

## ***IT in the Financial Sector – The Key to Thriving in a Challenging Economy***

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*Written by  
Don Jones,  
Co-founder of Concentrated Technology  
and Microsoft MVP*



White Paper

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World Headquarters  
5 Polaris Way  
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656  
[www.quest.com](http://www.quest.com)  
e-mail: [info@quest.com](mailto:info@quest.com)  
U.S. and Canada: 949.754.8000

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# INTRODUCTION

No industry has been more affected by today's economic downturn than the financial industry. In many cases, institutions have been forced into consolidation and have requested government assistance as a matter of survival. Financial institutions feel pressured to begin showing business benefits almost immediately, and executives are increasingly turning to IT to find ways of realizing them.

Consolidation of financial institutions, both large and small, has become increasingly common. In the past, these institutions were able to take months or even years to fully integrate their respective technology investments. The increased business growth from the combined organizations would often result in a larger IT staff size, more IT projects, and generous IT budgets. Prior to this decade, there were fewer legislative requirements and security concerns consuming IT resources. IT was free to focus almost entirely on projects that added direct benefit to the bottom line and was considered a strategic and tactical asset for increasing revenue and lowering costs. The economic downturn has shifted this paradigm – a large IT staff and budget is no longer considered an asset. Instead, it is regarded as redundant and expendable.

Financial institutions that accept governmental assistance through the Troubled Asset Reduction Program (TARP) or other sources now face public visibility and massive demands by shareholders for as-fast-as-possible increases in revenue and reductions in costs. They must now try to meet these demands as well as additional legislative requirements, industry rules and regulations and potential security threats. Despite these challenges, technology executives are facing downsizing and budget cuts as financial organizations take drastic measures to put themselves on a sound footing for the future.

# THE CHALLENGES OF TODAY'S ECONOMY

## Mergers and Acquisitions: The Fallout

The recent spate of financial industry mergers and acquisitions has placed incredible pressure on the institutions involved. Consolidation typically brings demands for as-fast-as-possible increases in revenue and reductions in costs. In addition to supporting these demands, IT must handle new legislative requirements, industry rules and regulations, severely increased security risks, and other "distractions." And IT must do all this without adding staff or increasing their budget; in fact, they often must do it despite downsizing and budget cuts.

## New Financial Regulations and Transparency Demands

Major financial services companies today must not only comply with the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act (GLBA), but also with the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) that affects publicly traded companies. Most institutions also have to comply with the Payment Card Industry's Data Security Standard (PCI DSS) for payment cardholder information. They must also comply with the USA Patriot Act of 2001, which includes extensive requirements for banks, accountants, asset management houses, and others. The US Bank Secrecy Act (BSA), Know Your Customer (KYC), Anti-Money Laundering (AML), Anti-Funding of Terrorism (ATF), and countless other pieces of legislation have joined the fray, giving IT plenty of regulations to worry about.

And that's just today. Because of recent government intervention in the financial market, both federal regulators and the public are demanding more transparency from financial institutions. This means that future regulations will likely involve vastly increased auditing and reporting requirements with more stringent controls on internal data and reporting.

Today's large, multinational financial companies must also deal with a smorgasbord of global regulations, such as the European Union's various Money Laundering Directives, the United Kingdom's various financial responsibility laws, and EU privacy laws, which all place extensive access control, auditing, and reporting requirements on financial organizations. Additional worldwide regulation is possible, as today's troubled economic markets have global effects.

It is apparent that even organizations that are already completely compliant with current laws and rules are going to be challenged to become—and remain—compliant with the next wave. Because IT is facing diminishing budgets and lowered headcount, reducing waste and making the remaining IT resources more efficient is going to be absolutely essential for financial companies to succeed.

## Increased Security Risks

Financial companies are also dealing with a broad increase in potential threats and risks to their security, as well as threats and risk to their compliance posture.

Many intruders will try to take advantage of any internal instability by relying on employee confusion, inconsistently-implemented policies, and the simple chaos of change. But that increased security risk is just a part of the problem: organizations also face greatly-increased risk of internal security problems from disgruntled employees who suspect their job may be in jeopardy, are dissatisfied with changes in management, employee benefits, and other issues and are being contacted in droves by competitors seeking to take advantage of the employees' additional stresses and pressures.

IT must help counter these threats by becoming more vigilant, applying more consistent access controls, and providing more comprehensive auditing and tracking. Yet they must somehow accomplish this with fewer people and with less money.

# IT CHALLENGE: MAXIMIZING EFFICIENCY

The issues facing today's IT organizations are unprecedented in scale and scope. Institutions accustomed to investing heavily in IT may no longer be able to do so, yet must still rely on IT to create more business value. With the IT investment being reduced, how can IT itself continue to increase its business value? The key strategy is to simply *maximize efficiency*. However, in these times more efficiency isn't nearly as "simple" as simply counting paperclips or making sure staff members aren't taking long lunches; lost efficiency in today's tighter markets comes from a startling number of sources.

## Ease Migration Challenges

In the fast-paced world of IT in the financial sector, time is a precious commodity. Managing tasks and allocating appropriate resources is a delicate balance, and you need every advantage available to succeed. An Active Directory migration initiative requires a seamless process that will enable the IT department to get the job done right – and get it done efficiently. But this is not just a challenge for the IT department; the users also must be considered as well in order to minimize the impact on productivity and morale. Ideally, this project should be completed as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately, migrations, particularly those in larger environments, are very complicated and time-consuming. Before and during this project, it is critical to find a solution that enables competing systems and applications to effectively communicate with each other.

While some institutions may attempt to perform these activities using the native tools available in the current systems and applications, most now recognize that it is far too risky to use this approach and are seeking tools that can assist them during this complicated process.

## Eliminate Redundant Effort

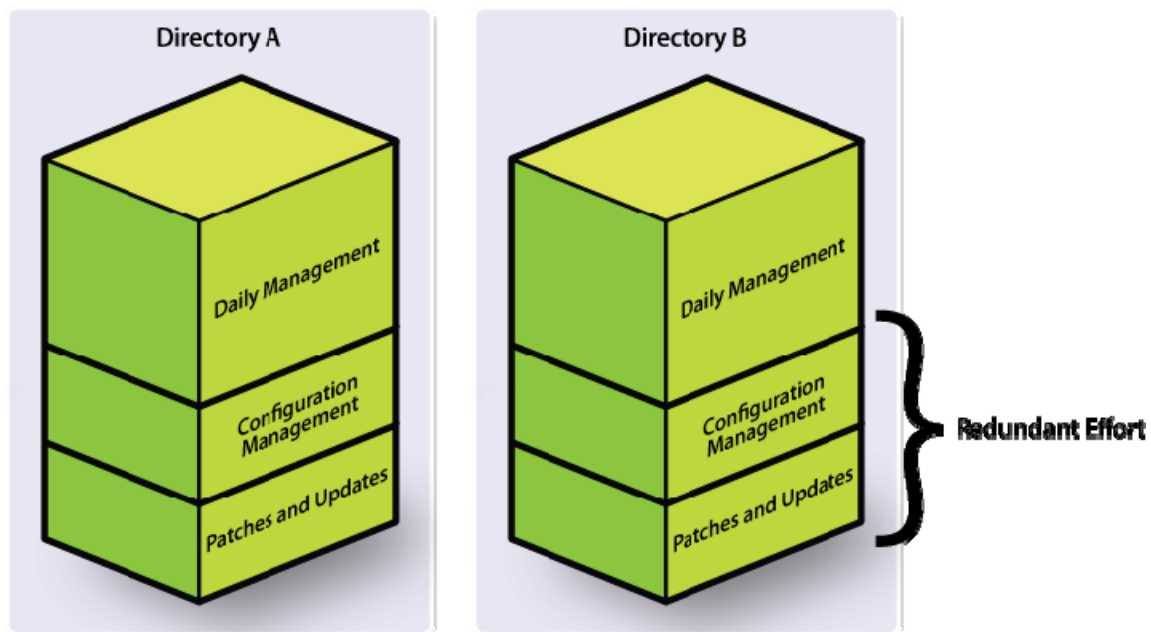
Nearly every financial institution tolerates what is essentially redundant effort. They may have both a Windows and a Unix infrastructure. Typically this requires two parallel divisions within IT to manage these disparate resources—and a lot of overlapping effort. A Windows Active Directory domain, for example, may manage certain resources, while a Unix directory may manage others. The company may maintain multiple e-mail systems and database platforms. In some cases, even redundant instances of the same technology may exist, such as multiple Active Directory domains.

While there are legitimate business needs for some duplication of effort, most large organizations have more than can be justified by business need. These redundancies may have come from previous mergers and acquisitions, from internal political decisions, or from misunderstandings regarding the best way to deploy new technologies.

The bottom line is that redundancy results in wasted effort. Supporting any technology requires a certain amount of fixed overhead, including keeping

the software properly patched, securing the software and managing its configuration. When technologies are duplicated, this overhead is also duplicated.

Figure 1 illustrates how this overhead results in redundant effort, and demonstrates the potential value in consolidating redundant technologies into a single technology.



**Figure 1. Redundant effort from duplicated overhead**

Redundant technologies can also result in additional waste beyond maintenance overhead. An institution may maintain two directory platforms and create the same employee identities in both platforms. This effectively doubles the amount of required daily management in the environment. While it may be necessary to *have* both directories in place (one supports a mission-critical application, for example), it should not be necessary to spend additional time on the redundant technology. It should instead be possible to automate the redundant platform's management and stop the redundant effort.

## **Reduce the Time Required for Repetitive Tasks**

In the event of a merger, each financial institution brings with it a complete set of IT resources: software, staff, constraints, and issues. However, because of today's economic constraints, the consolidated institution finds itself in the same situation as one that is forced to downsize. They must begin eliminating redundancies almost immediately, with human capital often being one of the most expensive and quickly-reduced redundancies. The result is that institutions often find themselves with fewer people on the IT staff, but must still continue to support most, if not all, of the same technology infrastructure, software, and other resources. In other words, the remaining staff must do more with less.

Reducing the number of technology assets - particularly redundant ones, as discussed above - can help the smaller staff cope. Ultimately, however, "the staff must do more with less" means that no IT staff member can afford to waste time. Unfortunately, many IT staff members are *required* to waste time in order to support many technologies. For example, the IT staff may need to change the permissions on a selected set of data. This data may be spread across several file servers and databases. Properly securing the data in most environments requires a large amount of tedious, manual labor.

In order to properly configure security, an administrator must manually navigate a dialog box on *each* folder and on *each* file server containing the target data. Configuring security in messaging and database systems requires using similar dialog boxes. This means that changing the security permissions on a single set of target data could easily take an administrator several hours or even an entire day.

Manually navigating these dialog boxes requires administrators to perform a number of simple, repetitive tasks—*exactly* what computers are *supposed* to be doing for them!

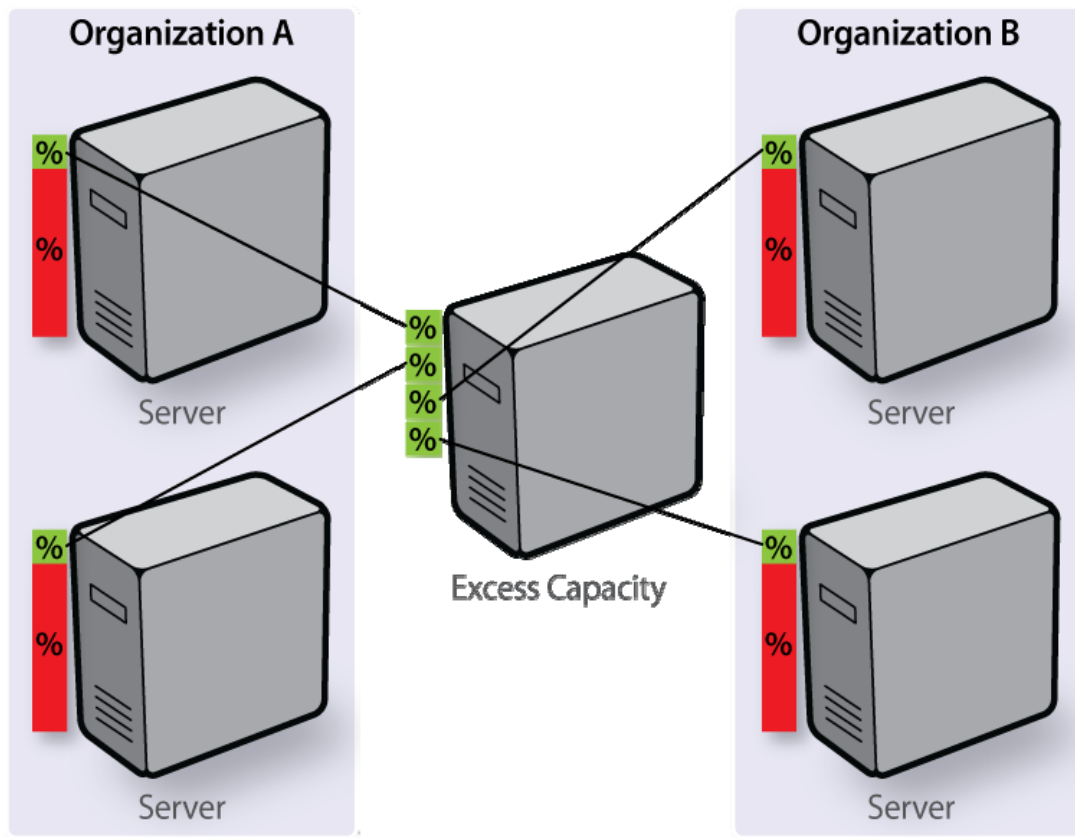
This kind of highly-repetitive work is not infrequent. In fact, most administrators must do this type of work constantly in order to provide resource access to new users, manage access for users with changing roles and removing access from users who leave the organization. This type of wasted time is insupportable in financial institutions that are struggling to do more with less.

## **Reduce Excessive Expenditures**

Aside from human capital, the other IT resource that is often quickly reduced is the budget. IT often must respond to greater challenges with a downsized staff and less money.

Smaller budgets mean that no waste of money can be tolerated. For example, a consolidated financial institution may be paying for maintenance and support on a separate IT management toolset. Many other institutions may find themselves with legacy duplicate technologies with similar functionalities. In order to avoid wasting any of the diminishing IT budget, IT needs to quickly consolidate toolsets, selecting best-in-class solutions that can provide the biggest positive impact on IT operations and the bottom line of the business.

Excess resources can also be found in servers that aren't working to full capacity. For example, an institution may have two servers and decide to provision them to maintain an average utilization of 80%, leaving a bit of extra room for peak workloads and for a bit of growth. However, as Figure 2 illustrates, they now have *40% unutilized resources* (shown as green blocks in the illustration); nearly half of the IT investment isn't earning its keep.



**Figure 2. Excessive resources equaling nearly an entire server's capacity**

This level of excess should not be maintained. Resources need to be consolidated and reallocated by accurately assessing actual production workloads on a continuing basis, providing more visibility into how resources are being consumed—and wasted.

# THE SOLUTION: HOW TO DO MORE WITH LESS

It is possible to do more—much more—with less. This means that you need to create a leaner, more efficient set of IT resources that are firmly aligned with the business' bottom-line needs. You will also need to make sweeping changes to the ways things have always been done and eliminate years of accumulated IT inefficiencies, redundancies, and waste. Let's look at specific ways you can do more with less.



## Consolidate

A key strategy for reducing IT's internal overhead is to consolidate redundant systems and file servers. It is also important to reduce the number of directories and consolidate the remainder into a less-complicated infrastructure design. Non-Windows directories should be consolidated into Active Directory whenever possible. Extending Active Directory to include Unix, Linux, and Mac systems can help eliminate redundant directories from the environment, further improving efficiency and saving time and money.

Directory consolidation and migration offers an opportunity to start fresh, eliminate leftovers from the past, and create an environment compatible with today's business needs. Of course, migration and consolidation are not without risk, particularly when dealing with something central to your entire IT infrastructure, like Active Directory. Migrations and consolidations *must* be accomplished in a way that minimizes or eliminates production impact to end users while preserving the stability and reliability of the directory infrastructure.

## Automate

The key to maximizing efficiency is automation. Let software handle the most repetitive tasks, especially those that must be performed across different systems. Automation also improves consistency by eliminating human error, helping to keep systems and users productive.

One of the most repetitive and manual tasks in an environment is user provisioning, re-provisioning, and de-provisioning. Because of the present economic reality, employees have become regularly transient and managing a variety of native access management tools in order to accomplish these tasks can be time-consuming and difficult to coordinate and monitor across a large environment. Manually managed access controls are also difficult to audit and keep properly configured. Administrators can improve efficiency by automating identity management tasks and managing them from a single, central location that can also serve as a source for audit reporting and policy enforcement.

Disaster recovery can also require an inordinate amount of manual effort. For example, properly backing up Active Directory isn't terribly difficult, but it is time-consuming to coordinate and monitor across an entire environment. And restoring Active Directory—especially the common single-object restoration—can require hours of an administrator's time. These tasks should be automated.

## Compliance, Compliance, Compliance

Solutions that help address various aspects of compliance throughout the environment should be considered in order to ensure that your infrastructure remains completely effective and trustworthy.

- Consider compliance across the enterprise, not on a per-platform basis. When possible, auditing Windows, Unix, Linux, and Mac systems together will save time and improve compliance.
- Implement configuration controls such as Microsoft's Group Policy in a way that can be extended across platforms, giving you a *single* configuration control system for Windows, Mac, Linux, and Unix systems.
- Do not align access controls to technologies or platforms; align them to business objectives by matching resources, including files, e-mail and databases, to job titles. This simplifies security and creates a compliance-focused access control process.
- Implement change control and auditing on configuration control systems such as Group Policy.
- Establish a configuration baseline for operating system configurations across the enterprise, and use automated reporting tools to compare the current enterprise configuration to it. This creates simple dashboard and report card-style monitoring.
- Audit *everything*. Consolidate native event logs from Windows, Unix, Linux, Active Directory, Exchange, databases, firewalls, and more into

a single, centralized, tamperproof database for searching and reporting. Use tools that reach beyond the native event logs to capture additional, more detailed auditing information.

## **Maintain Availability**

Users who are working are contributing; users who are not working are costing the business money. Maintaining full availability of your IT resources keeps your users productive. In addition, most major compliance regulations (such as Sarbanes-Oxley) have specific requirements for the availability of certain types of data. Maintaining availability in those cases is an absolute necessity.

Your files, folders, e-mail, and databases are all obvious candidates for solid backup operations. But also consider backing up Active Directory, Group Policy, and other “command-and-control” technologies in your environment regularly and automatically, place them under change and version control when possible, and keep them thoroughly audited.

## **Audit and Track**

Maintaining compliance is difficult and may be even more challenging in the future. Extracting the necessary information from operating systems and applications is complicated. In some cases, native event logs may not even have the information your auditors need. You need to audit and track a wider variety of data, store it securely, and use fast, powerful reporting tools to turn it into the reports auditors demand.

# QUEST SOFTWARE: ALIGNED TO FINANCIAL SECTOR NEEDS

Quest Software offers a combination of solutions that uniquely addresses the needs of financial companies dealing with an uncertain economic climate. These tools are powerful, easy to use, and, most importantly, designed to help financial institutions create effective and efficient infrastructures quickly and safely.

For specific information on Quest solutions that address these issues, see Appendix A.

# CONCLUSION

Financial institutions depend more on technology today than ever before, and the most successful ones will use it as a partner to help them thrive through the economic downturn. The CIO should be actively participating in business strategy. An efficient and effective IT department, without redundancies and insecurities, can ensure user productivity, improve information distribution, and assist in handling multiple transactions.

Executives should take advantage of today's economic climate and use technology to bring business units together. Now is the time to move the focus from cost-cutting to demonstrating how technology can add business value.

Tools that help the IT staff manage and maintain the infrastructure can save time and budget dollars as well as make efficient use of limited IT personnel and resources. These tools should be considered based on their cost and contribution to long term revenue growth.

## About the Author

Don Jones is a co-founder of Concentrated Technology (ConcentratedTech.com), a Microsoft Most Valuable Professional Award recipient, and the author of more than thirty books on information technology. His consulting practice specializes in making the connection between technology and business, helping businesses realize more value from their IT investment, and helping IT align more closely to business needs and values.

Don has been an IT journalist for more than eight years, and is currently a Contributing Editor for *Microsoft TechNet Magazine*. He is also a sought-after speaker at industry conferences and symposia, including Connections conferences, Microsoft TechEd, TechMentor Events, and others.

# APPENDIX A: QUEST SOLUTIONS FOR THE FINANCIAL SECTOR

Quest Software offers a number of software solutions designed to help financial institutions by reducing redundancy, saving time, improving compliance, and controlling IT expenditures.

## Migrate Without Interruption

Quest's Migration Suite for Active Directory with Storage Consolidator reduces the risks associated with migration and consolidation. The suite ensures efficient co-existence of multiple directories throughout the consolidation process, enabling IT to undertake a simpler "prune and graft" consolidation or a wholesale migration to a new directory design. And Quest's ZeroIMPACT technologies ensure no impact to the end users or the production environment.

Storage Consolidator helps consolidate file servers during a directory reorganization, reducing the number of file servers the institution needs to manage. The product also ensures that users' home directories and other files remain available.

Migration Manager (part of the Migration Suite for Active Directory) helps maximize administrator efficiency during complex consolidations by permitting the consolidation tasks to be accomplished smoothly and safely during normal business hours with no impact to end users. Eliminating the need for extensive after-hours projects prevents the burnout of already-stressed IT staffers and keeps down IT costs.

Quest® Collaboration Services™ Services resolves many of the communication challenges inherent during complex migration or consolidation processes. It enables real-time synchronization of free/busy information and Global Address Lists (GALs) between organizations. Collaboration Services maintains secure boundaries between Exchange organizations and Active Directory (AD) forests.

## Reduce the Number of Directories

Quest Authentication Services reduces the number of directories needed by centralizing authentication to Microsoft Active Directory—even for client computers and servers running Unix, Linux, or Mac operating systems. Reducing the number of directories eliminates redundant overhead, freeing up IT staff to focus on more important, business-aligned projects.

Quest Authentication Services also extends Microsoft Group Policy to Mac, Unix, and Linux computers. This reduces the number of management points in the environment, allows for greater solution diversity, and reduces administrator overhead. Quest Authentication Services also brings the configuration controls of Active Directory to Unix, Linux, and Mac computers, simplifying configuration management.

Centralizing authentication, identity, and configuration under a single directory architecture offers an additional benefit: consolidated compliance for Windows, Unix, Linux, and Mac systems.

## Automate Provisioning

ActiveRoles Server helps automate some of the most time-consuming and repetitive tasks in the enterprise: managing user identities and access controls. ActiveRoles Server takes hundreds of disconnected manual processes and turns them into a single automated provisioning process. It also enables your administrators to build their *own* automated processes through tight integration with Microsoft's Windows PowerShell. ActiveRoles Quick Connect enables you to manage more directories from a single location, such as HR and ERP systems not connected to Active Directory, or other systems connected to Microsoft Identity Integration Server (MIIS).

ActiveRoles Server works by transforming the manual tasks involved with access controls into business policy. You simply specify top-level, business-aligned controls for resource access. Those policies are automatically applied and enforced throughout the enterprise—across file servers, messaging systems, and more. ActiveRoles Server also helps control change within the environment by specifying top-level workflow and change control policies to both access controls and identity management.

ActiveRoles Server improves compliance by aligning resource access control more directly to business roles, automating the provisioning and de-provisioning of access to user identities, and centralizing access control reporting as needed by compliance auditors.

Access Manager provides a single console for identifying and controlling user and group access to resources such as files, folders and shares throughout the enterprise. This strict control and granular visibility enables organizations to meet security and compliance requirements, control operational costs and optimize infrastructure performance.

## Back up and Recover Quickly

Recovery Manager for Active Directory automates the otherwise manual and time-consuming recovery of objects within Active Directory. With Recovery Manager, quick, granular recovery—even at the attribute level—takes a matter of minutes, not hours, and doesn't require extensive administrator training and preparation.

## Manage Group Policy

Group Policy represents an important configuration technique within the Windows enterprise, but its power entails risks: one wrong move in a Group Policy object and the environment can easily suffer extreme damage and downtime. GPOAdmin helps reduce and eliminate these risks by applying full change control to Group Policy objects and by retaining past versions of these objects for fast and easy restoration.

GPOADmin provides full auditing capabilities for Group Policy, increasing the visibility and control over this important configuration management technology. GPOADmin also applies full version and change control to Group Policy, helping organizations to better manage changes and increase environmental stability and security.

By placing Group Policy objects under strict version and change control and providing integrated auditing of all Group Policy changes, GPOADmin helps ensure that compliance-sensitive configurations used across your client and server computers are secured.

## **Take Control of Auditing and Reporting**

InTrust and ChangeAuditor provide the automated auditing and reporting capabilities you need for effective compliance. By collecting both native event logs and previously unavailable internal auditing data, these solutions provide an unprecedented level of visibility. They also automate the consolidation of that data into auditor-ready reports. Supported platforms include Active Directory, Exchange Server, SQL Server, Oracle databases, Unix and Linux systems, corporate firewalls, MIIS, and many more.

Quest Reporter with Configuration Baselining offers a detailed way to audit and track changes to the Windows infrastructure over time, and can provide a “scorecard” that compares your environment’s configuration to top-level configuration policies and industry best practices.

# ABOUT QUEST SOFTWARE, INC.

Quest Software, Inc., a leading enterprise systems management vendor, delivers innovative products that help organizations get more performance and productivity from their applications, databases, Windows infrastructure and virtual environments. Through a deep expertise in IT operations and a continued focus on what works best, Quest helps more than 100,000 customers worldwide meet higher expectations for enterprise IT. Quest also provides customers with client management through its ScriptLogic subsidiary and server virtualization management through its Vizioncore subsidiary. Quest Software can be found in offices around the globe and at [www.quest.com](http://www.quest.com).

## Contacting Quest Software

Phone: 949.754.8000 (United States and Canada)

Email: [info@quest.com](mailto:info@quest.com)

Mail: Quest Software, Inc.  
World Headquarters  
5 Polaris Way  
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656  
USA

Web site: [www.quest.com](http://www.quest.com)

Please refer to our Web site for regional and international office information.

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