

Ensim Unify: Automating the Health of a Microsoft Infrastructure

Unify is a system management framework that offers a layer of insulation, protecting the management of mission-critical infrastructure applications—such as Microsoft Exchange, Active Directory (AD), and mobility gateways such as BlackBerry Enterprise Server (BES) and Windows Mobile.

The key idea behind Unify is to automate the day-to-day administration of Exchange, AD, BES, and so on, by wrapping their administrator interfaces so it can bundle sets of commands into single, task-focused operations. It provides a management umbrella, defined through IT policy, that permits administrative delegation to employees based on their role.

Issues Addressed by Unify

Major challenges facing messaging managers include:

- *Availability*: Offering a reliable email service; minimizing scheduled and unscheduled downtime.
- *Provisioning*: Adding user mailboxes, configuring their attributes, maintaining distribution list membership, and “deprovisioning” mailboxes when users leave the organization.
- *Compliance*: Ensuring that the email service follows organizational policy and legal regulations.
- *Security*: Keeping the wrong people out while allowing the right people in, tracking the activity of those who access the systems, and so on.
- *Credential management*: Responding to requests for help from users who have forgotten their passwords; ensuring that users adhere to rules on password composition and lifetime.
- *Delegation of management tasks*: Permitting non-IT users to perform certain management tasks without needing to bother experienced staff for trivial changes.
- *Unauthorized change prevention*: Ensuring that configuration changes are only made by those authorized to do so; enforcing delegated authorization at a granular level.

Role of a Scripted Framework

One important way of addressing these challenges is to enforce carefully thought-out procedures by encapsulating them in scripted operations used by all administration staff. This allows staff to initiate automated procedures by invoking these preprepared scripts, written in Microsoft PowerShell and accessed via a Web interface, for example.

Automation is the key to avoiding human error and the associated risk. Such scripts effectively encapsulate expert knowledge and best practices. They also allow IT to delegate some administration functions to nontechnical staff, based on a defined policy.

However, the up-front effort required to create these administration scripts typically prevents organizations from developing and implementing them on their own. Ensim provides such a framework as a prepackaged, off-the-shelf product. Ensim Unify is available as a suite in four “editions” that are customized for different types of organizations: enterprises, hosting providers, managed service providers, and software vendors. It is also available as separate modules that address AD, Exchange, BES, and password management.

Benefits

Unify is designed to help IT managers reduce their total cost of ownership (TCO) and provide a better service to their users. The idea is that it improves operations by offering:

- *Greater consistency.* Command bundling helps all IT and help desk staff use the same methods to perform administration tasks.
- *Faster responsiveness.* Messaging managers can delegate certain operations to lower-level staff, which speeds user requests. Some operations can even be made self-service.
- *Higher availability.* Unify guards against common configuration errors that can harm performance or cause servers to crash.
- *Stronger security.* It also guards against configuration errors that open exploitable security holes.

Is Unify Really Necessary?

Some Exchange experts believe that tools such as Unify are unnecessary. Frequently, these experts are passionate and dismissive, opining that similar value can be created by combining free tools such as Microsoft System Center, Exchange Best Practices Analyzer, and Exchange Troubleshooting Assistant.

Certainly, if an organization’s IT team is *exceptionally* well led, adequately staffed, and all highly experienced, there’s probably little benefit from such a product. However, few organizations are so blessed. Nor do most have the time that is required to review the event logs each day.

There is a clear benefit from a single product that intelligently hides the complexities of the Exchange/AD/BES combination and allows certain administrative tasks to be safely delegated to less experienced staff.

What’s Interesting About Ensim Unify?

Essentially, Unify is like an expert system that is programmed to perform day-to-day AD/Exchange operations under the guidance of staff members who may not themselves be particularly experienced or knowledgeable. It encapsulates the knowledge and experience of senior AD/Exchange experts and so imposes best practices.

Unify can impose structure and discipline onto an organization’s management of AD/Exchange. Take account provisioning, for example. In some organizations, provisioning can be ad hoc, even to the extent that users who have left the organization may not get fully deprovisioned. Unify “ties up the loose ends” by helping ensure that administrative practices are consistent and by avoiding oversights.

Unify allows certain administrative tasks (such as password resets) to be delegated. While native AD and Exchange administrative interfaces permit some measure of delegation, Ensim claims greater granularity, allowing more flexible control over who can perform which administrative tasks.

Unify also logs all changes made using the system. This is useful if a change needs to be backed out hours or days after it is made. It is also useful if one step of a multistep process fails: In such a case, Unify will automatically roll back all the preceding steps.

Unify helps prevent other common issues, such as:

- Setting the default gateway on multiple network adapters.
- Configuring inappropriate SMTP virtual server message size limits.
- Incorrect DNS host names on public folder servers.
- Orphaned Active Directory entries.
- Partially disabled diagnostics (for example, Regtrace).

The Bottom Line

It's a good idea to implement a framework for managing AD, Exchange, BES, and the like, using repeatable, expert-defined processes with rollback and task delegation. For organizations without such a framework, Ensim offers the opportunity for organizations to buy such a framework, probably at a lower cost than building the in-house equivalent.

*Author: Richi Jennings
Editors: David Ferris and Mona Cohen*

Ferris Research

Ferris Research is a market research firm specializing in messaging, electronic content control, compliance, e-discovery, and data leak prevention. To help clients track the technology and spot important developments, Ferris publishes reports, white papers, bulletins, and a news wire; organizes conferences and surveys; and provides customized consulting.

In business since 1991, we enjoy an international reputation as the leading firm in our field and have by far the largest and most experienced research team in our core competencies. Our clients include 300 of the world's 1,000 largest organizations as well as computer vendors from the largest corporations to small startups.

While other analysts have come and gone, we have published more than 200 formal reports and 1,100 short bulletins since 1991. Our news service covers more than 2,000 highly specialized announcements annually. In short, our technology and industry depth helps you understand today's products, where they've come from, and where they're going.

Free News Service

Ferris Research publishes a free daily news service to help you keep current on messaging, electronic content control, compliance, e-discovery, data leak prevention, and related topics. To register, go to www.ferris.com/forms/newsletter_signup.php. In addition to our daily electronic newsletter, you will receive periodic emails announcing new Ferris reports or webinars. To opt out and suppress further email from Ferris Research, click on the opt-out button at the end of each email.

Sponsorship of This Report

This report was sponsored by [Ensim](#), which has the right to distribute copies of it in electronic format. Ferris Research independently conducted all research and retained full editorial control. You may copy or freely reproduce this document provided you disclose authorship and sponsorship and include this notice.

Ferris Research, Inc.
One San Antonio Place
San Francisco, Calif. 94133, USA
Phone: +1 (650) 452 6215
Fax: +1 (408) 228-8067
www.ferris.com