

pt360 Free Tool Suite V1.1

Abstract

At the end of January, PacketTrap Networks (PacketTrap), a leading provider of enterprise-class network management solutions, released its latest incarnation of its network management solution, the free pt360 Tool Suite, Version 1.1. This new version incorporates key enhancements and new product features to include a completely overhauled GUI user interface, user customizable dashboard, effortless integration with third-party network management tools, and important features that increase network engineers' productivity such as integrated flow results between integrated network tools, and user definable *Favorites* and device groupings.

By focusing individual tool interaction through a single application interface, PacketTrap has been able to effectively control data and flow interaction between the main application and the individual tools. This is a key step for a product at this level – it facilitates ease of user operations and reduces repetitive data entry on the user's behalf.

Underlying all the new enhancements and feature innovations is this product's ease of use and visual elegance. The way everything is laid out around the main application window keeps the end user focused on the use of the tool suite instead of having to hunt around or drill down to find what they are looking for. PacketTrap has placed a great deal of emphasis on ensuring the new product release's visual appeal is consistent throughout the entire solution – thus, moving it head and shoulders above the competition.

Product Overview

When a product comes along on the network management front and captures a person's eye because of how straightforward and simplistic it is, and how it accomplishes what it does, and how it accomplishes what it claims to do, that product definitely deserves notice and recognition. And that's what we have with PacketTrap's pt360 FREE Tool Suite. There are other products on the market, both commercial and open source/freeware based, but none with the clean, elegant user interface of this one. And while it's difficult for vendors to differentiate themselves based on their diagnostic or monitoring tools, PacketTrap does so by incorporating all of theirs into a single GUI interface. What this means for users is consistency in tool operation, unmatched dataflow between the tools and continuous visibility into the network. Also, there's no more

need to have to switch between one tool to another to another and have a computer's screen filled up with individual tool windows. With PacketTrap, they all operate through a centralized dashboard interface.

The Core of pt360 Too Suite, ptDashboard

PacketTrap has laid out a strong foundation for its product roadmap. That foundation is based on a dashboard-based network management system that provides real-time monitoring, diagnostics and analysis. The dashboard has customization options that incorporate tabs to allow end users to logically group and customize the dashboard – they can be set to office location, a group of devices or a specific device that requires constant monitoring. Viewed in full-screen mode, ptDashboard automatically rotates between tabs for end user convenience. It's clean without being cluttered as many user interfaces have become these days when every single feature and function is crammed under the product hood. Because of its vast capabilities, it's also capable of performing basic inventory management and can assist in compliance auditing.

With ptDashboard, users can customize the product's interface to create their own unique view of their network environment. It can be populated with key performance indicators that are of special interest for continuous monitoring of key network assets. All key areas of pt360 Tool Suite support the new *Quick Launch* capabilities that provide a single click access to key functions and tools for easy drill-down into those areas of greatest interest to facilitate more effective root cause analysis.

Gadgets

ptDashboard includes gadgets, which allow the end user to create special groupings of functionality, i.e., a set of top 10s. Gadgets allow the end user to focus in on specific problem areas or areas of interest. Of particular interest might be the top 10 highest latency network devices or the top 10 with the highest average percentage of packet loss. Other popular ones are key device indicators like CPU, memory availability, disk utilization, and network interface utilization. A user can monitor a switch or device at port level all on one dashboard, and monitor all key stats of a server on one dashboard. Gadgets are built as drag/drop so custom views can be created instantly.

Device Groups and Favorites

With pt360, end users can now create their own individual device groups from regular network targets by using ranges of IP addresses or subnets. These device groupings can include any device or range of network addresses the user chooses. Once a device group has been created, it can be included on the *Favorites* list for future quick reference without having to dig down through various layers of menu selections to run, and access regularly used tools and address sets. Designated device groups can be created with individual tools or with multiples. It's completely customizable based on the user's own preferences, and can easily be changed at any time.

Encrypted Credential Store

Another part of pt360's core foundation is its Encrypted Credential Store. This is a convenient feature that stores user names and passwords of protected, single location SNMP, WMI, and Telnet-credentialed devices for quick and easy access.

Key Tools and Features

- **TFTP Server:** a multi-threaded, highly scalable TFTP server is provided to support unlimited simultaneous file transfers between client and server, including clock size, transfer size, and timeout.
- **SNMP Scan:** discovers the contents of network subnets quickly and simply by combining SNMP discovery capabilities with a Ping Scan of a designated range of IP Addresses. Used and unused IP addresses are all identified and logged as well.
- **MAC Scan:** sweeps the immediate subnet of its host and builds a table comprised of a pertinent MAC Address, ping response time, DNS, network card manufacturer and manufacturer address information for each IP Address.
- **WHOIS:** accesses multiple public domain records databases and performs a search by IP address or domain name. It then creates a detailed report on domain names, URLs, IP addresses, network addresses and e-mail addresses. The WHOIS report can be exported to HTML, XML or CSV files.
- **Wake On LAN:** boots any networked device with previously enabled capability in its firmware from a remote location. Upon reception, the network device's adapter alerts the device to power.
- **Trace Route:** finds the route from an IP address to any other address by sending specially configured packets in

a series of hops from node to node. By sending packets designed to time out and be returned after differing numbers of hops, and examining the ICMP and SNMP data returned, Trace Route can rapidly assemble a real-time display of resolved DNS, machine type, ISO level, boot and response time.

- **Ping Scan:** sends ICMP ECHO requests across a range of IP addresses and rapidly builds a spreadsheet for a quick visual display of which IP addresses are in use and which are not.
- **Enhanced Ping:** continuously logs running response times and exports data on demand to HTML, XML and CSV files. Reports register current response time and running average response time in milliseconds as well as the current rate of packet loss.
- **Graphical Ping:** a powerful and versatile graphing tool which offers graphing functions and variable ICMP parameters to optimize data collection for differing situations and purposes.

Cisco config, syslog server, port scan, DNS audit, WMI scan and Traffic Jam, a random traffic generator that bombards WAN links with specified loads of random packets to measure network performance under known load conditions and is used to solve small problems before they grow into large costly ones, are included along with other more advanced features in the professional version of pt360, pt360 PRO.

EMA's Perspective

As mentioned earlier, it's difficult for a vendor to distinguish itself by its tools alone because there are a lot of them out there serving enterprise network management. However, none so far has offered this level of integration between individual tools and the product interface. Typically, what is found is a central product application that provides a one stop menu for activating the individual tools, but the tools will typically operate within the confines of their own individual window with each tool essentially acting as a stand-alone product. There's no integration of data between individual tools and the main product window. This adds time-consuming and tedious rekeying or copy/paste operations to the end user's part.

PacketTrap has gone the extra mile and added deep integration between the main interface and all of its tools. This makes all of the tools fast and accurate. EMA is impressed with how quickly a tool can execute and display results across one or multiple subnets. They appear seamless no matter which one is selected or what type of drill-down operation is performed.

Factor in the new dashboard functionality and the depth of its integration becomes readily apparent. On top of the toolset integration, PacketTrap has upped the competitive bar with the addition of the product's new gadgets and GUI flexible customization. End users are no longer left with the out-of-the-box view of how their network management tool has to look and operate.

Now that PacketTrap has a sleek, sexy-looking management GUI, EMA would like to see other tools including perhaps a switch port mapper and sniffer. But what matters most is what end users want and that's up to market feedback. Built into the upper right of the product window is a *Give Feedback* selection option. If PacketTrap is following through internally on the feedback it is receiving, then it should be only a matter of tallying up the feature requests, assessing the most requested top 2, 3, 4, etc. tools and pointing its engineering team in the right direction.

EMA feels PacketTrap has a strong product that is solidly positioned in its portion of the marketplace. It still needs to follow through on its planned product roadmap and continue to deliver on new features and enhancements as scheduled so as to keep pace with its competition. PacketTrap's roadmap includes further open source integration, application monitoring, SaaS, VoIP and enhanced virtual server monitoring, plus a platform that will highlight advanced reporting and alert features. The key will be for PacketTrap to transition from an all freeware product set into an evolved commercialized product suite that will not only attract paying customers, but keep them coming back for more as the new releases appear with new tools and enhancements.