

An exposed cut takes longer to heal if you do not disinfect and protect it, and exposed machines are equally vulnerable. **Eric Doyle** reviews quality band-aids

The number of updates, patches and service packs emanating from software vendors has turned the systems manager's job into a never-ending nightmare. Trying to keep up with the latest security fixes alone is labour-intensive and the need to test the effect of the

patches before rolling them out makes life even more difficult.

According to Symantec's latest Internet Security Threat Report, there was an average of 220 security vulnerabilities a month between July and December 2003. Of these, 99 were classed as high sever-

ity and 70% of them were easy to exploit.

With so much activity, the temptation is to skip the unimportant patches and concentrate on fixing the holes that are exploited by the latest viruses, worms and Trojan Horses.

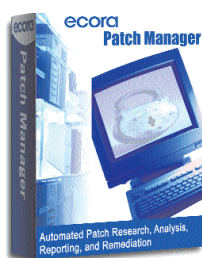
Ecora Patch Manager

Version	3.1
Supplier	Ecora
Price	1,000 nodes for \$11 each
Contact	www.ecora.com

SC MAGAZINE BEST BUY This is ideal to apply patches quickly and effectively. The manager is aimed at Microsoft sites, but will handle Sun Solaris servers in mixed sites. There is a user interface with a clear set of buttons leading to dialog screens for data entry, which makes the process intuitive and the lack of agents to deploy makes installation easy, even for novices.

The system finds servers and desktops at a click during setup. The hardware can be stored on any Microsoft SQL Server available or in the Microsoft Desktop Engine database (downloadable). Hardware can be grouped and patching policies can be applied to the groups.

Despite patches being tested and Ecora reports being available, the patches are downloaded from Microsoft's website and stored in a repository for instant use. Computers can be displayed to show their current patching state. Alternatively, a patch can be selected and a list of machines requiring the patch is shown or refined to



machines yet to be patched.

When a patch is selected, a panel under the display shows test notes, Microsoft TechNet articles, and links to more information. Ecora can show a software inventory of each machine (down to the version number) allowing configuration control.

Patch application is based on tick boxes to select patches for each host, group or workstation. Ecora also has the Patch Test Center for new patches. This allows two similar (preferably identical) machines to be selected. The patch is applied to one and the performance of both systems is compared to watch for deterioration in performance.

Patch Manager has an Online Reporting Center that has to be loaded on a Microsoft Internet Information Services server running .Net Framework 1.1 or better. The center allows anyone to access

patching details in simple report formats. This allows views showing the administrator the overall state of the network, departmental heads their sections' systems, or individual users their workstations.

SC MAGAZINE RATING

Features	★★★★★
Ease of use	★★★★☆
Performance	★★★★★
Documentation	★★★★☆
Support	★★★☆☆
Value for money	★★★★★
OVERALL RATING	★★★★★

FOR Agentless and quick to set up with an excellent interface. It has browser access to reports.

AGAINST Basic Microsoft applications support. Might meet Microsoft website contention problems when a new, popular security patch is released.

VERDICT Excellent tool for non-technical users in small companies, but would also keep a seasoned administrator happy.



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