

PC MAGAZINE

Are Server Appliances Right For Your Business?

No matter what size your business is, choosing the hardware heart of your network is no small decision.

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THE INDEPENDENT GUIDE TO TECHNOLOGY

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Net Integrator Mark I

Quite simply, this box blew us away. Though pricey compared with the other all-in-one devices in this story, it has more than the usual complement of features. In fact, it is the only product we reviewed with three NICs, two externally accessible and removable hard drives, and the ability to back up and restore with one push of a panel button.

We recommend that only the smallest, most cash-strapped businesses consider putting all of their networking into a single box. If you're one of these businesses, the Net Integrator has the brawn to handle the job. Its features and strong performance make it our pick as an Editors' Choice.

Initial setup and configuration of the device are really a matter of plugging in the cables and getting a cup of coffee. When the system powers up for the first time, it uses a feature called Net Intelligence to identify the subnet on your LAN automatically. It configures itself to a valid IP address and configures your ISP connection, then displays its new IP address on the front-panel LCD. By pointing

your browser to that IP address, you can use the Net Integrator's excellent browser-based interface to create user accounts and manage the system. Even with all the automation, the browser interface offers in-depth control over all configurations and operations and an excellent help system.

The included VPN and shared-printer setup is also nearly automatic. And if you have Net Integrators located at several offices connected to the Internet, the devices can automatically create VPN tunnels to connect all of the offices into one virtual LAN.

The Net Integrator's two removable hard drives are designated as the primary and secondary drives. Every 15 minutes, the system's self-backup feature makes an incremental backup of the primary hard drive to the second hard drive.

Because the system boots from flash memory and not the hard drive, it can restart and provide minimal functionality, including Internet connectivity, even if both drives fail.

The Net Integrator's unique Double-



Tom O'Connor

NOW AVAILABLE: The Net Integrator Mark I has shed its boring beige box for a sleeker look.

Vision feature allows two ISP connections. When both connections are working normally, the Net Integrator performs load balancing by splitting the traffic load across both; if one goes down, it reroutes all traffic to the working connection. Other notable features include an Apache-based Web server with SSL encryption and an e-mail server with POP3, IMAP4, and Web access.

The Net Integrator's small-company focus may not satisfy the larger, midsize corporate offices that want a lot of centralized control over their networks. But if you need an all-in-one product, the Net Integrator is the way to go. *L.F.*

Net Integrator Mark I

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Every once in a while, a low-profile product comes along quietly and hits the mark dead-on, to our pleasant surprise. That is precisely the case with our Editors' Choice



in this roundup, the Net Integrator Mark I. Its many features and easy-to-use setup and interface clearly make it the server appliance of choice for small to medium-size businesses building a network.

To be fair, we should mention straight away that it costs about \$600 more than the runner-up, the Sun Cobalt Qube 3. But the Net Integrator is worth the price. The box is equipped with externally accessible and replaceable hard drives, three NICs, and a push-of-a-button

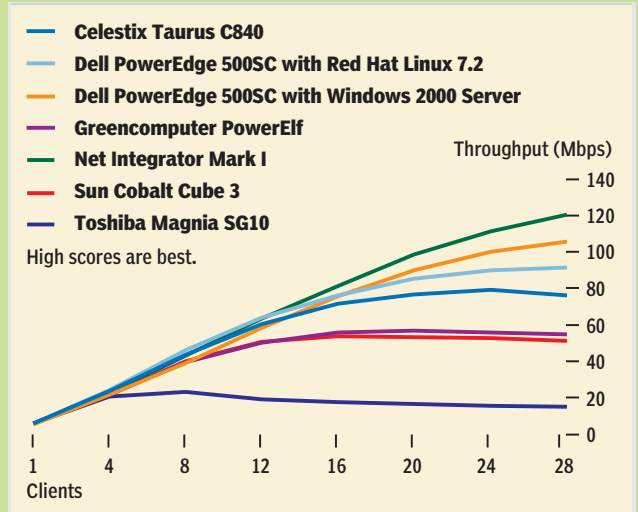
integrated backup and restore system.

The interface makes setup and management truly intuitive. Turn it on and bam!—you're up and running. Best of all, the operating system can boot from Flash memory, so if both hard drives fail, you still get bare-bones functionality, including a basic Internet connection.

Don't let first impressions fool you. Though the Net Integrator is a hearty machine full of features inside, the outside is just a dull beige box resembling a beefy PC—certainly not as sleekly designed as the Qube 3. (A new case design gives the Net Integrator more personality.) But while the Qube 3 is also a capable, viable, and mature product, this year it was simply outclassed by the Net Integrator.

When we compared the two, we found that the Qube 3's inherently locked and sealed-up nature could be a possible weak point. Replacing the unit's hard drives requires opening the case, and the NICs are not removable or replaceable by the owner.

We still give it an honorable mention, however; its extremely simple and intuitive interface and lower cost make it a good product for a small business or as a workgroup device.



▲ We ran NetBench 7.0.1 to test file-sharing performance on those machines that support this feature.



About Net Integration Technologies Inc.

Net Integration Technologies Inc. develops high-performance integrated office super servers designed to meet the IT needs of small to medium-size businesses. The Net Integrator family of products leverages Net Integrations' technologies to deliver an easy-to-use, reliable, powerful and cost-effective IT solution. Net Integrator products are delivered through a global network of Partners. For more information about Net Integration Technologies, please visit www.net-itech.com.

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