

The complete email solution?

CALDERA VOLUTION

MESSAGING SERVER 1.0R

There are now more and more commercial products joining the already gigantic range of Open Source MTAs, promising an integrated solution together with a Web interface. Nico Lumma investigates just one example, Caldera's Volution Messaging Server

An MTA (Mail Transfer Agent) alone rarely comprises the complete mail infrastructure in companies these days. There is usually an IMAP server as well, and since the invention of the Web as the all-beatifying Internet service, electronic mail should as far as possible also be accessible via the Web. The idea is that people who don't want to devote a great deal of time to assembling separate software components will, conversely, rather spend some money to get a total solution.

Caldera's product for this target group is called the Volution Messaging Server 1.0. As well as the product CD, the manufacturer and Linux distributor also supplies a somewhat slender manual, in which installation and configuration are explained. Caldera confidently insists that you use its own operating system for the mail solution: Open Linux Server 3.1 or Open Unix 8 must be installed on the prospective mailserver. The Linux distribution is nevertheless also available as an out of the box product by download.

Caldera Open Linux Server 3.1 was installed in short order on the test server, which occurred very rapidly and efficiently thanks to the multi-tasking installation tool Lizard, which functions beautifully. When the Messaging Server product CD is then inserted in the drive, with the KDE desktop open, it is automatically recognised and KDE merely enquires as to whether `autorun.sh` should be started automatically. If this is agreed to, the installation of the necessary packages proceeds extremely briskly (Figure 1) and, at the same time, completely free from any configuration queries. Lastly, rpms are installed with the graphic progress indicator keeping the user informed about the activities of the installer.

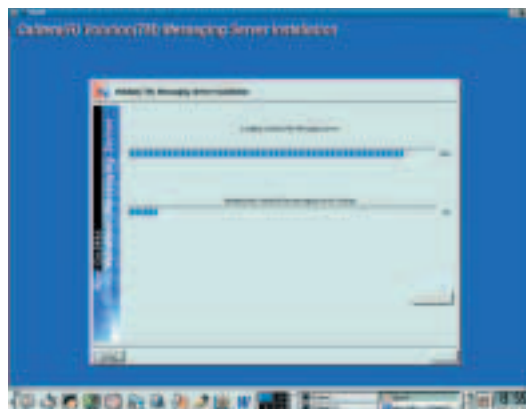


Figure 1: Installation is done automatically

Getting started

Since 4 January it has been possible to download the Maintenance Pack 1.0.1 from the Caldera FTP site. The user only has to unpack a tar archive and execute `install.sh` – the rpms are then automatically refreshed. The Maintenance Pack fixes security problems in MTA Postfix, the Cyrus IMAP Server and the Web-mail solution IMP.

It takes relatively little time to get Open Linux Server 3.1 and the Messaging Server – including updates – up and running. This is also speeded up by the fact that the installation completely skips the restarts, which are usual with other distributions. The Messaging Server is then configured via a Web interface, which can be found at <https://Hostname/msg>. The Apache Web server is automatically started on the Messaging Server and can make SSL-encrypted connections in its basic configuration.

The admin area is reached in the usual way with the username-password combination `admin/admin`, which is why the first thing the system administrator should do is change the password of this user. The Web interface itself is very clear and divided into four main points: Domains, Users, Aliases and System (Figure 2).

In the test environment there is only the domain, localhost, which is why it is a good idea to create at least one proper domain first of all (Figure 3), to which one can then add one or more users, who can also be given aliases. Domains, users and aliases which have been created can, of course, be changed or deleted. The LDAP server stores all the data. For both users and aliases, there is a search mask, with the aid of which one can find the corresponding entries quickly and easily.

The menu item System offers the Admin the option of changing his password or getting an overview of the current processes in the Messaging Server. He can also grant users some access options. These include changing the respective password, adapting a user profile or making one's own aliases. If a more detailed Postfix configuration is desired, though, the system administrator must rely on an editor and modify the corresponding configuration files.

The Web-based configuration menu is also available to the individual user, although in this case it is only



Figure 2: The Admin area after logging in

possible to change a few personal settings or to install a vacation memo or a mail-forward. Options, such as mail-filters or more complex vacation configuration will, however, be sought in vain.

Outlook as the measure of all things?

The item Client-Setup offers one very interesting feature, which allows Outlook/Outlook Express (98, 2000, XP) to be configured automatically. A click on Configure creates a Visual Basic script file with the personal configuration data of the user, which is then immediately executed and makes the corresponding settings in Outlook and sets up an account. At this point, there was an error message in the test, but nevertheless the corresponding data was saved for posterity in an Outlook account.

This is how users of this Windows mail client obtain a completely configured email account and fully installed access to the LDAP server at no great expense. For other mail programs, the menu item Client-Setup allows all important data to be seen at a glance, in order then to enter it into the configuration of the Mail User Agent.

Caldera explicitly points out that the Messaging Server is compatible with Outlook. This is certainly true, since Outlook speaks POP3, IMAP and SMTP like any other good mail client. But this statement suggests a range of functions similar to Microsoft's Exchange Server – and that's promising far too much. The Windows mail client can certainly call on



Figure 3: The options for making a domain.

the LDAP server of Messaging Server and via the free/busy function you can make your schedule available, but this extends only as far as showing others in the LAN when you are busy or have some time. The complete integration of the calendar feature with the server does not, however, exist. This would, for example, enable users to let other people enter and/or delete an appointment or to block times.

The Web-mail client IMP (version 2.2.7) which comes as part of the package functions solidly, though it is unfortunately not integrated in the Messaging Server, but to be found at <https://Hostname/horde/imp>. IMP (Figure 4) offers all features one would expect of a Web-mail client: It can cope with several folders and subscribe to various IMAP folders, allows searches of the LDAP databank and can send attachments.

However, it offers no option for filtering emails. It would also make sense to be able to apply Procmail or SIEVE rules actually on the server – here, too, Messaging Server has to pass.



Figure 4: The inbox under the IMP Web-mail client

Conclusion

Even though Volution Messaging Server's range of functions is fairly slender, it does look attractive for those who don't want to configure this functionality themselves. The installation, during which only the required packages are installed, works without a hitch and getting started is equally smooth.

However, a Web browser admin will run aground early on, doing everyday tasks such as entering a relay mailserv – without a text editor and Postfix know-how, nothing will work. Nor do the manual or online help provide any assistance. One tasty morsel is the automatic configuration script for Windows users, but this should be expanded as a matter of urgency for Linux users, too.

Lastly, the high price for not very much in the way of functionality will play a part in the implementation decision, especially in view of the licensing policy, which, under the cheapest licence, allows it to be used by only 25 clients.

Volution Messaging Server	
Supplier	Caldera
Price	\$899 (plus \$249 for Open Linux Server 3.1.1)
Web	http://www.caldera.com
For	Easy to install and get started
Against	Expensive, limited function
rating	★★★★★