

Cox Communications Conquers Policy Management with NetIQ Group Policy Administrator

Cox Communications needed to better diagnose Group Policy anomalies on servers and desktops, quickly restore Windows 2000 Group Policies and cut down on repetitive search and back-up processes. Before installing NetIQ Group Policy Administrator, these processes took hours to accomplish with the native Windows 2000 tools. Now the same work is performed on hundreds of policies throughout the entire enterprise in a matter of minutes.

The Cox environment supports 500 servers and 15,000 to 16,000 users across the enterprise.

Executive Summary

Industry

Cable communications

Customer Profile

Atlanta-based Cox Communications Inc. is among the nation's largest broadband communications companies, serving 6.2 million customers in more than 20 states.

Business Scenario

NetIQ Group Policy Administrator helped Cox Communications achieve stability and consistency by pulling together its Group Policy management tasks into one easy-to-use application.

Benefits

- Tighter network security with control over desktops
- Flexible control of policies
- Easy back-up
- Remote diagnostics and auditing
- Consistent, stable environment

Products and Services

NetIQ Group Policy Administrator



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— **Chip Gandy**, Systems Architect, Cox Communications

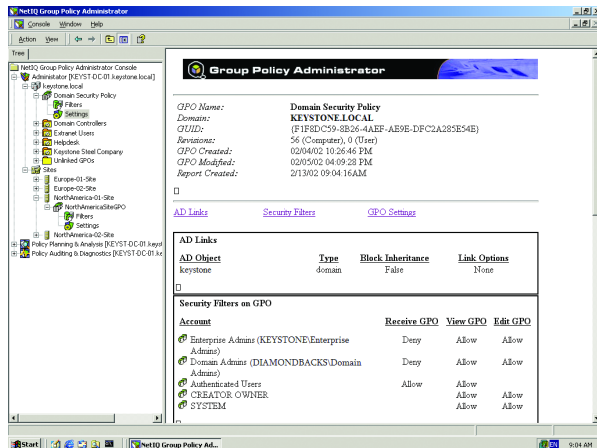
Group Policy Management Used to Take Hours

When Cox Communications began migrating to Windows 2000, it was clear that Group Policy management would play a key role in securing its enterprise and creating a more productive environment in which to administer and enforce Group Policy.

Before implementing NetIQ Group Policy Administrator, Cox Communications’ systems architect Chip Gandy spent large amounts of his time managing policies. “Part of our migration included collapsing most of our domains into one root domain within Windows 2000,” Gandy said. “That included organizational units (OUs) for 35 sites across the country, each with five different OUs for separate user groups and 200-plus policies for all the servers and desktops within the groups.” Initially, Gandy used the native tools within Windows 2000 to try and manage the process. “It was possible to manage it,” Gandy said, “but certainly not something we wanted to get used to.”

Things went from bad to worse when it came time to update multiple policies at one time, as the migration process nearly ground to a halt. “It would take us three to four hours to make changes to 100 different policies with the native tools,” said Gandy, who had to rewrite hierarchies several times to define policies and link changes to different users. Each of the 35 sites could further restrict users on their own, but Gandy steered clear of that chore. “To try and figure out what was going on and then change them myself would have taken forever,” he said. “We had one case where some policies became corrupted, and we had to rebuild them on multiple OUs. It took four hours of constant work to get everything back in order.”

This inefficient approach to Group Policy management often left users stranded without access to their applications because the right policies weren’t being applied to their particular machines. Or the opposite scenario would occur—unauthorized users gained access to restricted data and applications, creating a security breach.



NetIQ Group Policy Administrator enables you to quickly view and document all aspects of Group Policy objects.

Productivity Improves with NetIQ Solution

Cox initially came across NetIQ Group Policy Administrator on the Microsoft web site. The product is based on technology that NetIQ licensed from FullArmor called FAZAM 2000. Cox had also heard about the product in Windows migration circles.

With NetIQ Group Policy Administrator, Group Policy management troubleshooting processes, which had previously been done using native tools, could now be administered centrally. “The ability to pinpoint where particular policies were being applied and what settings were in effect completely sold me,” Gandy said. “In the past we had to look at each individual machine and keep refreshing.”

“It used to take all day. Now it takes 20-30 minutes to manage everything in NetIQ Group Policy Administrator,” he added. “That return on investment is tough to quantify, but we know it’s there. We don’t waste any more time doing repetitive things like searches and backups. We can better diagnose clients that are having issues receiving policies. We quickly create Active Directory GPO backups, and NetIQ Group Policy Administrator is a lot easier to use than the native tools.”

Cox separated its users into three groups for policy definition purposes: standard user, power user and

administrator. Access to machine usage is restricted by a variety of permissions, including file and registry access.

Reporting Features Enhance Security

With NetIQ Group Policy Administrator, Gandy can quickly generate detailed reports about specific Group Policy changes and anomalies within the enterprise. Whenever management requests specific information, the IT department can deliver it on demand. "We had an issue where a policy was changed," Gandy said, "and we used NetIQ Group Policy Administrator to generate reports about where and when it was altered. From that point on, this type of independent Group Policy change never occurred. That's a powerful capability in terms of enterprise-wide security and the ability to act quickly when unanticipated changes occur."

The product also allows Cox to remotely diagnose machines that are having Group Policy issues.

Fast, Easy Install and Simple to Train On

Implementing the product was also a snap. "What implementation?" asked Gandy. "You just install it." He also notes that training new administrators on the product is simple and straightforward.

Part of the NetIQ Administration Suite

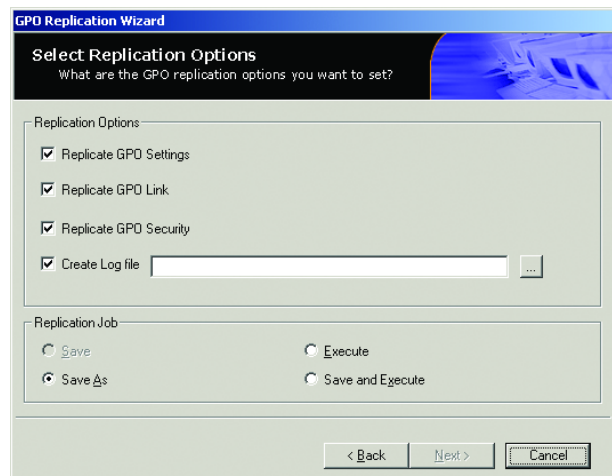
NetIQ Group Policy Administrator is a component of the Advanced Edition of the NetIQ Administration Suite. Integrating NetIQ Group Policy Administrator with the other solutions in the NetIQ Administration Suite enables administrators to delegate and automate dozens of time consuming administrative and security tasks.

Summary

With NetIQ Group Policy Administrator, Cox Communications has gained complete control over its desktop and server policies. The company can quickly address Group Policy changes and eliminate discrepancies that lead to security breaches. By reducing repetitive policy search and back-up processes, Cox has significantly increased the productivity of its policy administrators.

"Right now NetIQ Group Policy Administrator is doing everything we need it to do," Gandy said. "Being able to deploy more policies and easily manage them has been really helpful." Gandy writes his own policy objects and templates as necessary. "NetIQ Group Policy Administrator works perfectly with all my custom generated templates."

Gandy's advice to those considering NetIQ Group Policy Administrator: "Do it early, and you'll find out how much time you can save yourself down the road."



NetIQ Group Policy Administrator allows you to easily replicate Group Policy objects, including GPO links and security filters, from one domain to another or even from one forest to another.

About Group Policy Administrator

NetIQ Group Policy Administrator is the industry's leading solution for planning, managing, troubleshooting and reporting on Group Policy--no other solution provides more Group Policy management capabilities. You can manage virtually all aspects of Group Policy with NetIQ Group Policy Administrator's central, easy-to-use console. From the console, you can plan and analyze the set of effective policies, perform health/status checks, diagnose problems and delegate GPO (Group Policy Object) management.

Key Benefits

Improves the security of your Windows environment - Helps secure Windows 2000 and Windows XP desktops and Windows 2000 servers by significantly reducing the time and effort required to manage and control Group Policy.

Audits your policies - Provides reporting capabilities that document exactly which settings are in place and allows you to compare those settings to past reports and identify any changes.

Maintains the security of your Group Policy environment - If GPOs are changed, inadvertently or maliciously, the security of your environment could be compromised. NetIQ Group Policy Administrator provides backup and restore capabilities so you can ensure that your policies are properly enforced.

Reduces error risk when configuring GPOs - You can configure settings once, and then replicate and apply those settings to GPOs in other domains and even other forests. This guarantees that your settings are configured correctly, and reduces the risk of missing or misconfiguring a setting.

Simplifies Group Policy management - Delivers policy-centric view which reduces your risk of errors by displaying crucial information in a clear, concise format- and helps prevent security exposure that errors may introduce. This product's single, easy to use console also dramatically increases planning and troubleshooting efficiency.

Lowers total cost of ownership - Reduces configuration complexity to lower administrator learning curves. This reduces implementation time, keeps staffing levels consistent and reduces the risk of downtime.

Part of the NetIQ Administration Suite - The NetIQ Administration Suite provides highly secure administration and powerful reporting for your complete Windows environment.

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