Analysis
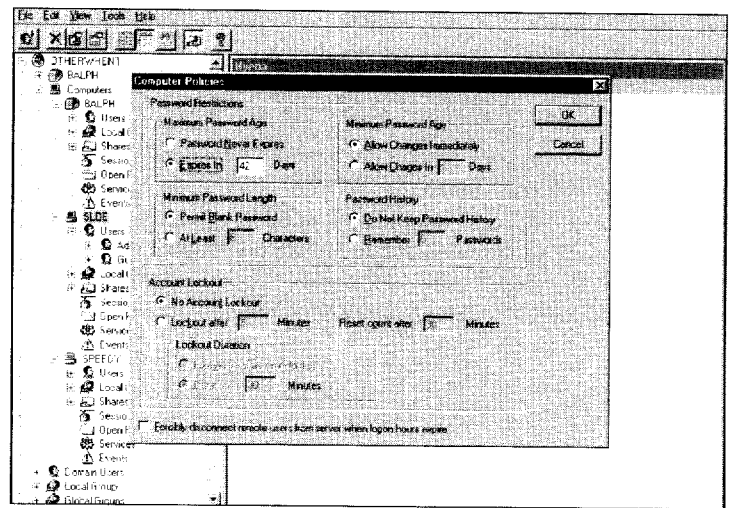
minimizing cost is essential. A package such as IpSwitch's Whats-Up Gold (see review, below) can handle many network monitoring chores. Although WhatsUp Gold isn't as glitzy as the heavyweight packages, it can address the needs of many companies, and at a cost of about $695, which is 10 to 20 times less than those heavier packages.

Major time-savers

Other specialized packages can save the network manager time that could be better spent making progress instead of fighting fires. Many NT managers find they spend time shuffling from one management utility to another.

Adkins Resource's Hyena consolidates the clutter of NT management programs, allowing the network manager to administer many NT servers from a single console, including adding, modifying, and deleting users; changing account passwords on a number of servers;

starting, stopping, or checking on services on different servers; allowing easy access to hidden shares, and much more. And all this for a measly $270 per administrator in an enterprise.

Certainly, there are capabilities the heavyweight management suites will have that the less expensive products will not. The low-cost products do not integrate with help desk software, and there is precious

little artificial intelligence in these packages to help you unravel your network problems.

Nevertheless, low-cost network management products deliver an amazing bang for the buck, and may well deserve a place in your management toolkit.

Mike Avery (mavery@mail.other when.com) has designed and supported networks of all sizes.

ETHERPEEK, *from Aggroup, performs decodes and statistical analysis of data as it is captured, unlike many other packet analyzers.*

Low-cost network management tools: nothing to sneeze at

Big networks don't always call for exorbitantly priced network tools. Here are a few of the best low-cost products around.

Product	Function	Cost	URL
Ipswitch WhatsUp	Network monitoring	$99	www.ipswitch.com
Ipswitch WhatsUp Gold	Network monitoring with SNMP administration, Web access, multiple active network views, and more	$695	www.ipswitch.com
Birch Grove Software ScreenPass	Enhanced security screen saver allows network password override, enforcement of password security	$445 per 100 PCs	www.bgrove.com
Adkins Resource Hyena	NT Administrator aid that combines the functions of many NT tools into one easy-to-use package	$270, single administrator enterprise license	www.adkins-resource.com
Ipswitch WS_Ping ProPack	Low-level IP diagnostic tool kit	$37.50 per technician	www.ipswitch.com

▶ **Network management**

WhatsUp Gold proves an excellent tool at a low cost

■ Full-featured product appeals to small and large enterprises

By Mike Avery,
For InfoWorld Test Center

A big network often calls for a big network management tool, which usually translates into a big price. Many companies purchase a major network management suite, only to find that it doesn't cover all of what they need. But surprisingly, a few low-cost tools can take care of entire networks — even for large corporations. (See our Test Center Analysis on low-cost network management tools, page 43.)

In keeping with this high-cost

mentality, people may see Whats-Up Gold 5's modest $695 price tag and dismiss the product as just a way to get into network management on a lite-beer budget. But Ipswitch's WhatsUp Gold, is more than an inexpensive way to manage a network: It's a complete network management package with enough features to keep even the most demanding network managers happy.

WhatsUp Gold tracks devices and services on your network, allows you to send appropriate alerts to staff members so prob-

lems can be resolved in a timely way, works with SNMP, keeps history on monitored devices, and can be used from a Web browser on other systems. Business leaders will be impressed by the productivity boost it can give to enterprises. It was unflappable in my testing, and it easily earned its rating of Excellent.

It is hard to pin down WhatsUp Gold's competitors. Because of its low price, there are no direct competitors. But several times during the past few years, product managers for more expensive products

have told me that they consider WhatsUp Gold their most significant competitor. The only product that is fairly comparable, Geneva-Soft's AlertPage, was purchased by Platinum Technology, which sold AlertPage's descendant, Platinum Network Monitor. Computer Associates then acquired Platinum Technology, and the product has become hard to find and is more expensive than WhatsUp Gold.

Setup without a hitch

As I have come to expect from Ipswitch products, the installation was easy and the manual was clear and helpful. The worst part about setting up a network-monitoring package is usually the initial scan and setup.

Most of the packages I've seen lately will over-scan, ignoring the subnet boundaries and picking up other companies as well as your own. Then they return too little information. By interrogating a router on my network that supported SNMP, WhatsUp Gold pleasantly surprised me by knowing what was on my network in seconds.

I would have preferred to scan the nodes for services in batch mode and to use a scheduler because scanning for services took about half a minute per device I checked. Nevertheless, WhatsUp Gold offers subnet scanning, manual input, and importation of data files to populate its network map for sites that don't have an SNMP-based router.

In the past, the worst shortfall of WhatsUp Gold, compared to larger management packages, was its inability to support multiple management consoles. Additional copies of WhatsUp Gold were less expensive than an additional management console for other products. Ipswitch addressed this by allowing good Web access via WhatsUp Gold's internal Web server.
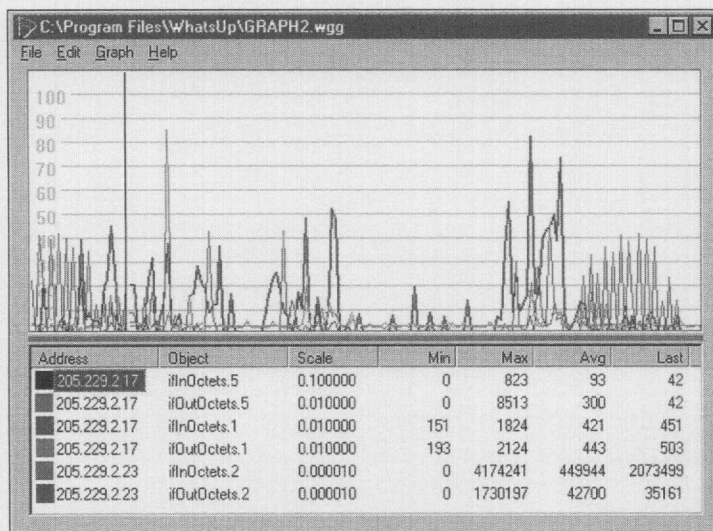
WHATSUP GOLD'S *SNMP Graph function lets administrators monitor any SNMP parameters, including IP packets.*

Remote use via Web server

Ipswitch has enhanced WhatsUp Gold's internal Web server, and using WhatsUp Gold remotely is almost as effective as using it on the console.

On the plus side, WhatsUp Gold's Web server is largely browser-independent; I used Microsoft's Internet Explorer, Netscape's Navigator, and Opera's Opera with good results. If you are running WhatsUp Gold as a service on a Windows NT machine, the Web service will start automatically with the machine, which allows WhatsUp Gold to act as a monitor in remote sites, even in sites with no technical staff.

WhatsUp Gold continues to offer its Network Tools submenu. These tools allowed me to work on a network at a low level, look at ping time, do Whois lookups, and so on. The functions have been extended across the previous versions.

The most significant change is the addition of time-server monitoring. You can select a number of time-servers to monitor, and the monitor package can keep your PC on time.

All the Network Tools functions are available separately in the WS_Ping Pro Pack for less than $37.40 a copy.

Ipswitch has added an SNMP graphing utility to WhatsUp Gold. This allowed me to track any SNMP field on any of my systems that supported SNMP. I used it to track traffic patterns and loads, and it worked very well.

A report generator also has been added to the package that allowed me to look at the different nodes and their performances. The report generator was flexible, and although I wasn't crazy about the reports, they are useful for management presentations.

WhatsUp Gold also will monitor IPX-based networks and Windows NT-based networks. To monitor IPX, however, it is necessary to use the Microsoft IPX stack, which most NetWare administrators, myself included, would rather not do. During my tests, we didn't have any NT servers online, so both of these functions were passed over.

At the end of every test, I uninstalled the software. WhatsUp Gold uninstalled as easily as it installed, another example of the quality that earned it a score of Excellent, which makes it easy for me to recommend it highly.

WhatsUp Gold is an affordable and powerful network-monitoring tool and a class act from start to finish. Its grace and power makes it easy for every level of network manager to monitor and manage networks.

The new feature that stands out in WhatsUp Gold is its capability of using an SNMP-based router to do the initial network scan, which is a major time-saver. The value of the product is even more amazing when you realize that the price of WhatsUp Gold still hasn't increased since Ipswitch introduced it.

Mike Avery (mavery@mail.other when.com) is a networking consultant in Beaumont, Texas.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Ipswitch WhatsUp Gold 5.0

EXCELLENT

BUSINESS CASE
This network management product offers ease of use, excellent network management tools, rock-solid performance, and an unbeatable price. It will pay for itself the first time it is used.

TECHNOLOGY CASE
A powerful range of tools in WhatsUp Gold allows the network manager to monitor networks, set alert conditions, and send alerts to staff members. With it, the network manager can look at — and into — almost every device on a network.

PROS
- Reduction in the number of foreign devices found during setup scans via improved network scan
- SNMP-graphing functions for at-a-glance performance tracking
- Improved Web-server functions via simplified remote monitoring

CONS
- Requires use of Microsoft IPX stack to monitor IPX networks

COST
$695

PLATFORMS
Windows 95/98, Windows NT; Intel 386 processor or higher.

Ipswitch Inc.,
Lexington, Mass.
www.ipswitch.com
(781) 676-5700

For scoring and testing methodology, go to www.infoworld.com/method.