Dan Means—IT administrator software distribution specialist

Having the users download software themselves doesn't always work well," Dan Means explains as he selects the custom query he will use as the target for his software package. "No matter how simple the instructions are, we'll get calls if they have to click more than once."

Dan Means speaks from experience. As a network administrator at Indeco, Inc. for the past 7 years, he has handled his share of calls from confused end users. Dan is the go-to guy for software deployment for his 7,000-node company. He uses LDMS to update software OSs to the latest security levels and refresh the custom applications his customers use for mission-critical duties.

"You can't work in a vacuum. You have to let the users know what's going on." Typically, Dan sends an e-mail announcement to let customers know what changes to expect. Dan often pushes vital security patches out immediately, but he lets customers pull some less-critical application updates at a convenient time. "You don't want to make a sales guy download a 20MB file while he's trying to get a presentation ready in his hotel room," Dan points out.

"Sometimes you have to force it (upgrades or patches) with the department heads from a political standpoint. People don't like to change."

Even with vigorous lab testing and careful scripting, Dan concedes they get some phone calls with nearly every update, so Dan always lets the help desk know his plans so they are ready.

Dan has been using Windows since the 3.0 days and has current MSCE certifications tacked on the wall. He's used LANDesk for several years now, but he still doesn't know all the features available to him. "I don't have much time to explore much. Sometimes we're just fighting fires around here."

Dan checks the manufacturer requirements for all software updates, but he knows undocumented idiosyncrasies or requirements are a way of life. "No one tells you everything. The docs are usually written to the best-case scenario." Because of this, Dan phases his deployments to smaller groups of clients at a time, even at the main site where bandwidth isn't too much of a concern. "If you try to blast it out all at once, bad things will happen," says Dan authoritatively. "My last deployment? It was only to 50 nodes."

Dan checks each job to ensure it was successful. If it fails once, he assumes the computer was turned off or disconnected, but he never really knows for sure. Finding out why a machine didn't get updated or why the package doesn't work right on a specific machine is a manual, time-consuming process.

Dan only builds packages once every couple of weeks, and bases them on an existing script that he then cuts and pastes. He says he'll often get the package about "80% finished" before he runs into some issue with a specific platform or configuration in the test lab. Then it's a matter of troubleshooting the dependencies to finish it.

Most of Dan's queries are already set up. He admits he isn't a database expert, so when he needs something special, he asks the team's SQL expert for help.

"These people are busy with other things so I don't want to break things," says Dan of his customer's computers. And, if things break, Dan's team will take the hit. "If something breaks my team will have to spend the time fixing it. And if we can't do it remotely we'll have to go out to their desk."

Dan's goals:

- Distribute software successfully the 1st time.
- Send updates without maxing out network pipe.
- Keep help call traffic from updates to a minimum.

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