

# Extending Active Directory Across Platforms

Contributed by David Noel-Davies

Some machines just don't die. You know this, especially if you deal with any UNIX or Linux systems. And maybe you know some UNIX guys and gals whose motto was "mess with my UNIX system over my dead body." Those guys are still around, too. But compliance requirements are altering their jobs and yours, especially if your IT department manages across platforms. Now the word from above is "extend Active Directory to UNIX and Linux systems" or maybe the word from above is just "Do it." Symark Software believes it can help. Its PowerADvantage product offers a unified log-in solution that brings Active Directory (AD) centralized authentication, policy enforcement, and infrastructure management to UNIX and Linux systems.

PowerADvantage works by setting up an agent on UNIX and Linux machines that talks to the AD domain controllers (DCs). During installation of the agent, the UNIX/Linux host joins the domain and the host is configured to route authentication requests through the PowerADvantage agent. The agent is then able to communicate with AD DCs and handle authentication requests and access the Group Policy Objects (GPOs) needed for configuration management. "A lot of UNIX guys aren't familiar with Windows—we had to make it [the product] UNIX-specific," says Symark product manager Jeff Nielsen. On the other hand, he adds, "The nice thing about Group Policy is the template side is in a template language that's Microsoft and simple. On the app side, the user can create in shell script. A UNIX guy can feel comfortable." Symark approaches identity management from the UNIX security side. "Our big customers asked us to get into this [extension of AD]," Nielsen says. A lot of their customer companies feel the pain of dealing with identity management in this age of auditing and compliance, he says. "Some have LDAP directories and AD was separate and on top of that they had a global directory. As soon as you have a number of UNIX machines and Windows machines to manage, you need help—three UNIX machines you can manage; five to 30,000 UNIX machines requires this product to keep configurations straight." The enterprise as well as small-to-midsized businesses (SMBs) find the product appealing, he adds. Symark also adds solutions to use in tandem with PowerADvantage: PowerBroker provides protection for the UNIX root account, which AD cannot, and PowerKeeper holds passwords for crucial accounts.