools and colleges need a commercial license for staff, but a free license is available for pupils and students.

You can run Contact for a 30 day evaluation period with an unrestricted number of mailboxes. A license key is not required. However, you should be aware that the package will not revert to evaluation mode if you supply a license key. Deleting and re-installing is the only solution in that case.

Conclusion

Contact is not a plug & play server. Admins will need appropriate skills and a considerable amount of time, if they want to leverage the product's full potential. The Tech Guide alone comprises 700 pages of configuration information. The software will reward this effort with its considerable flexibility and even more impressive scalability. Distributed Groupware for several thousand mailboxes is no problem for what used to be HP Openmail, and performance is not an issue. ■

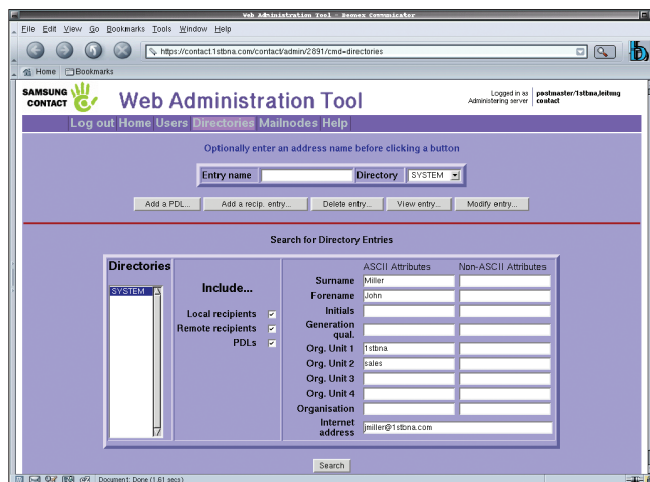


Figure 5: Contact provides an administrative Web front-end by default

INFO

- [1] Information on the administrative Web front-end: <http://www.sowandpigs.co.uk/mailtest/owat/>
- [2] Unified Communications Products: <http://www.yomi.fi>
- [3] Add-on for high availability clusters: <http://www.hp.com/products1/unix/highavailability/ar/mcserviceguard/>
- [4] HP Openmail: <http://www.openmail.com>