

Analytics Rolling Review

Editor's Choice: Dell KACE Rocks For Windows 7 Deployment



In a market full of software products, Dell KACE immediately distinguishes itself in the OS deployment and client management space with its appliance. Of course, an appliance is just a cinderblock unless it delivers useful features and functions, so we put it to the test as part of our Windows 7 deployment rolling review. Dell KACE sent in both the 1000 and 2000 series appliances for review, and to get the entire scope of features and functionality that KACE offers, you need both. The KACE Management Appliance 1000 series focuses on client management, including client inventory, software distribution, app virtualization, remote control, rudimentary NAC, and a Web-enabled help desk, among other things.

The KACE Deployment Appliance 2000 series is where most of the OS deployment magic happens. Features

such as OS installation, disk imaging, user state migration (from XP/Vista to Windows 7), and system recovery are all contained within the box. If your overriding concern is client management, you can get all you need out of the KACE 1000. Similarly, if OS deployment is all you care about, then the KACE 2000 will fit the bill. Dell KACE recommends you purchase both appliances so you can manage your clients after OS deployment—of course it would—but it's not mandatory.

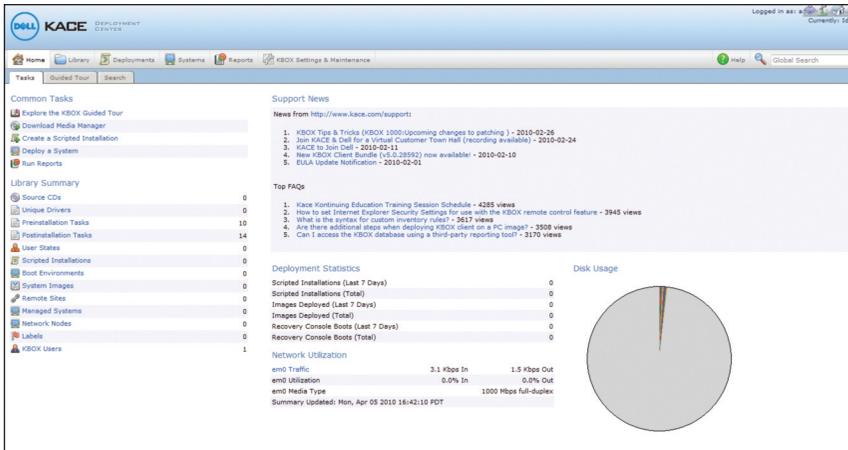
Because this rolling review is about Win7 deployment, we went right to work on the KACE 2000. One of the first things we appreciated about the KACE 2000 was its ability swallow up all of the OS images we work with. Our KACE 2000 came with two 250 GB SATA drives configured in a RAID-1 set, so with around 232 GB of usable space available, we had plenty of room

to upload custom images as well as every flavor of Windows 7 and Windows 2008 Server. While outside the scope of our testing, the KACE appliance also supports the deployment of various flavors of Linux as well as Mac OS.

With KACE, you can capture and deploy OS images client side or KACE 2000 side. To test client side image capture, we first configured our DHCP server to PXE boot the KACE 2000 Pre-Installation Environment (KPE). If you're a Mac shop, KACE 2000 also supports the Netboot protocol. The preinstall environment was simple to use and quickly pulled an image of our base Win7 build. On the KACE 2000 side, when a particular PC has been inventoried by the appliance, it can also be configured to boot the KPE during the next reboot.

One of the more powerful features of

REAL-WORLD ANALYST ASSESSMENT		Acronis Snap Deploy	KACE KBOX	MS Config. Manager	Avocent LANDesk
UNACCEPTABLE	← ● ○ ○ ○ ● ● → IDEAL				
Short List ✓	Editor's Choice ☆	Best Value \$			
		\$	☆☆	✓	✓
Ease of Win7 OS deployment		●	●	●	●
User state migration		N/A	●	●	●
Task sequencer and debugging		N/A	●	●	●
Post install client management		N/A	○	●	●
Reporting features		N/A	○	●	●
Bottom Line: The Dell KACE 2000 appliance gets Editor's Choice. OS deployment is as simple as turning a key, and it's a good value at \$4,500.					



found is that building installation tasks aren't wizard-driven. This means you'll have to do the heavy lifting of writing scripts for complex tasks. To be fair, scripting complex tasks with any solution requires effort, and KACE provides most of the scripts you'd need to deploy Windows 7 from day one. The Dell KACE Deployment Appliance 2000 starts at \$4,500, and the KACE Management Appliance 1000 starts at \$8,900.

the KACE 2000 is its pre- and post-installation scripting environment. If you're deploying a large number of servers, administrators can do things such as define, create, and configure a RAID set, or tweak the BIOS, all before the actual OS deployment begins. On the desktop side, you can partition disks, the BIOS, or check for minimum hardware requirements, among other things, before the OS image is allowed to proceed. Post image, you can apply any user-defined or KACE-supplied task you wish. Out of the box, the KACE 2000 includes post-installation tasks like automatically joining a domain post install, or deploying a captured XP/Vistas user state to a Win7

image, among other things.

Perhaps the most impressive feature of the KACE 2000 was the pre-boot system recovery console. There's nothing too exciting about a pre-boot system recovery tool in and of itself, but being able to access that environment remotely over a VNC connection is cool. (VNC is a platform-independent remote control program. KACE uses a Java VNC to let administrators access a corrupted PC remotely.) The remote recovery console allows you to tweak the registry, extract data, work in a command prompt, and so on.

On the whole, we couldn't find much about the KACE 2000 we didn't like. The one minor drawback we

our take

Dell KACE Appliance

- » KACE's appliance turbo-boosted our Win 7 deployment efforts in the *InformationWeek Labs*.
- » With separate appliances for OS deployment and client management, IT can pick which appliance suits their needs, or combine both for the full range of features and functionality.
- » The KACE 2000's ease of use and feature set make it as an early front-runner in our Rolling Review of Windows 7 deployment products.



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