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The Iris
Interview

Art Thomas: Domino R5 Administration

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Level: All
Works with: Domino 5.0
Updated: 05/03/99

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*[Editor's Note: To learn more about Domino R5 administration, check out the discussion with Art in the **Developer Spotlight**.]*

Want to drag-and-drop users from one group to another, or from server to server? Need to see just which tasks are operating on a specific server? Like to see where your largest mail volumes are coming from? These are just some of the features receiving wild applause for Domino R5, where administration takes a lead role.

What are your broad goals for improving administration in Domino R5?
Our biggest goal is to make administration of Domino domains a lot easier, and to reduce the overall cost of management for the customer. This is easily the biggest set of administration enhancements to Domino and Notes of any release to date.

Bigger than NotesView and the R4.x enhancements?
Yes. NotesView was sort of the first step in delivering real-time monitoring of distributed Notes servers, using agents and graphical workstation software.

Then, with R4.x, we began to pull a lot of the administration functions into the administrator's client panel so you could have them all in one place. But, just providing a better grouping of tasks isn't enough. We want to create an environment where it's absolutely clear where the administrator should go to get things done, and to give better information about the status of tasks. Previously, if you wanted to configure messaging, for example, you had to go to a specific server, open up a database, and look around for the right document to edit. It took a lot of time, but those days are over.

What have you done for Domino R5?
The most noticeable change is that we have a new task-oriented client for administration called the *Domino Administrator.* It pulls together all of the Domino administration tasks into one easy-to-use, very rich interface. When you launch Domino Administrator for the first time, it automatically populates a bookmark with all the servers in your domain. You can also

view servers by cluster, network, hierarchy, release, and operating system. The right-hand pane divides Domino administration tasks into "areas" by placing each on its own tab. From here, you can quickly switch from directory management, to file management, to server, messaging, or replication management. If you're working in an administration area for a particular server, you can quickly switch servers using the bookmark. So, for example, you can be viewing the databases on Server A, and then quickly view the databases on Server B with a click of the mouse.

[Editor's Note: The following screen shows the Files tab of the new Domino Administrator.]
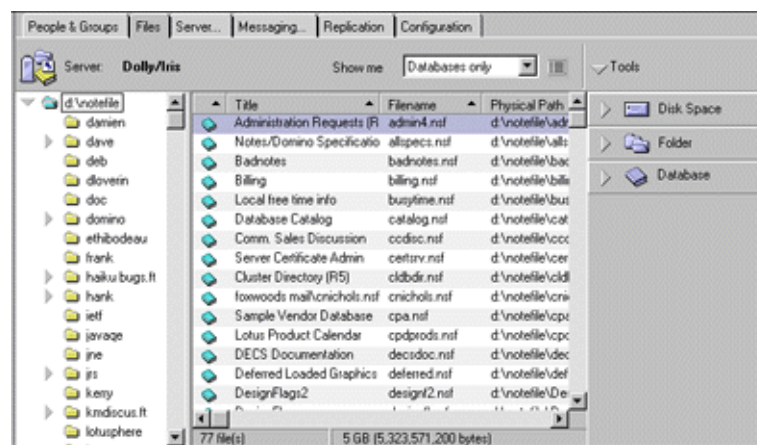
So why a new administration client?
The whole purpose of the new UI is to make the lives of Domino administrators much easier. Before we even wrote a single line of code, our admin development team personally visited several customer sites to talk to real-world Domino administrators, and to get a personal, hands-on look at a day in their lives. This gave us a lot of insight into how administrators use our product today, the tasks that they do, and the problems that they face.

What can the new Domino Administrator do?
Many things. For instance, it will allow administrators to quickly find information about the databases on their servers and then easily manage them. That, alone, is going to be a huge time-saver because now you can see all the servers in your domain and all the files on those servers. You'll have all of the nifty database tools from R4.x, as well as some new ones. For example, to move, copy, or replicate a database from one server to another, you can simply drag it from one server and drop it on another. You'll also be able to change database properties and ACLs for multiple databases at once.

From the People & Groups tab, where you do all of your directory management, we've got a new tool that displays all the groups in your directory. From there, you can pick a person and it will show you what groups that person is in, including all of the nested groups that they belong to. You can drag-and-drop people in and out of groups, and from one server to another. From the Administrator, you can change a user's home server by simply dragging them from one server and dropping them on another. We do all the work to move the user's mail file, change their Person document, make sure their mail is routed to the right place, change their desktop settings, and so on.

You can change their actual desktop settings?
Yes. This is possible because of the enhanced setup profile in the Domino Directory, which allows you to create setup profiles for users upon installation. This gives you a much more useful configuration profile than

you had previously, and we're using that information to touch the individual's desktop. So, if you need to make changes, like adding a bookmark to a group of users' desktops, changing their location documents, or creating replica stubs, you can do this work from the Administrator. When the user connects to the server, all of these changes are automatically made to their client. Obviously, this reduces the cost of having to visit each users' desktop.

That has to save the administrator a lot of time.
Yes, but even more importantly, you used to have to know all the steps involved in moving a user. You had to replicate databases over to the server, then go and change the Person document to point them at the right server, notify them that their mail server had changes, update their location documents on their client, and so on. This is work that the administrator used to have to do, but now it's all done for them.

What can the Administrator do to help people monitor their servers?
From the new Domino Administrator, you can monitor your servers, all their tasks, statistics, and IP services. So, for example, you can see not only that the server is up or down, but that the Router on Server A is not functioning or that your Domino Web server has stopped responding. You can have multiple status indicators per server -- one for each configured service, and you can see a history of state changes for the server's services. You can see why a server is not responding, access a server's log, access Server and Connection documents, run remote console, access help on status indicators, and determine the probable cause and solutions for errors reflected by the status indicators.

Also, we've incorporated server topology maps, which give you a graphical display of how your servers are connected. You can see the mail and replication connections between your servers, so you can see instantly how information is distributed in your network.

What about message tracking?
Our message tracking feature is going to enable you to see where your messages are in the network at any point in time. This will be possible from the Domino Administrator, as well as from the Notes R5 client. From the Notes client, you can send out a request and find out where the message is in the system. From the Administrator, you can go out in real-time to your servers, look in the message tracking database, and see where the problem is.

You'll also be able to track messages across Domino domains, across pre-R5 Domino servers, and even across the Internet, if your destination server is running Domino R5. This really is enterprise-wide, industrial-strength message tracking. It was developed in conjunction with the Soft-Switch division of Lotus, leveraging their vast knowledge and experience with enterprise-wide messaging.

There's also some great work being done in another group to improve message routing controls. You'll be able, for instance, to control when larger messages are sent, so you can specify, for example, that particularly large ones only be sent out after 2 a.m. (Editor's Note: For more information on the messaging team's work, see our **interview with John Banks-Binici**, development manager of the messaging and directories team.)

Are you doing anything to help people deal with the spamming problem?
One area we're improving is message reporting, where you'll be able to create reports based on the throughput of mail via a given router. So you can tell who your top 25 users are, based on mail volume they are receiving or sending, as well as where mail is coming from and going to. The biggest

problem with spamming is you don't always know where it is coming from, and we think this capability will help a lot. Once you know who is sending the spam (either by the sender's name, host name, or domain name), R5 will allow you to specify mail restrictions based on these values, preventing the unwanted mail from entering your domain.

Because of the increasing use of such controls, spammers try to circumvent them by using phony or borrowed domain names and user names. For these cases, R5 will allow you to verify the sender's name, and to reject any incoming mail that cannot be verified as coming from the claimed source.

Another way that spammers hide their identity is by routing mail through the mail server of an innocent third party. When the mail arrives at its eventual destination, it appears to be coming from this intermediate third party, rather than the original source. To help stem the use of this technique, R5 will allow an administrator to control the relay capability, preventing the unwanted use of the servers by unauthorized sources.

How about helping customers with consolidating servers -- any new work here?
Yes, we have a great new analysis tool for decommissioning servers so you can see the steps needed to take an existing server out of service permanently. The difficult task for the administrator has been in determining everything that needs to be done and changed to bring a server down without causing any lapse in service for the users.

How does it work?
From the Domino Administrator, you can run a Decommission Server Analysis, which will create a results database with detailed information, comparing the source server and the target server. Any inconsistencies between the source and target servers that could be more restrictive or not provide needed service will be marked in the results database. Then, the information in the results database can serve as guide for the administrator of what needs to be done before the source server can be decommissioned, such as adding protocol support, databases, server tasks, and so on.

Is there anything to help with document retention and archiving?
Yes. We're taking the feature set we introduced for the mail archiving agent in Release 4 and making that capability available for all databases by incorporating it into the core product. When you archive to a database, you can also maintain all your folders, which we couldn't do before. Administrators can manage retention policies centrally, taking the onus from the less-experienced end user.

So, it will be a core feature for all databases, and because it's part of the core code, it will be faster and more scaleable.

What about mail migration tools?
We're doing lots of new work here. Our migration tools will all be tied into user registration so that you'll see an Upgrade button and get a choice of all the other mail systems you can upgrade from. We'll ship tools for cc:Mail, Microsoft Mail, Exchange, NT, and LDIFF. Plus, we're working with third-party vendors to have them write others, for example, for Novell Groupwise. (Editor's Note: For more information on the migration tools, see our **interview with Mike Brown**, developer of the Exchange-to-Notes migration tool.)

Can we use administration products from other vendors?
Certainly. Domino has an enormous Business Partner community and they've developed some really great administration tools. We're constantly working with Business Partners to give them new ways to extend and enhance Domino. In R5, we're laying the framework for third-party vendors

to integrate directly into the Administrator UI. I mentioned already how third-parties will be able to plug migration tools into our registration UI in R5. In future releases, we'll be adding more and more integration points for third-parties to take advantage of.

We're also providing hooks to the Administration Process on the server so third-parties can create their own Administration Process requests or get notified whenever a request is processed.

Anything we've missed?
We're also doing some things to ease installation. We're using the de facto industry-standard installer for Windows, InstallShield, which provides familiar scripting for automated installations and should be familiar to any Windows user. Also, using the Incremental Installer, you can upgrade clients much more easily because you download only the modifications that you need.

Domino has gotten beaten up in the past for its lack of ease in administration. Is this going to fix that?
No question. I think this work is going to remedy that criticism. You're going to be able to get a much clearer picture of your Domino domains, and a lot of the manual processes associated with managing the network are going away. This has been a long time coming, but it's almost here now and I think people who aren't already attracted to Domino R5 for its great new user features are going to want to upgrade for the administration improvements alone. The Admin team has really worked hard on getting this right, and I think administrators will agree that the Domino Administrator is really awesome!

BIOGRAPHY
Art Thomas leads the Server Administration development group at Iris. Their job is to make the Domino server easy to administer whether you have a small single-server operation or hundreds of Domino servers in an enterprise-wide network. Domino R5 marks another milestone in this arena.

Prior to joining Iris, Art developed a Windows-based network management system to monitor an ATM network in Australia. He joined us in 1992 working in the external support group and then found himself finishing the events and statistics routines for Release 3 of the Notes Server. Since then Art has proven himself to be a jack-of-all-trades, taking on bug fixing and enhancement jobs on most of the server tasks (design, update, router, replicator,) as well as the core NSF and NIF engines.

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