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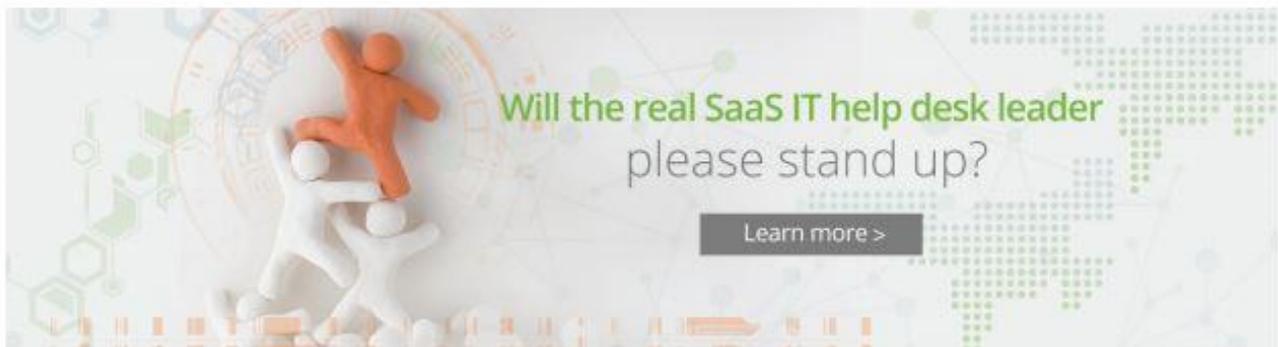
'Free' does not translate to 'lacking in quality'. Free tools are a great way of nurturing a good IT management ecosystem. Most of the premium software from ManageEngine has a free version. These solutions help cover the basic IT management needs of startups and SMEs.

VidyaVasu,
Head of the ManageEngine Community and Free Tools speaks to SE about their Top 10 free IT solutions for SMEs

ServiceDesk Plus

An efficient Help Desk is critical to organize IT. ManageEngine ServiceDesk Plus recently made the standard edition free. This IT help desk tool packs in a lot of value for SMEs who would otherwise need to invest heavily. What is interesting is that at any point in time, an SME can choose to upgrade to bigger editions and the upgrade will be seamless. The free edition has a self-service portal, a built-in knowledgebase, multi-site support, SLA management, and detailed help desk reports. There are no restrictions whatsoever on the number of technicians, users, or the tickets, which are the usual limiters.

Active Directory Management

ADManager Plus is yet another powerful Windows Active Directory management and reporting tool. This tool helps admins perform critical tasks such as defining role-based access to help desk technicians, automating routine AD management tasks, creating, deleting, or modifying objects in AD, and more. Some of these tasks that are accomplished with this tool also have to do with confirming to compliance audits. The free version of ADManager Plus lets SMEs manage up to 100 domain objects. This includes close to 150 AD reports, user management, computer management, multiple domain management, and help desk delegation. Like all other free versions, upgrading to other editions is a breeze.

OpManager

Monitoring and managing IT infrastructure is very critical for SMEs as it directly impacts the business. IT admins need to stay on top of things and know whether it is a server, an application, or a network that is the problem. In fact, the admins need to be wary of an impending fault and proactively avert an issue. For SMEs, ensuring minimum downtime is crucial for business continuity. ManageEngine OpManager monitors up to 10 devices for free. The devices could be servers, routers, firewalls, switches, or any manageable device. There is no restriction on the number of interfaces managed on these 10 devices! Monitored resources include availability, host resources like CPU and Memory, Windows services, processes, TCP ports, and traffic. It is a very compelling offer for a free tool.

Desktop Central

When there is IT, there is a constant need to keep your systems updated in addition to being managed. One of the important tasks the admins have to deal with is to keep all the systems updated with the latest patches, or deploy a software across multiple systems. Desktop Central supports managing patches, software deployments, management of mobile devices, mobile applications, assets, USB devices, and power. The free edition lets SMEs manage up to 25 computers and 2 mobile devices. This edition does not restrict any other functionality available in the paid edition.

Applications Manager

Monitoring business applications helps enterprises stay on top of IT. SMEs need to ensure that applications that are revenue-critical meet end user expectations. ManageEngine Applications Manager enables admins to plan end-to-end application management tasks. It lets users deep dive into the application performance metrics and alerts when a specific component of a business service fails. The tool gives all the insights you need to ascertain the performance of a business application. The insights include slow transactions, performance bottlenecks, and analysis of thread dumps, detecting and troubleshooting memory leaks, et al. Applications Manager manages up to 5 servers or applications for free. Monitored applications include open source and commercial apps and servers, databases, websites, virtualization monitoring and more.

NetFlow Analyzer

NetFlow Analyzer is a network traffic analysis and bandwidth monitoring tool. It also integrates with ManageEngine OpManager and complements its network management capabilities. Network admins need real-time visibility into the network performance and need to be aware of the top-talkers in order to be able to take quick decisions. This tool leverages Cisco's NetFlow among other flow technologies to provide visibility into the network performance. NetFlow Analyzer provides detailed reports on traffic analysis and bandwidth usage as NetFlow makes it possible to gather granular performance data. Bandwidth reports are available by top hosts, top applications, top conversations, and top talkers. The free version lets admins analyze and monitor bandwidth for 2 interfaces.

DeviceExpert

Network configuration is a dicey area. Any small change in a configuration rolled-out, could throw surprises. DeviceExpert is a network change, configuration, and compliance management software from ManageEngine. It manages configurations for network devices across multiple vendors. This tool helps automate repetitive, laborious configuration management tasks. It helps induce bulk configuration changes on your network. It lets users playback the recorded changes. The free edition allows configuration management of two network devices.

Password Manager Pro

IT security is on the top of the list when it comes to budgeting for IT management. ManageEngine Password Manager Pro is a centralized secure vault for securing and managing security information such as passwords, documents and digital identities. It allows sharing of administrative passwords securely when there is a need. This tool helps automate security tasks such as periodic password changes on critical systems. It also provides real-time alerts where there is a 'suspect' password access. It is also possible to restrict user access to resources based on their scope. The tool confirms to security audits and regulatory compliances including SOX, HIPAA, and PCI. The free edition allows one administrator access and managing of up to 10 resources.

EventLog Analyzer

EventLog Analyzer helps collate and visualize system logs from a single console. The logs require analysis as they bear critical clues on what is happening on your systems and the network at large. This tool helps pinpoint critical events such as breach attempts, insider threats, and policy violations to name a few. It also provides useful insights into network anomalies and event trends. Its real-time alerting, log forensics, file integrity, privileged user monitoring, and compliance reporting, make it a comprehensive security utility. The free version of EventLog Analyzer enables SMEs manage 5 hosts, without limiting any of the functionality of what is available in the professional edition.

ADSelfService Plus

ADSelfService Plus is a web-based, end-user password reset solution. Users have self-service options to reset their own passwords, unlock accounts that are locked out, update personal details (as in employee information) on the Active Directory. This service could go hand-in-hand with the IT help desk who are bombarded with requests for password resets. This lets the admins automate the task while reducing the number of calls to the IT help desk. This tool is free for 50 users, without any cap on the tool's functionality.

Besides the free solutions, ManageEngine has close to 50 smaller free IT utilities that lets admins perform certain IT management tasks in isolation.

- Rajeshkumar