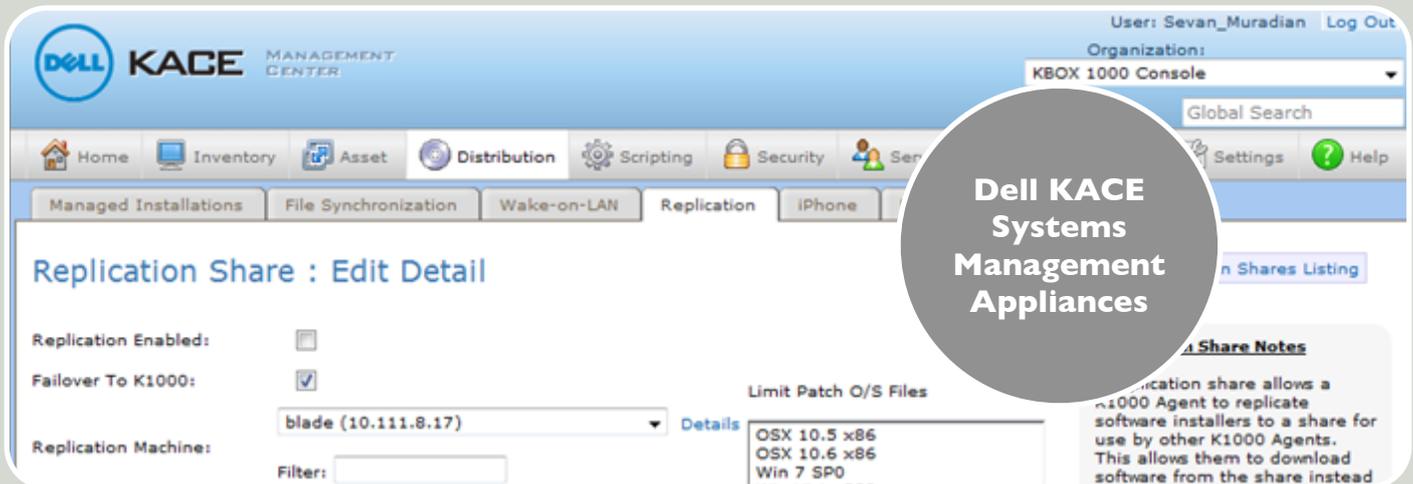


READER REVIEW

Dell KACE Systems Management Appliances



November 2011



Reader Reviews - ITAM Review readers sharing their opinions on ITAM Tools, Technology and Services.

The ITAM Review

The ITAM Review is an online magazine and resource portal for the niche IT field of IT Asset Management.

"The ITAM Review is an online community for worldwide ITAM professionals. Our mission is to provide independent industry news, reviews, resources and networking opportunities to Vendors, Partners, Consultants and End Users working in the areas of IT Asset Management, Software Asset Management or Software Licensing."

The ITAM Review began in late 2008 so that anyone involved in the SAM or ITAM industry could share their expertise, feedback and opinions of the technology and services in the market for the benefit of others.

The goal is to provide a free, impartial and independent forum for industry professionals to rate and review tools and services and share advice and techniques. Allowing readers to make informed decisions on their ITAM and SAM investments and strategy.

Reader Reviews

This review has been written by three ITAM Review readers. Our thanks to Lainie, Bill and Tim for taking the time to share their views on the Dell KACE Systems Management Appliances.

Our reviewers have been specially selected for their experience in the IT industry and in the interests of a fair and balanced review are new to Dell KACE, i.e. our reviewers are not customers or in any way affiliated with Dell KACE.



"Very simple and easy to use asset management and monitoring solution for any number of end users"



Product Name

- K1000 Management Appliance
- K2000 Deployment Appliance

Date

- November 2011

Website

- www.kace.com

READER REVIEW

Dell KACE Systems Management Appliances



“An all in one systems management toolset that covers all the requirements you would need to manage your systems”

Although Systems Management toolsets are not a new concept, the Dell KACE product set was an interesting option. As opposed to the software based solutions provided by its main competitors, KACE is an appliance based solution where you have a ready configured machine that you attach to the network, then let it go to work discovering all the IT assets you have connected. This “set it/forget it” approach is in contrast to the complexity involved in setting up most alternative products and the key selling point for myself and I suspect other IT professionals is – SIMPLICITY.

Simplicity, not just in the initial setup but through the integration of many different features (Asset Management, Software Distribution, Configuration Management, Policy Management, Patch Management, Service Desk...). This combination removes the administrative and management overheads often experienced using a mix of individual toolsets. Scaling up is simply achieved through additional appliances and bolt-on modules and this avoids the complexity of architecture and management associated with more traditional products.

I am not going into depth on the web interface and the features of the product set as opinions are often based on previous experience and familiarity, but I personally found that the GUI, information level, reporting, etc. that KACE delivered was on a par with its competitors. The one feature that I will specifically mention is the labeling, allowing you to easily create labels for every need.

Although the KACE KBox family of appliances can manage from zero to 30,000 nodes, the system

is specifically designed for enterprises and business units with up to 20,000 nodes. Taking economy of scale into consideration, I believe 500 nodes and above would see the greatest return on investment.

There are not many cons that I could find with the technical or functional aspects of the system. It does what it says on the box and matches the features of its competitors at a lower price when economy of scale becomes more favourable. Linux support being restricted to Red Hat is a negative and there could be a potential storage issue if you have a very large number of images to store. On the financial side, the only negative I can see is that the initial capital investment is quite high (although future financial benefits more than compensate for this). [See Dell KACE response below]

The pros to this model revolve round the simplicity of the solution and potential mid-long term cost savings. Technically and functionally the simplicity of the set-up, learning, and on-going management is a major plus. This can drastically reduce the resourcing required to manage the system and subsequently reduce costs. For smaller businesses a single technician could manage this, for larger businesses this could easily be managed by less resource than would be required for software solutions currently in place. From an IT perspective, functions such as Asset/License Management, patching, software deployment, etc. which are often seen as additional tasks over the day to day job of supporting the environment actually become manageable through the simplicity of this solution.

The integration of AppDeploy live and Lumension® Patch functionality are great



BILL

enhancements and ease the burden for both patch and software deployment and management. In addition, a “Virtual Containers” module has been introduced that supports the creation, updating, patching and modifying of virtual applications to compete in the cloud computing and virtualisation environments.

In summary, I think this is an excellent solution giving control of the overall network environment within a single box. It allows management of physical and virtual environments, facilitates local and remote management with minimal resource overhead. If you look past the initial capital outlay and see the long-term benefits and ROI then this can be a cost effective solution. For SMBs that do not have a management system in place, then this is a solution that they may want to seriously consider.

SUMMARY

- Would you recommend this technology to a colleague? [YES]
- Would you consider using this technology in the future? [YES]
- Ease of Use [9 / 10]
- General Features [9 / 10]

Strengths

- Multi-Platform Management
- Ease of Use
- Minimal Management and Resource Requirement

Weaknesses

- Linux support other than RedHat

BILL

- IT Asset Management
- UK
- FINANCIAL SERVICES
- ~30,000 Employees

READER REVIEW

Dell KACE Systems Management Appliances



“Very simple and easy to use asset management and monitoring solution for any number of end users”

Issues involving asset management, software deployment, migration, and security are always present in any environment whether you are working with 5 users or 5,000 users.

The Dell KACE Systems Management appliance streamlines all of these issues. There are a plethora of asset management solutions for IT professionals to choose from but the Dell KACE Systems Management appliance sets itself apart by its usability, customizability, and cost effectiveness.

The Dell KACE Systems Management appliance includes 2 appliances. The first is the Dell KACE K1000, which is responsible for the asset management, software deployment, service desk, and security functionalities of the KACE system. The second appliance is the Dell KACE K2000, which is primarily responsible for desktop imaging and recovery.

These 2 appliances work together as dedicated hardware or can be virtualized. Dell has really made a point to have this software work in any environment and have the capability to fit to any IT department's needs or at least they have tried.

The Dell KACE Systems Management appliance, or KACE appliance as it will later be described is not without limitations. Especially if you work in a mostly Mac-environment, which this industry is steering to very quickly and if you have a strong need for an asset management solution that also solves the need for an advanced help desk ticketing solution.

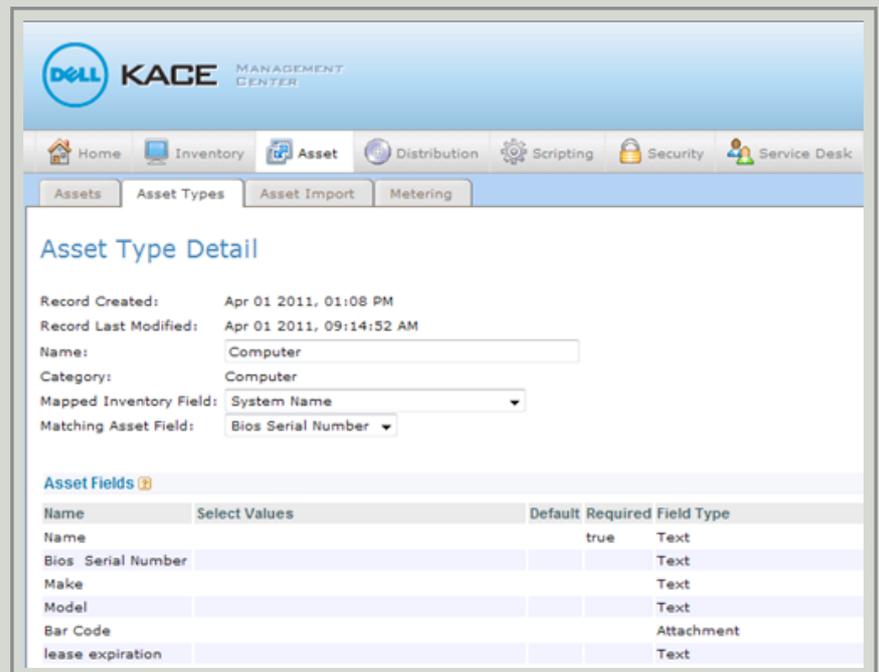
A second issue with the KACE appliance is its non-friendliness to Mac environments. It definitely had imaging and inventory features for Mac and Linux machines that I was surprised by, but it stopped there. One fantastic feature of the KACE appliance is its ability to push out software

without having to build packages to machines. So for example, if a user on the 4th floor of your office building needed Adobe CS5 installed and your office was on the 2nd floor, you would not have to leave your desk or break a sweat in order to do so.

Lastly, I would like to state that for a mostly Windows environment without a need for an advanced service desk, the Dell KACE Systems Management appliance would be a perfect addition to your infrastructure. But unfortunately, that is not the environment that I work in.



LAINIE



SUMMARY

- Would you recommend this technology to a colleague? [YES]
- Would you consider using this technology in the future? [YES]
- Ease of Use [9 / 10]
- General Features [8 / 10]

Strengths

- Software Deployment
- Asset Management
- Usability

Weaknesses

- Entry Level ServiceDesk

LAINIE

- IT SUPPORT
- USA
- MEDIA SECTOR
- ~400 Assets

READER REVIEW

Dell KACE Systems Management Appliances



“Pretty decent software application management, and strong reporting. A helpmate for PC platform managers, needing to keep on top of builds and patches.”

These products take the form of a 1U rack mounted hardware item, the K1000 is what Dell call a Management Appliance, the K2000 a complementary Deployment Appliance.

Between them, they are pitched as a total solution for PC build and recovery, with application and patch management, remote installation and monitoring features.

I'm very impressed with the K1000 Management Appliance – web integrated, agented or agentless depending on feature, efficient dashboards and detailed data.

I'm less enamoured with the K2000 Deployment Appliance – aimed more at run of the mill desktop platform deployment.

K1000: Management Appliance

On first take, I was sceptical about this product, being used to software suites to provide this type of ability. Watching the fairly comprehensive product video, I was slowly won over as the demo went on showing the capabilities of this product.

As could be expected, the interface is rather hardware focused, in that it contains provision for lease management, support contracts etc on the hardware itself. Having said that software inventory linking through to the computer configuration is provided, along with other usual SAM functions such as application usage monitoring / metering (although it's not listed how it identifies usage), and a ability to deploy individual applications, irrespective of entire build of target PC. The feature relies on the application having a command line deployment capability, which they reassure nearly every modern application contains.

AppDeploy

Something I really like is the AppDeploy feature – this provides deployment assistance by identifying the relevant deployment parameters from AppDeploy.com minimising bespoke parameter identification.

At present, there are just under 2000 “packages” and over 150,000 software applications listed in the product listing. What is unclear is the mechanism for adding an application, since some of the more esoteric applications in my inventory weren't listed, and a quick scan didn't resolve my question. [See Dell KACE response below]

Detractors

This looks like a pretty robust and comprehensive package, however there are a few shortcomings that I don't like the look of:

Firmware / BIOS updates – having these is fantastic, yet only for Dell equipment is not realistic in today's age of heterogeneous environments

A lot of time and effort has gone into describing security functions in minute detail, both in the product video and in all the demonstration artifacts. As a specialist application software manager I don't need the security functions – I am not involved with the platform, however I can see how these details could be useful for an IT manager.

There's no mention of whether this can integrate with a brownfield site (a specific example is the service desk functionality), the assumption seems to be “do it our way only”.

None of these shortcomings are major; they just detract from an otherwise rock-solid solution from what I can see.



TIM

K2000

Deployment Appliance:

For anyone familiar with building Sun workstations using the JumpStart technology, this essentially provides the same feature for windows PC builds. Ostensibly the presentation material gives the illusion that building a system based on an “Answers” script is trivial and straightforward, however I remain sceptical on the ease of this.

If one has an identical build for many computers, this methodology is ideal – it saves having to build a master system manually then use Ghost or equivalent to redeploy an image of that system, as the master system is a virtual one built and held in the device. Not to be outsmarted, this system does permit imaging of separate builds – the example given is of separate departments requiring a common OS and unique software applications.

Here is where the strength lies, in that the virtual image built can incorporate not just the OS but also a common application set. Once an image is composed, it is subsequently straightforward to tweak the image details.

In short, I can see this portion of the device pair being very useful for IT departments with a lot of common images to deploy, however in my personal environment (where nearly every user has a bespoke build) I think the capability is over-proportioned.

SUMMARY

- Would you recommend this technology to a colleague? [YES]
- Would you consider using this technology in the future? [YES]
- Ease of Use [8.5 / 10]
- General Features [8.5 / 10]

Strengths

- Ability to deploy individual applications, irrespective of entire build of target PC

Weaknesses

- Relies on an agent installed on each target
- Firmware / BIOS updates only for Dell equipment

TIM

- Software Asset Management
- UK
- Aerospace and Defence
- ~2,000 Assets

DELL KACE RESPONDS..



Taking part in this review has been great for us – it has been good to get feedback on where our appliances are perceived to meet the needs of customers and where there is room for further improvement. The assessors at The ITAM Review have been receptive to our feedback as well, so it has been a great two-way discussion.

There are a couple of areas where Dell KACE is already looking to expand support and functionality for asset management, and we are enhancing our range of Linux operating systems support as well as providing additional storage options for customers with larger system image libraries to maintain. We expect to address these situations later in 2011.

Additionally, we are continuing to support application deployment professionals through the 60,000 strong AppDeploy community. More participation in this community means that a wider variety of applications can be supported and example installers shared. We continue to encourage this, as it brings value to the wider IT community as well as to Dell KACE customers. I would note that I have yet to hear from a customer about being unable to deploy a software package because it didn't have the requisite command line parameters that could be distributed via the K1000 appliance, but we are always keen to get more applications listed as part of the AppDeploy site to make things easier for everyone.

On the hardware and firmware side, we are seeing a real advantage in being part of Dell by enhancing our support for Dell systems. However, while being part of Dell brings benefits to us in how we can manage Dell equipment, this in no way detracts from our investment in supporting operating systems regardless of equipment brand. The majority of our customers run multiple OS and hardware platforms, so offering support for all of these is an advantage for us in the market. We'll continue to expand our hardware and operating system support as we can by working directly with those vendors.

One point that was raised was around the cost to acquire the appliances. Rather than looking only at the initial purchase costs of ITAM solutions, we advise users to consider their cost per year per managed node for any solution they consider. This not only gives a fair comparison of the price for the Dell KACE appliances compared to other ITAM suites or point solutions, but also helps the customer evaluate their purchase based on total cost of ownership.

“The survey revealed that more than 62 per cent of users found that their KACE appliance paid for itself in less than six months.”

At our 2010 KACE User Conference, we ran a customer survey to gauge what savings customers had seen from using the KACE appliance. The survey revealed that more than 62 per cent of users found that their KACE appliance paid for itself in less than six months. We also found that 69 per cent of customers fully deployed their system in less than a week; and we know that many small and medium sites deploy in just one day. From our perspective, this makes the return on investment that much faster.

Ken Drachnik
Director of Product Marketing
Dell KACE



Ken
Drachnik

ABOUT READER REVIEWS

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In the interests of complete independence and impartiality the following guidelines apply:

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2. Vendors or service providers are not aware of the reviewers who have been selected for the review until the review is completed
3. Reviewers must not be known to the vendor or service provider (e.g. Reviewers must not be a customer, previous customer, prospect, partner, or associated or affiliated with the vendor or service provider).
4. Reviewers do not know what product or service they are reviewing prior to starting the review

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<http://www.itassetmanagement.net/2011/11/04/reader-review-kace/>