

September 2002 Panda Antivirus Enterprise Suite

by Jon Tullett

FOR

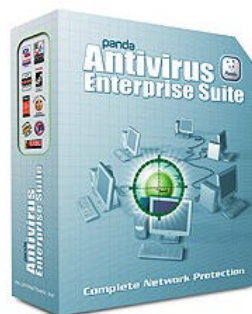
Excellent consolidated interface and consistent operation, backed up by a broad anti-virus suite.

AGAINST

Nothing.

VERDICT

Anyone managing numerous, possibly disparate, nodes on a network will welcome this product. It's an excellent package with very few drawbacks at all.



If you administer a network of any size, you'll know that coordinating anti-virus software on every desktop, server and network device is a nightmare. In spite of all your efforts to enforce policies, there's always the risk that someone's machine somewhere will miss an update, become and progress to the worst-case scenario. It only takes one new machine lacking an anti-virus install, or one traveling user who's a generation of signatures behind.

With that in mind, most enterprise anti-virus suites include facilities to manage and coordinate their products across the network. The idea is simple enough; to be able to tell - at a glance - what machines are protected or not; to remotely install, configure, update and manage the protection on each system, and to do so with the minimum of fuss.

Arguably, this is something that desktop software management tools should be doing anyway, but there's a crucial step from "is the software installed and licensed" to "what is its patch level and when did it last update its signatures?" This is where Panda's enterprise anti-virus suite fits in.

We were supplied with Panda's Antivirus Enterprise Suite (as part of the Corporate Antivirus Solutions bundle), which contains just about every anti-virus product ever to bear the Panda name. I was more interested in the unified administration facilities because the pedigree of the Panda anti-virus offering is already established. But for the record, this includes the company's solutions for workstations, servers, firewalls, proxies, messaging and groupware. And probably more; it's an impressive collection. The average site will use only a fraction of it, but while the price listed is for the whole bundle, you can license components separately.

The product is supposed to consolidate anti-virus protection across an entire network, but that description doesn't really do it justice. This puppy can monitor and manage anti-virus tools on anything Panda can protect: web servers, mail servers, firewalls, proxies, workstations, servers - you name it. The goal of the product is to establish a single point of control, from where everything related to anti-virus throughout the enterprise is managed, and that's a goal it accomplishes in style.

Installation is about as idiot-proof as you can get. Panda is obviously aware of just how many administrators read documentation, so thrusts it in your face at every stage of the install. Every step is clearly explained, along with requirements and precautions.

It's not easy to pin down where the install process stops and regular operation begins; it's a smooth transition. Step one is to get the admin console installed, and from that console to install and manage various components. By 'installing' protection for multiple environments onto the admin server, they can then be pushed out to other devices on demand.

A handy tool is the View Manager, which allows nodes to be grouped into logical sets for easy management. You could group workstations by department, for example. The network can be scanned for new nodes to be added. You can then launch the main Administrator to control the systems listed in the selected group. This is a vital part - while sometimes you might like to bring up an admin window for the

whole network, if you have a few thousand nodes you probably only want to do this for bulk operations like upgrades. It'll be small subsets you're working with on a day-to-day basis, and this is how to keep that under control.

The actual Administrator is where the product comes into its own. This is the nerve center of your network anti-virus; a simple tree view lists servers, workstations and application servers (proxies, mail servers, etc.). Each node shows at a glance what its operational status is, whether anti-virus protection is installed, and whether a virus has been detected.

Although unlikely to be a real problem, it's a bit of a chore that the View Manager (inaccurately cited in the documentation as Views Administrator) cannot be run while the main Panda Administrator is running. You have to close that window, rerun View Manager and launch Administrator again to view a new group of nodes. From the Administrator, every component can be configured - manually or according to a schedule - like installing workstation software or updating signatures, or adjusting protection settings.

Because updates are downloaded onto the server for dissemination across the network, there's no need for each workstation to access the vendor's site for upgrades. That reduces bandwidth and can avoid having to open the firewall for updates. More importantly, you can instantly determine which workstations have in fact been updated and which have not.

There are a few requirements to do all this - you have to have administrator access to each node (obviously), the workstations must execute login scripts, and so on. None of this is out of line with usual workstation policies, so it shouldn't cause any problems.

Looking towards servers, the product can administer various flavors of Windows, NetWare and OS/2, and Exchange, MS Proxy Server and ftp. Also firewalls - protection can be configured and controlled for any content vector protocol (CVP) firewall like Check Point Firewall-1. But more appealing to me is the manner in which Panda's admin interface consolidates and simplifies the task of managing so many different components.

If I were to wish for new features, I'd ask for better reporting and a web (or Java) interface. The reporting provided is very basic service start/stop stuff. And I'm always a fan of web interfaces - unchaining administrators from their consoles is a Good Thing. Neither of these would be difficult to implement, and I'll watch the next revision with interest. Nor should the lack of either dissuade you from taking a close look at the suite.

As a whole, the package really marks the target towards which the anti-virus world is moving. Installing point solutions for different tasks (workstation, email, web servers, etc.) is inefficient, prone to configuration mismanagement and can also be costly. Providing bundled packages that draw a line under the problem and provide protection for every component possible is a key goal. Managing it cleanly is a key objective too, and Panda has hit both targets with this offering.

Features	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ease of use	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Performance	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Documentation	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Support	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Value for money	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Overall Rating	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



Contact Information:

Panda Antivirus Enterprise Suite
Version: n/a

North America

Supplier: Panda Software
Price: \$450 (1 year license for 6 seats)
Contact: (818) 553-0599
info.usa@pandasoftware.co.uk
<http://www.pandasoftware.com/>

UK/Europe

Supplier: Panda Software
Price: £281.28 (1 year licence for 6 seats)

Contact: +44 (0)870 444 5640
corpsales@pandasoftware.com
<http://www.pandasoftware.co.uk/>

Asia Pacific

Supplier: Panda Software
Contact: China +86 21 6351 9020
Malaysia +60 3 7620 6250
Singapore +65 6336 7085
Thailand +66 2 7311480
intlsales@pandasoftware.com
www.pandasoftware.com/

SC On-Line

SC Magazine
<http://www.scmagazine.com/>

Copyright © West Coast Publishing. All rights reserved.