ToolMan Meets PatchReport

sWarning: This issue’s ToolMan is highly platform specific and hard-core sysadmin. If you don’t run and maintain Sun Solaris systems, you might wish to move on.

Boring Technical Stuff

OK, now that everyone else has gone away, we can get down to business. As you know, one of the very tedious aspects of maintaining computer systems is keeping them up to date via application of OS patches. This process breaks down into basically three phases: (1) identifying patches that are needed, (2) downloading patches, and (3) installing patches. You know how much fun this isn’t. The process is tedious, time-consuming, error prone, and boring. But I’ll show you a program that can accomplish all of this and more in one single, solitary command line.

Background

In our department, a medium-sized site, we have (among other systems) about 150 computers running Sparc and X86 Solaris (SunOS 5.5, 5.5.1, and 5.6). These all need occasional patch updates, either to fix some identifiable problems or because, well, it’s just that time. Sun makes these rueful patch update tasks more bearable in a few ways. (1) They supply a nice Web site from which most patches can be downloaded – whether or not you have a support contract (though if you have the contract, you get a few extra bennies). (2) They also supply a handy program, `patchdiag`, which will analyze your system and tell you which patches could be applied. And (3) They supply some useful tools for applying and maintaining patches on your system, namely, `installpatch`, `showrev`, and, for Solaris 2.6, `patchadd`.

But there are some problems with going through this procedure. One is the use of the patchdiag program. You must connect to the SunSolve site (<http://sunsolve.sun.com> or <ftp://sunsolve.sun.com>) using your support ID and password, and download the latest copy of the `patchdiag.xref` patch database file and possibly a current copy of the `patchdiag` program. Then there are some deficiencies with the `patchdiag` output (see Listing 1).