

Big Businesses may require Big Solutions

*Jonathan Richey, Co-Founder
Michael Christensen, Consultant*

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Introduction

Big businesses may require big solutions – others should use Altiris Deployment Solution 6.9 with DS eXpress Tools.

Problem Statement

Altiris Deployment Solution has been intentionally limited in new features for several years and the current upgrade path is uncertain at best. Some of the missing beneficial features are:

- Integrated console views
- Inventory reports
- Job status reports
- Intel vPro integration
- Asset management
- Patch

Previous Options

Using the “DS scraper” provided DS inventory and job history to the Notification Server report engine.

eXprescient Solution

DS eXpress Tools (DeT) is an easy to install add-on product to Altiris Deployment Solution 6.9 and provides many of the missing features and is quickly being extended to provide all the features that customers need and are interested in.

The Issues

Why does it seem that big businesses always try to solve problems using big complicated solutions? For companies that have lots of resources: money, personnel and time; those solutions can be valuable. On the other hand, many IT professionals that are trying to maintain the integrity of a company’s computer hardware assets and keep them in top running condition rely on tried and true management tools. For at least the past five

years, the Altiris Deployment Solution 6.x asset management tools have provided the easiest way to manage all computers within a business organization – Servers to thin clients, and everything in between.

While merging the unique functionality of Altiris Deployment Solution 6.9 with the Symantec Management Platform will eventually reach its potential, the Symantec development teams have a long way to go. Altiris Deployment Solution 6.9 (DS6.9) has a rich set of features and abilities that have matured over the life time of the product and it will take time to bring all those features to completion in a new product. Don't be taken in by software vendors who announce product features and only deliver a small portion to keep you from looking elsewhere for a solution with a real value proposition. Promises to fix or add the missing features in the next release can at times seem like a Grand Unified Theory. To solve problems now you need a product that will deliver.

Exprescient Inc. has developed a unique application, DS eXpress Tools, that extends the life of tried and true Altiris Deployment Solutions 6.9. DeT v1.5 adds new life to your Altiris Deployment Solution installed base. The main direction for DS eXpress Tools is, and will continue to be, to consolidate accessing multiple installed DS 6.9 servers and add features that DS is capable of supporting, but which previously haven't been added. DeT will allow you to attach to all of the working DS 6.9 servers and gather and manage information all from one console. For example:

You want Microsoft Windows 7 readiness information and dread the fact that you have to connect to each of your installed DS 6.9 servers, configure a DS display filter then manually copy the information into a spreadsheet so you can make a budget proposal. However, by running the consolidated DS eXpress Tool's "Windows 7 Readiness" and "Near Win7 Readiness" report across all your DS 6.9 servers, and then exporting the results to an Excel spreadsheet it's easy and quick.

OR

You purchased new thin clients and recently discovered that the DS console is complaining about licensing non-compliance. But don't thin clients come with an automatic DS node license? Not any more! So how many more DS licenses do you need and why? Run the DS eXpress Tool's "Thin client license compliance" report and find out from all your DS servers at the same time, which thin clients have a built-in license and which ones don't.

Let's look at some more problems and how they are solved by DS 6.9 and DS 7.x. While you examine these scenarios, ask yourself this question, "Where do I need to spend my time, solving the problem or figuring out how to install, setup and use the tools?"

Problem: Expanding network

You have exceeded the recommended number of managed computers per management server and have to install another server to accommodate the next group of new computers.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – Run the simple install wizard for DS 6.9 and then run the simple install for DeT 1.5, a few minutes and you're done.

DS 7.x – An interesting excerpt from the DS 7.x install instructions. If you want to execute Deployment Solution tasks, you need Deployment Solution installed on the Notification Server along with the Deployment Solution task server handler. Deployment task server can also be installed on your task server. You need to install the Notification Server first and get it into the network topology of the company.

Problem: New computers

You just received a new shipment of computers that were delivered to different buildings for different groups, now you have to configure them before they can be used.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – Just have the employee set them up and turn them on. DS 6.9 PXE has Zero Touch and will boot them to the unmanaged pre-boot image that will start the configuration, deployment and initializing the Altiris agent. The PXE server is always ready to process unmanaged computers.

DS 7.1 – In order for DS 7.1 to manage the new computers you have to install the Altiris agent so the Notification Server will be able to cause a reboot of the new computer when it is ready to start the boot process.

Problem: Slow WAN

You need to have a network mapping to a local PXE server because over the WAN it would be way too slow and you want to reduce the bandwidth being used.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – Create a new pre-boot image for each location using PXE Config and then use the Redirect option to map it to the Shared Job for all computers.

DS 7.1 – Manually create a new pre-boot image for each location and then create a new job for each image to be deployed.

Problem: Linux

You are a Linux shop and will only allow Linux to touch your computers.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – Create a new pre-boot image using the available Linux distribution, create a job to use it and reboot the computer.

DS 7.1 – No Linux available in this release.

Problem: Custom PXE boot

You have a highly customized OS which you need to use for PXE booting some selected computers.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – Create a user defined image using the same pattern for the other images and then import that image folder, create a job to use it and reboot the computer.

DS 7.1 – Only WinPE is available for pre-boot.

Problem: VAR extensibility

As a VAR you would like to create a custom deployment solution.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – Many hardware manufacturers (HP, Dell, IBM, Fujitsu Siemens, and others) have created custom deployment solution enhancements for their specific hardware using the Altiris DS 6.9 product, these can be combined in unique installations for a true value add environment for your customers. You can even add your own if you have a white box business and the infrastructure is there to make it easy for you.

DS 7.1 – Work is underway, but none are ready yet and not all hardware manufacturers are working on it.

Problem: Diverse CPUs

You have a number of computers that have x86, x64 or ia64 type of CPUs and you want to use the same Job to configure them.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – For WinPE and Linux all three CPU types can be associated with a single pre-boot image. The PXE server will dynamically select the correct image for each computer.

DS 7.1 – Each image is different and must be included in its own Job. Oh, you can't do Linux or ia64 CPUs.

Problem: PXE boot time

You have diverse heterogeneous computers and production operating systems that need to be deployed and have hardware configuration done before the production OS can be started.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – DOS is still available with DS 6.9 and is less than 2 Megabytes in size and loads really fast and can be used to script the hardware configuration from PXE servers.

DS 7.1 – DOS is less than 2 Megabytes, Linux is less than 50 Megabytes both are unavailable. WinPE is 250 Megabytes and takes a long time to load when compared to the other pre-boot options available in DS 6.9.

Problem: Rogue PXE server

You have heard or your company believes that PXE is dangerous and a rogue PXE server could take over your machines.

Solution:

DS 6.9 – PXE server has multiple pre-boot operations that take place to ensure that the window of vulnerability is small, detecting CPU, request SMB information, etc.

DS 7.1 – Each PXE server attempts to control this problem by only receiving the per-computer image and boot information just before the Notification Server sends the reboot command. The

PXE server then throws this information away when the pre-boot image is deployed. This is not real time but close time and the reconfiguration is a burden.

Summary

- DS 6.x product line has been around for a long time and is still considered the best of class in performance and features.
- DS 7.1 product is the first merge of DS 6.x features. This feature integration list is very small and not able to support multiple pre-boot operating systems.
- DS 6.x has been used by thousands of customers and fixes, KB articles and service help has made the product a world leader.
- DS 7.x has been delayed multiple times with delayed feature promises.

DS eXpress Tools features:

- Gather information from multiple DS 6.9 servers and present it in a single console view.
- Presents Asset Management information in a timely fashion.
- Provides Inventory control for computer retirement.
- Gives full view of the DS 6.9 database information for Jobs, Computers, Groups, etc.
- Supports Thin Client License and compliance information.
- Shows Deployment information for managed computers.
- Integrates Roll and Scope Security across multiple DS 6.9 servers to only allow authorized information to be gathered by current logged-in user.